UNDOCUMENTED LATINO STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

A Dissertation by

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UNDOCUMENTED LATINO STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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“They tried to bury us. They didn’t know we were seeds.”

-Dinos Christianopoulos
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Thank you Dr. Patterson for guiding me through the entire process of the graduate program. I appreciate the time you sacrificed to understand my background, thank you for incorporating me into your thoughtful guidance. You have strengthened my ability to share the voices of a marginalized community who really need a chance to be heard. You make the world a better place. Thank you to my wonderful Committee, Dr. Sherwood, Dr. Matson, Dr. Bray, and Dr. Mau. Each of you has thoughtfully provided feedback to empower the voices of my participants.

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ABSTRACT

This Narrative Inquiry depicts the experiences and perceptions of undocumented Latino students/graduates within Kansas. Through the lens of Latino Critical Theory, counterstories pushed back against the dominant narrative of undocumented Latinos and higher education. An aspect I hope to capture is how undocumented Latino students are navigating their educational journey within the current anti-immigration context. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted based off a semi-structured protocol to examine themes from the LatCrit theory. LatCrit theory offered a race conscious framework to critically contrast oppressive aspects of society and the experiences of undocumented Latino students. The findings indicate DACA greatly influenced how participants approached higher education. The findings support Obama’s administration and their attempts to strengthen the undocumented Latino student community. Participants explained how DACA had changed everything. For the first time in their lives, they were able to attend college with no fears of being deported. They were able to work legally and pay taxes. They were able to apply for driver’s licenses and legally drive themselves to work and class. Participants challenged the common assumption about undocumented Latinos not valuing higher education. They would have felt more welcomed on campus if they had someone who could relate and discuss specific issues surrounding current immigration laws and DACA.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Approximately 11.5 million undocumented immigrants reside in the United States of America, by far the largest number in United States immigration history. Of the 11.5 million undocumented immigrants, the largest segment of this population is approximately 9.6 million from Latin America, which includes Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. More than 2.1 million undocumented Latino1 young people, ranging from the ages of 15-24, reside in the United States and have since childhood (Batalova & McHugh, 2010; A. Russell, 2011). These young people are considered part of what has been called the 1.5-generation.

The term 1.5-generation describes children who have migrated to the United States of America from another country before the age of 15, often with a legal status that is undocumented. 1.5-generation Latino students from these countries are in a delicate situation due to this legal status. They are not first generation immigrants; those who choose to migrate to the United States. They are not second generation immigrants; those who were born in the United States. Children wedged between these generations were born in their country of origin but are currently residing in the United States. Although they have spent time in their home country, their primary identification is influenced by their experiences growing up as Americans in the United States (Gonzales, 2009).

1 There are various connotations when using the terms Latino and Hispanic to identify people who have migrated from Latin American countries. Latinos identify themselves with a high regard to their nationality; this includes a strong pride of their history, family lineage, and homeland. As they have arrived in the United States, they were first categorized as Hispanic by the U.S. Department of Education in the 1970s to track population growth and socioeconomic levels. For the purpose of this study, the term Latino will be used to provide recognition to the indigenous culture and sociopolitical histories of the 1.5-generation Latino Student (Garcia-Preto, 2005).
Many undocumented 1.5-generation Latino students obtain a high school diploma and wish to attend higher education, but are unable to. These students have graduated from a U.S. high school with the belief that college can enrich their lives. While most states allow undocumented Latino students to enroll in college, many of them do not grant in-state tuition or access to financial aid. Therefore, laws that permit access to primary and secondary education can also put undocumented Latino students at a disadvantage, making it harder for them to pursue higher education (Abrego, 2006).

The belief that higher education is an important component of upward economic mobility is highly promoted within American culture. As students obtain college degrees through higher education, they become eligible for employment opportunities with higher salaries. Participation within postsecondary education is no longer a luxury; it has become a necessity to compete in today’s labor market (Gonzales, 2009; Santos, Asgary, Nazemzadeh, & DeShields, 2005). Not only do degrees increase the possibilities of employment and earnings, there are other levels of prestige resulting from higher education. Indirect benefits such as personal growth, fulfillment, and self-awareness are highly associated with postsecondary education. Adults with higher levels of education are more likely to take responsibility for their health and the communities they live in. Higher education contributes to the enrichment of individuals’ lives through lower incarceration rates, increased volunteerism in society, and heightened political understanding. Social benefits of higher education are improved life expectancy, increased personal status, better consumer decisions, and increased quality of civic life (Frum, 2007). The following section will discuss what the problem is, who is impacted, and offer an explanation as to why it is occurring.
Research Problem

A normative assumption in the United States is that all students have equal possibilities to the advancement of their futures. In spite of this belief, not all people residing in the United States have the same opportunities to obtain higher education. Undocumented members of the 1.5-generation, who have been given the understanding that higher education is available to all, receive a clear message of exclusion when they enroll in college. This message contradicts previous notions of planning for their futures as it places specific limitations on financial aid and in-state tuition rates, setting them apart from their peers. These students desire to invest in higher education not only for their own future but also for the collective future of the nation, yet federal and state policies cut their potential short in specific ways. They have grown up within the United States; they have been exposed to the same types of hopes and aspirations as their documented peers all the way up into their senior year in high school. They take part in honor roll programs, athletics, high school class presidencies, valedictorian roles, all the while aspiring for opportunities associated with higher education (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2005; Gonzales, 2009). They have graduated from U.S. high schools with a normative idealism that higher education is the key to opportunity (Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011; Gonzales, 2009; A. Russell, 2011). The 1.5 generation has benefited from the 1982 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, Plyler v. Doe that gave them access to K-12 education regardless of their legal status.

The Plyler v. Doe case set the precedent that allowed immigrant children access to K-12 public education. During the case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the state of Texas could not deny undocumented immigrant children access to K-12 education. The court reasoned that withholding K-12 education would only punish children for the wrongful acts of their parents and would create a lifetime of hardship suspending these children into a permanent underclass.
Consequently, public school personnel are not permitted to inquire about any student’s legal status and are required to make educational services available to them.

This decision, however, did not address higher education (Frum, 2007; A. Russell, 2011). Federal policies such as the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) were established in 1996 to address undocumented students within higher education. While they do not prohibit undocumented Latino students from registering in post secondary institutions, they asserted that undocumented Latino students were not eligible for public benefits such as financial aid. These federal policies left it to individual states to determine whether undocumented Latino students were eligible for in-state residency for tuition purposes (Frum, 2007).

While undocumented Latino students can apply to most colleges and universities within the United States, they are often not eligible for in-state tuition, federal, or state financial aid (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). Some state policies exclude undocumented Latino students from applying to post-secondary schools altogether, while others permit enrollment and in-state tuition rates. States with restrictive policies explicitly deny eligibility for admission and/or in-state tuition for undocumented Latino students. States with inclusive policies grant in-state tuition and/or eligibility for public financial aid for undocumented Latino students. Very few states provide financial aid for undocumented Latino students to attend institutions of higher education. As of 2014 only Washington, California, Minnesota, Texas, and New Mexico have extended state financial aid to undocumented students (Velasquez, 2014). Eighteen states within the U.S. allow college enrollment and in-state tuition rates for undocumented students, including the state of Kansas. Thirty-two states within the U.S. allow undocumented students to apply for college,
but do not permit in-state tuition rates. Two states strictly prohibit undocumented students from enrolling in post secondary institution, Alabama and South Carolina.

In 2004, Kansas passed its own version of the DREAM Act permitting undocumented Latino students in-state tuition rates for higher education through the HB2145 statute. However these students do not have access to financial aid and are at risk of being deported at any time given their legal status in the United States (Gonzales, 2011; Velasquez, 2014). They are allowed to apply for private scholarships that do not require a social security number.

Despite oppressive laws and policies that can make higher education a challenge for undocumented Latino students, there are those who persist and find ways to pursue higher education. This group of 1.5-generation Latino students/graduates is the exception to the rule. Their stories challenge the normative assumption that Latino immigrants are in the U.S. to take and not give back, or that they do not value education. Regardless of the financial aspect of paying for higher education with no access to financial aid, these students/graduates are finding solutions to achieve their goals for the future through higher education. There is much to be learned from the experiences of these students/graduates who have managed to pursue higher education.

The dominant narrative about undocumented Latino immigrants in the United States is socially constructed by people in power who are predominately white (Abrego, 2011). This dominant narrative labels undocumented Latinos as illegal criminals who pose a threat to America’s shared values, community, and culture which have served as a basis of liberal democracy (Drachman, 2006). This anti-immigrant climate promotes the general belief that undocumented Latinos compete unfairly for jobs, receive public benefits they do not deserve, and pose a threat to national security (Drachman, 2006). Mainstream media promotes negative
portrayals of undocumented Latinos, dehumanizing them with labels such as “illegals” or “criminals.” Vocal mass media and anti-immigrant groups make it clear that undocumented Latinos are unwelcomed and subject to immediate deportation disguised under the mantles of national security (Abrego, 2011).

The “undocumented” or “illegal” categories are not new terms within the United States, originating in the 1920s through immigration policies. Since then, these policies have progressively criminalized undocumented Latinos by expanding the powers of border patrol, enforcing proof of documentation for employment, and enforcing sanctions for employers who knowingly hire undocumented employees (DeSipio & De la Garza, 1998). There may be another narrative that goes untold, that is, the stories and experiences from 1.5-generation undocumented Latino students/graduates. Counterstorytelling, a method associated with Latino Critical theory, has been utilized to share the voices of those on the margins of society. These counterstories challenge the dominant narrative of those in power by revealing stories from populations such as undocumented Latino students/graduates (Delgado, 1989). This qualitative methodology legitimizes the voices of undocumented Latinos in the United States by incorporating their knowledge to offer another side of the majoritarian story, providing a respectable space for oppressed groups to exist (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012).

**Theoretical Framework: Latino Critical Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) establishes the notion that racism is socially constructed and prevalent in society. CRT theorists often challenge socially constructed norms within institutions (Pizarro, 1998). Latino Critical (LatCrit) theory branches off from CRT into fields of legal scholarship and educational research that critically observe the social and legal positioning of Latino individuals within the United States. In order to develop a race conscious framework
that helps explain the experiences of undocumented Latino students, LatCrit theory emphasizes the oppressive aspects of society. Oppression can include very specific policies that exclude state benefits or in-state tuition rates to undocumented Latinos, but is not limited to guidelines in a policy book (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). Oppression can be found within curriculum and pedagogies that are designed for predominately white students, leaving Latino students in the margins. Positive generalizations are presumed when students enroll in prestigious universities such as Harvard and Stanford, whereas negative expectations are associated with state universities or all-Latino institutions. Students who are on the outskirts of mainstream culture are often sorted into inferior academic institutions. For example, students who do not have access to specialized curriculum are often unprepared for higher-level degree programs or opportunities such as assistantships and fellowships (D. G. Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). LatCrit theory is complementary of CRT, serving as a beneficial supplement to challenging normative perspectives and discourse related to race and racism that marginalizes undocumented Latinos students within educational structures. A LatCrit framework with a transformational resistance lens can address how undocumented Latino students navigate an oppressive educational system (D. G. Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

**Latino Critical Theory**

The LatCrit theory lens on education is comprised of five common themes. These themes form the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of education as posited by LatCrit theorists Solórazo (1998), Solórazo and Yosso (2001), and Solórazo & Bernal (2001).

The first theme proposed through the LatCrit lens is the centrality of race and racism. Race and racism are pulled into focus because they exist widely in society. This theme is designed to acknowledge that racism is not limited to small structures, but is centralized in
mainstream society. Through the LatCrit lens racism is not regarded as an individual issue, it is an institutional and societal problem. Undocumented Latino students are positioned within a negative context where they are often discriminated against (M. Russell, 1992). Forms of subordination included under this category are gender and class discrimination.

Racism is a relationship between oppressors and the oppressed, established and maintained to protect the interests of a dominant group (Valenzuela, 1999). The oppressed or marginalized group is controlled through violence or subtle attacks on their cultural identity. Attacks of cultural identity on a marginalized group can be based on their language, religion, and history, separating them from the dominant oppressive group by labeling them inferior. Castro-Salazar and Bagley (2010) discussed the formation of class through racism; the polarization between the oppressors and oppressed creates racialized communities based on poverty and low levels of educational attainment through sorting. The combination of race and class contribute to questions that highlight experiences of the marginalized by closely looking at biased practices that end up being discriminatory towards oppressed groups (D. G. Solórzano, 1998).

These types of discrimination can create feelings of powerlessness within undocumented Latino students through the stigmatization of being “illegal.” Munoz and Maldonado (2012) reported the undocumented Latino participants in their study felt they did not belong on their college campus due to expressing opinions that supported social justice in class or being called derogatory names in reference to their Latino ethnicity. They felt exposed, as if they were perceived “illegal” and U.S. citizens questioned their right to be there. Undocumented Latino students reported feeling invisible in class during discussions of immigration and legal status. General questions about immigration status from administration or “Where are you from” probes from peers became dangerous inquiries for undocumented Latino students who felt they had to
conceal their legal status. This theme would allow me to examine undocumented Latinos experiences of racism, prejudice, and discrimination that perpetuate feelings of marginalization throughout their educational experiences (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010).

The second theme is related to challenging dominant ideology. Institutions and structures facilitate normative views that reflect on their core objectivity, meritocracy, and equal opportunity. These views support the assumption that everyone begins from the same status and has a fair chance for advancement. Meritocracy promotes an assumption that all individuals share equal access to the same opportunities, therefore with hard work or dedication everyone can eventually get ahead. This creed is oftentimes written in policy books or noted in mission statements, declaring all students will be regarded impartially and objectively regardless of their background. These views influence notions of colorblindness and racial neutrality.

Colorblindness is the practice of suppressing the identification of skin colors other than white. Pretending to not notice students of color indirectly creates a narrative of different colors being deficit or shameful. Colorblindness is the belief that by simply ignoring skin color, racism can be eliminated. Making racism invisible excludes minority cultural values, historical achievements, and social experiences (Thompson, 1998). Administration within educational settings often practice colorblindness where any mention of race is the very definition of racism. Neutralizing race and masking inequality perpetuates racism through devaluing policies such as affirmative action within admissions and marginalizing those who experience racism in their everyday lives. The notion of colorblindness in not limited to administration, it is also exercised within the classroom among students. For example, documented white students often come to the classroom with the expectation that the class and lessons will center on their experiences. This assumption of colorblindness is based on the notion of racial neutrality, essentially because
they believe their experiences are the norm and represent everyone’s experience. When importance is placed on the perspectives of students of color, documented white students can feel victimized. This notion of white individuals replacing people of color as the primary victims of discrimination is referred to as reverse racism (Kandaswamy, 2007).

A LatCrit theorist challenges these traditional ideologies by critically questioning the claims of normative views and dominant ideologies within the educational setting. LatCrit can be applied to reveal patterns of dominance and subordination within the power structure of an educational establishment. Not only are LatCrit theorists bidding to challenge customary norms, they also try to deliver interventions based on identity and practice to race discourse (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1996). This theme can enable me to examine how undocumented Latino students push back on the dominant ideology within their educational experience, to fully understand dominant forces at work in their oppression (Pizarro, 1998).

An overarching component of social justice is the third theme when looking through the LatCrit lens. LatCrit theorists center their reactions to race, gender, and class oppression with a general emphasis on equality and solidarity in society (Matsuda, 1991). Social justice pedagogy concentrates on the dignity of every human being, in hopes to eliminate racism, sexism, and poverty. The commitment to social justice empowers those who are subjected to marginalization and underrepresented minority groups (D. G. Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The elimination of racial subordination and discrimination are goals of social justice throughout LatCrit. The media portrays a hostile context about Latino immigration, assuming they do not contribute to the U.S. while at the same time seizing opportunities from citizens. Theme three will allow undocumented Latino students to push back on this stereotypes and offer another version of
reality (D. G. Solórzano, 1998). This theme can create space for these students to define what a socially just society looks like and how to better it (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012).

The fourth theme is the importance of experience through a person of color’s perspective. The experiential knowledge of men and women of color is not only appropriate but also critical when examining all levels of racial subordination within the educational setting (D. G. Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Experiential knowledge of Latino students is considered a strength originating in storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, chronicles, and narratives (Delgado, 1989). LatCrit draws from persons of color’s perspectives and lived experiences to enrich the understanding of marginalization and subordination in educational structures (D. G. Solórzano, 1998). This theme could support my research data to legitimize, empower, and promote the voices of undocumented Latino students (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). Capturing undocumented Latino students’ stories and making meaning of their educational experiences can offer insight into their lives. Data collected from these students might offer a softer side to the negative normative assumptions perpetuated in the media. As the voices of this population are increasingly received, they have the opportunity to become empowered by being heard legitimately. They have the chance to speak for themselves, not be spoken for by mass media.

The fifth theme draws on historical and contemporary contexts when examining race and racism in educational settings (Delgado, 1984). LatCrit theory is used frequently within the contexts of women’s studies, ethnic studies, sociology, and other fields committed to eradicating racism, classism, and sexism (D. G. Solórzano, 1998). Many undocumented Latinos experience a level of criminalization for living in the United States. The mainstream media frequently promotes negative portrayals of Latino immigration, suggesting they pose a threat to America’s
values and traditions. Undocumented Latino students are living in a context that assumes they
do not value education and are taking opportunities away from documented citizens without
contributing anything. This theme provides space for undocumented Latino students to describe
their goals of higher education and plans for the future, contextualizing their experiences within
a dominant climate.

**Transformational Resistance**

Although the themes listed above specifically address the racial discourses of being a
Latino/a person of color, combining a resistance lens might help explain undocumented Latino
student’s responses to systemic oppression at a deeper level. Through transformational
resistance, undocumented Latino students are aware of oppressive structures within the process
of obtaining higher education. This awareness is usually accompanied with a motivation for
social change. Transformational resistance framed within the LatCrit framework enables me to
look more closely at how undocumented Latino students resist structures of dominance to
achieve their educational goals. Transformational resistance of undocumented Latino students is
political, collective, conscious, and driven by a desire for social change (D. G. Solorzano &
Bernal, 2001).

Transformational resistance is based on two types of resistance, internal and external.
They are not separate concepts; they tend to be fluid and overlap with one another as
undocumented Latino students resist oppression in various ways. Using these two types of
resistance enables me to examine various levels of resistance among undocumented Latino
students (Bernal, 1997).

Internal resistance can be challenging to identify and analyze because this behavior
appears to conform to institutional norms and expectations. Although undocumented Latino
students may seem to embrace institutional and cultural norms, they are consciously aware of how they are faced with oppression. An undocumented Latino student preforming well in higher education classes with a goal in mind to one day give back to the community is a common example of internal resistance. The student may not be overtly campaigning for social change, but has a silent agenda to give back to the community through education and social service. Because internal resistance is not as pronounced as obvious protesting, I will be prepared with various probing questions to fully capture their experiences within the narrative interviews (D. G. Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

External resistance is easier to identify because these behaviors are visible and explicit. External resistance behaviors of undocumented Latino students are not considered silent or subtle. Rather, this behavior tends to be public and operates outside of the traditional system. A civil rights activist who regularly participates in protests or demonstrations in hopes of social change is a common example of external resistance behavior (D. G. Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). It is unlikely the undocumented Latino students will be activists in this sense; therefore I may not capture examples of this type of resistance within this study.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe experiences and perceptions of a select group of 1.5-generation Latino student/graduate within Kansas higher education. Through the lens of Latino Critical Theory, counterstories in this narrative inquiry can push back against the dominant narrative of Latinos and higher education. I hope to capture the higher educational journey of undocumented Latino students residing in Kansas, including instances of oppression or racism. An aspect I hope to capture is how undocumented Latino students are navigating their educational journey within the current anti-immigration context. This context fuels a negative
dominant narrative of undocumented Latino students by labeling them illegal criminals. With a steady number of students graduating from high school every year in hopes of obtaining a college degree, what is next for these students?

The following questions guide this study to understand the experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation Latino students’ living in Kansas who have, are, or have pursued higher education. How do undocumented 1.5-generation students describe their journey through higher education?

1. How do undocumented 1.5-generation Latino students describe their current undocumented status?

2. How do undocumented 1.5-generation Latino students describe ways they resist systemic oppression within higher education?

3. How do undocumented 1.5 generation Latino students perceive the anti-immigration context they reside in?

4. What does social justice and equality look like for undocumented 1.5-generation Latino students within higher education?
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a review of previous literature relevant to the proposed narrative inquiry of undocumented Latino students. Myths about Latinos and education, deficit views on the Latino population, and commonly published examples of the Latino experience in higher education are provided in this section. Challenges described in the literature will be considered with a LatCrit theory lens to critically study the social and legal positioning of undocumented Latino students residing within the United States.

Myths and Deficit Thinking

One of the major myths published throughout literature and other media is the belief that Mexican individuals do not place value on education. The idea that Latino parents, particularly those with a low socioeconomic background, do not value education and instill this ideology in their kids is found within literature dating back to the 1920’s. These myths have been influenced by the notion of deficit thinking, an ideology based on the assumption that students from a low socioeconomic background are not successful in school because they and/or their families have internal defects, or deficits (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Deficit thinking tends to focus on how students of color are low preforming in school due to their alleged cognitive and motivational deficits. Blame is placed on the students and their families; the assumption of inadequate familial socialization has been used to explain school failure. However, using a LatCrit theory lens, these traditional ideologies or normative views can be challenged and critically examined to offer other explanations for low performance in school. As the second theme within the LatCrit theory proposes: A LatCrit researcher would
consider how the schools and political economy might be structured to prevent Latino students from learning at their best capacity (Valencia, 1997).

The majority of research tends to perpetuate a deficit view of communities of color, perpetuating stereotypical structures that assume marginalized cultures are somehow deficit compared to the dominant culture of the United States. Previous scholarship suggests that undocumented Latino students are unprepared for higher education based on deficiencies within their poor neighborhoods and households (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). Tinto’s theory within the assimilationist model describes marginalized groups having to assimilate into the dominant white culture in the United States to be successful (Tinto, 1987). According to this model, college success depends on the willingness to let go of cultural values, identities, and ideologies while embracing dominant values and identity.

In an early study, Pratt (1938), offered a perspective to counter deficit thinking toward Mexican families when examining data from an agricultural community located in Delta Colorado. As Pratt examined schooling conditions, socioeconomic status (SES) background, and academic achievement of Mexican and White children, he discovered that Mexican students were experiencing attendance issues because they did not have clothes or shoes to wear, were too sick, or had to work for supplemental income. Instead of assuming that Mexican students’ poor attendance was due to their families placing little value on their education, he interpreted the issue being rooted in serious economic problems related to parents being subjected to low paying occupations (Pratt, 1938). Most Mexican families were working in the local sugar beet industry and supplementing their income by harvesting other crops in Delta. The first theme under the LatCrit theory is designed to acknowledge forms of subordination including class discrimination, which could be due to types of occupations and how Latinos are sorted into lower paying jobs.
A lot of published research about Mexican students has centered on a deficit view but does not fully support the generalization of Latinos not placing value on their educations. For example, in his publication about ethnic America, Sowell (1981) claimed the goals and values of Latinos have never centered on education. His rationale for this statement was comparative high school completion rates across ethnicity. Sowell conveyed that between the years of 1960 and 1980, 13% of Latinos in the southwest completed high school, compared to 17% black, 28% non-Latino White, and 39% Japanese students. From these statistics, Sowell concluded that Mexican students do not value education. He asserted that Mexican students are responsible for their own educational shortcomings. This inaccurate inference was published as a creditable source of racial and ethnic history, further perpetuating the belief that Latinos do not value education (Sowell, 1981). LatCrit draws from Latino perspectives and lived experiences to correct these kinds of misunderstandings about undocumented Latino students and how social and systemic forces influence subordination.

Another form of deficit thinking can place blame on the Latino student’s parents. Academic issues of Latino students have been labeled a direct result of Latino parent influence, assuming that Latino parents do not value education. It has been suggested that Latino parents and students have failed schools and society due to their lack of motivation to make the system work for them (Dunn, 1987). A LatCrit researcher would counter this assumption by examining whether the school system is supporting the needs of the undocumented Latino population or not. Dunn has not critically considered aspects of segregation, financial inequalities, or curriculum differentiation. Blame is placed on the Latino student, not the structure.

There are Latino individuals who perpetuate a deficit view of the Latino community and its beliefs about education. Cavazos, former U.S. Secretary of Education, (1990) addressed
Latino educational issues at a press conference in San Antonio capturing the attention of newspapers and television. Cavazos asserted that although Latinos have always valued education, somewhere along the line “we” have lost that emphasis. Cavazos placed responsibility for lack of academic achievement on the attitudes of Latinos rather than acknowledging the history of Texas state mandates on this population (Valencia & Black, 2002). Not only do these types of generalizations promote racial stereotypes that are damaging to undocumented Latino students, they contribute to patterns of dominance and subordination within the power structure of an educational establishment as embedded in LatCrit theory.

Despite the hostile climate toward undocumented Latino students and their parents in the United States, this population values education and relies on their own set of cultural values that are not inferior to the dominant culture. Parents of undocumented Latino students display high aspirations for their children’s education even if they themselves did not have the opportunity to attend school in their youth (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). When Latino students and their families were interviewed, researchers found that even low socio-economic families were invested in their children’s educational welfare (Morrow & Young, 1997). Undocumented Latino student parents may not be able to navigate the educational system within the United States or tutor their children over the content, but their endurance of migrating for better opportunities has the power to motivate their children to pursue higher education (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). A survey of public attitudes and opinions regarding higher education concluded that Latino and Black parents were more likely to emphasize the importance of higher education than White parents or a population as a whole (Immerwahr & Foleno, 2000). Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) visited the homes of 25 Mexican families in Arizona over 100 times in their study. These observations
revealed Mexican families having a philosophy supportive of education. Parents expressed they wanted all their children to attend college (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

**Cultural Wealth rather than Internal Defects**

Cultural awareness is defined by an individual’s knowledge of his or her culture, such as language, history, traditions, customs, and cultural icons. Undocumented Latino students with a strong identification of cultural awareness are conscious of traditional norms, values, gender roles, and behaviors. Buriel and Saenz (1980) described Latino individuals as being heavily focused on prioritizing marriage, family, and the household above other pursuits. The normative view describes education as a secondary value to Latino individuals who are closely bound to traditional roles because they are more likely to place emphasis on childbearing and the household (Niemann, Romero, & Arbona, 2000). Cultural influences within Latino families can prevent preparation for future economic situations due to immediate concerns about economic shortages (Lareau, 2002).

Within this marginalized group of undocumented Latino students and their parents, Yosso (2005) described a unique set of cultural wealth or values. She emphasized the cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts that give Latino families the best chance to survive or resist racism and oppression. The notion of community cultural wealth highlights six forms of cultural capital held by undocumented Latino students living in the United States. Aspiration (the drive to succeed), navigation (the ability to move around institutions given their legal status), linguistics (the ability to effectively communicate within the realms of cognitive, social, and arts-informed skills), social skills (being able to lean on their communities for emotional strength and information), familial influence (an awareness of a shared sense of history and
intuition from immediate and extended family), and resistance (having ability regardless of inequalities).

Aspirational capital as a form of cultural wealth encompasses the hopes and dreams of Latino students for their future, regardless of challenges. They have aspirations for opportunities beyond their present situation, even if they do not have the means to attain these ambitions. Latinos experience the lowest educational outcomes in the U.S., however they still aspire for the futures of their children. Narratives of their resilience offer hope for the Latino population in terms of higher educational attainment (D. G. Solorzano, 1992; Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) referred to navigational capital as one of the main forms of cultural wealth where undocumented Latino students have the necessary skills to navigate successfully throughout social institutions and policies. This academic invulnerability has been acknowledged as an innate set of inner resources, social competencies, and cultural strategies to maneuver through structures of inequality regardless of their legal status (Yosso, 2005). International travel experience is another form of capital for undocumented students as they have immigrated from their home country to the U.S. (Moll et al., 1992).

While a normative view might generalize Spanish-speaking students as not proficient in English, undocumented Latino students are most likely to have linguistic capital. Yosso (2005) explained linguistic capital as a component of cultural wealth where several powerful qualities derive from being bilingual. The undocumented Latino student is likely to have strong memorization capabilities, display key timing during story telling, use appropriate vocal tone selection, and possess the ability to communicate with various audiences (Yosso, 2005). The ability to successfully navigate between Latino and Anglo languages has been an affective skill found in higher academic achievement among undocumented Latino students (Shinnar, 2007).
Social capital involves the use of networking and community resources between peers and social contacts and can provide support for Latino students. Instrumental and emotional support can be utilized to navigate through society’s institutions. Social capital comes in the form of information and resources to gain education, legal justice, employment, and health care. Communities of color have historically united to face the day-to-day adversity through supportive social networking. An example of a social network could be a community center based on resources specifically tailored to the community it serves (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

Familial capital refers to having a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). These components are nurtured through the utilization of an extended family such as, aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends, community, and church, which model lessons of caring, compassion, and coping (Bernal, 1998, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Familialism is a cultural value that affects undocumented Latino students desire for higher education and career advancement (Shinnar, 2007).

Resistance capital is built from knowledge and skills utilized to oppose inequality. Parents of color who maintain and pass on skills created to push back on the status quo are employing a legacy of resistance capital. This resilience creates methods to confront race, gender, and class inequality. Parents who encourage their children to resist societal messages that devalue people of color are consciously encouraging their children to value themselves (Pizarro, 1998; D. G. Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

**Legal Climate of the United States**

Laws and policies have various implications for undocumented Latino students in regard to higher education. Proposed legislation could provide pathways to permanent residency. New
programs have been created to offer some protection from deportation. Other legislation restricts in-state tuition rates and access to financial aid. The following section will describe how these policies can influence undocumented Latino students.

Proposed federal legislation referred to as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act would offer an avenue for undocumented Latino students to access higher education and eventually be granted permanent residency within the United States. The DREAM Act, first introduced in 2001, was designed to address the legal and economic challenges faced by the 65,000 undocumented high school students graduating each year. The current form of the federal DREAM Act is designed to repeal section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) that prevents states from offering in-state tuition rates unless they do the same for documented students from other states. Young individuals who have been educated in the United States for five years or more, have exhibited good moral character, and have graduated from a United States high school would be eligible for conditional residency. To maintain conditional residency, the DREAM Act beneficiaries would be required to successfully complete at least two years of higher education within a six-year period. By meeting this requirement, they can then apply for permanent residency. Becoming a permanent resident in the United States could open doors to financial aid such as Pell grants and state and federal scholarships that were once unattainable (Morales, Herrera, & Murry, 2011).

As congress debates immigration reform, there are programs that ease the concern of deportation for undocumented Latino students residing in the United States. In 2012, the Secretary of Homeland Security announced that certain people who came to the United States as children and meet specific requirements may request consideration of deferred action for a
period of two years, subject to renewal. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program does not offer any solutions for citizenship but it enables eligible undocumented Latino students the opportunity to continue residing in the United States without the possibility of being deported. DACA recipients have been granted opportunities such as being hired for occupations, opening a bank account, obtaining a driver’s license, and/or applying for work permits and credit cards (Cervantes & Gonzales, 2013).

Opponents to in-state tuition access for undocumented Latino students are inclined to say that it promotes illegal activity and could potentially encourage more illegal migration. They also believe it is waste of taxpayer dollars, especially during tough economic times. A common viewpoint about undocumented Latino students is although they might gain higher education degrees, they do not have the legal status to work in the United States, which would be a poor investment for the country. Opponents argue that lower tuition rates for undocumented Latino students might take away openings or financial aid from their documented counterparts (A. Russell, 2011).

Supporters of access to in-state tuition for undocumented Latino students have asserted it is the United States’ moral obligation to be inclusive of this group regardless of their legal status. Children of parents who migrated to the United States without documentation have done nothing wrong and should not be penalized for choices they did not make. Supporters have asserted that the United States’ future is dependent on the development of intellectual capital and workforce members who have higher education (Erinsman & Looney, 2007). The educational attainment of undocumented Latino students, from ages 25-29, offers a glimpse into the United States’ future (Santos et al., 2005). Lack of higher education for this population could increase poverty and societal costs (Erinsman & Looney, 2007; A. Russell, 2011).
Supporters also have argued that access to in-state tuition being a financial drain on taxpayers’ money is a misconception because in-state tuition is not free tuition. In-state tuition would likely increase enrollment of undocumented Latino students which would increase tuition revenues. Therefore, it is counterproductive for the United States to invest in K-12 education and then cease at higher education levels (A. Russell, 2011). Investing in undocumented students’ higher education is generally associated with higher lifetime earnings and more productive employees, which can lead to higher economic return at state and federal levels (Frum, 2007).

When determining tuition matters, the IIRIRA allows the state to determine residency for undocumented Latino students, declaring in-state tuition a non-monetary benefit. Due to the lack of consistency from federal policies regarding access to higher education for undocumented Latino students in the U.S., individual states are left to decipher residency policies, which can create critical consequences for undocumented Latino students who are pursuing higher education. With inclusion of Latino perspectives and awareness of how the law affects immigrants, social justice can be promoted for all individuals regarding higher education access and affordability. State policymakers have proposed hundreds of bills designed to expand or restrict higher education opportunities of undocumented Latino students. Three possible legal scenarios are in-state tuition for undocumented students, the ability to actually enroll in college, and/or the ineligibility for financial aid (Frum, 2007).

A class action lawsuit filed in the state of California in 2010, Martinez vs. the Regents of the University of California allowed undocumented students to be eligible for in-state tuition (Martinez v. the Regents of the University of California). The AB540 law enabled undocumented students to be eligible for in-state tuition if they attended a California high school
for at least three years and graduated, there are no further requirements of residency in the state of California (A. Russell, 2011). Other states, such as Alabama and South Carolina, have passed legislation prohibiting undocumented Latino students from enrolling in any post secondary institutions. Eighteen states have updated legislation to provide in-state tuition to undocumented students: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah and Washington. The United States government annually distributes $129 billion dollars for federal financial aid and loans within post-secondary education (Frum, 2007). There are five states who allow undocumented Latino students access to state financial aid; California, New Mexico, Texas, Minnesota, and Washington (A. Russell, 2011).
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative, narrative inquiry research design to understand the experiences of undocumented Latino students in relation to their pursuit of higher education (Chase, 2005). The objectives of the study were to engage, acknowledge, and learn from narratives and life stories of undocumented Latino students as they navigate between two worlds and strive for and/or attain higher education (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). Qualitative researchers strive to thoroughly explore the day-to-day interactions of individuals, how occurrences transpire, and the meaning behind them. Qualitative researchers generally hold a research perspective that is either interpretivist or critical. Using the LatCrit theory, this study will uses narrative inquiry to take a critical stance on how inequality and oppression influence a phenomenon (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012).

Narrative Inquiry

LatCrit theorists use stories, counter-stories, and narratives to empower marginalized groups who are often silenced within educational research (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; Fernández, 2002). Storytelling, giving voice, and allowing one to share his or her reality is central to a marginalized population challenging an oppressive system from the margins. Storytelling can serve various methodological functions and benefit people of color by legitimizing their voices through incorporating their knowledge into a critique of the dominant social setting. These stories or counter-stories serve as an opportunity for undocumented Latino students to describe their lived experiences as academically successful immigrants (Daniel G. Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The method of storytelling allows the speaker to reflect on their
experiences, making their personal story public, offering another perspective to the dominant narrative, and raises consciousness of experiences that can lead to social action (Fernández, 2002). Through the use of storytelling I honor undocumented Latino immigrant student voices and offer a perspective that might counter generalizations about them (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012).

Although the ultimate goal is to give undocumented Latino students the opportunity to tell their stories, a narrative inquiry is much more than storytelling. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) originally coined the term narrative inquiry with a specific lens in research: life experience is education. A narrative inquiry research design utilizes theoretical ideas when examining the nature of human life and can place emphasis on education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The perspective of human nature, individually and socially, derives from the human experience. Stories and narratives shape the lives of people, as they offer possibilities to understand their lived experiences. Narrative inquiry is utilized to examine the life stories of undocumented Latino student participants, to empower their experiences, and to understand how they identify themselves within their context (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007).

Because the human experience is largely understood narratively, a study using narratives was the best way to deliver participants’ experiences about their life stories. A narrative inquiry shares a colorful description of the emotional aspects that shape participants’ lives. The participants and I relied on their personal and social interactions of the past, present, and future in addition to location and situation. This balance of interaction and situation has provided a holistic outlook of participants’ lives, which is the framework of their narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).
Connelly and Clandinin borrowed the notion of commonplaces from a study by Schwab (1978) regarding curriculum. In Schwab’s study, four commonplaces were employed to adequately explain curriculum; the teacher, learner, subject matter, and social environment. Utilizing the commonplace notion, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) developed three commonplaces of narrative inquiry; temporality, sociality, and place. These dimensions provide a framework for conducting a narrative inquiry that captures a holistic picture of participants’ perceptions throughout their higher educational journey (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

The first commonplace is referred to as temporality. People, places, and events are continuously transitioning through a past, present, and future. This commonplace emphasizes that everything is always in transition within a narrative inquiry. The second commonplace, which is sociality, addresses personal and social conditions of the inquirer and participants. Personal conditions can be defined as feelings, hopes, reactions, and dispositions of participants and myself. Social conditions include existential circumstances, environment, and surrounding forces that influence the context in which participants experience. This commonplace embraces the relationship between participants and myself. The third commonplace, place, is defined by concrete and physical boundaries in which events take place. Place is important to consider because it can have various impacts on participant experience. All of these commonplaces serve as checkpoints within a narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

A well-established narrative explains why participants’ stories are meaningful as well as expressing their emotions, thoughts, and interpretations. My intentions are to contrast a deficit assumption that Latinos under value higher education within the context of participants’ experiences and desires to pursue higher education. The reason I layered location into the narrative of participants such as communities, local settings, memberships, cultural and historical
locations was to better contextualize how they interact with the status quo of the society they reside in.

Participants’ willingness to share their narrative was shaped by our interactions throughout the research conversation process. The stories collected were a joint effort between the participants and myself. It is important that this qualitative study is both comprehensible to myself, as the researcher, and to the participants who are being studied. By linking LatCrit theory within my analysis and research questions, this research informs and challenges commonly held misconceptions about undocumented Latino students. These assumptions include status quo epistemologies of Latinos undervaluing higher education and deficit thinking where blame is placed on the undocumented Latino student due to alleged cognitive and motivational deficits. All of these points are layered within my research design and have produced rich, multidimensional narratives of undocumented Latino students experience within the United States (Chase, 2005; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Research Context

This study was conducted within the state of Kansas because it has a high population of young Latinos who are foreign born. The U.S. Census Bureau categorizes undocumented or 1.5 generation populations as foreign born. Foreign born is defined as anyone who was not a U.S. citizen at birth. As of the year 2012, the U.S. Census data indicated that Kansas’ total population was approximately 2.8 million. Of this population, youth residing in Kansas under the age of 18 years accounted for approximately 25%. Latino populations within the state of Kansas account for 11% of the total population, where 6% of Kansas’ population is considered foreign born. The U.S. Census Bureau defines foreign born as anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, including naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, temporary migrants, foreign students,
humanitarian migrants, refugees, and undocumented migrants. The U.S. Census bureau reports the foreign born population from Latin America was the largest region-of-birth group at 53% of the overall foreign born group (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

**Participant Selection**

The research participants for this study were individuals from the undocumented Latino student population in the state of Kansas. I gained access to participants through a member of an international marketplace, which is a Latino district offering authentic food and cultural entertainment for the community. The person referred me to a community who is well known for its advocacy of undocumented Latino students within Kansas. I was then directed to a statewide, non-profit, grassroots organization whose mission includes justice for immigrants, civic engagement, worker justice, better public education, and more livable neighborhoods throughout Kansas. Through this community I was able to connect with an undocumented Latino student who was very excited about sharing her positive example of pursuing higher education.

In our first informal conversation, the undocumented Latino student and I discussed higher education and the legal position of undocumented Latino students. After our phone conversation, I was invited to a group meeting where other undocumented Latino students regularly gathered. Three undocumented Latino students agreed to participate in interviews regarding their experiences pursuing higher education while being undocumented. Two out of three students had graduated from college with their bachelor’s degree, one of whom has now obtained a Masters degree. The youngest of the group had recently graduated high school is currently in her first year of college.
From these three undocumented Latino students I identified other participants to interview. I interviewed eight participants, which is more than what I originally hoped for.

Once I interviewed participants, they reached out to other undocumented Latino students who were excited to share their stories. After speaking with eight undocumented Latino students, I ceased with interviews because I was collecting similar responses from participants within the semi-structured interview protocol.

Participants ranged from the age of 18-26. I spoke with three men and five women. Participants had spent most or at least half of their lives residing in the U.S. Most of the participants migrated from México however one participant migrated from Nicaragua. Three out

| TABLE 1. |
| Participant Sample |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Years residing in the U.S.</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>DACA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sergio</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Zacatecas, México</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Completed Masters</td>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>Recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco</td>
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<td>Aguascalientes, México</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Enrolled Masters</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariana</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Zacatecas, México</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Enrolled Bachelors</td>
<td>International Business &amp; Political Science</td>
<td>Recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Zacatecas, México</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Graduated Bachelors</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regena</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Guadalajara, México</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Enrolled Bachelors</td>
<td>Criminal Science</td>
<td>Recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nita</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Jalisco, México</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Enrolled Bachelors</td>
<td>Criminal Science</td>
<td>Non-Recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Du Plateau, México</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Graduated Bachelors</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Enrolled Bachelors</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Recipient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of 7 participants from México migrated from an area called Zacatecas. They did not know one another before or after moving from México to the U.S. One participant had graduated with his masters while another was finishing his masters this semester, 2015. Two Latinas graduated with their bachelors while the remainder of participants where enrolled and pursuing their bachelors degree. Many of the participants were specializing in political science or criminal justice, so they were very aware of laws and policies influencing their legal situation. Seven out of 8 participants were recipients of DACA, while one participant was in the process of applying for DACA. Although most of the recipients had DACA, not all of them had DACA as they pursued higher education so I was able to collect various experiences from my sample.

**Data Collection Plan**

Qualitative data sources in this study included eight individual narratives based on semi-structured interview questions and researcher notes of my observations to inform the study. Each participant’s narrative stands on its own, therefore various types of sources offer a deeper description of their story. This collection process will be discussed in this section.

**Narrative interviews.** In an effort to gain participant perspectives and life stories, I met with eight participants to conduct multiple face-to-face and in-depth interviews (Clandinin et al., 2007). I met with each participant two times, for a total of 16 interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 70 minutes and focused on five themes based within LatCrit theoretical framework. Themes that guided the purpose of the study were: centrality of race and racism, challenging the dominant ideology, an emphasis on equality, the importance of experience through a person of color’s perspective, and historical and contemporary contexts throughout the educational setting. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions taken from pre-
established, semi-structured protocol designed with the intent to collect the richest information possible, a method of narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Although I used a semi-structured protocol to guide the dialogue between me and the participants, I remained flexible, as I wanted my participants to tell their stories the way they felt best (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A lot of times I would begin with a question and they would take it where they wanted to. I allowed for that. If they did not fully address the original question, I used probes from the previously establish protocol. We worked together to discuss information that we both felt was important for the study. As Clandinin and Huber (2002) have suggested, the researcher should be able to guide the participants both inwardly and outwardly throughout the dialogue. The participants and I moved back and forth between the past, present, and future with a notion of location, while identifying personal or social interaction to achieve the three-dimensional structure of interaction, continuity, and situation (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). A three-dimensional narrative inquiry is based largely on how people experience both personal and social interactions amongst one another. As we moved inwardly and outwardly through our in-depth conversations, time became relative as we leaped through the past, present, and future to capture their perspective. Flexibility in the protocol was crucial for the participants to tell their stories in the most natural way (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Once participants agreed to meet with me and participate in an individual interview, I allowed them to choose where we met. Many participants worked 1-3 jobs so I remained flexible about where and when we interviewed. Interviews took place at community centers and offices where participants worked. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the vulnerability of the participants, I let them choose where they would be most comfortable or convenient. The confidentiality of the participant was my primary concern however, seven out of eight
participants were recipients of DACA and they were not concerned with issues of confidentiality. Many participants told me they wanted me to use their real names but I informed them I would be using pseudonyms. Interviews between the participants and myself were digitally recorded through an audio recorder application on a handheld device. These audio recordings were immediately backed-up onto a secure, password protected online “Dropbox” location in addition to the handheld device. Transcriptions of these audio recordings were completed soon after the interviews to maintain a clear interpretation of the dialogue. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

During individual interviews, I documented examples that were not expressed vocally: such as environmental surroundings and participant interactions. These observations were recorded in hand written journals in efforts to inform my research questions. My researcher notes include the date, time of day, location, specific details of occurrences during interviews, sensory impressions, and insider language (Berg, 2007). A two-column journal method was utilized in my journal to keep observation description and researcher interpretation separate while notes were taken at the same time (Lapan et al., 2012).

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is best performed simultaneously while collecting data to prevent data from becoming unfocused, repetitive, or overwhelming (Merriam, 2009). The process of analyzing data was ongoing, constantly reflective, and concurrently practiced as I collected data, identified themes, and linked them to the Latcrit theoretical framework (Maxwell, 2013).

Analysis began with digital recording sessions with my participants. Our sessions were digitally recorded to ensure the accuracy of my respondents’ responses. These digital recordings
were stored on a recording device and immediately uploaded to a secure, password-protected “Dropbox” back up. I am the only person who has access to this data. Narrative responses were transcribed verbatim on a word processor document from these audio recordings. These transcriptions are also backed up to a secure, password-protected “Dropbox” location.

Demographic information is stored separately from survey information to reduce the risk of loss of confidentiality. As I collected data, I immediately began sorting, transcribing, and typing out my filed notes and observations to be prepared for the next step, looking for themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Analysis of my data progressed through a classification of emerging themes, ideas, activities, topics, and types of people (Lapan et al., 2012). Participants’ insights and data collected throughout our meetings were directly linked back to the research questions and reinforced through the LatCrit theory. There were many commonalities between participants’ narratives, but each of their stories stands on its own. Once similarities across data were generated, they were grouped together and classified as a theme (Chase, 2005; Merriam, 2009). The themes are internal to the participant, not across participants. Themes were linked to my research questions and the LatCrit theory. The analysis of narrative interviews, field notes, and my reflective journal is a platform for participants’ counter stories (Creswell, 2013).

I utilized the narrative framework, the LatCrit theoretical framework, and research questions to organize the findings through the retelling of characters, events, and themes. Once all transcriptions were completed, I began reading the narratives several times to become familiar with each person’s narrative. During the initial review of my transcripts, I began labeling data that match the participants’ narrative with the LatCrit themes. I identified commonplaces as described by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) encompassing temporality (past, present, and
future), sociality (personal and social conditions), and place (where, location). I utilized this structure to give meaning to each participant’s narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

One of the concerns going into data collection through interviews was a language barrier. Language could have created a possible barrier for in-depth interviews between the participants and myself if they do not speak English fluently because I do not speak Spanish. Implementing a language other than the interviewer’s primary language during interviews can create a unique challenge. Qualitative analysis is about capturing meaning of human behavior. Because I do not speak Spanish, it was possible I would miss some of the meaning in my participant’s responses. To ensure I understand as much as I possibly can if a translator is necessary, I selected a translator who is familiar with the content of my study. This translator was on standby throughout the data collection process. This translator was briefed about the study and what it means to be undocumented. Fortunately all participants were comfortable speaking English and Spanish so we did not utilize the services of a translator. The participants had lived a large part of their lives within the U.S. so they were able to communicate in English.

**Research Quality**

In qualitative research design reliability refers to the dependability and trustworthiness of the data (Lapan et al., 2012). Within the narrative inquiry, dependability can be achieved through transcripts, field notes, and journals. One of the most important aspects for a narrative inquiry researcher is to portray individual truths from key participants. Unlike traditional methods of data collection, narrative analysis does not place tremendous importance on replication or generalizing (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This section will expand on how dependability and trustworthiness will be achieved in this study.
Dependability was attained when narrative findings were consistent with and supported the data collected from narrative interviews (Merriam, 2009). Dependability is associated with rich, descriptive data that connects with the findings. Descriptive data supports consistent findings and accurately signifies participant perspectives. To ensure the dependability of this study, I recorded and maintained thorough notes that logged research design decisions and the rationale behind them. Dependability was achieved through trustworthiness of interpretation and providing reasonable and convincing meaning to the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Trustworthiness refers to correctness or creditability when interpreting the data I collected. This approach required me to consider possible ways I could be incorrect when attempting to explain my data. Although I have obtained undocumented Latino students to participate in interviews and allow me into their community, there was always a possibility they feel it necessary to withhold sensitive information or they may not disclose their actual views. There could be gaps in their narratives that I might not be able to pick up on because I am an outsider of their community (Maxwell, 2013). In another sense, I am an insider of the community because I share a similar ethnicity. Participants and I share the same passions for higher education and equal access to it. Hammersley and Atkinson (1996) described a place between insider and outsider positionality, where the researcher adopts a marginal stance. Within the marginal position, I did not embrace a position of an outsider or insider. I moved in and out of these roles to establish trustworthiness with my participants. As an insider, sharing a similar passion for social justice to build trust, and as an outsider, having enough distance to notice the things I might overlook if I was too close.

I requested my participants review the original transcription of our individual interview and the narratives I constructed from our interviews. I did this within the second interview
meeting, not through email correspondence. This gave my participants the opportunity to correct or refine their original input. Participants verified if I had captured an accurate representation of their experiences, which reduced the risk of misinterpretation. Member checking can also serve as a method of identifying my own biases or misunderstandings in observations or interviews (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Meeting with each participant two times for in-depth interviews enabled collection of rich data that revealed a full picture of the phenomenon I wanted to capture. Throughout the interviews, data collected was transcribed verbatim to prevent from omitting any details. Data collected was documented with detailed with descriptive note taking. Describing my participants and setting in rich detail allows readers to make a connection between my study and the context in which they experience. The collection of individual interviews, field notes, and journals enabled me to capture and convey participant’s individual truths (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Another component of collecting and managing data throughout my study is an audit trail. The audit trail is a transparent method to display how my data were collected and managed. It provides a traceable foundation accounting for all data and design decisions throughout my data collection process. The audit trail promotes reliability within my study because it can be used to provide a history or chronicle of my data collection and management (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

**Ethical Considerations**

Various processes were utilized within the qualitative research design to ensure that the study accurately reflects my participant perceptions of the phenomenon examined. The researcher should be aware of all possible risks to their participants within the study and have a
plan to prevent harm to everyone who is participating. For this study, the identity of participants who are members of an underground population had complete privacy and anonymity. Each participant’s identity was concealed for his or her protection and I will maintained confidentiality by utilizing verbal consents and refraining from stating participant names or detailed descriptions within the study (Check & Schutt, 2012). I assigned pseudonyms for each participant; real names were not recorded or used to identify participants at any time.

Given the nature of participant legal status, consent forms were used however; participants were not required to sign one. Verbal consent in place of signatures eliminated documentation linking their names with this study. A copy of the consent form was provided to all participants. They had a choice of a consent form in English or Spanish. I requested a waiver of consent from the IRB due to the risks associated with a breach of confidentiality concerning my participant’s participation in the research and the consent document being the only record linking participants with the research. The consent form informed my participants that their involvement in the study was voluntary and they were able to withdraw from participation at any time (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The consent form notified participants that during our conversations, I would be audio recording throughout the duration of our interviews with an application downloaded on a device that will later be backed up into a password protected “Dropbox” type of storage. I informed participants that I would be asking a series of questions and that our meetings will be held at mutually agreed locations, such as the community center where I originally meet them. The consent form also disclosed that any materials collected throughout our time together will only be shared with people directly involved in working with me on this research (Clandinin, 2007).
Because my participants are especially vulnerable to unique risks in participating in this research study, extreme caution was taken to ensure participants are protected first and foremost when producing any sensitive information. Because participants are members of an undocumented population, verbal consent was used to offer another level of anonymity. The participants are closely linked within a small community and although I will be using a pseudonym, I will be taking another level of caution to ensure the names they mention are also changed. Not only are my participants assigned a pseudonym, all identifying names and places will be disguised (Clandinin, 2007).

Due to undocumented status of my population, high levels of safeguards were utilized when seeking approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). To ensure my participant’s privacy and well-being, approval from the IRB was mandatory prior to any data collection. Within the interview process, I disclosed that I am Latina and pursuing higher education myself. As a measure of precaution for myself during interviews, I informed participants what my role in the study was. Because participants might be likely to identify with me, emotional transference was possible and I needed to be clear about the role I play in our interview process. My role was to collect the richest possible data from interview participants while establishing rapport. I recorded my opinions and perspectives in a journal separately from interactions with participants, in order to remain neutral when pulling information from them. I had a trusted colleague review my journal with me to debrief.

**Researcher Positionality**

The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as an instrument to collect data. If my participant’s experiences and perceptions are shaped by social-cultural context, it is reasonable to expect mine are too. My position is influenced by my belief system, political
stance, and cultural background. While I strived to remain fully objective within the study, I also acknowledged who am I and how I move in and out of social positioning. It is important that I document my subjectivity in relationship to my inquiry and its outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Peshkin, 1988).

One of the assumptions I had going into the research process is that I needed to monitor my subjectivity because I identify with Latino 1.5-generation students. Participants reminded me of my family. Most participants migrated from the same country as my Latino family members, Mexico. Three generations ago, my great grandmother migrated from Mexico to Arizona. I share two ethnicities; I am half Mexican and half White. All my life, I have navigated two very different cultures that have influenced my decisions to pursue higher education.

As my Mother describes her childhood in the Latino community to me, education was not highly valued or promoted. Her mother attended primary school until the sixth grade and dropped out to enter the workforce because her family needed the additional income. My Mother describes her childhood growing up on welfare with no positive mentors to promote educational goals. Although my Mother was not encouraged to pursue higher education, she graduated high school and attended cosmetology school. This intentional choice to pursue something outside of raising a family, in her family, was considered taboo. I believe when she broke tradition; she created the opportunity for my sister and myself to aspire to higher education. My sister and I are the first generation to attend college with plans to graduate with our doctorates.

With an awareness of bravery on my Mother’s part, I have deep sentiments of hope for my participants. My personal experiences have ignited my motivation to conduct this study (Maxwell, 1998). These emotions can transform my role from a researcher to a defender; I must
be thoughtful not to transfer my experiences, assumptions, or opinions into my participant’s narratives. In efforts to enhance my awareness of subjectivity, I monitored my feelings in a meaningful way. I recorded my feelings in a consistent systematic manner: a journal. The insertion of my positive and/or negative emotions into the research process was recorded in a journal to establish a routine of reflection on my subjectivity. Although subjectivity is unavoidable, this method was my attempt to manage it throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing (Peshkin, 1988).
This chapter includes findings from individual interviews with eight undocumented Latino students in the Midwest. I refer to the participants as undocumented Latino students, however they can be also be referred to as the 1.5-generation. These undocumented Latino students did not come to the U.S. voluntarily. They migrated at a very young age with their parents and they have spent at least half of their lives within the U.S. The participant’s ages ranged from 18 to 26. They have been residing in the United States anywhere from 8 to 22 years. The participants migrated to the U.S. from México and Nicaragua. All of the participants have attended and graduated high school. Some are recently enrolled at a university or community college while others have graduated with their bachelors or masters degrees. One of the eight participants graduated with a master’s degree, while another is preparing to graduate with a master’s degree. Two graduated with their bachelor’s degree, while four of the younger participants are currently working toward their bachelor’s degree. Seven out of eight participants have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which permits them to get a social security number needed to apply for a driver’s license and work legally in the U.S. Although most of the participants requested that I use their real names, I have assigned each of them pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. I am honored to share the voices of Sergio, Marco, Ariana, Claudia, Regena, Nita, Mia, and Bruno.

Sergio

My mom is cleaning rooms at a hotel for me to go to college. I cannot fail class. I cannot be out partying because I wouldn’t want her to pay again just for me to miss or fail class
because I decided not to study. It is not an option to fail really I thought about how my parents suffered and how many hours they spent at work just to get me to college.

My Perception of Sergio

Sergio is driven, very intelligent and articulate. He has dark brown hair and brown eyes with an evenly tan complexion. He is active and enjoys running as he used to be in track. His youthful looks and happy smile made it simple to engage him in conversation. During our interviews I found him both approachable and knowledgeable about Latino immigration.

Sergio’s Background

I am 26 years old and I was born in Zacatecas, Mexico. The small town’s population is approximately 1,000 people who live in adobe styled housing. I grew up in Zacatecas until the age of 13 when I migrated to the United States with my family. I am undocumented. My parents did not have documentation when they entered the U.S. I have lived exactly half of my life in México and half in the U.S. I identify with Mexican and American culture as two equal sections of my life. On one hand, I am Mexican; I am so Mexican that Super Bowl parties feel foreign. On the other hand, I am American. Most of my friends are American because I began attending the U.S. K-12 educational system in 8th grade. Some Mexican events where the audience only speaks Spanish and the activities are part of Mexican culture, such as dances or rodeos, make me feel too “American.” I am not married nor do I have kids. My immediate family lives in the U.S., including my parents, brothers, and sisters. My brothers and sisters are all married with children. I am the middle child and the first to graduate college.

Feeling Invisible

I felt the university dealt with undocumented Latino students with minimal thought: “Oh this came up so let’s deal with it.” It wasn’t like they were exclusive: “Oh no we are going to
ban undocumented immigrants.” Nothing like that. But I felt like they weren’t informed because the number of undocumented Latinos at the university I attend is pretty low. In California or Texas the issue is different. The universities make more of an effort to be more truly inclusive of undocumented students because the problem is bigger. Here it’s more like, “Oh ok, we have this student” and they send us through the pipeline and give us education. But there is no conversation about it so I felt almost invisible. If I went to register face to face, it wasn’t, “Oh we can’t take you” or “We are going to make it more difficult for you to register.” There just wasn’t anyone there to greet me. No one said, “Oh this is Latisha, she will be able to help you and let you know about the resources you can draw from to be successful at our university, ” Instead it was like, “Oh you are just different.” I didn’t deal with them a lot because I usually registered online so I never had trouble. At the university, they were friendly, at the community college – not so much. But they hustled and moved me through. My teachers were aware of my situation and my plan was to go to law school. When that didn’t work out I asked myself, “What will I do? Where will I go? What’s next for me?” Those were the big questions in 2012.

One of the things I struggle the most with right now is living in an invisible community. The majority of the Latino communities, even in the town I live in now, are first generation immigrants and there are many undocumented people. One of the things that frustrate me is when you have a county commission, a city commission, and a school board making decisions for the invisible community. A community who may or may not have a representative on that board or commission. For me, being invisible is when you do not have a vote. Especially in the elections when you can’t really choose a representative. Who will speak on our behalf? I struggle with that because we are not participants. We are not engaging in discussions. There
are numerous reasons why we’re not engaged. Undocumented immigrants are afraid of their legal status, they don’t know their rights, they don’t have reliable information, and sometimes they are misinformed. And that’s when you become invisible. At college I felt invisible. My first year, undergrad, I felt invisible because DACA wasn’t there at the time and without DACA everything felt hopeless. Yes, I was going to get a college education but there was no promise I would be able to use my degree or have the documentation required for employment. I really didn’t see any options of hope. No way to utilize my degree in the future.

Finding Advocates

Then I talked to my teachers and they told me to look into a public administration program. They asked, “Why don’t you apply?” But I explained, “Yeah I can apply and yeah I can go to school there but where am I going to work? How am I going to pay my expenses? I don’t qualify for any financial help or grants.” But my teachers were helpful for me and my situation. They actually wrote a letter of recommendation and attached it to my application to the program. Their support helped me so much that the program offered me a graduate research position. The program department wasn’t aware of my legal situation. So my teacher called them and said, “Hey we have this unique situation, he’s a good student and a hard worker, he really wants an education,” so they worked it out. I had someone advocating for me, the teachers were great advocates on my behalf and I felt like if it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t have made it through. Teachers were bigger advocates than administrators. When you come in contact with your teachers on a daily basis you get to know them in a personal level. That’s why they were good advocates. They knew me, the kind of person I was, and were able to write a letter of recommendation and contact the program I applied for. This is the way I was able to move forward with my education.
I am lucky enough to live in a state where they allow undocumented Latino students to enroll and pay in-state tuition. At the moment, some states don’t allow undocumented students to attend colleges and universities. So there is a disadvantage to some undocumented students in other states where they don’t allow you to even apply. But I think the state of Texas is friendlier towards undocumented students because they even offer state financial assistance. I didn’t have that help in my state. But my state is friendly enough to let me pay in-state tuition. When I graduated high school and applied for college, there were only 14 states that allowed undocumented students to enroll.

**Parent Support and Inspiration**

My parents kept me inspired while I pursued my higher education. I remember when we had barely moved from Mexico to the States my mom said, “I’m going to issue or solicit visas as you go with me to the States and you are going to get a higher education.” That always stuck in my mind. We were going to the U.S. to go to school. That actually got in my head--I’m here for school and if I don’t get my education I fail my mom. So that was my motivation. Also, you really come here, not only to work, but also to succeed. When you work hard and you work minimum wage jobs, you really want to succeed. You really want to get your education and become successful. You think, “OK, nothing is given to me, I really have to work for it.” It gave me discipline. My mom is cleaning rooms at the hotel for me to go to college. I cannot fail class. I cannot be out partying because I wouldn’t want her to pay again just for me to miss or fail class because I decide not to study. It was not an option, really. I thought about how my parents suffered and how many hours they spent at work just to get me to college. I worked as well. I worked two jobs during the summer to help pay for my college and living expenses.
Navigating Immigration Laws

The media doesn’t affect me but it does. I guess it does influence me because immigration is a trigger word and many people think it’s bad. One of the comments I hear a lot is “Oh why don’t you go back in line, come here legally, and do it the right way?” Well, the truth is, there are no lines to wait in. There are no pathways to citizenship for undocumented Latino students in the U.S except to marry a citizen or somehow get a green card through marriage, work, or family sponsorship. For example, if my dad is a green card holder, he can sponsor my entire family and I can get my green card. After five years of holding my green card I become a citizen. That is a path, which is really not an option for us because my dad does not hold a green card and we are never going to get there in that way.

How DACA Changes Lives

DACA is a temporary deal and it gives me work authorization. I am able to work in the United States legally and it defers me from being arrested by ICE or immigration authorities. It’s renewable every three years once granted. I have to pay a fee of $465 and if I get legal help, which many of us need, I would have to pay that in addition. If you apply for DACA on your own its cost is $465 plus mailing. If I were to go for legal help that would probably cost me $500 or more depending on my case. If I had a criminal background or I got in a fight when I was in high school, there’s a possibility DACA might deny my application. Then it would be more expensive because the attorney would have to work harder to convince immigration otherwise. If I got a DUI for example, I would be disqualified or if I had a felony I would be disqualified. If I had something criminally related that showed I was a threat to public safety, I would be disqualified. If the next President, whoever that may be, if he or she doesn’t support DACA or this executive action, he or she can take it away. So it’s not legislation. It’s not a permanent fix.
It’s a program that can be taken away at anytime. It’s like a little Band-Aid. If it is taken away, I won’t be able to work legally. I would have to go back to being paid under the table or maybe make up a social security under my name or, pretty much like a handy man. Back to nothing, no status, no work authorization, no documentation.

I would be excited about the DREAM Act passing because most of the senators, congress, and representatives like the DREAM act more than immigration reform. We are kind of like the “sexy group” in the immigration community because we are educated professionals. But now, one of the biggest deals that comes to mind when we talk about the DREAM Act is, well what about my parents? I get to stay here but is this the only thing that gets passed and supported by some of the representatives? And is it going to be more difficult to even pass legislation that would benefit my parents and my older siblings if they don’t qualify under the DREAM Act? What about my parents? What about the risk of getting deported or detained and sent back to Mexico?

The new executive action last November will help my parents. And luckily, one of my brothers holds a green card so they will be able to apply because of him. He is a permanent resident and my parents meet the qualifications. Hopefully they will be granted the DAPA. They would pay the same amount $465, although some attorneys have been saying it will cost more. Since the DAPA is going to affect close to five million people--that demands more work, more personal--the cost will go up. If you take that into account and think about most of the immigrant community, you have to ask: how do they pay if they are working minimum wage jobs? They don’t qualify for any benefits under their situation. They are at a disadvantage because the fee is a large number for the household income of undocumented folks. And on top of that, the majority of these people are not educated enough to fill out the application.
themselves so they are going to be seeking legal help. That really bumps up the cost and those people that live out in the county for example, they have to travel to larger cities to go to immigration appointments that come along with DAPA/DACA applications. They are going to be missing work and will have hotel expenses. It’s almost impossible for you to get a green card or a visa to come here legally. I guess the facts are not there for a lot of people and that’s why they are not educated or aware of the broken system that exists today.

Countering the Negative Narrative

One of the biggest assumptions is that we come here to take away jobs and to take advantage of the system. Or that we are here for free health care or other financial help, to just take away resources. In fact, if you don’t have documentation you don’t qualify for those resources. We, as immigrants, working under another name or made up social security number pay taxes, directly or indirectly. I pay for groceries and I pay sales tax. The undocumented community contributes to the sales tax base. Many people are not aware of that.

One of the ways I have pushed back on the negative narrative is through organizing with some of the non-profit organizations or simply through conversations with my neighbors and peers about the issue. I think we have better shot of educating people when you have a relationship with them. When they know you. For example, “Hey my neighbor Juan is undocumented but he works, he pays taxes, and he didn’t come here to take away from the country, he came here for a better life.” Sometimes you have to do protests to get the word out and push representatives to pass legislation that would benefit the undocumented Latino community. We are here, we aren’t going anywhere.
U.S. is the Land of Opportunity

Having the opportunity of migrating from another country, a third world country, to a country that offers a lot of opportunities for you, motivates you. I couldn’t miss that opportunity. If I go back to Mexico, the opportunities are not there. Here I am able to work and provide for myself and pay for school. Those options aren’t there in Mexico or any other country. The employment opportunities to even save up to go to college aren’t there. In the little town that I grew up in about 75% are unemployed. They depend on relatives who live in the United States to send them money to sustain and provide for their family. The opportunity just isn’t there. Universities and colleges aren’t there, so access to education isn’t there. Employment opportunities aren’t there so you are at a greater disadvantage than you are here. If your parents have money in Mexico and you are able to move to a bigger city, there are universities. I don’t know much about the university system in Mexico but I believe there aren’t enough scholarships for you to even attend. There aren’t scholarships or financial aid.

Undocumented and Strong

My legal status has probably made me more disciplined and responsible. Knowing that I’m working hard and my mom is working hard to achieve my education--that gives value to going to college. Rather than the average American kid, where everything is not necessarily just given to them, but everything is readily available to them. Undocumented immigrants don’t have that. We have more value, more responsibility, more discipline, and more courage than anything else.

How do I feel we are represented in the media? Depends who you talk to. We are known as a strong force; we aren’t going to back down for anything. We are going to stand up and fight
for DACA. We are going to keep pushing for the DREAM act or immigration reform. We are not going anywhere, we are unafraid.

**Higher Education to Uplift the Community**

I value higher education because it wasn’t readily available in my own country, and because it’s given me the opportunity to grow and provide for myself. I am able to help and contribute to my community. I am able to help make a better country and world. It’s like a cascade effect. Once you do something good, it will benefit the next level. I really value my education because I am able to help people in my community. It’s not the ugly narrative: “Hey look at that one, he crossed the border and he’s claiming a higher education. He’s expecting chances and opportunity when he did a criminal act.” At the end of the day, we are really just trying to push for a fair system, give to our community, and contribute back.

My parents both sacrificed a lot. They work a lot of hours; sometimes my mom would have to work two jobs. They view education as a benefit, now that I’ve graduated, not only for me but also for the family and community. At this moment they really value higher education more than before because no one in my family had ever graduated or seen the benefits of a higher education. Now they see the benefits of higher education.

**Discrimination in the College Classroom**

One of the most difficult times was at my university. As a political science major my classes always included politics. We discussed various issues including immigration. I was the only Latino in that class. At that time, I was “closeted.” No one knew about my status. I wasn’t really open to anybody about my legal status. We touched on the immigration topic in my classes. Just hearing some of the horrible comments and not being able to defend myself with facts—that was a really tough spot to be in. It was really discriminatory, it was just nasty the way
my classmates expressed themselves. Comments, even from current representatives describing undocumented immigrants as “aliens from another planet” or suggesting “Shoot them as hogs from a helicopter” or “Shoot them like crocodiles so they don’t cross the Rio Grande” are ugly. These references utilize all these criminal type of words to describe us. But really - we are human. We are here for better lives. How could anyone want to tell a Latino kid in class, a kindergartener, for example, “You’re a criminal because you were brought here when you were two months old.” Or, “Your parents are criminals just because they are in search for a better life.” Is that a crime—to want a better life?

When you are perceived as being “illegal,” you feel like you are being pointed at all the time. When people find out you are from Mexico, or if you have an accent, or you tell someone you’ve only been here for ten years, they start questioning you. They ask; “Do you have a green card or did you come here the right way? And if not, how did you pass the border?” A lot of emotions come with those questions and really the only answer I can offer is this: “I am a human; I’ve done nothing wrong other than just coming here. I haven’t killed anybody.” I think criminal is a really harsh word; it’s nasty. That sort of things makes me feel invisible, an outsider not only in my classes but also in the community.

**Envisioning a Socially Just America**

A socially just society would look like fair equality to me. Not just here, but in all the states. Just give us the opportunity to earn—whether that is a green card, path to citizenship, or just being able to contribute to this great country. All we really want to do is work, contribute, have a better life, and educate ourselves. A just system would allow that. It would give us opportunity to become citizens, to become part of the American society. That would be a just and fair system. To go to college, earn your citizenship, and be socially active. Not a lot of
undocumented Latino students have the same support system I do, that is my family and friends. Some undocumented Latino students are at a greater disadvantage and resources are important to them. Not so much just giving them money, but giving them the opportunity to earn their education and the ability to finance it.

Marco

“You need to speak more like an Anglo-Saxon because that’s the only way you can get better positions or opportunities in life.” He [my boss] was trying to help me but it was offensive. I told him I honestly don’t agree because my professors, look where they are at and they have a stronger accent that I do.

My Perception of Marco

Marco is quiet-spoken and has a peaceful demeanor about him. His voice is soothing and he is comfortable speaking about his experiences as an undocumented Latino student. He mentions he does not feel he appears Mexican, he tells me that he is often mistaken for someone from another country, not Mexico. He has light brown hair and hazel eyes. His skin is a very light olive color. Marco’s calming disposition made our conversation effortless as we explored some bold questions about living in the United States as an undocumented Latino student.

Marco’s Background

I am 26 years old and I was born in Aguascalientes, México. My hometown is a cultural and pioneering city, dedicated to traditions and technological advancements. Aguascalientes is amongst the six most competitive and sustainable states in Mexico relying on the vehicle-manufacturing sector. The most important out-of-Japan Nissan plant is located in Aguascalientes. It is also home to La feria de San Marcos, also known as La feria de Mexico, the most important fair in Mexico. I spent the first thirteen years of my life growing up there. At
the age of thirteen, I migrated to the United States with my parents, who were undocumented. We have lived in the United States for thirteen years now. I am undocumented. I identify as 100% Mexican but I also feel impacted by growing up in the U.S. I am not married nor do I have children. I live with my mother, father, and uncle and I am an only child. After graduating from high school I completed a Bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering and I am currently very close to completing my Master’s degree in Engineering. I am a big promoter of higher education, I enjoy tutoring students and I am involved with various programs that educate youth about college.

**How DACA Changes Lives**

Recently, with the announcement of DACA, the state started making changes. I am an engineering student and I always wanted to get experience with co-ops and internships but I couldn’t before DACA. Once DACA happened, I started talking with the co-op office but they really didn’t even understand our situation. I think the problem at the university is a lack of information about “us.” They thought we were international students. We had to be completely open about not being citizens or residents, which meant we were not internationals. They were really confused about that. What happened is that they created a new category, the DACA. That way we could also apply for co-ops. That’s when I finally saw a big change, when I felt like they were actually taking us into consideration, and not because they hadn’t wanted to earlier, they just because they hadn’t known about us.

When I started at the university I had to sign an affidavit basically letting them know that I was undocumented. I had to be open about my legal status to have access to in-state tuition but I didn’t have any negative experiences. I enrolled back in 2009. I’ve been at the university for a really long time. The classroom has been a really good experience, and I don’t know—maybe
it’s because I never said anything about my legal status. I felt like every other student in there. I had the same opportunities that documented students had—the only problem I had was finding scholarships. That changed with DACA. Now I have a social security number and a lot of the scholarships required a social security number. So that’s what I mean when I say I didn’t have the same opportunities for scholarships. I could only apply to private scholarships or corporations that didn’t require a social security number. Even with DACA I can’t apply for FAFSA because it’s federal money.

I feel like we (undocumented and documented) started from the same place until the moment you want to get a job. All of your documented friends are getting jobs, but you (the undocumented) can’t. This happened with my cousins—even the ones who arrived here at a really young age—because they are also undocumented. They are the most frustrated about it. When I got here, I was aware of my situation. My parents told me. For a lot of people, like my cousins, I can see the frustration. For me, it made me a little sad that I couldn’t get a job but I was aware of being undocumented. So I was ok with it. That is all changing right now thanks to DACA.

DACA gives you protection from deportation and it allows you to have a work permit, work authorization, a driver’s license, and a social security number. DACA is attached to a three-year renewal with a $465 fee. My parents can still be deported. Let’s say I had a sibling that was born here; they could apply for the new DACA for parents so they could be exempt from the deportation. But I was not born here.

The general public listens to us but they don’t really want to help us. They think we are students, but not the type of students they want to help. And they should change that philosophy—that’s why they introduced the DREAM Act but it’s never passed. A lot of people
think that DACA is the DREAM Act, but the DREAM Act would actually give us pathways to
citizenship. It makes perfect sense for me. People complain that it’s going to consider people
over thirty years of age – and they are not really children anymore. But those people have been
here for a long time.

**Moving Forward after Falling through the Cracks**

Now the good thing with my parents is that they are now going to become residents
because of an application my uncle did for them 17 years ago. This same application would have
applied to me except, once you turn 21, you age out. So I no longer fall under that petition. A
lot of people ask me what my options are. It is not easy.

There are times I feel like I cannot believe this is happening to me. My parents are
becoming residents and I’m not. We all came here together for me and now I am unable to
benefit from that. I basically channel that and use it for fuel. I can’t sit there and complain about
it. There are people who are in worse situations than myself. There are families who have more
children. It’s more expensive to take care of kids. I am an only child; maybe that is why it has
been easier for me. It also has to do with the fact that I knew I wanted to go to college. There
are times that I’ve felt like “Why me?” but I just get together with my friends, talk it out, and
move forward. It was always my mindset. I wanted to go to college. I wanted to study more
even before I came to the U.S. Education has always been my goal.

**Citizenship Options and Complicated Laws**

An option for me to become a U.S. citizen is to get married. And I am being blunt with
that, but that is the easiest option. The other option is getting sponsored by a company, getting a
visa sponsored by a company. First you get a work visa and then later that can change into a
residency, then later you can become a citizen. But a lot of things have to happen to establish
At the moment my job will not be able to sponsor me because under DACA I do not have status. I only have a legal presence. It’s strange. I don’t have a visa. In order to be sponsored on a work visa, you have to have a visa. Mine has expired. I would have to leave the country with no permit, and once you do this you cannot come back. As soon as I left, I would be punished for basically ten years because I’ve been here for so long undocumented. So I can get a provisional waiver, which would make me exempt from that ten year punishment and go to Mexico. I would then go to the U.S. embassy in Mexico, tell them a company in the U.S. is sponsoring me, and then come back. Which is why I am trying to get my Master’s degree because once you have a Master’s degree, there are more visas available for you. For work visa, there are like 60,000 visas available but if you have a Master’s degree there are 20,000 more. So there are more chances for you to get a work visa. I am not 100% on the details. The easiest way is to just get married. You would get married to a resident and it would take about six months. In my case, they would see that I’m going to school and I’m productive which speeds up the process. I know it sounds silly for me to keep bringing that up, but those are my options.

**Mentors, Strategies, and Money**

What are my strategies as I pursue higher education? I have had a lot of mentors. A lot of people that have helped me out and guided me. When I started at high school, I met a lady in administration who promoted college education. She’s the one who really got me thinking. I mean, I’ve always wanted to go to college but I didn’t know how. When I got here, I didn’t understand what a credit hour meant. We don’t have that in Mexico. She was a major role model for me in high school. Then once I started college I wasn’t doing well because I didn’t know anyone. I didn’t have a new role model or mentor. So I did really badly and was put on academic probation. I said, “What am I doing here? I’ve lost a scholarship that I had.” So I had
to go to community college. At the community college I just tried my best. At that time I wasn’t able to work. But then my parents – there’s always ways—my parents helped me out. They got me a non-valid document to work and so I worked at a restaurant for five years. That entire income was going to the community college. When I returned to the university, I found out about the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. That is when I started getting help with finding scholarships. A lot of the scholarships did not require a social security number so that group really helped me out a lot. I am still part of it. That’s been the biggest influence in keeping me going.

**Stereotypes in the Media**

So many things are going through my head. It’s just that, not all the channels do this, but the ones I’ve seen like Fox News seem to basically repeat the same bad stereotypes. They repeat, let’s say, an image of a person jumping over the border. They do that so the image embeds in people’s minds and gives them the wrong idea. I totally disagree with that. I think what needs to happen is some type of English broadcasting center. They need to really show how Latinos in general are contributing to the country. Undocumented people are not just Latino. There are undocumented people from Vietnam, China, different African countries and other places but the media reports on Mexicans because they are the largest group. It makes everyone think the only people who are undocumented are Latino. I don’t know if this is true or not, but I feel that non-Mexicans, even if they are undocumented might not get abused as much at work as the Mexican guy. They automatically assume Mexicans are here illegally. So they focus on the Mexicans.

One of the things Americans don’t fully understand about undocumented Latino students is, contrary to popular belief, we do pay taxes. This is a common misconception. We are able to
get a tax identification number. Lots of people think that we don’t pay our taxes but we do. A lot of it is lack of education and this is just one example of it. A lot of people don’t know about the tax identification number. It’s kind of like a social security number but it is designed specifically to pay taxes. It allows us to pay taxes; that way we can show we are responsible and part of the community. My family has been doing that since we have been here, along with sales taxes.

I push back by trying to justify that I am a member of the community. I can’t just show that I am working and paying taxes. That’s a good start. Working, paying taxes, it all helps but you also need to get a higher education. It doesn’t have to be engineering, the degree doesn’t matter. At this point, what’s important is to show them that we are not uneducated people. So increasing the number of Latino people graduating from college—I think that’s really going to change their perspectives. That’s why I am a big promoter of higher studies. I participate in a lot of activities in school and within local elementary and high schools. The organization I am in, Society of Hispanic Engineers, we try to promote engineering but then we changed a lot of our tactics. We said, “Let’s not just promote engineering, because in middle and high school, they don’t know what they want to do anyway. So let’s promote higher studies in general.” We also are not just focused on Latinos. We invite other people from other races. I am not an official mentor but I tutor. And I consider myself a mentor.

Support from Family

My parents don’t want me to go through the same things that they went through. I think that they realize that you can live happy without higher education but they want more for me. They want me to have ambition. I know that ambition can sometimes lead to wrong places but they want me to have ambition so I can improve my way of living for the future. I can have a
better way of living. They support me in whatever I want to do. My mom wants me to have kids of course because I don’t have siblings. Since I was 19 she would hint at when are you going to have babies? She asked if I was going to go after my PhD after my Masters. She told me, “No you don’t have to do that.” I still consider a PhD as an option. If I was a citizen by now, I would be more financially stable and I would definitely go straight into my PhD. But now I have to change my mentality. For now, I have to raise money. If I worked for a company, a lot of times they pay for your education. I am trying to discover my options. My dad has always been there for me whenever I have school projects. Whenever I needed to physically construct things, he’s been a huge role model in directing me towards engineering. My mom has been the one who would always take me to school. She also worked but she rearranged her work schedule so she could take me to school. She would drive me out of town to various community college classes for a whole year. She helped me out a lot. When I told her I have to drive too, I have to do it myself, and then she let me start doing it on my own. So they really sacrificed completely.

My parents taught me to value higher education and I have learned that people who are educated are more open to other views and cultures. I have seen this with my professors. Here in the U.S. what I really like is that it has people from all around the world. Some of my professors are from different parts of the world and it makes me more comfortable when I interact with them. I value higher education because I feel people who have gone through it are open to different views and cultures. For example, I was raised Catholic, but going to school has opened my mind about every other religion. I love hanging out with Indian and Asian people. I really value that. I would have not experienced this in Mexico because it’s still very secluded. Now it’s becoming more open to different things but there is still a lot of racism in Mexico.
You Need to Speak More like an Anglo Saxon

I have felt discriminated against because of my background. I don’t think it was delivered in a way to make me feel bad. During the summer 2012, I got my first engineering experience. I finally got a job offer in the summer from a person who was starting his own company in the field of light sport aircrafts and light airplanes. He needed someone to help him build it. I worked for him in the summer and he’s a really nice person. He’s an older white man. He and his wife are really nice people. They kept asking me “Why don’t you just get legalized?” I felt like they were pushing me. I told them it’s because they don’t know how hard it is. In their minds, it couldn’t be that hard and they couldn’t understand why I hadn’t done it. My boss told me that I needed to work on my accent, which has nothing to do with being undocumented. But it’s something that made me feel uncomfortable because he said, “You need to speak more like an Anglo-Saxon because that’s the only way you can get better positions or opportunities in life.” He was trying to help me but it was offensive. I told him “I honestly don’t agree because my professors, look at where they are at and they have a stronger accent than I do.” I respect my professors. But my legal status—that’s one of the things that I don’t want to talk too much about. It’s one of those things that I try to avoid, I only tell people when I feel comfortable with them. I have friends who are born here, one is Vietnamese and one is White and they know about my situation. We don’t necessarily talk about it but one of them told me that he doesn’t care—the one who is Vietnamese. He says I am his friend and he will support me. But there are people who don’t support my situation. My girlfriend has friends who know about my situation. I chat with them causally just fine but she told me that in their head my situation is not correct. They don’t agree with undocumented individuals. It’s kind of like a double standard.
Let Me Tell You, I am Mexican

There have been times when I felt unseen in the classroom. There was a leadership class I took at the university. They never talked about politics but at the end of the class, one girl who was actually born here started talking about how she felt discriminated against by a policeman. The class was about leadership and the professors don’t lecture. It was a discussion-based course. You have to talk with everybody. It was a pre-session so we were exhausted after five days. On the last day, we were having a really intense conversation. In those classes, you don’t even know how or why conversations get intense. This girl started crying. She was of Hispanic descent but she was born here. She was crying because we were talking about racism. She started crying because she was discriminated by a policeman who assumed that she was undocumented. She is not undocumented but I am. In that moment, I felt really happy she brought it up because I would never have brought it up. We were talking about racism and I could have said, “Well I am undocumented and let me tell you about all the things I have to deal with,” but I didn’t have the courage. A lot of these times I didn’t have the courage to say it, but the fact that that girl said it made me feel like I could release that. With her pain, I was able to release mine because she made everyone listen to her. They were really quiet about it and because she said “It doesn’t only happen to black people, it happens to everyone and its based on your skin color.” It gave me the courage to say “They discriminated against you because of your color and let me tell you something, I haven’t been discriminated a lot because they don’t know I’m Mexican. I don’t look Mexican.” My skin is very light and my eyes are not dark. There are a lot of times where they assume I’m from a different country and they start talking about Mexicans, so I tell them “I am Mexican. Let me tell you - I am Mexican.” Those are the only times where I have felt uncomfortable in class.
Envisioning a Socially Just America

A socially just society for undocumented Latino students would embrace fair wages, regardless of race, sex, and sexual orientation. We still have a long way to go promoting education for women. There is still a big gap in their wages as compared to men, which needs to change. People need to realize the biggest role models are woman. The moment you are born, your mom is there for you all the time. That’s what I consider an equal society.

There are other ways to ensure social justice in the community for undocumented Latino students. We need people to pursue higher education for the city and for the state to grow economically and financially. Having undocumented students pay out of state tuition doesn’t make sense. Undocumented students are not legal residents but they are residing here. They have been living here. Give them a chance to prepare themselves and give back to the community. Why charge them more when they have been here going to K-12 with American citizens all their lives. It just doesn’t make sense. In my state they are always trying to make undocumented students pay out-of-state tuition although back in 2003 they passed a law allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. The moment I enrolled, I had to sign an affidavit saying as soon as I get my paperwork settled I would give them all my information. For example, a social security number. I’ve been able to pay in-state tuition and I think that is the first thing to do.

Ariana

My parents sacrificed so much for my higher education. They risked our lives to cross that border so my brothers and I can have a better education and future. They migrated to the U.S. to avoid risk of being killed in México. For the past years, my family over there has been living in fear of the cartel.
My Perception of Ariana

Ariana is youthful and cheerful, yet it is clear she is resilient and brave. Her smile lights up the room; she is a breath of fresh air. My conversations with Ariana are engaging and full of laughter. She has dark brown hair and big brown eyes. Her complexion is bronzed and beautiful. Ariana is wise for her young age. It is clear she is comfortable with who she is and what her goals are.

Ariana’s Background

I am 19 years old and I was born in Zacatecas, México. When I was 3 years old, I migrated to the U.S. with my parents. I am undocumented. For the most part, I have spent the majority of my life in the U.S. I have very little memory of my hometown because I have never been back to México. My family practices all the traditional Mexican celebrations, so I identify as being Mexican more than I do American.

I am not married, nor do I have children. I live with my parents, two sisters, and one brother. I am the oldest sibling and the first person in my family to graduate high school. I am now attending my second year in college. I plan on graduating in 2018 with my bachelors, double majoring in international Business and Political Science.

Feeling Left Out

I attended a Latino high school, it was 80% Latino. I really didn’t see a difference between Whites, African Americans, or Hispanics. Once I attended the university, it’s all white people. It’s really rare to see Hispanics, especially my first year. In high school, I would always receive letters from universities and colleges encouraging us to visit. They mailed us about scholarships and invited us to events but once I went to campus, it’s more about the money instead of promoting Hispanics to go to college.
I don’t really feel that the university and I share the same vision for my educational goals. I feel like professors and faculty don’t know what being undocumented really means. I don’t think teachers know they have undocumented students attending their classes. I had a professor last semester from my American politics class and I really didn’t speak much because she used a lot of “illegal” terminology. I didn’t think she realized she had an undocumented student in her class until I wrote an essay. Since she read my research paper, she started changing a little bit. It would always upset me. You have to be more open-minded, you don’t always know if undocumented people are there. My essay was over my experience living in the Midwest. When the elections were coming up, they mentioned Obama and the executive action more frequently.

I don’t have the same opportunities as American citizens. All my friends who are U.S. citizens, they support me in different ways. They talk about all these different types of scholarships they received, based on academics. Even though I have the same or better quality academics, I was not eligible. One of my friends, he received a full ride for 4 years for being in the top 10%. I was in the same position but I couldn’t apply because of my legal status. In a way, I get it. We are trying so hard to enter into higher education to improve. Throughout high school years you are being taught to do your best and go to college but when it comes down to being undocumented, it’s like, what do we do now?

I started from a different place than American students. For me, I am the first person in my family on both sides to graduate high school and attend college. My dad knew I could do it, he just didn’t know how he was going to pay for it. It wasn’t until my junior year in high school where I received the Kansas Hispanic chamber of college scholarship. Although it was just for $1000.00, that’s when we started realizing that this was real. The dream was coming true. We
set up payment plans each semester. My friends on the “other side” have scholarships and they are not the first person to attend college. So they have knowledge that I didn’t have.

Personally, it’s my parents that keep me going. They sacrifice so much for me that I’m not going to quit. I won’t drop out because the media promotes something negative about us. We are going to prove them wrong. That’s how I look at it. My dad pays $3,500 each semester, if not more plus books. So to quit, it is not worth it. It’s not an option.

**How DACA Changes Lives**

When the president announced the executive action, that same day I saw so many hateful posts online from teachers I had in middle and high school. At the moment, I posted something back. They all think DACA is amnesty, a pathway for citizenship. It’s not. It’s just a permit that can be taken away. I keep looking forward. I ignore those comments. I don’t absorb them. I know how the “other side” thinks but that’s not going to change me. It won’t change my opinion. Like I said, my parents sacrificed so much for my higher education. They risked our lives to cross that border so my brothers and I can have a better education and future. They migrated to the U.S. to avoid risk of being killed in México. For the past years my family over there has been living in fear of the cartel. The cartel has invaded the town. In 2010, one of my mother’s family members was murdered. My mother’s family member owned a company that drug dealers wanted to utilize but he didn’t cooperate so they killed him. I’m not sure how often something like that happens but people go home early because they are terrified of something happening to their families. This is the main reason why people come in search of a better future here. I think everyone would rather fear deportation than death of a loved one because of poverty or the cartels.
So for them it's a relief living in a country that's not corrupt or with a high rate of crime. Here we just worry about deportations. DACA is a three-year permit but I always see posts in social media or in the news, debating it. If they take it away, what are we going to do? We won’t have a work permit so? Even with DACA, you cannot go out of the country unless you ask far in advance. It has to be humanitarian or work reasons. It’s like you are stuck in jail.

Lately, I have been more reserved when talking about my situation. I talk to my peers, friends, parents, and my community. Last year I felt like I was a leader. This year I want more people to speak up, sharing their experience as an undocumented Latino student. We are here and we are not doing any harm to anyone. I know there are a lot of people who are in the same position as me. For example, one of my friends is a really good student too and he is undocumented. He always pays his tuition out of pocket as well. I feel these stories that are similar to mine, need to be shared. You just want to see other people take a step forward and lead the community. You want to see more leaders. We are bringing guest speakers to our conference to speak about Latino immigration because on campus no one really talks about it unless it’s the dominant negative narrative. You’d be surprise to see how many of your friends are undocumented.

**Approach Higher Education with Caution**

When I applied to the university, I approached with caution. I had a counselor with me to make sure I clicked on all the right terms. It only has an option to check resident, U.S. citizen, or international student. For example, I didn’t know if I was considered international or resident. Going to college the first day, you are really excited about everything but once you take a look everywhere, everyone is majority white. What I’m trying to do is change how people look at me.
When people are just staring at you because you are a group of Hispanics, they are probably making negative assumptions. Having a more diverse group at the university would be better.

Many times I have felt I was discriminated against or treated poorly because someone assumed I was undocumented. The most recent incident, we were at a school event last week for the university. I was with a Pakistani friend looking at information for student success. The professor there was telling us about all the benefits to the program but he kept mentioning you have to be a U.S. citizen. Then he would ask us, are you a U.S. citizen? That was just last week. I told the professor she is a U.S. citizen, I’m not even going to do the program so you don’t need to know. It was weird because my friend appears Mexican so they were targeting us. In stores, if you look Hispanic, right away you can tell when they don’t want to serve us. They probably assume we might steal or something. I have a credit card.

At times it feels horrible to be perceived as undocumented. They say you crossed a border and you broke the law. I was brought here. It wasn’t my choice but my parents sacrificed so much for us to have better education. I am going to stand with them. And if they think we are all criminals then oh well. We are here paying everything we have to. How do you really know whose legal or illegal? It’s hard at times but you really get past it once you know how to handle it.

I have felt invisible in my American politics course. This happens mainly when there is a white professor with majority white students. If it’s a white professor with a diverse group of students then the professor knows how to handle those discussions more politically. They always use illegal alien terminology, which I haven’t heard in a long time. People always think my sister is undocumented, but she’s not. She’s always going into colleges because our parents
are pushing her to attend even if it’s a very young age. She always gets asked if she’s a citizen. She responds yes I am a U.S. citizen, what would you like to see? A green card?

But it doesn’t really make a difference anymore, at this point I am going to do what I have to do to graduate and become a better person. I won’t be one of those negative stereotypes. It used to really hit me hard, like wow, this is what they think about me? But it doesn’t affect me that much anymore, I just keep going.

**Family Support and Sacrifice**

College is an opportunity that my parents never had. It’s expensive to pay for, but I want to become someone who won’t fall into the dropout group. There are a lot of teenagers getting pregnant from our community, but I don’t want to be one of those persons. I want to be the one graduating college. I want to become successful in whatever I graduate with.

My parents are Mexican. Like I said, I was the first one to graduate high school. Everyone else in my family dropped out or got pregnant. For them to see me graduate high school and walk on that stage, it was like wow. Now they are convincing all my siblings and cousins here in the U.S. that they have to graduate high school. Don’t be one of the other ones. My parents tell me not to get pregnant all the time. They tell me that I need to graduate college first, focus on traveling the world. They want me to do what ever I need to do. They tell me in your thirties you can get married. They are not the typical Mexicans. My dad works about three jobs, he doesn’t come home till around 10pm everyday. It’s a construction job that he has in addition to his other job. He works weekends so I really don’t get to see my family all together all the time. We see each other for birthdays or the holidays so it’s a lot to sacrifice. He’s always telling me it’s worth it if you are going to pay me in return with good grades. My mom stays at home raising my siblings.
Envisioning a Socially Just America

My vision of a socially just world would allow everyone to pursue higher education without borders. To not have to give up on your dream the day you graduate high school and walk across that stage. To not have to question, what am I going to do next? Because I’m undocumented. To be able to apply for state aid, not federal. For me, personally in the Midwest, you have all these anti-immigrant bills coming up for debate. Why can’t we just move forward like other states have? You see the growth in the economy so that’s how I would picture my perfect, just society. In-state tuition makes our lives so much easier; I think about paying out-of-state tuition and that would be the only thing to keep me from pursuing higher education. It’s too high. At some point, if we could have access to federal financial aid that would also help but for right now I would be happy with state financial aid.

Claudia

When my dad said that he wanted to move here he said, “I want my kids to go to school to be something better than me.” So I wanted to do it for me because I wanted to be successful. I wanted to go to school. I want my parents to be proud of me; I wanted them to see that their effort was worth it.

My Perception of Claudia

Claudia is a beautiful woman. She has long dark hair, she’s very tall, and her complexion is a light olive shade. She tells me her entire family is very tall. Claudia is reserved; she takes her time when responding to my questions. She carefully thinks about her responses before she speaks with me about being an undocumented Latino graduate.
Claudia’s Background

I am 24 years old and I was born in Zacatecas, México. My memories of Zacatecas are warm and joyful. I miss the simplicity of the life there, even though we did not have all we needed, we were so very happy. I helped build the house we lived in with my own two hands. I helped my father make the adobe to put it all together. When I was 11 years old, I migrated to the U.S. with my parents. I am undocumented.

I am not married nor do I have children. My two sisters are married and have children so my parents do not push this on me. If I were to meet the right man, my family would support it however; there is no pressure to do so any time soon. I am the first in my entire family to attend college and graduate with bachelor’s degree. My bachelor is in Criminal Justice. I am working full time in a highly populated Latino community. I very much identify as being Mexican.

Limited College Opportunities until DACA

When I got out of high school I didn’t want to go to college. I thought it was too expensive and I wasn’t going to go because we have a huge family. I eventually decided to go over time, so I pushed myself and I received a scholarship. My parents and I both paid for college. When I graduated high school, I wanted to keep going but I had to stop, I didn’t have the money. So I stopped going and worked for six months. My friends kept pushing me, telling me even though it’s hard we are going to help you; we are going to do anything we can. They knew it was going to be hard to pay for college. I was the first one in my family to go to college.

I felt the university included me for the most part. When I wanted to apply I told one of the administration members and he really advocated for me. He helped me get a scholarship. I really opened up to him and I told him about my situation. He really helped me. I guess they
didn’t really pay attention to my legal status. I didn’t tell anyone about my status. My teachers
didn’t know.

I don’t feel I had access to the same opportunities as my documented peers. In the past, I
remember a lady calling me from a community college to suggest some support services for
students. She wanted to get me involved with student support services. After a long
conversation, we discussed joining this group and I was excited. Towards the end of our
conversation she asked for my social security number and I said, “I don’t have one.” After an
awkward amount of time, she told me she was sorry for wasting my time. So I was disappointed.
Some things you are required to have your social security number to participate in certain things.
Once I got DACA things were totally different. After DACA I felt a sense of relief. For
example, I was able to get my drivers license. I didn’t feel the same sense of dread or pressure.

Citizenship Options

There is really nothing we can do as far as becoming citizens in the U.S. My parents do
not have any documentation either so we can’t put in an application. There are people who have
their parents in the U.S. to sponsor them to apply for citizenship but we really didn’t have any
option. You have to have someone in your family to do that for you and it’s a very long process.
If you are 18, a U.S. citizen could technically adopt you. There are not many options though.
You could get married to a U.S. citizen. One of my sisters married a U.S. citizen and they had a
baby. It was really easy for them. He applied for her citizenship and she got her residency card.
After three years she was able to become a U.S. citizen.

We Are Not Taking Your Jobs

Assumptions made about the undocumented make me mad. They frustrate me. Most of
the people I talk to who say negative things about undocumented Latino immigrants are
uneducated about the facts. They don’t know what we go through, they don’t know what our struggles are. It just frustrates me sometimes but I try to not pay attention because then I will be upset and there’s nothing I can do about it anyways. I hate when they say that we come and take Americans’ jobs. I really hate that because, I don’t want to sounds racist against white people, but I worked hard labor and hard jobs while many white people quit the hard jobs. We are not taking the jobs away; they just don’t want to do them.

I usually push back on the negative mindsets indirectly. I know it’s frustrating but I try to not think about it. I have to show them that we are not the uneducated stereotype they promote in the media. I push back through example. That’s why I pursued higher education. We have to show them we can do better. We will show them this. That’s how I set my mind when I hear negative assumptions or opinions.

We Would Like to Give Back

We hear a lot of good things reported in the media about undocumented Latino students but then we hear a lot of incorrect things too. Some comments are hateful, for example, “Send them back.” Sometimes we hear good stories about the success of undocumented Latino students. Sometimes we hear about how these students overcome many obstacles to achieve their goals, which is a good thing. Many people see and value the strides we have made, but unfortunately you will still see comments online made by individuals who think we should not be here and that we do not belong here. I think it’s important that Americans understand that we do belong here. This is our home. We love this country as much as they do and that is why we work so hard to better ourselves. We want to give back to our communities.
Support from Family

My parents are the reason I value higher education. I always wanted them to be proud of me. When my dad said that he wanted to move here he said “I want my kids to go to school to be something better than me.” So I wanted to do it for me too because I wanted to be successful. I wanted to go to college. I want my parents to be proud of me. I wanted them to see that their effort was worth it. When I was in high school I would think to myself “I just need to graduate, that’s all I need to do.” Getting a higher education seemed very far away from me. But when you are a senior in high school the colleges start sending letters home to go to college. It was then when I started thinking about seriously enrolling in college. Looking back, now that I have graduated with my bachelors I want to go back for my masters. A lot of my undocumented Latino friends didn’t want to go because of money; there was no way they could afford it. For this reason, many of them didn’t go. My parents value higher education very much. Like I said, when we came over here, my dad wanted us to have the chance to do more. To go to college and have a career. They work very hard; they have part time jobs too. They sacrificed a lot. We are all working. I plan on getting my masters either in criminal justice or business. If I decide to do Criminal Justice I would love to get a job in a federal agency.

I am Not a Criminal, I Have a Voice

In high school there are many times I had been perceived as illegal but this one time really made me mad. As this girl was passing by, she made a comment that we should call immigration so they can remove all the wetbacks. It was indirect, but I knew she was saying it because of me – to me. It was a Mexican girl who was a U.S. citizen. It’s very upsetting no matter who it comes from. I know I am not a criminal. There are so many people who come here and work and they are good students. It’s hard. They are being stereotyped because of
what people say, “They came to the states to take our jobs.” It makes me mad and really upsets me when I hear those comments. It’s challenging because there’s so many people that make those comments, yet you have to remain calm. You can’t start arguments with everyone. That would be a full time job. Trust me I feel like I can argue our situation, I want to tell these people all kinds of stuff but it’s not worth it.

I have felt invisible in my classrooms. My major was criminal justice; in my last semester I had a lot of teachers who wanted to talk about politics more than ever. Comments are made like “Illegal.” For example, we were watching a you-tube video on Latino immigration and several students made comments such as “illegal Mexican.” This didn’t seem to bother any of the class, this type of terminology. They think Mexicans should be pulled over when driving because they look, appear illegal, much like the legislation in Arizona. I didn’t say anything but internally I thought, just because they are Mexican – how do we know they are illegal? How is this not racist? Who uses terminology like this? Who uses the word “illegal”?

**Envisioning a Socially Just America**

People are going to be stereotyped all the time. When I was going to college, I didn’t have my documents so I didn’t have the same opportunities to participate in some of the programs and activities I wanted to. I think a socially just world would grant every student the ability to explore and grow. Students should be able to go experience things and know more about higher education, I was excluded. We are excluded at school, even if they say its equal. When you go to high school, you don’t have to have your social security number so it doesn’t matter. But then when you try to join activities, you are excluded because you don’t have that number. You cannot enroll and you cannot participate. When I enrolled in college, I wasn’t so
much scared. It was more about the money. I knew I couldn’t get any help from any financial aid.

**Regena**

*If they [Americans] saw how living conditions are in México, Central America, or South America – I don’t think they would be so critical. If they knew how bad crime is in México then I think they might understand undocumented Latino students who are trying to get a higher education in the U.S. In México, students are being murdered for that.*

**My Perception of Regena**

Regena is enthusiastic when she speaks, she radiates with optimistic energy throughout our conversation. She is brunette, petite, and has a light olive complexion. She describes her eyes as “Asian shaped”, she tells me that many people do not assume she is Mexican. People ask her if she is white and Asian.

**Regena’s Background**

I am 23 years old and I was born in Guadalajara, México. When I was around the age of 2, I migrated to the U.S. with my parents. I am undocumented. I grew up in the Midwest and attended the k-12 educational system. I graduated from high school and I am now enrolled at a university. I identify as being Mexican and American. For example, I speak English outside the home but Spanish and English with my family at home. I do not have accent; I can bounce from English to Spanish depending on the environment.

I am not married nor do I have children. I live with my parents, one sister and one brother who are both younger than me. Currently I am a full time student and employee; I am also active in various organizations and extra curricular activities because I want to remain competitive when applying for scholarships.
Scholarships, Organizations, and Extracurricular Activities

Enrolling in college was not scary, I feel neutral about it. We still are allowed to pay in-state tuition but we do not qualify for FAFSA. Tuition is expensive. It’s about $3000 per semester, that’s $6000 a year we have to pay straight out of our pockets. It’s still a struggle trying to come up with that money. Most people either have FAFSA or they are able to get scholarships but we are restricted from a lot of scholarships. You have to look beyond the typical scholarships and you have to do it quick.

I feel I have the same opportunities as Americans. I don’t think I have ever had an issue. It’s difficult because, in my situation, I have to work full time and go to school full time. I am also doing a lot of extra curricular activities to get scholarships. I am in different organizations so it gets difficult to make time to study and keep my grades up for those scholarships. It’s difficult.

I don’t know if I’ve started from the same place as Americans have because everyone has his or her own story. Everyone grew up differently so I can’t speak for others. I can only speak for myself. I know that we, as undocumented Latino students, all struggle to pay that tuition because there is no other way. It’s a struggle just to pay for school. We all have the opportunity to attend school thankfully in the Midwest with in-state tuition but it’s still challenging. Some of my friends work 2-3 jobs; it’s a struggle to pay our way through college.

Support from Family

My father empowers me. He always says that the only reason we are in this country is to have a better life for ourselves. I feel like, I’m not going to waste that opportunity. If we were in México, my life would be completely different. I probably wouldn’t have graduated high school or gone to college over there. My motivation is my family and I recognize the hardships my
parents have gone through for me and my sister to go to college. When we went to community college, they paid for our school but my sister and I were able to get scholarships there. Once we transferred to the university, it was much more expensive. Even though both my sister and I work and pay tuition, my parents help us on the semesters we don’t have enough money. They work hard for us to “make” that tuition payment and buy those expensive books. It’s my family. Both my parents haven’t seen their parents for over 21 years. I am able to succeed here in the U.S. and complete my degree. I will be able to get a good job. Hopefully I will be able to help my parents go back to Mexico and visit their family they haven’t seen in so many years.

My Home is the U.S.

The way that it is now, it’s scary to even think that if for some reason I wasn’t able to continue here and I would have to go back to México, that is scary to me. I’m so used to the U.S. where I grew up. I don’t think I could survive in México, which sounds weird. The poverty and crime affects someone’s way of living. If you don’t have money to help your family then you have to get involved with cartel just to feed your family and survive. It’s sad. It’s scary to think that in México you have to go through crime to be able to survive. Here, I am just happy that working helps my family.

I understand hardships cause we have been through that. Working at McDonalds is not the best place but it helps you get money. Even for undocumented Latino students to be able to work at fast food restaurants, I know they are not glamorous occupations, but it gets the job done. Individuals who are documented shouldn’t be ashamed of working at a fast food joint because it’s bringing money to feed their kids and it’s keeping their utilities on. For example, African Americans have documentation to be here and work legally. Just because they live in areas of poverty in the U.S. doesn’t mean that they are unable to succeed if they want it. If they
choose not to, I think that’s their own position. It frustrates me because I know that my dad has worked three jobs and so has my mom. That doesn’t stop them from working; they are not ashamed about it. Americans shouldn’t feel ashamed about working at a fast food restaurant if it helps feed their family and live in a house.

**The Status Quo – Are You Legal?**

There are always people who are against undocumented Latino students attending college. There will always be those who advocate for it. It just depends on who is speaking. If they are anti-everything, they will portray us as these illegal immigrants. They don’t even say undocumented anymore. They say illegal. They say we are here to steal everything. They say we are here to steal higher education from citizens and steal jobs. Those who are for undocumented Latino students pursuing their higher education will say we are here to better ourselves and the U.S. It just depends on who the speaker is and I am comfortable with that. But it’s frustrating and sad to see such a critical and ugly narrative about undocumented Latino students. The only reason they are migrating to the U.S. is because they want a better life. If Americans saw how living conditions are in México, Central America, or South America – I don’t think they would be so critical. If they knew how bad crime is in México I think they might understand undocumented Latino students who are trying to get a higher education in the U.S. In México, students are being murdered for attending college. I think it’s something that they don’t understand and it’s frustrating. If people were able to survive in México, I don’t think they would be migrating to the U.S. I have learned throughout the years that it’s not necessarily better to be quiet about undocumented Latino immigration; but in a school or classroom setting – I don’t want to be the stereotypical angry Latina. I want them to be aware that we are not here to take over the country. We are just here to better ourselves. It’s the same thing when individuals
move from the Middle East or Asia to the U.S. They are trying to move away from crime and poverty. They are trying to get their children a better life.

I think they only focus on south of the border because it’s connected to the U.S. It depends on what part of México you are in. If you go to the big cities, it’s going to look like any other big city in the U.S. They have Wal-Marts, malls, shopping centers, but when you go into the country life, they live in poverty. Most don’t have running water or electricity. They are still living like third world countries. Especially now since crime is so high, many people don’t want to go out to work in fear of being killed in the streets. My Grandparents were fortunate enough that they grew up working hard and they saved their money to own their own house in México. They don’t live in a big city. Their little town looks nice but they have broken houses. Some of them have cars. It depends on where you are in México. Some places look really beautiful with cars and homes just like the U.S. but they don’t really show small little towns that are very impoverished. They don’t even have schools; they have to ride the bus for at least 30 minutes.

**How DACA Changes Lives**

Being undocumented sometimes feels negative. Before DACA, it really felt negative because I was afraid at work. Afraid they were going to find out if I was undocumented or not. Whether or not I was going to get fired and have to find another job. It’s always scary having to fill out those applications out at school. But now with DACA I feel much more safe. If I keep doing well nothing should happen. That’s another thing that they should do is make something more permanent where we are able to become residents and work our way up. So it won’t be as scary as we get older, especially when we graduate from college and try to look for a professional job out there. Having to deal with our legal status makes it a lot scarier.
**Being Undocumented and Navigating College**

When I enrolled in college undocumented it wasn’t that bad. I always knew I was going to go to college because I grew up here. When I would watch TV shows, everyone would go to college. So I had an image of going to college, but that’s not how it went. It was a little scary enrolling because I didn’t want to answer those questions. “Are you legal? Are you a legal resident? Were you born in this country?” I spoke to my counselor in high school and she told me that in the Midwest we had in state tuition so I shouldn’t worry about that. All I had to do was sign an affidavit form that would allow me to pay in state tuition. Explaining the process made it less scary. Once I was accepted to the community college I went to speak with an advisor and she explained the whole process to me. Everything was a lot less scary. Once I got into the university it wasn’t scary at all. I knew the process, it seemed less intimidating. I think that’s another reason why undocumented Latinos do not pursue their higher education –the not knowing. My mom always said “You are going to go to college.” She also pushed me to speak with my high school advisor. You don’t have to be scared, there is another process you have to do but they will keep that private. They won’t let anyone know, no one knows. When I went into college no one knew I was undocumented. They just assumed I was born in the U.S. until I joined HALO (Hispanic American Leadership Organization) at the community college and university. Once people get to know me and my story, they were shocked that I was born in México and that I’m undocumented.

**Countering the Stereotypes: We Value Higher Education**

The main assumption made about undocumented Latino students is the fact that we don’t want to get an education. The assumption that we’re using DACA just to stay here and not pursue something better. I am immune to what they speak about because they don’t know. They
don’t know my life story. What pisses me off the most is that we don’t get to hear from families that don’t speak English so they don’t have a voice to say what they are feeling or let people know the truth. I can speak my story in English, I can tell them that my parents value higher education and have always told me to study to get scholarships. When I went to community college I received scholarships but once I went to the university it’s a lot different. We still have the same opportunity it’s just that people don’t take advantage of it. It’s a lot harder for undocumented Latino students in other states who don’t have in state tuition. For them it is a little bit more difficult. Here, we all have the same opportunity to go to college—it’s just whether you want to or not. I think everybody deserves a higher education. No one should be denied one. It’s hard to succeed in life. It’s frustrating.

My parents always taught me that I shouldn’t think about what other people think because they haven’t been in my shoes. I don’t want to jeopardize anything because my emotions take over. I normally stay quiet and ignore them. This is my strategy. My whole life I’ve heard these assumptions and stereotypes about undocumented Latino students and it’s sad but I’m immune to them. I don’t even listen to them, nor do I care because I am just trying to better myself at this point. If I take in those negative assumptions, it will just hold me back. That’s not what I’m trying to do. I hope I’ve had conversations with people that have changed their minds about undocumented Latino students but in the end they are going to have their own ideas and assumptions. I hope that they are able to respect me as a person going to school, if they are still going to say those things; I hope they say it when I’m not around.

You are nobody in the U.S. if you don’t have a higher education. Higher education will always open the door for anything. Anything is possible with education. You are able to have a better job and lifestyle. If I have that opportunity to go to college and continue with my dream
job, I shouldn’t deny myself that. Especially when my parents didn’t have that opportunity growing up in México. They are going through all the struggles here in America to make my dreams come true. I know my dad get frustrated and he wants to give up and go back to México. I don’t want to do that, I won’t give up that easily especially when I have what it takes to do it. I have my parents and my family. I am able to get a higher education. Educating yourself is the first step in educating everybody else. I think higher education is everything.

Parent Support for Pursuing Higher Education

My parents value higher education very much. Especially more when I reached high school, my parents were more excited for me to go to college than I was. My dad always talks about how he wanted to be an architect and how he loves buildings. Every time we would go on vacation, he would always look at all the buildings and explain to us that if he had had the opportunity to go to college, he would be a part of designing the buildings. The closest he came was working construction in México. My mom and dad appreciate higher education because they know without an education; you won’t be able to succeed in life. They are happy that my sister and I are in college and that my brother (who was born here) has an even better chance of going out of state or to his dream college. They are very happy that their children are going to get the education that they weren’t able to in México.

My parents, my mom especially, tells me to not have any kids until I finish school. I am happy about that because like I said before, I don’t want to get married in the first place. I don’t want to have kids until I am able to fulfill my dream. My mom came from a family of 9-10 kids, she was the oldest daughter so every time my grandma got pregnant, my mom would always take care of her. That’s why my mom decided to have three kids. She also said that I need to focus on what I want in life because once you get married and have kids it will be hard to pursue your
dreams and take care of your family. She has always reminded me, and I always remind her, that I’m not going to have kids and that I am smart enough to take care of myself or I won’t get pregnant. That way I can finish my dreams.

Feelings of “Who am I?” and Being “Invisible”

I think I have a different issue that others don’t have. I am never perceived as undocumented. People always assume that I was born in the U.S. People don’t assume I’m Mexican; they assume I’m white or Asian. My name doesn’t even sound Hispanic so my whole image, my name, and the way I speak doesn’t help me at all. This prevents me from being discriminated against that way. Maybe I have not been offended as much as others have because of their looks and names. I get more discriminated against in my own race, like immediate family or just friends in general. When I go to parties or church, my sister looks more Hispanic than I do and my sister doesn’t speak Spanish as well as I do. I speak more Spanish than she does. When they speak Spanish to her she just nods, I come in and they speak to me in English. I end up speaking in Spanish. It’s the opposite. She’s younger than I am but she’s taller and looks older. She’s 21.

I have felt invisible in class. Sometimes I just laugh it off because they don’t know what they are talking about when the topic of undocumented Latino immigration comes up. I don’t want to say anything because the entire room is agreeing with anti-immigration views. I don’t want to be the only one. I am careful with the arguments I engage in. It’s weird to be in a classroom where I don’t make assumptions about people but they bring up politics. I want to believe that people are more open-minded. But that’s not the case. They are not open-minded. I tend to sit back and listen to what they say and ignore it. I laugh about it because they really have no idea what they are talking about. I stay quiet. My whole life, I saw it from various
perspectives and at this point in my life I don’t want to stir the pot anymore. Everyone has their opinion. They might hear different perspectives but most people still stick with their own beliefs. You grow up having thick skin with this issue, especially when you’ve lived it your whole life. Nobody is going to understand it unless they’ve been through it. Politics will be politics, I’m a psychology major – I believe that everybody has gone through something in their life that makes them feel that way and I am nobody to change their minds. People always stereotype because of color, I don’t think they really assume anything else.

**Envisioning a Socially Just America**

To me, equality would give undocumented Latino students who are still in middle and high school a more positive outlook to pursue higher education. I have heard this so many times in high school from undocumented friends: “Why should I even try to graduate from high school if I’m not going to go to college? Or not be able to pay for it?” At the same time, I understand where they are coming from. It also frustrates me because I always say what my parents said. Their parents also came here for them to have a better life and to just throw that away –It’s pointless. I think we need to educate kids in school who are going through that. If they don’t know there are resources out there to help them get their education (yes it might be hard to obtain) if they are willing to try they can get those scholarships. That would be my ideal, to educate awareness to undocumented Latino students. Especially schools, to not target undocumented, but to speak openly about it and not be afraid of it. Hopefully we would have more Latino high school graduates going to college.

**Nita**

They [Americans] are saying that undocumented Latinos don’t value education when it’s the opposite. We actually want to do better. We came to this country for a reason, to do better
than we were doing in Mexico. People don’t realize how hard we work to get where we’re at. People with papers, they don’t have to go through that trouble.

My Perception of Nita

Nita has long brown hair, a smooth bronze complexion, and she is very petite. Our conversation is effortless because she is receptive and articulate at such a young age. She seemed to sincerely understand the difference between the dominant narrative voice and the voices of undocumented Latino students. We were both excited to discuss her positive example of an undocumented Latino student pursuing her higher education in the U.S.

Nita’s Background

I am 18 years old. When I was 10 years old I migrated from México to California with my parents. I have been living in the Midwest for six years now. I am undocumented. I identify with being both Mexican and American. My childhood was spent growing up in Jalisco, México for the first 10 years of my life. My family and I would go to the local pools and go on camping trips. On mother's day, we would wake up early around 5am and all go to my grandmother’s house. We would take music and flowers to her. We would all drink coffee and spend family time the entire day. My adult life has been spent in the U.S., so I also identify with being American too. Most of my family members are documented and I have also filed paperwork to apply for DACA. I am now working to save the $465 fee. Although I would like to work, I cannot due to my undocumented legal status. I am however, a full time student. I am the oldest of three brothers; and I am setting an example by pursing higher education for them to see.

Included and Excluded

I have never had a problem on campus due to being Mexican or undocumented. I have never heard of anyone having discrimination issues because the social security number is
optional when you apply for college. The university pays attention to both documented and undocumented Latino students equally.

However, I have not had the same opportunities as American students. There’s a program called TRIO Talent Search, a federally-funded program designed to prepare and motivate middle and high school students for postsecondary education, but you have to have a social security number for that because they visit colleges. That’s one thing I cannot participate in. TRIO Talent Search is an organization with free tutoring and they take you to colleges, kind of like AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), an organization that prepares all students for higher education. I do not have access these programs because I don’t have a social security number. It makes me mad, but it all makes me keep going forward and believe in myself. That’s how I push back. I tell myself, “Ok I don’t have a kid and I am proving to people that I don’t have kids at a young age.” It actually motivates me instead of getting stuck on it.

Enrolling into college scared me a little because I didn’t know what I was getting myself into due to my undocumented legal status. I didn’t know how they were going to treat me because I didn’t have papers. It is scary for someone who doesn’t have papers because you are scared you won’t have the same opportunities. Some people don’t have the same opportunities because they need their social security number for almost everything. Now that I am enrolled, it’s not that scary.

Stereotypes and Assumptions

I don’t think the media accurately portrays undocumented Latino students. There are both positive and negative examples. There are always people who speak negatively about immigration and others who are more positive. I don't know how to explain it, for example, a lot of people can be racist or make fun of undocumented Latino students even if it's their own race.
And we may be perceived as lazy. On the other hand, it can set a positive example how we work hard for our goals and we keep going even when times are hard.

The media promotes this generalization of Latinos not valuing value higher education when it’s the opposite. We actually want to do better. We came to this country for a reason, to do better than we were doing in México. People don’t realize how hard we work to get where we are. People with papers, they don’t have to go through that trouble. They don’t have the narrative of “I can’t find a job or go to school because I don’t have papers.” They really don’t understand how hard the situation is for undocumented Latino students; it’s stressful to hear about. They say that about Latinos, so it’s discriminating. They really don’t know about our situation.

The worst assumption is that we don’t work hard or that we get pregnant at a young age. Getting pregnant at a young age is the worst assumption because people have said I was going to be pregnant by 15. They have said that I am getting pregnant at a young age just because they let me go out. That’s the main belief that upsets me, when people say because she is Latina and she’s young, that she’s already got kids. No. It all depends on how you respect yourself to break those stereotypes.

I don’t think it’s always a negative thing to be undocumented because it motivates you to do better. You end up working harder to get what you need and want because we are undocumented, we don’t have the same opportunities so we have to work harder. It’s more like motivation than something negative because later on it will pay off. That’s my way of seeing it.

**We Value Higher Education**

I value higher education because I want a good career. My parents, they didn’t go to college because back then it was different. They got married young and had kids young. For
me, going to college means a lot because I can show them things can be done differently. “You
didn’t do it mom and dad, but I can do it for you.” I can have a career and I do what they didn’t.
It’s also an example for my siblings because I’m the oldest and they look up to the oldest. I can
motivate them to keep going to school and not drop out.

My parents value higher education for many of the same reasons. My mom tells me all the
time, look at yourself and then look at me. I don’t want you to live the life that I live just
because we have struggled and didn’t go to college. Here in the U.S. you have more
opportunities to go to school and have a better life. My parents value higher education the same
way as I do. They didn’t have the ability to go but I do.

Here in my house, we are a team. This is how I find the strength to continue moving
forward with college. So I have the motivation to find ways. I have support. I don’t work but I
have come up with alternatives to fundraise money for tuition. I started doing a basket raffle
with the support of my father’s employer. I raffle handmade baskets with products in them, I sell
tickets and they are entered to win the basket. The basket is a $600 value. Another example of
support comes from friends of our family. We have a family friend who cares about my higher
education so they have told me that can help financially. Every little bit helps.

What Mexico Looks Like

For the most part, the crime in México changes opportunities but if you really want it you
can. I have childhood friends that still live in México and they are going to school. They are
getting careers and working so it’s possible. The crime is bad and there are a lot of things going
on. It depends on where you live in México. There’s crime every where in México but you can
find ways to be better and have a better education even if you are over there. However, in the
U.S. you have way more opportunities to find a job. Even as an art major, you can go to school
and teach or you can paint. In Mexico you have to have a degree to be a doctor or a nurse, if you
don’t choose in-demand occupations, you won’t thrive. You won’t have the same opportunities.

**Discrimination from Mexican Americans**

Discrimination for being Mexican or undocumented hasn’t directly happened to me but I see it with my parents. It wasn’t that long ago. The discrimination can come from not only white people but Hispanic people too. There are Hispanics who have papers and they think that they are way better than us. I feel like “Your family is Mexican, your parents were probably undocumented.” Your parents are still Mexican. You are still Mexican. It’s frustrating to see Hispanics discriminate their own kind. We went to a retail store located in the Midwest and you could tell the lady who works worked there was Mexican. Her name was Spanish; you could tell she could speak Spanish. My dad would ask her something in Spanish and she would just look at him like “what?” That really made me mad, “How are you working somewhere where most of the clientele are going to be Mexican with that attitude?” She was kind of rude, that’s discrimination because she didn’t want to speak Spanish and she knew what my dad was saying to her in Spanish. She kept talking to me and I told her “Well I don’t have the questions, he does.” It was frustrating to see that. She would talk to me in English and my dad would ask her something in Spanish. She would completely ignore his questions. We are customers, you cannot do that.

**My Generation and Legal Status**

I am from a generation where even in high school when immigration would come up, people wouldn’t say nasty things. They would have a debate but not be disrespectful. It was like a regular conversation. I never really saw ugliness when people debated. I have not felt invisible in any classroom. My teachers didn’t mention anything about my legal status because I
was in the Advancement Via Individual Determination program (ADVID). They introduced me to universities and college events, they were aware I was undocumented. They would teach me how to ask what my opportunities are because I was undocumented. They weren’t rude, they placed priority on me because they knew I didn’t have papers and they told me I had to find a way to go to school. They told me how to ask certain questions so I could get my answers.

**Envisioning a Socially Just America**

I describe equally as everyone having the same opportunities. That includes documented and undocumented people having the same opportunities. American citizens qualify for federal financial aid. Which mean they have access to loans, grants, and sometimes scholarships. They are able to work legally on or off campus. We, undocumented Latino students, don’t have this option because we were not born here. I feel like everyone should qualify for FASFA. Undocumented Latino students should have access to in-state tuition in all states.

What doesn’t make sense to me is the fact that we need better job opportunities because we migrated here for a better life but we end up working low paying occupations. Undocumented Latino students need to have better job opportunities. Everyone should have the opportunity to pursue higher education and a good career. This is the American dream for everyone, not just those who have documentation. We should all have the right to a better life and community.

**Mia**

*When I was about to quit college she [Mother] would tell me “No Mia, you have this opportunity and you have to keep going. There are many people from other countries who don’t have the opportunity to go to school, just think about that.”* She made me realize how lucky I was to go to college even if I have no papers.
My Perception of Mia

Mia is petite in stature but her spirit is larger than life. She has always been welcoming of my questions and pleased to share a more positive side to the dominant narrative about undocumented Latino students. Mia is warm and approachable; our conversations are filled with laughter and sadness as we discuss the realities of pursuing higher education as an undocumented Latina. Her only request is that I share the truth about her experience, as she recognizes they are misrepresented in the media.

Mia’s Background

I am 25 years old and I was born in du plateau, Mexico. I was born in a large city but raised in a small farming community. When I was 12 years old, my parents separated and I migrated to the U.S. with my mother. I am undocumented. Recently, I graduated college with a bachelor in Political Science. While I look for occupations in political science, I works full time in a dental office. For the most part, I identify as Mexican but I also feel a strong connection with American culture. My father, who lives in México, became very ill with cancer and I was able to visit him back in México. I was thrilled at the opportunity to visit him in México but once I arrived I immediately felt “too American.” The people in Mexico categorized me as “from the U.S.” it as a very odd feeling. I am not married nor do I have children. I am the baby of a very large family. My 5 brothers and 2 sisters all live in the U.S. except for a brother who has recently been deported to México.

Citizenship Options

There are not many pathways to citizenship for an undocumented Latino student in the Midwest. Have you heard about the bill in Topeka? They are so crazy they want to take DACA away from us. They wouldn’t benefit anything by doing so, it’s just hate. So what we are going
to do is, gather many undocumented Latino students and give our testimonies at the capital. We will let them know how we enhance this state through DACA. It’s so easy with DACA, now we have a permit. We can work legally, we can do our taxes, we can pay the government, we can go to school, and it’s easier for us. The government doesn’t like us, they hate us so much.

The only option that you have is to get married to a U.S. citizen. I don’t consider that an option, I come from a background where if you are going to get married, it’s because you really love that person. It’s not for business. There is no military option for citizenship. Your documented family can sponsor you, but the process, especially if it is brother to brother and sister to sister, can take up to fourteen years. For example, if you are undocumented and they are documented then they can apply for your citizenship (you have to be under 18), that’s a good way to get your citizenship. I think it takes about one to two years. If you are over 18, it will take a really long time.

**A Little Band-Aid called DACA**

DACA is a little Band-Aid that you can put on when you have a cut, it doesn’t cure you but it protects you. That’s how I describe DACA, a little bit of protection. A few months ago, immigration took one of my brothers and deported him back to México. It’s not a good feeling, it’s really sad. When you receive a phone call telling you “They have your brother, there’s nothing you can do.” I asked, “Okay, when am I going to see him again?” It’s sad, it’s very sad. He was driving and he got pulled over in a small Midwest town. If the town is smaller, it’s a bigger risk for undocumented Latinos to drive. Small towns are so, I don’t want to say racist, but they practice racial profiling. If they see you as a Mexican, they call immigration. My brother tried to come back and was caught and sent to Mexican prison for two months. It’s horrible. The bad thing is that he has a house here and he’s been here his whole life. The only thing is, he
didn’t go to college so he couldn’t apply for DACA. Now we have to pay his taxes on his house. I told my mom “Mom you know what? We just got a bill from his house, we need to pay.” I hope I see him again.

**Identifying Who I Am**

I am more Mexican than American. I feel both cultures actually. This is a hard question. I feel like I am Mexican. November of last year, my dad got really sick with his cancer. With DACA you can’t travel. There are only three reasons you are allowed to leave the U.S.; education, humanitarian reasons, or work. I sent my application to DACA and I told them that I wanted to go see my dad because I haven’t seen him in fourteen years and he was sick in the hospital. In November, they approved my application, they said yes! I went to Mexico last September; I spent two weeks there. It was so weird. Because when I am here in the U.S. – I feel Mexican, so Mexican. When I go to México – I feel different. It was a different feeling. People over there they don’t see you as Mexican, they see you as coming from the U.S. People I haven’t seen in a long time know about me, over there they all know each other. A lot of people know about you even if you don’t know about them. It was different; I don’t know how to explain it. When I am here, I feel both Mexican and American. Pretty much half of my life I have been in the U.S. Half of my life is here, and half of my life is there.

**Included and Excluded**

The university I graduated from was very open to undocumented Latino students. They were nice. When I graduated from high school, I was afraid because of my situation they were going to say no to me. I talked to one of my advisors in high school and he told me that he had a friend that worked at the university. He called her and she contacted me, she told me there
would be no problem from me to go to the university. I also got a scholarship for the first semester.

I wasn’t too scared to apply to college without papers because I had administrative support. When I applied, I was concerned about being able to use my degree and work legally. It was a gamble. I knew if I didn’t try I would never know. There’s a 50/50 chance of getting a job after graduating college, so I tried. There were many people who helped me.

I didn’t receive the same opportunities as Americans because in my situation I couldn’t apply for FAFSA (Federal Student Aid). That was the main difference. I couldn’t apply for any loans so I had to pay out of my pocket. I really want to go back and get my masters but the only thing that is holding me back is money. I don’t have the money. If I had the money I wouldn’t be here.

**We Are Not Taking Your Job**

I try not to face the hostile climate towards Latino immigration in the media. The public has the right to their ideas and ways of thinking. Not all people are going to agree with you on all the issues. There’s always going to be someone who doesn’t agree with you. I don’t pay attention to those negative comments; I don’t pay that much attention to any of it. Unless they want to repeal DACA, then I take it personal. You are the only one who knows what’s real. You are the only one that’s been through that situation. No one is going to understand unless they are people in the same situation. They always say we take their jobs and money, which is not true. In my opinion I don’t think that’s true. I have a super republican friend, he doesn’t agree with undocumented Latino immigration. I always tell him that the narrative in the media is not true. We need to try to understand why undocumented Latino students come to the U.S.
What are the reasons we are here? We are not taking people’s jobs, there are jobs for everyone, trust me. If you are not working, it’s because you don’t want to.

I Value Higher Education

Higher education opens doors for you. You got me thinking on this one. You have more opportunities when you have a higher education. With my education, I qualify for DACA. Thanks to my higher education, now I can legally drive and have a permit. I can legally work. Even though I was undocumented and had no papers I still went to college after I graduated from high school. I knew I had no papers; I knew I might graduate from a university and not have a job. I still continued with my education!

I am the first one in my family to graduate high school and college. They really value everything I do educationally. They sacrificed so much money, especially my mom. It was very hard for us because we paid everything out of our pockets. The first semester she helped me but after that semester, she told me “You know what Mia, you need to find a job because this is too expensive I won’t be able to help you much for the whole way.” The rest of the semesters I had to find a way. My dad was not very involved with my higher education, he’s in México and he’s not too supportive. He does not value higher education.

Influence from Parents

My mom kept me on track. She’s the one that keeps me going. She’s always there and she’s always motivated me to keep pursuing. When I was about to quit college she would tell me “No Mia, you have this opportunity and you have to keep going. There are many people from other countries who don’t have the opportunity to go to school, just think about that.” She made me realize how lucky I was to go to college even if I have no papers.
My dad was so against higher education, that’s one of the reasons my mom decided to leave him. I was in sixth grade and I was about to go to middle school, he didn’t want me to go to middle school anymore. My mom told him, “You did the same thing to all my kids. You are not going to do that to her.” They got into a big fight and that’s why my mom decided to leave him. Then we came here. I have older brothers who supported my mom, they told my mom “It’s better for you to come to the U.S. with us and have a better life.” She’s very brave and she decided to leave my dad. Now we are here.

That’s why I graduated from high school and college because of her. She was always there and supportive. There were times that I told her, “I am going to quit, I can’t do this anymore, and it’s too much.” I was too stressed and I couldn’t deal with it anymore. I didn’t have the money and it was getting worse and worse. When I was ready to tell my mom I am not going to study anymore, she would say, “No you have to keep going.” She would sit down and tell me everything’s going to be ok, let’s just pray and everything will be okay. Sometimes I was afraid, she told me to get that out of my mind. She told me to be firm and positive: “You have everything.” This is what my mom tells me, “Mo Mia, don’t get married and don’t have kids right now. Live your life to the fullest.” I tell her I want to have a family. My sister got pregnant without being married and that’s a big deal in the Hispanic family and community. They are always raised with the mentality to get married and have kids. With my sister, she got pregnant and she wasn’t married. My mom was so upset and sad, even to this day, she is sad. She loves the grandkids but she says, “She could have waited.” She tells me, “Please don’t do that to me. I believe in you and I feel like you can do so much, do more, don’t get married now and don’t have kids.” She tells me you will have a family one day, but not right now. She tells me to go out with my friends and don’t stay home. Do things. If you feel like you want to go
dance, go dance. Meet new people, don’t get married, you are too young. She tells me all these things because she got married at a young age. She doesn’t want me to go through the same things that she went through. She wants me to do what she couldn’t do. Have fun and travel, save money and do all the things that you want. Then you can get married. She’s very sweet.

**Discrimination from Latinos on Campus**

I have never experienced discrimination. Thank god. I’ve never had that experience. When I was in college, we had a lady in class from Guatemala. She was an international student and we brought up the undocumented Latino immigration issue and she was so against immigration reform. She told the teacher she didn’t understand why people come here without papers, she had to wait in line and go through the process. She felt that it wasn’t fair that we were asking for immigration reform. I didn’t add to the conversation, I just listened. She comes from a family who has money, trust me. She can talk all she wants. She’s saying that because she was lucky to have a family with money. We are actually friends, that’s how she thinks and I’m not going to change her mind. She’s actually very smart.

Unfortunately, undocumented Latino students are not always accurately represented in the media. It goes both ways, positive and negative. It depends on the media you watch. If it’s from the Hispanic media, they are all about DACA and undocumented Latino student rights. They show positive examples. We are discriminated against when people are not too happy about us being in the U.S., some American broadcasts are very anti-immigration. It’s sad but it depends on the person. Like I said before, not everyone will favor undocumented Latino students pursuing higher education.
Envisioning a Socially Just World

We’re not even asking to become U.S. citizens. If we were residents that would be really nice, not just for students but for everyone. Passing immigration reform that includes everyone is a way to start creating a socially just world. I think that would be the best thing ever. Not just students, but for everyone. It’s not going to make everything equal but it will enhance the Latino community. I am hoping your dissertation shows the world that we are not what the general public think we are. They think so negative about us, we are not like that. We are not the negative picture they paint about us.

Bruno

I identify 100% as an American even though I am Nicaraguan. I have wanted to join the military to defend this country but it’s not possible because of my undocumented status. In my head, I am American but legally I’m not a citizen. I am striving to be recognized in a country that doesn’t claim me.

My Perception of Bruno

Bruno is intelligent and driven. He has done extensive research on being an undocumented Latino student in the U.S. so he is able to defend his position when addressing Latino immigration. He is comfortable speaking both Spanish and English. Bruno very much identifies as an American. He is so patriotic he would love to serve in the military but cannot due to his legal status. Although he is from a different Latin country, he gives a very interesting perspective about being an undocumented Latino student pursuing higher education.

Bruno’s Background

I am 19 years old and I was born in Managua, Nicaragua. I am not from Mexico as most people assume. When I was 7 years old, I migrated to the U.S. with my parents from Nicaragua.
I have lived in the U.S. for 12 years and I am undocumented. I am a full time student majoring in Political Science at a large university in the Midwest. I am 100% American although I am Nicaraguan. I love American culture and I want the U.S. to accept me even if I came undocumented.

I live with my parents and two younger brothers. Both my brothers were both born in the U.S. so I am able to apply for residency through them because they are citizens. My Mother has two degrees from Nicaragua but was unable to make ends meet there. When I was very young, my parents divorced and she has since remarried in the U.S.

**Inclusion and Exclusion on Campus**

The university I attend somewhat embraces undocumented Latino students. It was kind of a weird process going through the in-state tuition waiver. To be able to pay in-state tuition, I signed an affidavit. The lady who does the affidavits, she told me “Ok you can sign this but you have to understand the laws can change so it could be revoked and you will have to pay out of state tuition.” It was like she was warning me about what could happen. It made me uncomfortable.

In the U.S. you have to be in high school for three years, then graduate from an accredited high school in the Midwest to get in state tuition. For example, I have a friend who moved from California his sophomore year, so he couldn’t attend three years of high school in the Midwest. He’s going to a community college where he is getting in-state tuition but when he tried to go to the university they didn’t let him have in-state tuition. In California, he had access to state financial aid but his parents could no longer afford to live in California.

I don’t have the same opportunities as Americans. Some are exclusively for documented people. For example, student support services. If you are low-income, you have access to
scholarships and tutors. They contacted me and I wanted to join. I went through the process and filled out the application. The application required me to indicate if I was a U.S. citizen. I called them and asked what my options were and they told me “You have to be a U.S. citizen.” I have DACA but they told me it didn’t count. I had to be a U.S. resident or citizen. I was not eligible. It really sucked but it’s okay. I don’t have to have it anyway. It’s the same for scholarships too; most scholarships require you to be a resident or citizen. It doesn’t matter how smart you are, it doesn’t matter if you are Einstein Jr. You are not going to qualify because you are not a resident. You can apply for private scholarships but a lot of them also require you to be a permanent resident.

To stay motivated, I think about my life and how the government is telling me I’m not a legal person. They are excluding me from things. I think about what I can do with a higher education. I could study here for a little bit; gain experience, knowledge, and skills. I could use these examples to my advantage. I want to ensure the government looks at me and says, “Oh we want you here.” I am striving to be recognized in this country that doesn’t claim me. What I do to afford it, that’s a different story. I am working three jobs and I pay tuition on a payment plan. I am paying $1000.00 a month. I have three jobs.

I knew the process before I enrolled in college, so it wasn’t new information to me. I thought I was going to have to skip college for three years until I got a decent scholarship. I couldn’t afford it and it was driving me insane. I’ve been thinking about college since I was 12. I was a middle-schooler and I told myself “I am going to do this and I’m going to be great one day.” It wasn’t just a dream; it was going to be my reality. We all have hopes and dreams, that’s what makes us human. That’s human instinct.
Why Would You Assume I am Mexican?

I have been discriminated against, but its not always directed at me. No one can look at me and tell I’m undocumented. It’s not a race thing. Most people think I’m Mexican when I am not. When people generalize all undocumented Latino students, that’s when I get upset. The most irritating assumption is that we steal jobs, that we are all Mexicans. When they assume that all South Americans are Mexican. A lot of us are Mexican but not all of us. It makes me angry when they assume I’m Mexican. I am Nicaraguan. They literally think that anything south of the U.S. border is Mexico. That’s not true, there are approximately 47 countries south of the Mexican border. I identify as American, even down to the shoes I wear. I wear “sperrys,” not “chanclas.” I wear sperrys.

Citizenship Options

I have a couple options for citizenship in the U.S. but in my case it’s different. The first option is waiting until my second in-line-brother can file a petition for me. This would take about 10 years. I can marry someone with papers. Preferably a white girl cause you never know about these Latinas now a days. That’s a joke. I just like white girls. I cannot do anything military, I looked into that. You have to be a resident or a citizen. I wanted to join the army and go serve my country. I am patriotic. I believe in America, I am majoring in political science. I have an unusual option than the typical undocumented Latino student has.

When I was a pizza delivery guy, I was assaulted on a delivery. I got beat up by three guys one night and went to the hospital. While they were beating me up I fought back, and was able to run away as fast as I could. I locked myself in my car and called the cops. Because I was attacked by U.S. citizens, the court system prosecuted these guys. I am now eligible for a new visa, which grants me a work permit for three years, then I can apply for permanent residency.
Because of this incident. Honestly getting jumped by three guys was horrible but it was the best thing that ever happened to me. They stole my tip money. It would have been great if they just took my pizza.

**We Value Higher Education**

I value higher education. I want to make something for myself. I might be poor because of my career choice, but I want to use my degree in political science to go to law school. Before I go to law school, I want to go work for the Peace Corps. I want to help people all over the place. After law school, I want to be an attorney and work for the United Nations. I want to become an ambassador to Nicaragua for the U.S.

My parents also value higher education. They like that I’m really focused and working hard. They have helped me financially with some of my payments on my payment plan. We went on vacation and I only had about $200 so they helped me with $800 to pay that month’s tuition. They also bought my books. They need that money a lot too so I’m a financial burden on them but they want to see me succeed. My mom has three degrees from Nicaragua. She’s educated she just can’t do anything with them here. She’s undocumented here. Even though she was an accountant and a teacher in Nicaragua, she worked two jobs and she barely had enough money to buy me a box of cereal. She didn’t want that kind of life for me. That’s why she grabbed me and brought me to the U.S. My dad stayed behind and they divorced. I have another dad here, he is Mexican and he is pretty cool.

**Acceptance on Campus**

People become my friend before they find out I’m undocumented so I don’t usually deal with direct racism. When I tell them I’m undocumented and that I advocate for my situation, they are surprised. They tell me “Wow the government really sucks, I don’t understand why
they don’t just legalize you.” My friends know I am undocumented. They support me. I have fraternities at the university that support me. Fraternities have tried to sign me and they ask why I don’t jump at the opportunity. I tell them I’m paying $1100 a month in tuition so I can’t afford an additional $350 monthly fee. They kept asking me questions, so I told them I was undocumented. They were more upset than I was honestly. They really wanted me in the fraternity.

Using Your Voice

I feel invisible on campus sometimes. I speak up in class. I don’t want people to simply regard undocumented Latino students as people with no voice. We aren’t like the untouchables in the caste system in India. We are people too and we deserve a voice, I like being that voice especially in political science classes. I will argue with someone who is anti-immigrant – and I will win. The common arguments are that undocumented Latino students take their jobs. In my opinion, they are the ones who are lazy (white people). They are the ones who want to sit around on the couch and not look for work. That has nothing to do with undocumented Latino students; we are going to look for work! I am not trying to be racist, I love white people. It’s a matter of how much more we are determined to do something, when they are not. For example, people who are begging out on the streets, they are unemployed and homeless. The general public assumes this is due to undocumented Latino immigration. No. He doesn’t have a job because he’s not out there looking for one. If you go out and look for a job, you can get a job. I have several arguments to back this theory. The thing is, when I push back, they people don’t respond. They don’t have the facts, I do. This is something I’ve been researching since I knew what being undocumented meant in the U.S.
African Americans get more scholarships than undocumented Latino students do simply because they are African American. They have more opportunities to higher education. The idea being, “They are poor and live in poverty so they are discouraged.” I think that is a bunch of bull because I am poor; I live in a impoverish community. I work three jobs and I go to college so it’s a matter of who tries. There are not scholarships for being an undocumented Latino student. There are limited Latino scholarships, ones in which I cannot apply for. I have social security number because of DACA but I’m not a permanent resident. A lot of scholarships require a copy of your permanent resident card.

**Obama Has Done His Part**

For what President Obama has done, he did all he could. I am a little bit more knowledgeable when it comes to politics because it’s my major. The president did all he could for us with DACA. Right now, it’s just a matter of trying to get the senate and the house to agree with something regarding immigration. He can’t just snap his fingers and boom we are all citizens, it’s not possible. He runs the department of homeland security, he runs border control because he is the commander and chief. The extent of his power is providing political asylum for us by not having us deported. I love DACA because it’s something that no president has ever done before. It’s given us equal opportunity to pursue our dreams. Because of DACA I can work three jobs to be able to go to college. Without DACA I’d be sitting at home doing nothing because I wouldn’t be able to legally drive or work. I am really thankful for DACA. It is not a Band-Aid. The actual solution for immigration is really hard to come by so DACA is a really good temporary thing.
An Emphasis on Equality in Society

The climate regarding undocumented Latino students has been happening since the 1940s. In the 1940’s the same things happened with African Americans. It irritates me when people say that undocumented Latino students are not worth it. The general assumption is Americans are more entitled to something because they were born here. It discriminates against me. In the draft of the senate bill they are trying to pass, they assume that getting rid of us will make the economy prosper. This bill is supposed to create more jobs to residents. What they don’t know is that undocumented Latino people actually create businesses for people who are documented to work in. My mother hires people who are documented at her cleaning company. It provides great benefits and everything. My mom hires both documented and undocumented because she knows what the struggles are like because she’s been there. She’s still undocumented and she is a business owner. The government gave her a tax ID number so she can pay taxes and own a business. She doesn’t really need a social security number.

Equality for undocumented Latino students pursuing their higher education should provide more financial assistance. Not even federal financial aid. For example, California provides state financial aid. That would help a lot. If people were to give out more scholarships, a lot more undocumented Latino students would attend. Obviously that would cost money but the university would make all that money. That would enable more prosperity to the university. I don’t know why they aren’t helping us out.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The chapter includes discussion and implications of the data collected from narrative interviews with eight undocumented Latino students in the Midwest. The discussion of findings will cover common themes found across the eight participants. Common themes will be organized through Latino Critical theory mentioned in Chapter one: Pushing back on the dominant ideology, placing an emphasis on equality in society, focusing a lens on undocumented Latino students, remembering the context of criminalization they live in, and remembering that racism runs throughout mainstream U.S. society. Implications from the findings are presented to disrupt the negative narrative about undocumented Latino students, to inform administration who provide higher educations to undocumented Latino populations, and discuss how supporting DACA and immigration reform is a benefit for the U.S.

Through narrative inquiry, this research reveals how undocumented Latino students and graduates experience their educational journey with higher education. Often times in the media, a negative dominant narrative about undocumented Latino students is presented. This research offers information straight from the source, the voices of undocumented Latino students and graduates. This research lends support to previous studies regarding deficit thinking about communities of color, cultural capital existing within undocumented Latino populations, and D.A.C.A. (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients (Cervantes & Gonzales, 2013; Valencia & Black, 2002; Yosso, 2005).
Conclusions

The overarching question in chapter one aimed to describe how undocumented Latino students described their journey through higher education. I set out to understand a) how undocumented Latino students described their undocumented status, b) how undocumented Latino students describe ways they resist systemic oppression within higher education, c) how undocumented Latino students perceive the anti-immigration context they reside in, and d) what does social justice and equality look like for undocumented Latino students within higher education? Throughout eight narratives, there were many commonalities across participants however all participants had a unique story regarding higher education.

I chose to use a critical lens (LatCrit theory) in this study because it acknowledges the enduring presence of racism within mainstream society. Through this lens, racism is not regarded as an individual issue, it is an institutional and societal problem. Undocumented Latino students are positioned within a negative context where they are often discriminated against (M. Russell, 1992). Contrasting this theme with data collected from eight undocumented Latino students enables me to examine experiences of racism, prejudice, and discrimination that perpetuate feelings of marginalization throughout educational experiences (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010).

Some Participants Experienced Racial Microaggressions

The term microaggressions was coined to describe subtle degradations or put downs exhibited toward ethnic and racial minorities that appear to be harmless (Pierre, 1996). However, microaggressions are powerful mechanisms that can inflict long-term damage on marginalized populations such as undocumented Latino students. Microaggressions reduce and atomize people by sorting them into an inferior “place” which creates feelings of insignificance
and irrelevance (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). To understand microaggressions, you must understand how they are related to macroaggressions. Macroaggressions are a form of legal oppression directed at marginalized populations such as undocumented Latino students. They are discriminatory practices and polices at the state, national, and international level. For example, a macroaggression comes in the form of a senate bill. In Arizona, the Senate Bill 1070 allows police to enforce immigration law by requiring individuals to prove citizenship (Quiroga, Medina, & Glick, 2014). This policy creates an environment where microaggressions can flourish.

Half of the participants stated they had not been discriminated against due to being Mexican or Nicaraguan. However, each of the participants who believed they had not experienced discrimination reported many examples of microaggressions. For example, Marco was excited to finally have an opportunity to work in his chosen field of engineering while pursuing his masters degree. His boss was a kind man who embraced working with Marco and often suggested tips and tricks to get ahead in the engineering field. With good intentions, Marco’s boss indirectly discriminated him by using a microaggression while attempting to correct Marco’s Spanish accent. He suggested that Marco would only be able to succeed in engineering if he were to assimilate with a more “American” dialect. The message was delivered with good intentions to help Marco but he felt marginalized because he spoke outside an American accent. These constant, almost invisible forms of discrimination place added strain on undocumented Latino students through feelings of degradation and destruction of self worth (Huber, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009).

Microaggressions constantly and deeply influence marginalized groups like undocumented Latino students because they occupy space, time, and energy. Those participants who attempted
to push back on attempts of microaggressions were often called too sensitive or angry. Regena was conscious of the battles she chooses to fight when addressing microaggressions in class. For example, she countered the normative assumptions of her peers by asking them to take the perspective of undocumented Latino students. Regena felt her peers would not be so critical of undocumented Latino immigration if they were aware of the living conditions in México, Central America, or South America. She provided valid facts about why undocumented Latino students migrate to the U.S. with their parents in search of a better life. Although she was capable of valid arguments, she was aware she would not always be able to change the dominant perspective. In order to avoid being labeled the “angry Latina,” she only took on occasional conversational battles in class. Many participants found themselves quiet and defeated because it is to draining to push back all the time. Undocumented Latino students often spend time and energy deciphering insulting microaggressions and choosing how to respond to them. These mechanisms are delivered on a daily basis that end up depleting time and energy. Over time, undocumented Latino students can feel fatigue because microaggressions they face have caused mental and emotional strain (Yosso et al., 2009).

Some participants were unable to pinpoint experiences of discrimination because they felt they did not appear “Mexican.” Microaggressions are so powerful that some undocumented Latino students unconsciously reinforced racist stereotypes about themselves that end up perpetuating racism (Huber, 2011). Undocumented Latino students internalized their on oppression by viewing themselves as being able to pass for someone other than Latino due to non-verbal cues such as skin, hair, and eye color. They associated light colors of skin, hair, and eyes as a subtle “pass,” allowing them to avoid discrimination. Often times they were mistaken for other ethnicities because they did not have typical “Latino” features. Nor did they speak with
a strong Spanish accent. They described themselves as having characteristics that differed from the typical “Mexican” person.

**Some Participants Experienced Racial Macro Aggressions**

Macroaggressions occur at a structural level and are often times presented in practices that contribute to inequality (D. Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Many undocumented Latino student participants were present in a classroom on campus where immigration topics were discussed. Some blatant forms of discrimination were derogatory terminology used within the classroom. For example, Sergio majored in political science where many conversations about immigration took place in class. As he recalled, many comments made by his peers were direct forms of blatant discrimination toward Mexican people. Many of his peers assumed Mexican people were highly associated with being in the country illegally. To his surprise, his instructor was comfortable with the negative comments being used by his peers when discussing Latino immigration. At the time, Sergio was not open about being an undocumented Latino student and he felt marginalized from the classroom conversation because he was the only Latino student present. The instructor and students never considered they might have an undocumented Latino student within their classroom. This made Sergio feel invisible and excluded from the class. Ariana felt singled out in class by her instructor, not her classmates. She remained quite when her instructor would use illegal terminology about undocumented Latino immigration. It was not until Ariana wrote an essay about her undocumented status that her instructor realized she had undocumented students in her class. Once she submitted her essay, she noticed her instructor no longer discussed illegal Latino immigration in class. Regena described herself as having thick skin; she had been in many classrooms where negative terminology about “illegal Mexicans”
was commonly used. She was careful how many conversations she engaged in because most of the time she felt hopeless.

**Many Participants Felt Invisible on Different Levels**

Undocumented Latino students felt invisible in class. Many of them majored or are planning to major in political science, which places them in several conversations based on current events and politics. Many of the participants reported the use of “illegal” terminology by their peers in class. They had experienced a lot of anti-immigration reform attitude from peers and were careful when picking their arguments. Many participants refrained from speaking up in class because they felt hopeless about the way they were represented. For example, Claudia described how racial profiling was identified as a socially unjust method of targeting specific types of people in general. However, as her peers began discussing Latino immigration, her peers justified racial profiling. They agreed that illegal Mexicans should be pulled over and deported. She wondered how anyone would know who was in the country legally or illegally. The justification of racial profiling those who appear illegal or Mexican is another example of systemic racist practices that perpetuate inequality.

Other participants felt invisible on a much larger scale. Those who lived in smaller Midwestern towns with high populations of undocumented Latinos felt they did not have a voice. The county commission, city commission, and school board are making decisions for a community who do not have any representatives speaking on their behalf. Undocumented Latino students were invisible because they do not have the opportunity to select a representative and vote in elections. They felt excluded from participation in discussions and decision-making about their own population. These are examples of how systemic racism keeps undocumented Latino students silenced, excluded, and disadvantaged (M. Russell, 1992).
Not all participants felt hopeless about being perceived as undocumented. Bruno felt empowered by challenging the dominant narrative in class and took it upon himself to represent undocumented Latino students. He took every opportunity to speak up in his classes with facts about undocumented Latino students. Undocumented Latino students often times empowered themselves with a deep understanding of policy and current events. They stayed up to date with the DREAM Act reform and DACA. When they discovered the possibility of DACA being repealed they made efforts to organize and find ways to be heard. They were willing to write letters to the governor or publically testify their experiences of being undocumented while pursuing higher education.

**Not All Discrimination Comes from White Majority**

Approximately 12 million undocumented Latino immigrants residing in the U.S. are criminalized through mainstream media. Media often portrays undocumented Latino students as individuals who do not want to contribute to society and deplete sources from American citizens (Abrego, 2011). Half of the participants indicated they had been perceived as living in the country “illegally.” They were aware of the association between being Mexican and being undocumented. Participants felt it was horrible to be called a criminal because their parents migrated to the U.S. for a better opportunity. They felt unfairly labeled criminals because they were pursuing higher education, not participating in criminal activity. They reported feeling dehumanized by inaccurate assumptions about undocumented Latino students.

The current anti-immigration climate in the U.S. presents a clear message to undocumented Latino students; they are unwelcomed in the U.S. (Abrego, 2011). Many participants quickly developed an awareness of negative connotations associated with being in the country without documentation. Participants described a level of fear when working to save
for tuition. Before DACA, they recognized they could lose their jobs if their employers were to discover they were undocumented. They also understood they might experience a level of mistreatment such as being taken advantage of or working in a hostile environment because they were perceived as illegal.

Participants related to discrimination from white majority, however they also indicated experiencing discrimination from Mexican Americans. Discrimination differed between two specific types of systemic racism. The participants were either treated poorly because they were Mexican or because they were perceived as undocumented. Three participants reported they experienced discrimination from Latino citizens. It appears the association between being Mexican and being undocumented is so strong that even Latino citizens have disassociated themselves from the negative undocumented stereotype. This example of racism is not an individual issue, it is a large-scale societal problem (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). Latinos who have lived in the U.S. for many years are more likely to socially identify with the dominant inner group. The more native-born Latinos identify with the culture of the dominant inner group, the less likely they are to support liberal immigration policies. Older generation Latino citizens are more likely to be concerned with monitoring the number of immigrants entering the U.S. (San Miguel, Miller, Kwak, Lee-Gonyea, & Gonyea, 2011).

Latino citizens worry about being associated with the undocumented in the U.S., due to the negative connotations that come with that stereotype. The undocumented Latino student participants who experienced discrimination from Latino citizens felt a deeper sense of hurt because it was delivered from their own people. Nita talked about Latino Americans who treated her family with disrespect as they shopped in a Latino district. She noticed a Mexican American store clerk would not speak to her family in Spanish when they approached her with questions in
Spanish. The Mexican American associate listened to the questions in Spanish and responded in English. Nita felt the Mexican American clerk assumed they were undocumented and decided to make an example of them. The associate did this by refusing to engage in Spanish conversation with her family. Nita felt she and her family were discriminated by someone who should have understood their undocumented status more than the white majority. The shame placed upon her and her family by a member of their own community is an example of how deeply ingrained systemic racism is in the Midwest.

Some of the discrimination demonstrated toward undocumented Latino students was delivered boldly. Participants reported being called derogatory names such as “wetback” or they received threats they would be turned over to immigration. Undocumented Latino students were surprised that many of these microaggression messages were delivered from Latino Americans. For example, Mia’s friend who migrated from Guatemala expressed disapproval with undocumented Latino students. Mia’s Guatemalan friend was bitter towards undocumented Latino students like Mia because they wanted immigration reform. Her Guatemalan friend could not understand why the 1.5-generation did not do things the proper way and come to the U.S. with documentation. This is another example of how deeply ingrained systemic, institutionalized racism is on campus settings. It is especially painful when Latinos with documentation feel superior to those who do not have documentation. Discrimination is layered in various social settings delivered from diverse groups of people. These are all example of racism, prejudice, and discrimination that perpetuate feelings of marginalization throughout the educational experiences of undocumented Latino students (Valenzuela, 1999).
Inclusion and Exclusion

Institutions and structures facilitate normative views supporting the assumption that everyone begins from the same place and have equal opportunity for advancement. This is true for educational institutions as well (Pizarro, 1998). Undocumented Latino students felt their educational institutions, for the most part, welcomed them on campus. Two of the undocumented Latino students described the enrollment process as a smooth transition from high school to college because a member of administration advocated for them. For example, Claudia was comfortable enough with administration to share her legal situation and a member of the university staff helped her apply for a scholarship. Mia had a high school counselor connect her to a university advisor so this eased some of the anxiety she felt about being undocumented. High school counselors educated some of the participants with information about how their legal status required affidavits to qualify for in-state tuition. When high school counselors connected the participants with university advisors, a real connection was made for undocumented Latino students and their educational goals.

Not all of the undocumented Latino students specified whether their college/university was inclusive or exclusive. They responded neutrally when talking about admissions. They were able to apply, enroll, and sign an affidavit to receive in-state tuition. However, many participants noticed there was no specialized help on campus for undocumented Latino students. They relied on themselves to seek out resources such as private scholarships. Sergio felt administration on campus pushed him through the pipeline. He was allowed to register but the were no conversations about his educational goals or interests. After they figured out how to “categorize” him, they quickly moved him through the process.
Immigration laws and policies are established to control immigration into the U.S., however participants felt these laws and policies controlled their very existence. The exclusive nature of immigration laws and policies restrict movement of some individuals (undocumented Latino students) while allowing admission of others (American citizens). Undocumented Latino students are forced to look towards these laws and policies to understand their “place” in U.S. society (Menjívar, 2006). For example, Bruno experienced uncomfortable conversations with university administration. While most educational institutions declare an equal playing field for all students, Bruno perceived administration had the attitude they were doing him a favor by having him sign an affidavit to qualify for in-state tuition. As he was going through the policy created by the state and university, he was also warned it could be revoked anytime. A level of fear ensured Bruno knew he was an outsider to the university. They made sure he was aware laws may change in the future and there was no guarantee he would have access to in-state tuition. These patterns of disadvantage work to oppress undocumented Latino students at the federal, state, and local levels. There is a definite difference in “starting” points for undocumented Latino students and American citizens. Students with documentation do not have this type of experience with administration when pursuing higher education.

All of the undocumented Latino student participants felt relieved to be able to enroll and pay in-state tuition; none of them took this for granted. Although they experienced some inclusion throughout the enrollment process, they did not feel they had the same access to opportunities as their documented peers. The educational institutions they attended promoted equal opportunity for all students however, the majority of participants felt they did not have the same access to opportunities in college (D. G. Solórzano, 1998). Before DACA, they were
excluded from participating in activities and organizations because they did not have a social security number.

Before most of the participants became DACA recipients, many of the participants felt excluded from scholarships. Even when they did have DACA, they were not always eligible for all scholarships. None of the undocumented Latino students was eligible for federal financial aid. Participants described feeling equal until their American peers began getting drivers licenses, hired for jobs, and applying for FAFSA or scholarships. This is the point where they began to lose an equal playing field.

However, participants described a significant change when they became DACA recipients. DACA has enabled undocumented Latinos students to apply for most scholarships, not just private scholarships. Participants with DACA have a social security number that opens doors for more educational opportunities. Before DACA, Ariana felt discouraged about searching for scholarships as an undocumented Latino student. She watched several of her American peers apply and receive grants and scholarships for their first year of college. She had the same dreams of pursuing higher education but was excluded from opportunities because she did not have a social security number. One of her friends received a full ride for four years because he was in the top 10%. She was in the same position academically but was excluded from applying because she was undocumented. Many of the participants felt their high schools promoted them to do their academic best and move forward to college. However, when it came time for college, several participants described being excluded from services on campus due to their legal status. A member of administration at a community college called Claudia to recruit her for a student support group. During the conversation, Claudia remembered feeling so excited to join student services she agreed to apply. At the end of the conversation, Claudia was asked
for her social security number. At the time, she was not a DACA recipient and did not have a social security number. The member of administration apologized for wasting Claudia’s time and told her she did not qualify. This is an example of how undocumented Latino students are only included to an extent within educational institutions. There are several policies at work in their exclusion and oppression.

Many participants mentioned the financial burden they experienced when going to college. All of them utilized a payment plan, which breaks down the semester’s tuition into three monthly payments. They were thankful to pay in-state tuition and utilize the payment plan provided by the university however many of them worked up to three jobs to do so. Undocumented Latino students are excluded from FAFSA even as DACA recipients, they all pay out of pocket. Many opportunities are exclusive for documented citizens only. For example, student support services were established for low-income students. The service connects low-income students with access to scholarships and tutors. When Bruno applied to join, the application asked if he was a U.S. citizen. He asked if DACA qualified him as a candidate but administration told him he had to be a U.S. citizen, so he did not qualify. He found the same was true for many scholarships, they require applicants to be U.S. residents or citizens. Regardless of DACA or how intelligent undocumented Latino students are, they are excluded from opportunities because they are not U.S. residents or citizens. Undocumented Latino student participants expressed concern for those in other states who were not eligible for in-state tuition. Not all states allow undocumented Latino students to enroll in colleges and universities, placing them at a disadvantage.
Parents Are the Main Support Behind Undocumented Latino Students

Contrary to a common normative assumption about undocumented Latinos not valuing higher education (Valencia & Black, 2002), parents of the young people in this study placed the highest importance on their children’s higher education. Mothers and Fathers were the main source of financial and emotional support for undocumented Latino student participants. Mothers provided the greatest source of positive motivation.

Undocumented Latino parents migrate to the U.S. for a better life. They do not only seek a higher standard of living, they are also determined to invest in their children’s higher education. Latino parents migrate to the U.S. for many reasons, the main goal is put their children through higher education (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). The undocumented Latino student participants were all in the U.S. to accomplish one goal: attend college and achieve more than their parents. The idea of migrating to the U.S. and not going to college was not an option. On average, participants and their parents invest $3500 each semester for tuition in addition to required textbooks. For these participants, quitting was never an option. Participants explained how their lives would be different if their families had not migrated to the U.S. They did not see themselves even graduating high school, much less attending college. In México, they did not have the same opportunities for advancement as they do in the U.S. Undocumented Latino student participants recognized the hardships their parents experienced and those memories ensured their pursuit of higher education.

Two participants described their mothers as being their biggest inspiration toward higher education. They expressed memories of their Mothers telling them they were going to the U.S. so they could get a higher education. They came to the U.S. for one reason, to go to school. One participant described his mother cleaning hotel rooms to help him make tuition. Sergio’s
mentality was forever changed by the support and motivation from his Mother because he learned nothing was given to him easy. With his mother cleaning rooms so he could take courses for his master’s degree, he was not going to skip class or fail exams. Mia and her mother migrated to the U.S. because her father was not supportive of higher education. Her mother left her father and Mexico for Mia to have a chance to pursue higher education. She credits her graduation from high school and college to her mother. When Mia felt she could not afford tuition or was unable to continue, her mother pushed her and insisted she finish.

Not all support from family and friends was financial. Claudia drew courage from emotional support of her friends when she wanted to quit. Her friends did everything they could to encouraged her. Other undocumented Latino students relied on support from a teacher, counselor, or member of administration to keep them on track. Without the support of mentors along the way, some participants did not excel academically and were sometimes placed on academic probation. The younger the student was when he or she received support from a teacher or mentor, the better he or she navigated through college.

Acceptance in the U.S. was another incentive for undocumented Latino students. Participants were so invested in higher education they worked up to three jobs to help pay tuition. College degrees make undocumented Latino students more desirable candidates for government visas. In aims for a pathway to citizenship, many undocumented Latino students wanted to appeal to the government through higher education. They are striving to be recognized in a country that does not claim them. Regardless of which strategies undocumented Latino students utilized, pursuing higher education is their reality.
Undocumented Latino Students Live in a Hostile Climate

I wanted to empower undocumented Latino students by giving them a voice within this study. I wanted there to be room outside of the dominant narrative promoted on television and social media. When we spoke about the hostile anti-immigration climate in the U.S. many of the participants felt aggravated because the media misrepresented them. The word immigration has become a trigger word fueled with negative connotations because people associate it with negative implications, including assumptions about undocumented Latino students who are residing in the U.S. to take advantage of benefits without contributing anything in return. Participants are labeled an economic drain on the U.S. economy and value system. They are living in a context where mass media and anti-immigration organizations are vocal about undocumented Latino immigration being the source of crime and poverty (Abrego, 2011). Many participants have been asked why they have not waited in line and paid their dues to legally enter the U.S. They assume participants wanted to come here the wrong way. The reality is, there are no lines to wait in. It is almost impossible for undocumented Latino students to get a green card or a visa and reside in the U.S. legally. As members of the 1.5-generation, undocumented Latino students were brought to the U.S. as children; they had no choice in the matter.

Participants recognized and pushed back on negative stereotypes such as the assumption that Latinos do not value higher education or Latinos take jobs from the citizens. Participants wanted to see more positive examples of themselves in the media. Considering the hostile climate they are living in, they were pleased to share their stories in hopes of contributing to a more positive outlook about undocumented Latino students. The media uses negative images such as Mexican individuals crossing a border when they speak about undocumented Latinos and this embeds in public mindsets. When trigger words such as “illegal immigration” or
“criminals” are utilized, people who have been exposed to the negative images and assumptions on the news automatically have a skewed perception about why Latino immigration is happening in the U.S. This is an example of how systemic racism creates racial subordination amongst groups of marginalized people. There is need for broadcasting centers to report alternative sides to the dominant narrative. The undocumented Latino student participants felt they never had a chance to be perceived accurately due to slander and stereotypes portrayed in the media. They had hopes of this changing.

Another method used to promote a hostile climate for undocumented Latino students was to accuse them of depleting jobs from Americans. A couple of participants pushed back on the accusation that undocumented Latino students take jobs away from Americans. They believed anyone in America could work if they were willing to accept the hard labor, lower paying occupations. Undocumented Latino students were offended when they were accused of taking away jobs. They worked hard labor jobs when most people quit. They felt they could not take away anything that Americans did not want in the first place. Participants felt there are jobs for everyone; if someone is not working it is because they do not want to. For the most part, undocumented Latino student participants recognized that the general American public believes the U.S. would flourish if they were deported.

Oftentimes, undocumented Latino students are accused of being young parents who drop out. A younger participant, Nita, mentioned she would disprove the negative stereotype of undocumented Latinas having children at a young age by not having children until after she graduated college. She expresses the worst assumption people could make about her was assumptions based on her race and having children. She wanted to break the stereotype of Latinas having many children at a young age through her own example. Ariana also pushes back
on the common negative stereotype about undocumented Latina students. As a younger participant and first year student, she wants to disprove the stereotype that young undocumented Latinas get pregnant and drop out. She wanted to be the example of Latinas graduating college, she resented the idea of being a young Latina drop out.

Anti-immigration propaganda triggered responses from undocumented Latino students. Ariana described the living conditions and lack of opportunities in México. She migrated to the U.S. with her parents at a young age because her family lived in fear of the cartel. The cartel invaded the town she lived in and one of her family members was murdered. She knew she had two choices. To remain in a high crime neighborhood where she or her family could be killed or they could take a chance and flee to the U.S. They chose to leave México. In the U.S., she only worries about being deported, not death. She referred to the dominant narrative as the “other side” as she vowed to remain unchanged by a negative climate because her family risked so much for her opportunities.

Social Justice can be Achieved Through Various Approaches

The LatCrit theory offers a component of social justice focusing on the dignity of all human beings. LatCrit theorists place importance on equality in society (Matsuda, 1991). Often times, undocumented Latino students do not have the opportunity to voice their ideas about what a socially just world is (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). The commitment to social justice empowers those who are subjected to marginalization and underrepresented minority groups (D. G. Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). This theme creates space for these students to define what a socially just society looks like and how to better it (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). The social justice component within the LatCrit theory was utilized to focus on participants’ dignity, in hopes to reduce racism perpetuated in our everyday lives (Matsuda, 1991).
The idea of a socially just world has many different interpretations. Undocumented Latino students described pathways to equality through different approaches. The end goal, for the most part, was the same. Undocumented Latino students want to get a higher education, they want access to stable careers, they want to give back to their community, and they want a better life not only for themselves but also for future generations. Participants had different ideas about how to reach this goal.

When asked to describe what equality for undocumented Latino students, all participants responded with different answers. No two answers were the same. I asked participants to describe equality because they are the living an undocumented reality. Sergio described social justice in simple terms: a chance to earn his way. He did not want handouts from the government; he wanted tangible pathways to citizenship. He wanted undocumented Latino students to have a chance to earn citizenship in all states. A just system would allow for undocumented Latino students to work, contribute, have a better life, and educate themselves. Marco referred to his Mother when defining a socially just world; he wanted fair wages for women. His vision of a just system was fair wages for all workers, not matter what their legal status is, which meant equal pay for everyone, regardless of race, sex, and sexual orientation.

Undocumented Latino students wished for college without borders. Refusing or denying access to higher education is a common strategy utilized to ensure marginalized communities remain powerless (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). Participants expressed concern when discussing social justice for undocumented Latino students. They suggested more education for those who were coming close to their high school graduation. Because participants had experienced the disconnect between high school and college due to being undocumented, they hoped this would not happen to students following in their footsteps. To prevent feelings of exclusion for
upcoming undocumented Latino students, participants suggested there be more education about affidavits, in-state tuition, scholarships, programs, and opportunities specific to the undocumented Latino community. Education about these variables could change the way undocumented Latino students are navigating their lives. No one should have to give up on their dream the day they graduate high school and walk across that stage. No one should have to wonder what he or she would do next because they are undocumented. Undocumented Latino student participants have watched many of their friends give up on their dreams for college because they were defeated by the high tuition costs. They often gave up before they even graduated from high school. Participants identified with these types of emotions but never embraced them as they continued their educational journeys.

Many undocumented Latino students pursued college before they were DACA recipients. Before DACA, the risks while pursuing higher education were greater. They could be deported any time; they could not drive or work legally. Once they graduated college, there was no guarantee they would be able to use the degree they earned to work legally in the country. Participants felt a socially just world would not exclude anyone from growing. Scholastic activities and programs that include all students regardless of legal status is a positive approach to equality and a socially just environment. Having the same opportunities to explore and learn, as many universities promote, can begin to eliminate racial subordination and discrimination. The elimination of racial subordination and discrimination are goals of social justice throughout LatCrit (D. G. Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Participants hoped for more positive experiences for future undocumented Latino students. They want no restrictions when participating in scholarly events, programs, and organizations.
Another approach to a socially just world for undocumented Latino students is immigration reform. Passing immigration reform in the U.S. would enhance opportunities for more permanent citizenship. Participants felt a socially just world would offer residency for undocumented Latino students. They have lived in the U.S. for the majority of their lives and do not plan on leaving. Their home is the U.S., therefore pathways to citizenship seemed to only make sense for all of America. Undocumented Latino student participants wanted a chance to be included permanently and make their contribution to the U.S. long term. Participants felt pressure from the general public to “legalize the right way” and give back to the U.S. However, when they applied for DACA, driver’s licenses, and social security numbers to pay taxes, these attempts were often threatened to be eliminated. The normative claim to equality for all in the U.S. depends on specific requirements that undocumented Latino students do not have.

Motivations for Higher Education Depended on the Students

Undocumented Latino students are living in a context that assumes they do not value education and are taking opportunities away from documented citizens without contributing anything. As I have mentioned before, my goal was to provide a safe space for my participants to contextualize their experiences within a negative dominant climate towards undocumented Latino students (D. G. Solórzano, 1998).

Although all the participants migrated with their parents to the U.S. to go to college, they all had different motivations for higher education. Higher education was not readily available in countries the participants migrated from. Higher education has given undocumented Latino students the opportunity to grow, help their families, and contribute to their communities. All participants were the first to attend college and the experiences of this accomplishment was a big influence for both them and their families. Many undocumented Latino students felt they
established a level of excellence for the entire family to follow. They are setting the bar high to motivate their younger siblings.

Another motivator to pursue higher education is the diversity available on campus. Within the U.S., people from all around the world are attending universities where undocumented Latino student participants are enrolled. They felt a sense of comfort when their peers were from various parts of the world. Many of their professors are from other countries and this creates a more inclusive environment. Undocumented Latino students perceived people from other parts of the country to be more open minded with their views about culture. They associated higher education with more tolerant individuals.

Educating oneself is the best way to educate others. This is another motivation to pursue higher education for undocumented Latino students. Participants were eager to disprove the common assumption that Latinos are all uneducated. They expressed hopes and dreams like any other American citizen. Higher education was so important to them they felt they did not exist without it. They claimed anyone who is anybody has an education. They felt college opened doors to a better job and lifestyle. They were motivated to pursue higher education because their parents did not have access to the same opportunities. They grew up hearing stories of struggle from their parents; they were raised to incorporate higher education into their futures. Undocumented Latino students, for the most part, have watched their parents struggle so they could advance.

Many participants’ parents were more excited for them to attend college than they were themselves. As they grew up, they listened to their parents dream about having the opportunity to go to college and pursue careers. Undocumented Latino students were raised listening to their parent’s lost dreams because they were unable to attend college. Their parents got married and
had families at a very young age, making school a last priority. As undocumented Latino students attend college now, their parents are living their life-long dreams through their children. Undocumented Latino students described pursuing higher education for their parents.

DACA is a motivator for pursuing higher education. Undocumented Latino students place importance on higher education because it qualifies them for DACA. Through DACA they are able to drive and work legally in the U.S. Without DACA, undocumented Latino student’s lives would be extremely limited. They described not being able to work or drive, which means they would not have the freedoms that enables them to pursue higher education. Bruno has plans of getting a law degree, working for the Peace Corps and United Nations, and later becoming an ambassador to Nicaragua for the U.S. Without being a recipient of DACA, these dreams would not be a possibility.

**Implications**

The data collected from this study contributes to existing literature about undocumented Latino students and higher education. The findings indicated DACA greatly influenced how the eight participants approached their higher education. In the current context regarding immigration reform, this study supports the Obama administration and its attempts to strengthen the undocumented Latino student community. Using the LatCrit theory, I was able to share the voices of eight undocumented Latino students who have pursued or are currently pursuing higher education. Most of the participants are recipients of DACA, only one did not have DACA but was in the process of applying. Analyzed data shows that counterstories exist, as the eight participants pushed back on the dominant narrative about undocumented Latino students. The data produced by this study promotes a better understanding of a marginalized population who has been criminalized in the U.S. The data suggests implications for aspiring undocumented...
Latino students and their families, administration providing higher educations to this population, and U.S. congress that are creating policies regarding this population. The goal has always been to provide space for eight voices that are a part of a silenced population.

**Disrupt the Negative Narrative**

One of the powerful negative stereotypes about undocumented Latino communities is they do not value higher education. This deficit thinking has trickled down from inaccurate literature and media about all Latinos. Blame has been placed on documented and undocumented Latino parents regarding their attitudes about education for their children. A common assumption is undocumented Latino parents do not want their kids to pursue higher education because they want them to join the workforce to support family. This assumption was very much challenged by the eight participants, as most of their parents supported them in their higher education pursuit in any way they could. Many participants expressed their parents were more excited than they were when they first attended college. Many participants described how their parents had dreams of higher educations for themselves in the past, so they lived vicariously through their children’s pursuit of college. Several of the parents reminded the participants how blessed they were to be given the opportunity to pursue higher education and enhance their futures.

These stories push back on the dominant narrative of Latinos not valuing higher education; on the contrary, they were the moving forces behind the participants seeking education. My hope is that teachers and administrators read this data and keep it in mind the next time they hear something negative in the news or participate in a discussion about immigration in the classroom. I hope that the data from this study also enables other
undocumented Latino youth to pursue their higher educational dreams. I hope awareness is increased for documented and undocumented individuals residing in the U.S.

**Administration Provide Higher Educations to Undocumented Latino Students**

Several participants benefited from having a member of administration explain the registration and enrollment process. One of their biggest concerns was having to report to the college that they were not necessarily an international student nor were they a resident, they were undocumented and had to fill out an affidavit to receive in-state tuition. Participants associated their undocumented legal status with the possibility of being mistreated by administration or loss of opportunities. Fortunately for the eight participants, none received terrible treatment from staff or members of administration. One thing they noticed was the absence of a specialized person on staff being able to help them look for opportunities tailored to undocumented Latino students. They mentioned they would have excelled more with the communication from a member of staff who recognized the current policies affecting undocumented Latino students. They would have felt more welcomed on campus if they had someone who could relate and discuss specific issues surrounding current immigration laws and DACA. They would have felt more comfortable approaching the campus if they knew administration knew who they were, the issues they face, and resources they could use to make their goals happen.

**Continue Support for DACA and Immigration Reform**

On June 15, 2012, President Obama announced a new policy that influences many of the participants interviewed in this study. The policy offers protection for undocumented Latino students; the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will not deport particular undocumented youth who migrated to the U.S. as children with their parents. Undocumented youth can be granted deferred action: temporary permission to reside in the U.S. Seven out of
eight participants are recipients of DACA. DACA has changed the way they approach driving, working, and going to college.

Not all of the participants had DACA while they were going to college; some pursued their education with no protection from the U.S. government. They described taking a big risk with college because once they graduated they did not have the opportunity to work legally in the country. They were unable to apply for drivers licenses and unable to drive legally to campus. For undocumented Latino students, higher education posed a significant gamble. It was not until the year 2012, when they could apply for DACA. They explained how DACA had changed everything. For the first time in their lives, they were able to attend college with no fears of being deported. They were able to work legally and pay taxes. They were pleased to give back to their communities. They were able to apply for driver’s licenses and legally drive themselves to work and class. DACA opened new possibilities for some of the participants through scholarships and internships. They were able to apply and receive graduate assistantships while obtaining higher education. Throughout the course of this study, there is no doubt that DACA has made some serious positive changes for undocumented Latino students.

Although participants greatly appreciated the life-changing policy Obama created in 2012, they still worried about the risk of their family members being deported. One of the participants was dealing with her brother being deported because he was undocumented and not attending college, which meant he was not eligible for DACA. Many other participants expressed concern for their parents being deported, as they were the main source of support for them as they pursued higher education. Other participants were concerned that one day the DACA policy might be eliminated and they would no longer have the same protection they signed up for. Not only losing protection, the U.S. government would have all of their
information and they could be easily identified and sought out for deportation. They looked beyond the DACA policy and hoped for real pathways to citizenship. They have lived in the U.S. most of their lives they had no desires to leave the country. The U.S. is their home. Which is why they are still huge supporters of the DREAM Act because it would offer an avenue for undocumented Latino students to access higher education and eventually be granted permanent residency within the U.S.

**Researcher Reflection**

As I mentioned in the methodology section, my positionality was influenced by my ethnicity. Being both Mexican and White. All my life, I have been navigating two different cultural worlds. I was able to establish a connection with participants because I was familiar with Latino culture, traditions, and values. As we explored their narratives, I was able to move quickly with participant stories because I understand Mexican cultural events such as quinceaneras. This enabled us to rely on one another and move quickly while collecting the deepest data possible. As an insider, I was able to identify with them. I was able to ask them questions that are commonly asked by the white majority. For example, as I progressed through my study, I heard several questions about why my participants did not choose to enter the U.S. the “right” way. I realized a majority of Americans wanted to know why my participants did not stand in line and pay their dues. So I incorporated this question into our meetings. It was not originally planned when I thought about Latino Critical theory. I explained to the participants that some of the push back I experienced when discussing my study was this sensitive question. They too had heard this question several times and were happy to address it.

The participants and I ended up relying on one another. Trust was equally given on both sides, the researcher and the participants. I was fortunate to have participants who were always
willing to answer the difficult questions, regardless of how many times I needed to speak with them. They were available and stayed close to the study when I reached out for additional information. The participants wanted to share their stories because they felt they were misrepresented in the media. Their goal was to promote more positive examples of undocumented Latino students in the public eye. Participants had to trust my ability to collect their stories and deliver them with the respect and dignity. I always felt it was my duty to empower them by providing a safe place to speak about their experiences while pursuing higher education within the U.S. As they depended on me as a researcher, I depended on them. I relied on them to share their experiences regardless of the controversial topics in our current anti-immigration climate. Trust was established naturally because we understood we had to rely on one another to achieve the end goal: counter stories to the dominant narrative about undocumented Latino students pursuing higher education in the U.S. I believe we achieved our goal.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

A. Background/Personal Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What country were you born in?
3. Where did you grow up?
4. What city are you living in now?
5. How long have you been residing in the city you live in?
6. Are you enrolled in college? Have you graduated college?
7. To what extent do you identify with your familial culture?
8. What are your feelings about the majority culture?
9. What are your feelings about other minority cultures in the U.S.?
10. Can you tell me about your family?
   - Are you married? Do you have children? Extended family?

B. Challenging the Dominant Ideology

1. In what ways do you feel your educational institution is not inclusive of undocumented Latino students?
   Possible Probes: Do you feel as though your school has the same vision of success for you as they do your documented counterparts? Why or why not?
2. Within your educational experience, how were opportunities available to some students and not others?
   Possible Probes: In what ways do you feel you “started” from a different place then your documented peers did? Please describe how you have overcome challenges that your documented peers did not?
3. What strategies have you utilized to overcome challenges as you pursue higher education? Tell me about a time when you felt empowered.
   Possible Probes: How do you resist oppressive practices within higher education?

C. An Emphasis on Equality in Society

1. What do you think about the hostile climate towards Latino immigration and stereotypes that directly or indirectly discriminate against you?
   Possible Probes: What types of assumptions are made about undocumented Latinos? How have you attempted to push back on these negative stereotypes?
2. How would you describe equality within higher education for undocumented Latino students?

Possible Probes: What would equality look like when obtaining higher education for undocumented Latino students? What are some examples of necessary change? Part of the journey is choosing and applying for college – how were you influenced by your legal status?

3. How does your legal status influence the way you approach higher education?

Possible Probes: What does undocumented legal status mean to you?

D. Lens of Undocumented Latino Students

1. How are undocumented Latino students represented in the media?

E. The Context of Criminalization

1. Why do you value higher education?

Possible Probes: What will you gain from higher education? How will college influence your future?

2. How do your parents view education? In what ways have you or your family sacrificed for your educational attainment?

F. Centralization of Racism within Mainstream Society

1. Please tell me about a time you felt discriminated against due to your race?

Possible Probes: How was the discrimination delivered? Through violence or was it subtle? Such as criticisms of your langue, history, or background?

2. What is it like to feel perceived as “illegal”?

Possible Probes: How has your “right to be there” on campus or in class questioned? In what ways have you had to avoid or be cautious about answering questions from peers or instructors about where you are from?

3. Describe a time when you felt invisible in the classroom or on campus.

Possible Probes: Please tell me about a time where you felt you were unable to openly speak about immigration with your peers and/or instructors. How would you describe your comfort level when expressing your opinions of equality for undocumented Latino
students? How have you felt excluded from discussions, activities, or opportunities on campus?
APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study of undocumented Latino students who are currently attending or have graduated college. I hope to learn a rich understanding of their experiences through the pursuit of higher education in a Midwest state.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an undocumented Latino student who is attending or has graduated college within the Midwest. Approximately 8 participants will be invited to join the study.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, your participation will consist of two in-depth interviews. If you decide to participate, these interviews will take approximately 45-60 minutes. The interviews will take place at a location that is mutually agreeable to the both of us and is helpful for our conversations. During the interviews, you will be asked a few questions concerning your experiences as an undocumented Latino student obtaining higher education. With your permission, the interviews will be digitally recorded. We will set up an additional meeting to review the transcripts of the interviews together. This gives you the opportunity to give any additional feedback, add more comments, or make any necessary corrections. Sample individual interview questions: Do you feel you have ever been perceived as “illegal”? Possible Probes: Have you ever felt your “right to be there” on campus or in class was questioned? Have you had to avoid or be cautious about answering questions from peers or instructors about where you are from?

Discomfort/Risks: There is some risk associated with undocumented legal status, those who are foreign-born, having either entered without inspection (and not subsequently obtained any right to remain) or stayed beyond the expiration date of a visa or other status. Undocumented Latino students’ legal status, unless they have applied for deferred action, could be considered at risk. Therefore, each participant’s identity will be concealed for his or her protection and I will maintain confidentiality by utilizing verbal consents and refraining from stating participant names or detailed descriptions within the study. If you feel uncomfortable with any question, you may opt to pass. During data collection, you are encouraged to be open in your responses. I will keep all responses confidential and your participation is voluntary.

Benefits: With your participation, you may benefit by gaining a better understanding of LatCrit theory as it relates to the experiences of undocumented Latino students. This study might also benefit undocumented Latinos who desire to pursue their higher education in U.S. In addition, this study could inform higher education policy and practice to enhance their approach with
undocumented populations. It is possible that I will disseminate the results of this study through presentations at state and national conferences and publication in scholarly journals.

Confidentiality: Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By participating, you are giving the research team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;
- The sponsor or agency supporting the study.

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study. A fictitious name will be assigned in my study to maintain your confidentiality. All the audio-recorded interviews will be stored in a secure online password protected location. These data collected digitally will be retained for a minimum of three years.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: Amber Anderson, (316-204-5014) or my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson at 316-978-6392 and jean.patterson@wichita.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your consent indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by accepting this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

____________________________________________________ _______________________
Witness Signature       Date