

Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic: Exploring the Role of Activism in  
DACAmented Latinas/os/xs' Thwarted Transition into Adulthood

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
under the Executive Committee  
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2018

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## ABSTRACT

### Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic: Exploring the Role of Activism in DACAmented Latinas/os/xs' Thwarted Transition into Adulthood

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Given the growing population of undocumented Latina/o/x immigrants who came to the United States as children, there is a need for research that explores the risk and protective factors of their experiences growing up in the United States. As they transition through adolescence, they emerge as adults in a very different world. No longer protected from deportation, they must take more serious risks with employment. Without access to federal financial aid, they face the reality that they may never be able to utilize their college education in the United States. Against these odds, and with the temporary protection of DACA, an increasing number of undocumented childhood arrivals are civically engaged in the immigrant rights movement. Employing a qualitative method based on constructivist and feminist frameworks called Consensual Qualitative Research, this study sought to explore the impact of activism in Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants' thwarted transition to adulthood, highlighting the ways in which Latina/o/x cultural values mitigate the impact of activism. The sample consisted of 12 Latina/o/x DACAmented activists, eight women and four men, ages 18-32, from Mexico (n = 10), Guatemala (n = 1), and Dominican Republic (n = 1). The findings in this study not only suggested that protective migration factors, DACA-related privileges, and strong coping skills contributed to Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants' decision to become activists, but they also noted that activism has been a protective factor in and of itself. The results also showed the ways in which Latina/o/x cultural values helped them make sense of their unique experiences and were consistent with the values within their activist communities. Existing clinical

recommendations, resources, and research methods were highlighted as ways in which mental health providers can apply these findings in their clinical, training, and research practice.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My village is enormous and has supported me throughout this process. Not all can be named for reasons related to this work, but they all know the depth of my gratitude. First, my chosen family, my partner, dropped everything to follow me home to pursue my dream of applying my research to serve undocumented college students at my alma mater. He has taken more than half of the load on numerous occasions for the sake of my passion. My son, the surprise of a lifetime, literally saved me from an endless well of grief. Motherhood has opened my eyes to a level of love and strength I never knew existed within me. My best friend, my biggest cheerleader, allows me to be weak, scared, and clueless without judgment, providing the safe space for me to grow continuously. Second, my family, extensive as it is, has collectively held me together in every way possible so that I could be fully present throughout this process. There were many acts of service from *Mami, Papi*, brothers, cousins, *tios, tias*, and *Tata* (meals, paid cellphone bills for years, cheap rent, free childcare, free place to stay to finish my last chapter, carpool buddy throughout my internship year, a part-time job in the family business for extra cash, etc.) that made this journey easier. Some days I feel like the weight of three generations of *familia*, brought to the United States by our Mexican Bracero *abuelos* and *bisabuelos*, counting on me to be the first of the 55 cousins to reach this milestone. Most days I feel the pull of my ancestors, calling me to join them *en la lucha* to represent my community with *honor, respeto, y furor*. Third, my adopted family, the many mentors, advisors, supervisors, teachers, and professors, has guided me along my professional journey from school counseling and marriage and family therapy to counseling psychology with warmth, faith, and validation. Countless formal and informal educational and professional relationships have helped me stay the course. My support groups, including my cohort, my first-time moms group, my grief group,

Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees, and #doctoralmomlife, to name a few, with their healing power, have helped me feel less alone throughout this journey. Lastly, many hands were involved in the execution of this work, from my devoted co-researchers, auditor, editors, advisor, and committee members, to the 12 brave Latina/o/x DACAmented activists who fearlessly shared their story with me, so that I could share it with you.

E. H.

## DEDICATION

Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot un-educate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.

–Cesar Chavez

Many crossed borders so that I could cross this stage. I dedicate this dissertation to my father and his legacy of service to the Latina/o/x immigrant community. No degree could ever symbolize the full extent of the reach of his impact.

I also dedicate this dissertation to *la lucha* of the immigrant rights movement. I stand in solidarity with the undocumented community and owe every word to the unafraid and unapologetic undocumented activists. #SaveDACA. #Not1More. #HereToStay

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

No human being is illegal.

–Jose Antonio Vargas

The vastly changing demographics of the United States beckons corresponding social action by mental health professionals. The significant growth of the immigrant population in the United States in recent years represents the largest proportion of the total population in its history (Passel & Cohn, 2012). Between 1990 and 2012, the immigrant population, which includes both legal as well as unauthorized immigrants, dramatically increased from 19.7 million to 40.7 million (Krogstad & Keegan, 2014). According to 2013 estimates by Passel, Cohn, and Gonzales-Barrera, one in five persons in U.S. households was a first- or second-generation immigrant and one in four children had an immigrant parent. Of the estimated 11.7 million unauthorized immigrants present in the United States in 2012, most were arrivals from Latin America, with the majority (52%) of Latina/o/x immigrants from Mexico (Passel et al., 2013). Since unauthorized immigrants tended to arrive young, during prime child-rearing years, their children made up a considerable share of both the American newborn (8%) and school-age (7%) populations (Passel & Taylor, 2010). According to 2011 estimates, approximately 5.5 million children were growing up with at least one unauthorized parent, 2 million children of which were unauthorized themselves (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

The presence of over 16 million children of immigrants in the United States poses significant challenges for mental health professionals. In 2008, 21% of children of immigrants were poor, compared with 15% of children of U.S. natives (The Urban Institute, 2010a, 2010b). For children in immigrant families, parents' level of education, English language ability, and the circumstances of their migration to the United States, including their immigration documentation status, are important factors in children's well-being as well as their educational and professional attainment (Mather, 2009). Notably, children are especially vulnerable to unhealthy development and maladjustment when they (a) immigrate to the United States with few or no resources, (b) reside in resource-poor communities, and (c) face negative treatment by government and health officials and/or discrimination (Hernández & Charney, 1998).

The recent surge in immigration has set the United States on a path to greater racial diversity, with projections that people of color, accounting for a third of the U.S. population, will reach 50% by 2042 (Mather, 2009). The population under age 18, however, is estimated to reach this milestone by 2023, due largely to the rapid growth in Latina/o/x families. As these Latina/o/x youth transition into adulthood, enter the workforce, and have children themselves, they will be at the forefront of the changing racial/cultural composition of the U.S. population and workforce (Mather, 2009). In order for psychologists to serve the needs of an increasing Latina/o/x immigrant population, they need to be aware of the factors that impede and facilitate adjustment (American Psychological Association [APA], 2012).

According to a meta-analysis by Liang, Salcedo, Rivera, and Lopez (2009), current economic conditions and migration experiences of Latinas/os/xs, including income disparities, increased rate of suicide, inaccessibility of quality care, and underutilization of mental health services, indicate they may be at risk for mental health problems. Nevertheless, Latina/o/x

immigrants continue to be underrepresented in psychological research, with Latina/o/x-focused articles representing only 2% of the 15,310 articles published in non-ethnic-specific journals between 1970 and 2005 (Liang et al., 2009). Results also indicated that Mexicans/Chicanas/os were the most represented ethnic-specific group along with a nearly complete lack of attention to any other Latina/o/x ethnic group. The authors posited that the limited number of Latina/o/x researchers available and a lack of non-Latina/o/x psychologists familiar with the needs of Latinas/os/x may account for the lack of Latino/a/x-focused articles (Liang et al., 2009).

In conjunction with the shifting demographic of the U.S. population, immigrants, especially from Latin America, have become scapegoats for international and domestic crises. Examples such as the Recession of 2008 and terrorism trigger negative media coverage, hate crimes, and exclusionary political legislation, which in turn cause an “integration imperative” (APA, 2012, p. 1). Historically, social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s inspired subsequent political action and public policy initiatives that “addressed explicit differential access to human rights and power based on race and ethnicity” (Constantine & Sue, 2005, p. 24). Following these legacies of social justice and advocacy, counseling psychology has historically been recognized as a leader in addressing issues of diversity and multiculturalism (Munley, Duncan, McDonnell, & Sauer, 2004).

In 2003, APA put forth guidelines that reframed the role of psychologists as “potential leaders of social justice in teaching, research, and clinical capacities and as active advocates of multiculturalism against the deleterious effects of racism, discrimination, and oppression” (Constantine & Sue, 2005, p. 24). Specifically, APA Multicultural Guidelines identified foundational principles that “articulate respect and inclusiveness for the national heritage of all groups, recognition of cultural contexts as defining forces for individuals’ and groups’ lived

experiences, and the role of external forces such as historical, economic, and socio-political events” (APA, 2003, p. 382). One such external force laden with oppression is immigration documentation status. According to Lahman, Mendoza, Rodriguez, and Schwartz (2011), the legal right to reside in a country is an abstract construct that is often taken for granted by those who possess the privilege of citizenship. The authors asserted, “being a noncitizen or undocumented does not mean one is a nonperson” (p. 305) and warned that the rhetoric around the legality or illegality of immigrants calls into question the basic humanity of undocumented immigrants.

Accordingly, in 2011, APA formed the Presidential Task Force on Immigration and developed an evidence-based report that addressed the psychological factors related to the experience of immigration, with particular attention to the mental health needs of immigrants across the lifespan, including the effects of acculturation, discrimination, and immigration policy on individuals, families, and society. The task force addressed populations that face unique challenges through their experience of migration, including undocumented immigrants and their children. The report stated that many of their needs are “unrecognized and as such may go untreated” (APA, 2012, p. 41).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the movement in psychology towards social justice, few studies in the field have addressed the mental health needs of the children who are impacted by immigration documentation status (Delva, Horner, Martinez, Sanders, Lopez, & Doering-White, 2013; Mather, 2009). Moreover, although little is known about the psychological needs of the nearly 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Gonzales, 2011), even less is known about the mental health needs of the 2 million undocumented immigrant children who are

now the fastest-growing sector of the child population (College Board, 2009; Sullivan & Rehm, 2005). For these children, their unauthorized status does not come about through their own “volition, but rather [...] as a result of a decision made and actions taken by their parents or other adults” (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011, p. 440). They tend to arrive in the United States before completing high school, forcing them to contend with American culture through participation in the public education system (Ellis & Chen, 2013). According to Gonzales (2011), undocumented immigrant youth face challenging and often contradictory routes to adulthood. Since much of the current scholarship is limited to children of immigrants from low-skilled groups, significant questions remain about how immigration documentation status shapes important factors in the development and integration of immigrant children, such as educational attainment and social and economic mobility (Gonzales, 2011).

Reflecting recent immigration policy trends, a growing number of adolescents who immigrated involuntarily to the United States as children are graduating from high school. Despite their eligibility for admission into a postsecondary institution, they do not qualify for federal aid, cannot lawfully hold a job, and face deportation as a result of their undocumented status (Romero, 2005). In 2012, President Barack Obama announced an executive order, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), designed to defer deportation and allow eligible unauthorized immigrants to obtain temporary work permits (McWhirter, Ramos, & Medina, 2013). However, this federal program not only excludes many unauthorized immigrants but it is inadequate in providing a long-term solution regarding their unauthorized status.

Some states, including Illinois, Massachusetts, California, Washington, New Jersey, and New York, have enacted pro-immigration legislation, such as providing health insurance to all children, regardless of immigration documentation status, and helping to put immigrants on a



path to citizenship. In addition, some cities, including Los Angeles, Houston, New York City, and Chicago, provide sanctuary to immigrants by prohibiting the use of local resources to enforce federal immigration laws. However, many state governments have limited access to certain services or privileges for immigrants and their children, including prohibitions on drivers' licenses, restrictions on in-state college tuition eligibility, sanctions against businesses hiring unauthorized workers, and restricted access to healthcare services (Mather, 2009). Moreover, various attempts at the federal level have failed to pass comprehensive immigration reform, as well as the narrower Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act), which would provide unauthorized immigrants who arrived as children a path to citizenship.

First introduced in 2001, the DREAM Act acknowledged the unique experience of DREAMers, or individuals who meet the requirements of the DREAM Act and would potentially benefit from its passage. Facing "similar childhood experiences, common restraints upon entry into adulthood, and shared feelings of deep disappointment when realizing the difficulty of achieving their dreams and aspirations" (Nicholls, 2013, p. 2), DREAMers set themselves apart from other undocumented immigrants. Rather than accept the untenable circumstances of their unauthorized status, they "rejected a life in the shadows and demanded the right to be recognized as rights-deserving human beings" (p. 4). They began to form various student and community organizations, a total of 71 organizations nationwide as of July 2010, not merely demanding residency status, but "coming out" and demanding recognition as Americans (Chavez, 2013). On February 13, 2013, Jose Antonio Vargas, a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist and founder of one such organization, Define American, appealed at a Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on comprehensive immigration reform:

I come to you as one of our country's 11 million undocumented immigrants. Many of us Americans at heart, but without the right papers to show for it. Too often, we're

treated as abstractions, faceless and nameless, subjects of debate, rather than individuals with families, hopes, fears, and dreams [...] Ultimately, it took me 12 years to come out as an undocumented American—because that is what I am, an American. But I am grateful to have been able to tell the truth. And in the past few years, more undocumented people, particularly young DREAMers, are coming out. Telling the truth about the America we experience. (S. Hrg. 113-129, 2013, p. 39)

Although several recent studies have focused on the unique experiences of undocumented immigrants who arrived as children (e.g., Abrego, 2006, 2008; Contreras, 2009; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Ellis & Chen, 2013; Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013), none have focused on the impact that activism has on the health and adjustment of the youth. These studies have demonstrated that support networks have a positive impact on the academic trajectories of these youth. However, the courageous act of public exposure, in which undocumented immigrants who arrived as children leave the safety of living in the shadows, puts them at a greater risk of deportation (Chavez, 2013). Research that focuses on the role of social justice advocacy in the lives of this vulnerable and marginalized population constitutes a potential area of growth within psychological scholarship. The current study was designed to investigate the psychological impact of the recent “coming out” of undocumented immigrant childhood arrivals from a status of invisibility and exclusion to the forefront of the immigration debate. As the literature review will demonstrate, scholarship on this topic has focused largely on the economic, legal, political, and educational implications of the large presence of unauthorized immigrants in the United States. Consequently, psychological research is limited and has yet to explore the impact of the recent surge in activism by undocumented childhood arrivals. Using an exploratory and in-depth research method, consensual qualitative research, described further in Chapter III, this study aimed to address the critical role that activism has on the psychological functioning of this unique and resilient group of

undocumented Americans, with the hope that mental health professionals will be better equipped to address their needs.

### **Demographic Considerations**

For the purpose of the literature review, the terms foreign-born and *immigrant* will be used interchangeably to describe populations and individuals who were born outside of, but currently reside in, the United States. Within this population, residents of varying immigrant documentation statuses are included. According to Motumura (2006), citizens are individuals who were born in the United States or met the legal residency requirements for citizenship. Noncitizens include permanent and temporary residents, refugees, and unauthorized immigrants. Although refugees and immigrants granted temporary work or school visas may qualify for permanent residency status, these noncitizens are lawful immigrants who pay taxes but cannot vote in national and state elections, have limited access to public services, and are subject to deportation.

Federal law has historically referred to all noncitizens as “aliens.” More recently, U.S. residents who entered without inspection or were admitted temporarily and stayed beyond the date they were required to leave, have been identified as illegal aliens, as well as unauthorized, illegal, or undocumented immigrants (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2006). According to Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011), many immigrants who are referred to as undocumented in the literature actually have some form of documentation but find themselves in “limbo pending a formal legal outcome” (p. 440), especially those who have passports from their country of origin or are recipients of the DACA temporary work visas. Therefore, the authors advocated for the term *unauthorized* because it is a more inclusive description of various immigration documentation statuses within this population. Nevertheless, given the context of political

activism for DREAMers and DACAmented (undocumented immigrants with DACA status) immigrants, the term *undocumented* to describe groups or individuals residing in the United States without authorization to do so will be used because it is the term used in the immigrant rights movement as well as throughout most of the recent scholarship on this segment of the immigrant population. For the sake of accuracy, the aforementioned terms will be used interchangeably as they are referred to in the respective literature.

Additionally, although the term *Latina/o* is used most often in the literature, the term *Latina/o/x* will be used in order to be inclusive of gender non-conforming persons. Salinas and Lozano (2017) argued that the use of *Latina/o* can exclude members of the community whose gender identity and expression do not fit traditional binary representations and, as such, recommended the use of the term *Latinx*. The term *Latina/o/x*, then, is meant to include those who still identify with the widely used *Latina/o* identity, while still including those who are embracing the more inclusive term *Latinx*.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What do you want to do with me? For all the undocumented immigrants who are actually sitting here at this hearing, for the people watching online and for the 11 million of us, what do you want to do with us? And the most important question is this: how do you define American?

–Jose Antonio Vargas

This chapter reviews the current literature on the unique experiences of undocumented childhood arrivals, including their psychological functioning, academic resilience, and activism. First, a brief history of immigration and public policy in the United States is outlined as a framework for understanding the growing presence of undocumented immigrants and the immigration reform debate. Second, a brief history on the growth of the Latina/o/x immigrant population, the largest of the immigrant groups in the United States, is provided to highlight the various relevant racial/cultural and mental health issues. Within the Latina/o/x population, the unique experience of immigrants of Mexican descent, the largest and most researched subset of Latina/o/x immigrants (Liang et al., 2009), is emphasized. Lastly, existing literature on the health and adjustment of undocumented immigrants, including childhood arrivals, is reviewed, focusing on both risk and protective factors that impact psychological functioning. Additionally, academic resilience and activism will be highlighted, given attention to emerging adults within the undocumented community who have mobilized immigrant rights efforts within college settings.

## **Immigration Policy in the United States: From Inclusion to Exclusion**

The United States has recently witnessed the greatest migration growth in its history, with a 44% increase in the foreign-born population since 1990. Following the congressional elimination of racial exclusions from U.S. immigration laws during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the majority of immigrants today are people of color (Johnson, 2003). Despite recent public policy efforts addressing discrimination, the United States has a history of unfair and harsh treatment of citizens and noncitizens of color (Zinn, 2003).

In an analysis of constitutional law concerning immigration and citizenship, Motomura (2006) questioned the democratic values and image of the United States as a “nation of immigrants” (p. 9). Although the concept of democracy as a community of individuals who share interests and values is based on the power to grant or refuse membership to newcomers, immigration laws in the United States have historically asserted and maintained the economic and political interests of only one group of immigrants: White Americans. Motomura posited that in order to both defend established homelands and settle newly acquired territory in the western states, early European Americans adopted an ideology of conquest, whereby “enlightened Europeans [fulfilled] their destiny by subjugating other peoples and thus civilizing the land” (p. 20).

As early as the late 1700s, the Alien and Sedition Acts authorized the expulsion of natives, or aliens, from enemy states without a hearing, due to a growing fear of foreign influence amid the French Revolution (Motomura, 2006). In the mid-1800s, as the growing economy in Western states created a demand for cheap labor, immigrants were recruited from China to work in mining and the construction of the transcontinental railroad. Thirty years later, over 250,000 Chinese immigrants, many of whom moved into other occupations following the

completion of the railroad, were a significant part of the U.S. workforce. As Western states faced the resulting depression in wages, growing anti-Chinese sentiment led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which allowed the United States to “regulate, limit, or suspend immigration of Chinese laborers whenever their entry or residence affects or threatens to affect the interests of the country” (p. 17).

Although immigration laws following the Chinese Exclusion Act were less blatant in their unfair treatment of people of color, subsequent immigration policies were no less discriminatory. In 1923, the United States introduced annual caps on immigrant admissions and legal distinctions between citizens and noncitizens, as immigrants from Mexico and Canada began to replace the sustained flow of immigrants from European countries (Motomura, 2006). Another example was the change in rights of lawful immigrants awaiting citizenship. Until the mid-1900s, the United States treated lawful immigrants as future citizens, requiring every applicant for naturalization to file a declaration of intent. This pre-citizenship status granted various degrees of eligibility for land ownership, voting rights, and overseas protection. As states began to repeal most of the benefits of pre-citizenship, the fading image of immigration as a process of transition with the promise of inclusion was replaced by an image of exclusion (Motomura, 2006).

### **Undocumented Immigration**

In 2013, 28% of the estimated foreign-born population in the United States was unauthorized (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Although a number of figures exist, U.S. Census estimates of unauthorized immigrants are generally calculated by subtracting the population of legal residents from the total foreign-born population. Legal residents include: (a) legal permanent residents, i.e., green-card holders, including amnesty recipients under Immigration Reform and

Control Act (IRCA); (b) refugees, asylees, and parolees; and (c) legal temporary residents, which include students, professors, high-tech workers, and a number of other temporary visa holders. Consequently, unauthorized immigrants are individuals who either: (a) entered the country without valid documents or (b) entered with valid visas but overstayed their visas' expiration or otherwise violated the terms of their admission (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2006). Given the strong emphasis on documents, namely green cards and visas, to delineate the varying immigration statuses, immigration advocates coined the term *undocumented* to replace the problematic terms *illegal alien* and *illegal immigrant*.

In a 2004 demographic study of the total undocumented population, 57% were of Mexican descent, 23% from other Latin American countries, 10% from Asia, 5% from Europe and Canada, and 5% from the rest of the world. Almost two-thirds of the undocumented population lived in just six states: California (27%), Texas (13%), New York (8%), Florida (7%), Illinois (6%), and New Jersey (4%). However, the most rapid growth in the undocumented population since the mid-1990s was outside these states (Passel, Capps, & Fix, 2004). Of the 11.6 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in 2005, 4.2 million had entered in 2000 or later and 6.6 million were from Mexico (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2006). In 2010, close to two-thirds of unauthorized immigrants had lived in the United States for at least a decade and nearly half (46%) were parents of minor children (Passel & Cohn, 2013).

During the past 25 years, the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States has risen from an estimated 2.5 million in 1987 to 11.1 million today (Passel et al., 2004; Passel & Cohn, 2013). This demographic trend has sparked a national debate regarding the direction of future immigration policy. The debate surrounding immigration reform in the United States cannot be understood apart from its historical, social, economic, and political contexts.



According to scholars, this trend is the unintended consequence of policies designed to curb undocumented migration and tighten the U.S.-Mexico border, transforming previously circular migratory patterns into permanent settlement (Nevins, 2010). The marked increase in the size of the unauthorized population in the United States can be traced to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which granted amnesty to roughly 3 million unauthorized immigrants present in the United States as of 1982, increased border enforcement, and introduced stricter employer sanctions (Borjas, 2007). Despite these efforts, the Immigration and Naturalized Service (INS, renamed the Department of Homeland Security) could not account for the estimated presence of 5 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States in 1996, which grew to 10.3 by 2004 (Borjas, 2007).

**Undocumented immigrants from Mexico.** The presence of Mexicans in the United States has a unique history. According to Gonzalez (2011), not only are two-thirds of Latinas/os/xs in the United States of Mexican origin, but also “only Mexicans can claim to be both early settlers on U.S. soil and the largest group of new arrivals” (p. 95). Settling in present-day Texas as early as the mid-1700s, elite families of mixed Spanish and Native American descent founded countless missions across the states through the 1800s. As the United States began to acquire once-Mexican land in the mid-1800s, Mexicans suffered exploitation, discrimination, segregation, and violence. The anti-immigrant sentiment culminated in the 1930s, when more than 500,000 people of Mexican descent, including U.S. citizens, were forcibly deported during the Great Depression (Gonzalez, 2011). This event was an important marker of future U.S.-Mexico relations, in which Mexicans who once were pioneers in settling the United States became increasingly unwelcome.

A key factor in the growth of undocumented immigrants is the historical influx of Mexican immigrants into the United States following three critical events. The first followed the 1964 termination of the Bracero Program, a guest-worker program created to ease the labor force shortage of WWII by bringing close to 5 million Mexican-born farmworkers to the United States. As multiple migratory trips became increasingly costly and dangerous following the implementation of several policies designed to curb undocumented migration and tighten the U.S.-Mexico border (Nevins, 2010), more migrants began creating permanent homes in the United States (Gonzalez, 2011). The growth in migration attempts by people of Mexican descent was evidenced by the dramatic increase in annual apprehensions by Border Patrol, from 41,600 in 1964 to 348,200 in 1970 (Borjas, 2007). The second critical event contributing to the growth of undocumented immigrants was the decline of the Mexican economy. In the early 1980s, the Mexican per capita income corresponded to 27% of the United States per capita income; by 2000, that percentage had dropped to 19% (Borjas, 2007). The combination of these two historical events resulted in more migrants bringing their children to settle in the United States, often to reunite with family members who had previously settled in the United States or gained legal status as a result of the Bracero Program.

The last and most recent growth of the undocumented immigrant population from Mexico occurred between 1988 and 2002. In response to the growing number of undocumented immigrants who settled after the termination of the Bracero Program and the worsening Mexican economy, various local and state governments attempted to deter settlement through anti-immigrant discourse. Anti-immigrant arguments saturated the media, including claims that immigrants were an economic threat, effectively driving down wages of the American working class while bankrupting the welfare state, as well as a cultural threat, “transforming large parts of

urban and suburban landscapes into ethnic spaces” (Chavez, 2013). In California, Proposition 187, aimed to deny undocumented immigrants the right to key social services and undocumented children the right to attend K-12 public schools, won 59% approval in 1994, although ultimately it was deemed unconstitutional by several federal courts. In an attempt to hinder similar efforts at the state and local levels, the Clinton Administration responded with Operation Gatekeeper, an expansion of border enforcement, transforming the INS from “one of the most insignificant federal law enforcement agencies in the country into the most funded and best armed” (Chavez, 2013).

Rather than decreasing the influx of undocumented immigrants through the U.S.-Mexico border, Operation Gatekeeper instead shifted border crossings from traditional points in California to increasingly risky parts of the Arizona desert. The increased risks drove up the prices of the human-smuggling industry and tripled the death toll, thus reducing the return rate for migrants from 50% in 1986 to 25% in 2007 (Fernandez-Kelley & Massey, 2007, as cited in Nicholls, 2013). Ironically, the population of undocumented immigrants grew in direct response to the increased border enforcement efforts in the 1990s. Moreover, as migration plans changed from temporary to permanent, immigrants began to arrive as a family. According to recent estimates, there are more than 2.1 million undocumented immigrants in the United States who have been here since childhood, more than a million of whom are now adults (Batalova & McHugh, 2010).

**Undocumented immigrants from Central America.** According to a Migration Policy Institute report (Lesser & Batalova, 2017), Central Americans made up 8% of the total U.S. immigrant population in 2015, the majority of them from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Recently, public policy and media coverage has focused on the migration of unaccompanied

children and families fleeing gang violence and poverty (Lesser & Batalova, 2017). According to the report, in 2016, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) intercepted 46,900 unaccompanied children and 70,400 family units from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. However, large-scale Central American migration occurred first in the 1980s and then again in the 1990s due to civil wars, political instability, economic hardship, and natural disasters (Lesser & Batalova, 2017). The authors noted that the natural disasters in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua rendered many immigrants eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), offering provisional protection against deportation and eligibility for work authorization. Between 1980-2015, the Central American immigrant population grew nearly tenfold, and by 2015, approximately 1.7 million immigrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were unauthorized (Lesser & Batalova, 2017).

**Undocumented immigrants from the Caribbean.** According to a report by the Migration Policy Institute (McCabe, 2011), Caribbean immigrants, mostly from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago, made up 9% of the total foreign-born population. Notably, in 2010, TPS was extended to about 53,000 Haitian immigrants following a massive earthquake (McCabe, 2011). According to the report, Caribbean immigrants are highly concentrated in Florida and New York, and when compared to other immigrants, are less likely to be new arrivals, tend to have higher levels of English language proficiency, and become naturalized U.S. citizens at higher rates (McCabe, 2011). Still, the population of undocumented immigrants from Caribbean countries is significant. According to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center (2010), approximately one in 10 of the 3.5 million Caribbean immigrants were unauthorized.

**Undocumented workers.** The immigration debate invariably begins with the “illegality” of millions of workers, despite their indispensable contributions to the U.S. economy (Rincon, 2008). One in every 20 workers in the United States is undocumented, working in high concentrations in the construction, agriculture, meatpacking, garment, and service industries (Lipman, 2006; Passel & Cohn, 2011). According to a 2004 statistical report by Passel et al., undocumented workers earned considerably less than working U.S. citizens. In fact, two-thirds of them earned less than twice the minimum wage, compared with only one-third of all workers. Since undocumented men were younger and less likely to be disabled, retired, or in school, their labor-force participation rate of 96% exceeded that of men who were legal immigrants or U.S. citizens. Conversely, undocumented women were less likely to be in the labor force than undocumented men or than women who were U.S. citizens, since more undocumented women were of childbearing age and more likely than U.S. citizens to have children and remain in the home (Passel et al., 2004).

Stereotypes of undocumented immigrants, as workers and taxpayers on the positive side, or as lawbreakers and service users on the negative side, have informed the debate on immigration (Fortuny, Capps, & Passel, 2007). Contrary to popular belief, undocumented workers pay similar taxes (sales, payroll, income, and property taxes) as the rest of the U.S. population, given that taxation is not dependent on immigration status (Lipman, 2006). According to Rincon (2008), since undocumented immigrants have varying degrees of rights and protections under the law that vary from state to state, the inability to be lawfully employed on both a state and federal level is emphasized as the most important issue in the debate. The lack of government and public consensus on the enforcement of immigration law has fueled the

argument that the substantial profits gained from the exploitation of undocumented workers have impeded policy efforts (Rincon, 2008).

For instance, Fortuny et al. (2007) found that one in 10 California residents is in a family headed by an undocumented immigrant, compared with one in 20 nationally. California's undocumented immigrant population is so large and well established, with one-quarter of the national total (2.5 million), that efforts to deport or prohibit their employment would have a major impact on the state's economy. Since a large amount of state and local revenue supports undocumented immigrants through public schooling and expansions of health insurance coverage, the authors suggested that extending immigration documentation status to undocumented immigrants could lower the rate of poverty and demand for public services by integrating them into the broader workforce (Fortuny et al., 2007).

**Undocumented immigrant women and children.** Working males are, of course, just one segment of the undocumented immigrants. Many women and children also enter the country without authorization or overstay their visas. In fact, in 2014, women made up 41% of the adult undocumented population, and about 1.6 million children under 18 in the United States were themselves undocumented immigrants (Passel et al., 2004). Unlike the temporary Mexican migrant population, composed mainly of men, the most significant development in Mexican immigration to the United States was the concurrent increase in the participation of women and entire families in undocumented migration and settlement (Hontagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

According to a study by Fortuny et al. (2007), U.S.-born children of immigrants tended to be younger, while a significant share of foreign-born children of immigrants tended to be older. Around a quarter of children of undocumented families were considered mixed-status families, where at least one or more of the children were U.S.-born, posing special concerns for various

social policies because different family members had varying eligibility for government programs. For example, undocumented immigrant parents' fear of deportation created a reluctance on behalf of parents to seek needed government services, even when their children, documented and undocumented, needed them and could have been eligible (Fortuny et al., 2007).

**College-eligible undocumented youth.** A significant portion of the undocumented population is made up of young adults who came involuntarily to the United States as children. A 1982 Supreme Court case, *Plyler vs. Doe*, granted undocumented immigrants the right to a public education (Rincon, 2008). Consequently, there has been an increase in undocumented youth who are college-eligible but cannot qualify for government financial aid because of their immigration status. While colleges and universities are not barred from admitting them in most states, undocumented immigrants cannot effectively compete for post-graduation jobs for which they have been trained because employers can be sanctioned for knowingly hiring them (Romero, 2005). Despite the fact that some states have allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition, they are still ineligible for federal aid, have no guarantee that they can achieve lawful immigration status following college graduation, and will continue to be ineligible for lawful employment and face possible removal from the country (Rincon, 2008).

As a result of the barriers that persist after high school graduation, undocumented youth often enter into an underground workforce that is subject to government raids. In 2006, an estimated 2 million people participated in nationwide protests following the passing of the Sensenbrenner Bill in the House of Representatives. The bill changed illegal entry from a misdemeanor to a felony offense. Additionally, it authorized the construction of an additional 700 miles of security fencing, and required the implementation of an electronic verification

system required by all employers to ensure that the workers they hire are legal residents (Rincon, 2008). Labor movements, churches, educators, and businesses that employ immigrants joined the demonstrations, increasing the visibility and consequently the vulnerability of undocumented immigrants. The rate of workplace raids by federal agents consequently increased as a direct result of these demonstrations (Rincon, 2008). This climate particularly affects undocumented students once they graduate from high school, subjecting them to the increasingly anti-immigrant workforce, where increasingly less employers are willing to risk government sanction by hiring undocumented immigrants.

### **Immigrant Rights Movement**

The immigrant rights movement emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s in response to increasing hostility toward immigrants. In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) was enacted to broaden the detection and deportation efforts of unauthorized immigrants. In addition to expanding monitoring of immigrant entry and exit data, lowering the threshold of deportable offenses, limiting judicial discretion during deportation proceedings, and extending periods of admissibility for deported immigrants, IIRIRA provided incentivized local police agency efforts to detect and remove undocumented immigrants in their jurisdiction (Nicholls, 2013). In the same year, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PROWORA) was enacted, restricting public benefits for noncitizens, including permanent residents, and made undocumented immigrants ineligible for public state and local services. According to PROWORA, in order for states to offer in-state services to undocumented immigrants, such as providing in-state tuition, a state law would have to be passed (Varsanyi, 2008, as cited in Nicholls, 2013). Consequently, local and state governments were allowed to use the immigration documentation status of their residents as a



“criterion of detecting whether people belonged in their communities and whether they merited basic rights and privileges” (Nicholls, 2013, p. 28).

The combination of these legislations at the federal level led to controversial anti-immigration legislation at the local and state level, including Arizona’s SB 1070 in 2010. Laws like SB 1070 allowed police to detain and question anyone they “suspect” of being an “illegal alien,” a measure upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, and elicited the practice of racial profiling (Barnes, 2012, as cited in Chavez, 2013). Adults in these jurisdictions face the greatest risks because they seek work without legal documentation, face police stops and border patrol checkpoints throughout their daily commutes, show visible signs of “foreignness,” and are asked for legal identification in daily transactions (Nicholls, 2013). Children are safeguarded by their protected participation in schools afforded by *Plyler v. Doe* and a higher level of acculturation. However, as they transition into adulthood, they come face to face with increased demands for legal documentation (Gonzales, 2011).

**DREAM Act and DACA.** The anti-immigrant political context of the 1990s and early 2000s forced immigrant rights advocates to search for any possibilities toward comprehensive immigration reform. Given that significant reform seemed limited in this political environment, advocates began to identify narrow groups and issues that had greater chances of success. In 2001, national immigrant rights associations and their allies in Congress believed that a niche opening existed for undocumented youth, triggering the creation of the decade-long DREAM campaign (Nicholls, 2013).

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) was developed by prominent immigrant rights organizations to place undocumented college students and youth performing community service, including military service, on a path to citizenship.

According to Batalova and McHugh (2010), students of good moral character who arrived to the United States before the age of 16 and had at least 5 years of continuous residency would qualify for conditional permanent resident status if they met any of the following criteria: (a) graduated from a 2-year college or a vocational college or studied for at least 2 years toward a bachelor's or higher degree; (b) served in the U.S. armed forces for at least 2 years; or (c) performed at least 910 hours of volunteer community service (p. 2).

Proponents of the measure argue that these youth, unlike the existing stereotypes about undocumented immigrants, are “highly assimilated and well-adjusted members of their communities” (Nicholls, 2013, p. 32). However, critics of the DREAM Act argue that the measure extends legalization to the family members of eligible youth and encourages further “flooding” of undocumented immigrants into the U.S. (Nicholls, 2013). The DREAM Act has yet to pass after multiple attempts as a standalone measure and within larger proposed legislation in 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2010. The failure of the DREAM Act, as well as comprehensive immigration reform, has become a driving force for undocumented students across the country to mobilize and create a collective voice as DREAMers.

In 2010, four undocumented students occupied the Arizona office of Senator John McCain, sparking a number of high-profile public actions across the country, such as lobbying senators and White House officials and garnering the support of powerful unions and human rights associations. According to Nicholls (2013), the “explosion of open, public, and assertive demonstrations across the country in spring 2010 marked the entry of undocumented childhood arrivals on the national political stage as the DREAMers” (p. 4). Among the successes of the DREAM movement, including the passage of in-state tuition and identification in several states, the most striking was the executive order of 2012, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

(DACA), designed to defer deportation and allow eligible unauthorized immigrants to obtain temporary work permits (McWhirter et al., 2013). Although providing a temporary work permit, renewable every 2 years, this federal program excluded many undocumented immigrants because many no longer meet the age limits set over 10 years ago when the DREAM Act was first introduced, and many more have contended with the greater risks of undocumented status as adults and may not meet the standards for good moral character.

### **Latina/o/x Immigrants in the United States**

In this new era, the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico [...] The extent and nature of this immigration differ fundamentally from those of previous immigration, and the assimilation successes of the past are unlikely to be duplicated with the contemporary flood of immigrants from Latin America.

–Samuel Huntington, Professor of Government,  
Harvard University (Huntington, 2004, as cited in  
Nicholls, 2013, p. 20)

Anti-immigration advocates like Dr. Huntington have gone beyond common economic arguments, claiming that the inherent culture of immigrants, particularly Latinas/os/xs, threatens national institutions and identity. Rising popularity of this sentiment led to the passage of stricter immigration enforcement, including expanding border enforcement and requiring local and state governments to deny basic services to immigrants. Besides the sheer size of the Latina/o/x immigrant community in the United States, Latina/o/x cultural identity is indeed complex and deserving of exploration within the larger sociopolitical context. Given that Latina/o/x immigrants are underrepresented in psychological research, with Latina/o/x-focused articles representing only 2% of the total number of articles published in non-ethnic-specific journals, the little we do know suggests that current economic conditions and migration experiences of Latinas/os/xs, including income disparities, increased rate of suicide, inaccessibility of quality

care, and underutilization of mental health services, indicate they may be at risk for mental health problems (Liang et al., 2009). The following section provides a summary of existing scholarship on the often-misunderstood Latina/o/x culture.

### **Latina/o/x Cultural Identity**

Latinas/os/x comprise the largest group of immigrants in the United States, and as such, the racial-cultural factors that shape their immigrant experiences are central to understanding the psychological impact of immigration documentation status. The Latina/o/x population is one of the fastest growing racial-ethnic groups in the United States, accounting for 45 million of the total population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007). Among the total Latina/o/x population in the United States, 34.4% are under 18 years of age (Ramirez & De La Cruz, 2003).

The term *Latina/o/x* refers to an individual whose ancestry is from Latin American countries, including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and other South and Central American countries, such as Colombia, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (Miville, 2009). Within the Latina/o/x population, people of Mexican origin comprise the largest group of immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, in the United States over the last 20 years (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007). Although Latinas/os/xs live in all parts of the United States, most reside in the Southwest and Northeast, with over half of all Latinas/os/xs living in just two states, California and Texas (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007).

Latinas/os/xs carry a long history of oppression in the United States leading to the self-selection of an ethnic identity that replaces labels such as Hispanic, Spanish, and Chicano/a. This identification embodies a heterogeneous group of people in terms of race, ethnicity, region, and socioeconomic status (Miville, 2009). Within the Latina/o/x identity, several mixed-race cultures resulted from the European colonization of the Americas and enslavement of people of

African descent, including the *mestizo* culture, from the intermarriage of European settlers and indigenous people, and the *criollo* and *mulatto* cultures, from the intermingling of African groups with European and indigenous groups (Miville, 2009). The Latina/o/x identity was further complicated by the annexation of various portions of the Southwest and Florida by the United States in the early 1800s, resulting in the reclassification of Mexican Americans as “aliens” and of Puerto Ricans as noncitizens (Gonzalez, 2011). As a result, Mexican Americans face a similar identity problem to that of Puerto Ricans, whereby they are both “native-born and immigrants, pioneers and aliens, patriots and rebels; no matter how far back some may trace their ancestry on [U.S.] soil, [Mexican-Americans] are still battling to emerge from the obscure margins of official U.S. history” (Gonzalez, 2011, p. 96). Despite their long presence in the United States, Latinas/os/xs still tend to be overrepresented among those experiencing poverty and unemployment, and underrepresented in the areas of education and high income, creating an especially vulnerable environment for new Latina/o/x immigrants (Miville, 2009).

### **Racial/Ethnic Stereotypes of Latinas/os/xs**

Stereotypes about Latinas/os/xs, particularly those of Mexican descent (also known as Chicanos/as), have historically remained largely negative (Neimann, 2001). As noted by Takaki (1993), the Chicano/a experience has been unique because “most of them have lived close to their homeland—a proximity that has helped reinforce their language, identity, and culture” (p. 8). Stereotypes became more negative after World War II when American soldiers began returning home. The large Mexican labor force that had been recruited to replace the labor of American soldiers during the Bracero Program was no longer valued (Takaki, 1993). Therefore, negative characterizations of people of Mexican descent, such as “possessing a low moral standard, helping to keep wages low, and spreaders of disease, served the institutional and

individual purposes of justifying the expatriation of Mexicans who had labored for the [U.S.] during the war” (Neimann, 2001, p. 59).

Furthermore, Chicanas have been stereotyped as self-sacrificing, submissive, promiscuous, unintelligent, and overweight, while Chicanos have been described as virile, ambitionless, unmannerly, poorly groomed, chauvinistic, lacking college education, and alcohol users (Andrade, 1982; Niemann, 2001). These stereotypes have been reinforced by the fact that people of Mexican descent are overrepresented among the lowest social classes in the United States, exacerbating the need for economic contribution from all family members, including school-age children. According to Neimann (2001), Chicanos/as have been historically tracked into non-college-bound and bilingual education programs, which often serve to maintain the perception that the comparatively lower educational level of Chicanos/as is one of choice, values, and/or genetic inferiority.

### **Latina/o/x Immigrant Mental Health**

Berry (1997) proposed that a person who is in contact with a new culture will slowly change in their use of language, personality, identity, attitudes, learning styles, and levels of stress. Thus, as a person becomes more acculturated, their attitudes should become more similar to those found in the new culture. While acculturation refers to the changes that groups and individuals undergo when they come into contact with a different culture, acculturative stress results from, and has its source in, the acculturative process. As such, Berry posited that individuals who are less acculturated experience more acculturative stress than individuals who are more acculturated. Research has indicated that immigrants’ mental health is often affected by the distress inherent in the acculturation process (Cuellar & Roberts, 1997; Hovey, 2000). Specifically, depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic problems were identified as the most

common mental health consequences among acculturating individuals (Berry, 1997). The acculturation process is also strongly influenced by structural and contextual factors in the new country, such as social class background and perceived racial discrimination (Gibson, 2001).

Within a conceptual model where cultural experiences can either lessen or increase the intensity of mental health problems, psychological health is viewed as a function of the interaction of acculturation with stressors and psychosocial resources (Ensel & Lin, 1991). In a quantitative study utilizing Ensels and Lin's mental health model, Cuellar and Roberts (1997) investigated the relationship between depression, acculturation, and socioeconomic status in a sample of 1,271 Latino first-year college students, 11% of whom were foreign-born. Two scales, the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARMSA-II) and the DSD26 Symptom Scale for Assessment of Depressive Symptoms, were utilized. Results demonstrated that acculturated participants reported significantly fewer symptoms of depression than their more traditional counterparts (Cuellar & Roberts, 1997).

In a study linking acculturative stress to mental health in a Mexican immigrant sample, Hovey (2000) found that family support, social support, religiosity, agreement with the decision to migrate, and expectations for the future are significant predictors of depression and suicidal ideation. Findings suggested that adult Mexican immigrants who experience elevated levels of acculturative stress could be at risk for experiencing critical levels of depression and suicidal ideation. In Hovey and King's (1997) conceptual framework for studying acculturative stress, the following cultural and psychological factors were identified as predictors of depression and suicidal ideation: (a) social support within the new community; (b) immediate and extended family support networks; (c) socioeconomic status; (d) premigration variables such as adaptive functioning (self-esteem, coping ability), knowledge of the new language and culture, and

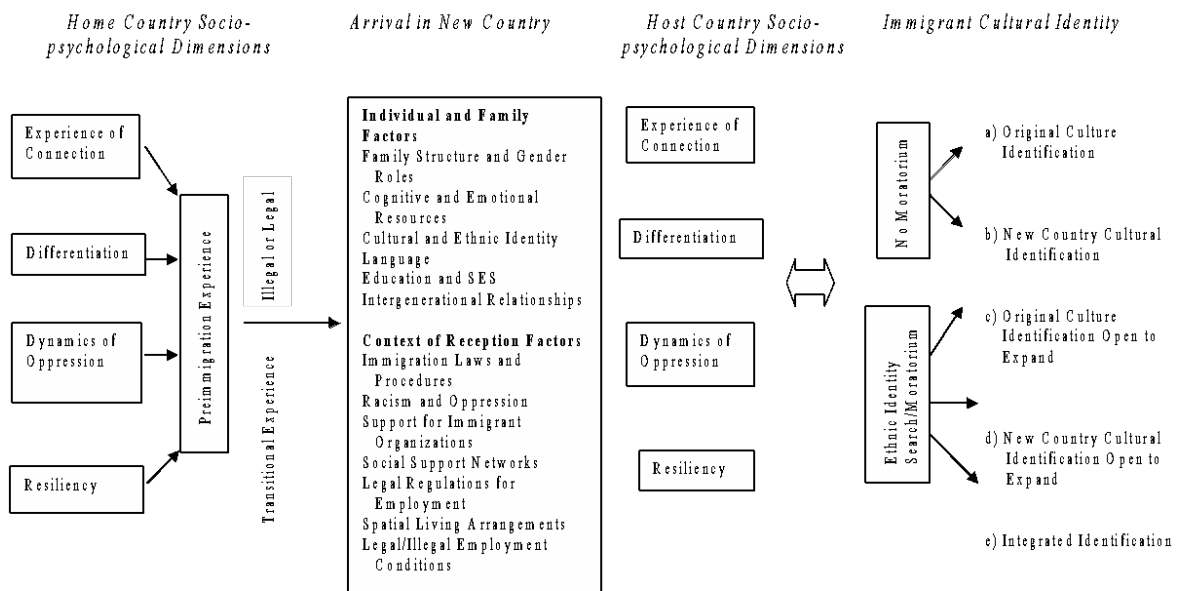
control and choice in the decision to migrate (voluntary vs. involuntary move); and (e) cognitive attributes such as expectations for the future (hopeful vs. non-hopeful), religiosity, and acceptance of cultural diversity (multicultural vs. assimilationist) within the larger society. For example, the authors found that acculturating individuals with positive expectations for the future and relatively high levels of social support may in turn experience less depression than individuals without the same expectations and support. In addition, studies have identified several factors related to immigration that increase the risk of suicide, including: (a) severing of ties to family and friends in the country of origin; (b) language inadequacy; (c) lack of social and financial resources in the host country; (d) stress and frustration associated with unemployment; (e) feelings of not belonging in the host society; and (f) disorientation in response to the unfamiliar environment (Hovey, 2000; Hovey & King, 1997; Sorenson & Shen, 1996).

According to Rosado and Elias (1993), when compared to middle-class White Americans, Latinas/os/xs and other ethnic minorities received inferior quality of psychological services and fewer visits (Rosado & Elias, 1993). Specifically, financially indigent and culturally diverse Latinas/os/xs (a) were often perceived as inherently more disordered and pathological; (b) were more frequently treated by physical or chemical means than through psychotherapeutic treatment modalities; (c) were given poorer prognoses; (d) had higher rates of institutionalization; and (e) were less preferred than young, attractive, White, verbal, intelligent, and successful clients (Rosado & Elias, 1993).

As a direct response to this need for culturally competent mental health professionals, Parra Cardona, Wampler, and Busby (2004) created a Transgenerational Cultural Identity Model, identifying the various sociopsychological and relational dimensions that exist in Latina/o/x immigrant cultural identity, both before and after immigrating to the host country (see Figure 1).



According to the model, Latina/o/x immigrants face internal and interpersonal processes that either push an individual away from his or her home country and/or pull him or her toward the new culture. These processes include: (a) experience of connection (emotional bonds with significant others); (b) differentiation (the ability to have a sense of self as unique from the culture, social class, or family that surrounds an individual); (c) dynamics of oppression (set of experiences that make an individual feel confined); and (d) resiliency (the ability to thrive amid adversity). In addition to differentiating between legal and illegal migration, the model identified individual and family factors, such as education, socioeconomic status, family structure, gender roles, and emotional resources, and reception factors, such as immigration laws, social support networks, racism, and employment conditions, as crucial to understanding the Latina/o/x immigrant experience (Parra Cardona et al., 2004).



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Figure 1. Transgenerational Cultural Identity Model (first generation)  
(Parra Cardona, Wampler, & Busby, 2004)

**Latina/o/x immigrant children's mental health.** As stated earlier, a large portion of the Latina/o/x population is below the age of 18. Immigration affects this population, since one in every five children under age 18 living in the United States (14 million) was an immigrant or had immigrant parents, referred to as children in immigrant families (Hernández & Charney, 1998). Four percent were naturalized citizens and 21% (1.7 million) were not citizens. Of the citizen children, 54% (3.6 million) had at least one parent in the home who was not a citizen; thus, approximately two-thirds of children in immigrant families were either themselves not citizens or lived with a noncitizen parent (Hernández & Charney, 1998).

In a study supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Hernández and Charney (1998) found that, on many measures of health and well-being, children in immigrant families perform as well as or better than U.S.-born children with U.S.-born parents. The study suggested that the extent to which children in immigrant families experience healthy development and successful adjustment depends on the following factors: (a) resources from their country of origin; (b) official categorization and treatment by federal, state, and local government; (c) socioeconomic circumstances and cultural environment in the United States; and (d) treatment by others and from health and social institutions in the United States (Hernández & Charney, 1998). Consequently, protective factors contributing to healthy development and adjustment involved coming into the United States with existing resources, settling in resource-rich communities, and being free of negative categorizations or stereotypes. Risk factors of unhealthy development and maladjustment, therefore, involved children in immigrant families who emigrated to the United States with few or no resources, resided in resource-poor communities, and faced negative treatment by government and health officials and/or

discrimination. Using this model, Latina/o/x immigrant children are an especially vulnerable population because they are more likely to experience the risk factors than the protective ones.

Risk factors such as poverty and limited access to healthcare are those most commonly associated with Latina/o/x immigrants. Low income is a well-documented negative risk factor for children's healthy development, generally. For immigrant children, poverty status is largely determined by the employment opportunities of their parents. Since 1980, employment has steadily declined for men with less than a college education, a population that includes many Latina/o/x immigrants. Specifically, Latina/o/x children, who tend to have family incomes below the poverty threshold, parents with low educational attainment, one parent or many siblings in the home, and/or overcrowded housing conditions, were at risk of negative health, developmental, and educational outcomes (Hernández & Charney, 1998). Specifically, results indicated that Mexican-origin children in immigrant families are considerably more likely to report poor health and dental problems, exhibit elevated blood lead levels, and be exposed to damaging environmental toxins. Immigrant children were more likely to lack health insurance coverage, mainly because of its high cost and lack of employer coverage, when compared to older generations (Hernández, 2008).

**Academic resilience among Latina/o/x immigrant adolescents.** Adolescents encounter normative physical, cognitive, social, and environmental life changes that are novel, challenging, and stressful. The intellectual and developmental tasks presented by educational settings are pivotal among these challenges (Blechman & Culhane, 1993). Since the completion of high school is a significant milestone for healthy development into adulthood, adolescents place a high level of importance on academic achievement (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2007).

Adolescents who face non-normative life events or risk factors such as poverty or language and

cultural barriers are at risk of dropping out of high school because of the added stress. The vast majority of research addressing adolescents' developmental stress has referenced a resilience model, which focuses on factors that limit negative behaviors associated with stress and results in adaptive outcomes amid adversity (Garmezy, 1991). Resiliency is understood as the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances. To achieve this, a person must draw on all of his or her biological, psychological, and environmental resources. Examples of the relational components of resiliency are social support networks, the recognition by others of personal qualities, as well as engagement in meaningful personal relationships supporting an individual under stress (Garmezy, 1991).

Although preexisting research studies have pointed to the risk factors associated with Latina/o/x populations in the United States (Buriel, 1993; Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001), few studies have described the protective factors that exist within vulnerable populations who demonstrate resilience (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). In one of the few longitudinal studies on the psychological adjustment of eighth-grade immigrants from China, the Philippines, Mexico, and other Latin countries, Kao (1998) used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) of 1998 to identify protective factors for this at-risk adolescent population. Protective factors included aspects commonly associated with assimilation. For instance, Kao (1998) found that those who speak English, acquire English quickly, and/or have parents who speak English had an advantage as they adjusted to school, tried to fit into peer groups, and, more generally, navigated within American culture.

Similar to Hernández and Charney's (1998) findings, immigrants who resided in a U.S. community with a large network of family members and other people from their home country were more likely to receive personal, social, and economic support (Kao, 1998). Crucial to the

transition process, increased support included information about medical and health services, schools, jobs, and other resources. Despite the risk factors identified among children from immigrant families, factors promoting healthy development and adjustment among adolescents were related to education. For instance, adolescent immigrants were less likely than U.S.-born adolescents with immigrant and U.S.-born parents to report (a) school absences due to health or emotional problems, (b) risky sexual behaviors, (c) delinquent or violent behaviors, and (d) substance abuse and/or smoking (Hernández & Charney, 1998). Interestingly, although adolescents in immigrant families reported overall levels of psychological well-being and self-esteem that were similar to adolescents in U.S.-born families, they reported feeling less control over their future and less popularity among classmates.

Consistent with adolescent development and resilience research (Blechman & Culhane, 1993; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Papalia et al., 2007), several studies reported that educational aspirations, grade point averages, and math test scores for adolescents in immigrant families were comparable to or higher than those for adolescents in U.S.-born families (Buriel, 1993, Hernández & Charney, 1998; Kao, 1998). Buriel (1993) suggested that since immigration was often motivated by a desire for upward mobility, Latina/o/x immigrants exhibited characteristics that were conducive to achievement, such as lower rates of delinquency and psychological stress. In a 2000 study comparing the educational attributes of immigrant and native-born students, Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix found that immigrants performed as well or better than their native-born counterparts along a number of dimensions. Immigrants were (a) more likely to report high personal and parental aspirations, (b) more likely to take advanced math and science courses, (c) more likely to take advanced placement tests in preparation for college, (d) as likely to graduate from high school, and (e) more likely to graduate from college. Immigrants arrived to

the United States with hopes of a better life, if not for themselves then for their children.

Immigrant parents passed their hopes and dreams down to their children in phrases such as *estudia y sea alguien* (study and be somebody) (Suárez-Orozco, 1989).

Given the changes in the U.S. economy and labor market in the last decade, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) posited that educational attainment was critical to the social mobility of all children and identified the critical role that school had in shaping immigrant youths' understanding of their place in society. However, while some individuals with modest levels of education managed to find skilled blue-collar jobs, most needed a college degree to qualify for jobs that offer decent wages, benefits, job security, and the possibility of advancement (Gonzales, 2011). This posed a significant challenge to populations of immigrants, particularly Latina/o/x and undocumented immigrants, who have historically experienced difficulty attaining significant levels of education.

### **Mental Health of Undocumented Immigrants**

Before reviewing the existing mental health literature on undocumented immigrants, it is important to contextualize the scarcity of research amid methodological factors. Studies of undocumented immigrants posed significant methodological challenges around immigration documentation status because they may be reluctant to expose themselves out of fear of deportation (Sullivan & Rehm, 2005). According to Ellis and Chen (2013), the “fear of confiding in others as well as pain associated with the experience of living in the shadows” have tested researchers' understanding of the psychological effects of being undocumented (p. 251). Additional obstacles, including language barriers and the variation of experiences related to country of origin, class, education, occupation, and existing support networks, were also cited (Ellis & Chen, 2013). Furthermore, early studies of undocumented immigrants have been

conducted either in Mexico, with return migrants, or in the United States, with apprehended undocumented immigrants (Hontagneu-Sotelo, 1994). These methodological strategies effectively undersample and underestimate the presence of long-term settlers, particularly women and children. Additionally, researchers seldom referred to, much less described, documentation status and often used inconsistent operational definitions, assessment tools, and variables, further underscoring the unique mental health risk profile of undocumented immigrants (Sullivan & Rehm, 2005).

### **First-generation Undocumented Immigrants**

As much of the existing literature has focused on first-generation undocumented immigrants of Mexican descent, it mostly emerged within the medical field. For example, in a meta-analysis of the mental health of undocumented Mexican immigrants (UMIs), Sullivan and Rehm (2005) found that when compared to their documented counterparts, UMIs fared worse on multiple quality of life factors, such as housing, employment options, access to medical care, wages, level of education, and kinship networks. According to the authors, UMIs had higher rates of mortality stemming from diabetes, homicide, chronic liver disease, and human immunodeficiency virus infection than the general population. The study found the following themes to reflect the mental health status of UMIs: (a) failure to succeed in the country of origin; (b) dangerous border crossings; (c) limited resources; (d) restricted mobility; (e) marginalization and isolation; (f) blame/stigmatization and guilt/shame; (g) vulnerability/exploitability; (h) fear and fear-based behaviors; and (i) stress, depression, and health implications. Specifically, the stressful experience of living in a hostile environment, with a constant fear of deportation and the resulting hypervigilance as well as experiences of discrimination, increased UMIs' risk for depression. Beyond the acculturative stress factors, such as disrupted social networks,

unfulfilled financial expectations, incompatibility between cultures, and distance between home and host country, “legal status stress” was found to have a significant effect on immigrants’ perceived health status (Finch & Vega, 2003, as cited in Sullivan & Rehm, 2005).

More recently, Arbona, Olvera, Rodriguez, Hagan, Linares, and Wiesner (2010) conducted a study examining the differences in the prevalence of three immigration-related challenges between documented and undocumented Latina/o/x immigrants. Challenges included separation from family, traditionality, and language difficulties, all in the context of the passage of restrictive immigration legislation in 1996. In the study, 416 documented and undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants living in two major cities in Texas completed the Hispanic Stress Inventory, an acculturative stress assessment tool used to determine the combined and unique associations between legal status, immigration-related challenges, fear of deportation, and acculturative stress related to family (intrafamilial) and other social contexts (extrafamilial). According to the study, undocumented immigrants reported higher levels of immigration challenges compared to documented immigrants. Both groups, however, reported similar levels of fear of deportation. Results also indicated that while immigration challenges and undocumented status are uniquely associated with extrafamilial acculturative stress and not with intrafamilial acculturative stress, fear of deportation emerged as a unique predictor of both forms of acculturative stress (Arbona et al., 2010). This study highlighted the unique impact of undocumented status on acculturative stress.

### **Children of Undocumented Immigrants**

As stated in Chapter I, there were 5.5 million children with at least one undocumented parent in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011), of whom 2 million were undocumented themselves (College Board, 2009). As 73% of undocumented immigrants had children born in



the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2009), mixed-status families, where at least one individual is undocumented (typically the parent[s]) and one member is a U.S. citizen (usually the child), are common and profoundly affected by “draconian arrest, incarceration, and deportation practices of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011, as cited in Delva et al., 2013, p. 26).

A community-based participatory study of 20 immigrant youth affected by documentation status, in which 12 were undocumented themselves (Delva et al., 2005), indicated that children of undocumented immigrants live with the fear that their parents may be arrested, incarcerated, and/or ultimately deported. In addition, since children often witnessed the forced entry, arrest, and even violent apprehension of their parent(s), they experienced a considerable number of mental health problems that are at the very least aggravated by these immigration enforcement policies and activities. The most common clinical problems of children of undocumented immigrants in this study included attention problems, anxiety, depression, and withdrawal (Delva et al., 2005).

Similarly, a recent study exploring the consequences of the threat of detention and deportation for the physical and mental health of U.S. undocumented families (Satinsky, Hu, Heller, & Farhang, 2013) concluded that high deportation rates—over 419,384 in 2012 alone (Passel, 2013)—may result in significant hardship and mental health risks, particularly for the children in these families. The study estimated that if 2012 deportation rates remain consistent, children of undocumented parents will experience a decline in health status as well as educational outcomes, diminished access to food, and higher rates of poverty. Additionally, an estimated 100,000 U.S.-citizen children may show signs of withdrawal or detachment from others with the absence of a parent due to immigration-related arrest. Notably, these children

will suffer behavioral problems, such as aggression, anxiety, and withdrawal, which are linked to poor school performance and poor development (Satinsky et al., 2013).

### **1.5-generation Undocumented Immigrants**

Existing research on undocumented immigrants who arrived in early childhood, also known 1.5-generation immigrants, noted that immigration documentation status dampens future aspirations and sensitizes them to the reality that they are blocked from integrating legally, educationally, and economically into U.S. society (Abrego, 2006, 2008). In a 2011 study by Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners, results indicated that the denial of financial aid inhibits undocumented students from pursuing higher education. According to the authors, undocumented students faced additional stress in their pursuit of higher education, including paying for their education through work, making family contributions, receiving few scholarships, and employing strategies such as working more and taking fewer classes. These stressors, in turn, were linked with poor Latina/o/x retention and graduation rates (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011).

Drawing on 150 interviews with undocumented 1.5-generation Mexican-origin immigrants in California, Gonzales (2011) examined the complex transition from adolescence to adulthood, which involves leaving the legally protected status within the K-12 school system and entering into adult roles that suddenly require legal status. According to the author, the abrupt shift from a protected to an unprotected state had a profound impact on identity development, socialization, future orientation, and economic mobility, moving these youth from their respective social class into a “new, disenfranchised underclass” (p. 604). Gonzales referred to the interaction between family poverty and immigration status as leaving these youth in a “developmental limbo,” in which family needs required undocumented youth to make significant

financial contributions and assume considerable responsibility for their own care, while legal restrictions kept them from participating in many adult activities. As such, they often had adult responsibilities without the ability to participate fully in many of them.

Through interviews with 1.5-generation young adults aged 20 to 34 years who migrated before the age of 12, Gonzales (2011) identified three distinct transition periods: (a) *discovery*, during ages 16 to 18; (b) *learning to be illegal*, during ages 18 to 24; and (c) *coping*, between ages 25 to 29. Starting with the period of *discovery*, most participants in this study reported dramatic shifts in their daily lives and future outlooks around age 16. Public schooling provided them with an experience of inclusion uncharacteristic of the experience of undocumented adults (Chavez 1998, as cited in Gonzales, 2011). Consequently, participants spent their childhood in a condition of “suspended illegality, a buffer stage wherein they were legally integrated and immigration status rarely limited activities” (Gonzales, 2011, p. 608). Similar to research on second-generation immigrants, participants developed aspirations based on the acceptance they experienced in school settings and the belief that they will have better opportunities than their parents. According to the author, this period was crucial in supporting academic aspirations and identity formation. Upon discovery of immigration status, important adolescent transitions like finding a part-time job, obtaining a driver’s license, and applying for financial aid for college suddenly became impossible. Participant reactions included confusion, anger, frustration, and despair, followed by a period of “paralyzing shock.” Unprepared for the sudden limits of their rights, these youth reacted with anger and frustration as they struggled to make sense of their experience (Gonzales, 2011).

Following the period of discovery of their status, Gonzales (2011) identified a second shock as participants realized the long-term effects of unauthorized status. This second period,

which Gonzales identified as *learning to be illegal*, was characterized by identity shifts, exclusion from important rites of passage, a growing mistrust of teachers and peers, and eventual withdrawal from school and social support systems. In the next phase, *coping*, Gonzales remarked on the irony that while many respondents believed they had been lied to in childhood, “they [adopted] lying to themselves as a daily survival strategy that [separates] them from the very peer networks that had provided support and shaped a positive self-image” (p. 615). Confirming results of earlier studies, Gonzales found that frustration with present limitations, uncertainty about future challenges, and discord with strained support systems caused many participants to withdraw, with harmful effects on their progress during the last half of high school (Abrego, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Most recently, McWhirter et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study with 475 Latina/o/x high school students using a perceived barriers scale. Results indicated that students anticipating immigration status problems had lower vocational outcome expectations and anticipated more external barriers to pursuing their postsecondary plans. Notably, Latina and older high school students were more likely to attend 2-year colleges instead of 4-year colleges and were less likely to envision a future beyond high school. These results implied that gender and age moderated the impact of immigration status on vocational expectations and postsecondary plans.

**Health and adjustment of emerging adults.** A new focus of developmental research is on individuals between 18-29, also known as emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). Age 18 marks a variety of legal transitions, such as being allowed to vote and sign legal documents. The traditional transition to adulthood is typically marked by milestones including: completing school, moving out of the parental home, establishing employment, getting married, and

becoming a parent. Considered to be years of profound change and importance, Arnett argued that the increases in the median age of marriage in the United States (from 21-23 in 1970 to 25-27 by 1996) and number of individuals obtaining higher education after high school (from 14% in 1940 to over 60% in 1995) were responsible for the new shift in development. As young people spent more time in postsecondary schooling, they were delaying exit from the parental household, entry into full-time work, and decisions about marriage and children (Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut 2005, as cited in Gonzales, 2011). As marriage and parenthood were delayed until the mid-to-late-20s for the majority of people, it was no longer normative for the late teens and early 20s to be a time of entering and settling into long-term adult roles, but rather a period of change and exploration.

Arnett (2000) stated that risk factors associated with the changing values of emerging adults were that young adults tended to see the world as grim, feel pessimistic about the future of their society, and have a prevalence of risky behavior that peaks not in adolescence but during the late teens and early 20s (e.g., unprotected sex, substance use, driving at high speeds and while intoxicated). Arnett also found that individualistic qualities, such as accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, determining personal beliefs and values, establishing an equal relationship with parents, and gaining financial independence, were important factors in conceptualizing the transition to adulthood. However, Arnett noted that Latina/o/x emerging adults also valued becoming capable of supporting a family financially as an added criterion for adulthood.

In the earliest study on undocumented college students, Dozier (1993) found three central emotional concerns for this group: fear of deportation, loneliness, and depression. According to the author, students' fear of deportation was central to undocumented students' experience,

influencing almost every aspect of their lives, including being afraid of going to hospitals.

Unable to obtain work authorization, students stayed in unfavorable work conditions out of fear of not being able to find another job. Notably, the study found that undocumented students were often reluctant to develop close emotional relationships with others for fear of their undocumented status being discovered (Dozier, 1993).

Emerging adults from less advantaged immigrant households delayed postsecondary schooling because their parents were not able to provide financial assistance or they had considerable financial responsibilities in their households that made it highly unlikely for them to afford tuition (Gonzales, 2011). Unlike documented peers who lingered in adolescence due to safety nets at home, many undocumented youth started contributing to their families and taking care of themselves, placing them in jeopardy of becoming a disenfranchised underclass. According to Gonzales, “blocked mobility caused by a lack of legal status [rendered] traditional measures of inter-generational mobility by educational progress irrelevant: the assumed link between educational attainment and material and psychological outcomes after school [was] broken” (p. 620). Those who went on to pursue higher education in the face of uncertainty found themselves underprepared for the disparity between their levels of education and the limited options that awaited them in the low-wage, underground labor market (Gonzales, 2011).

More recently, Gonzales et al. (2013) compared three studies examining the relationship between undocumented immigrant status and mental and emotional health for 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants in Los Angeles, Washington State, Boston, and New York City who grew up in the United States. The authors discovered a large gap in the classical model of development, asserting that “coming of age as ‘illegal’ means exclusion, the inability to meet developmental milestones, constricted social networks, and absence of purpose or

belongingness” (p. 1191). Results indicated that identity threats and constant exposure to stress left undocumented youth vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes, including externalizing behaviors such as impulsivity in relationships and drug use, and internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and even suicide. The undocumented youth’s internalization of their immigration status led to social isolation. Specifically, the study found that the concealment of their status, self-censorship, and hyperawareness about others discovering their status led to spending less time in public spaces, rarely venturing outside their communities, having difficulty trusting others, and struggling to build and maintain healthy relationships (Gonzales et al., 2013).

**Resilience in Latina/o/x undocumented immigrant youth.** Despite the vast barriers described in studies on 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants, several studies have highlighted the factors that led some of these youth to pursue higher education and community involvement. In a retrospective case study on the academic resilience of two Stanford graduates of Mexican origin, Cabrera and Padilla (2004) linked various factors to the academic success of undocumented immigrants: strong connection to their cultural heritage, social support, rapid English language acquisition, the role of linguistic broker, personal motivation, and awareness of college culture. Despite feeling marginalized via racial profiling by police and anti-immigrant policy efforts, both individuals learned to utilize their struggles to their advantage (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). For example, both individuals adopted the role of English translator for their parents and relatives. Frequently being asked to translate important legal documents, medical diagnoses, and parent-teacher communication allowed both individuals to gain access into a world normally reserved for adults.

The most important protective factor shared by both individuals, relevant to the mental health profession, is the strong sense that they are valuable not only as individuals but also to

society at large. This strong sense of confidence or self-esteem was the basis for their academic motivation and positive attitude about their future. Despite the frequency with which this population faced adverse risk factors associated with their present legal and socioeconomic status, undocumented immigrants like these young people graduated from high school with sufficient academic achievement to be admitted into postsecondary institutions. Consequently, mental health providers serving undocumented immigrant populations are able to recognize and promote the factors that led them to succeed in the face of adversity as they continued to cope with the effects of their legal status as adults.

Similarly, a larger study by Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2009), which examined the academic resilience of undocumented immigrant Latina/o/x students, found that high-risk students experiencing high levels of both personal and environmental protective factors had higher academic outcomes than students with lower levels of these protective resources. Risk factors included elevated feelings of societal rejection, low parental education, and high employment hours during school. Meanwhile, personal and environmental protective factors included supportive parents, friends, and participation in school activities. The results from regression and cluster analyses (N = 104) were consistent with the findings on Latina/o/x academic resilience mentioned earlier as well as with Cabrera and Padilla's (2004) reflections.

Gonzales (2011) also identified protective factors against legal barriers for high-achieving 1.5-generation undocumented youth, including extra-familial mentors, access to information about postsecondary options, financial support for college, and lower levels of family responsibility. Although these results were consistent with studies on youth resilience more generally, Gonzales posited that these factors took on added significance for undocumented youth. Specifically, he attributed the intervention of caring adults to helping reduce anxiety and



minimize barriers that allow undocumented youth to delay entry into legally restrictive adult environments and make successful transitions to postsecondary institutions (Gonzales, 2011).

**Activism of undocumented immigrant youth.** Few studies have focused on the unique role that activism plays in mitigating the stress of immigration status. Perez et al. (2009) examined the civic engagement patterns of undocumented Mexican students and found surprisingly high rates (90%). The authors surveyed 126 students' participation in social service, activism, tutoring, and functionary work. Survey data results found that females and students with higher academic achievement and extracurricular participation demonstrated higher civic engagement, whereas older students were more likely to have participated in activism. These high rates of civic engagement were notable since participants also reported high rates of feelings of rejection because of their undocumented status, part-time employment, and household responsibilities.

Recently, researchers have begun exploring the impact of rights-granting legislation (proposed and passed) on the civic engagement of undocumented immigrant youth (Abrego, 2008; 2011; Morales, Herrera, & Murry, 2011). In 2008, Abrego conducted a longitudinal qualitative study of undocumented immigrant youth's legal consciousness surrounding the passage of Assembly Bill 540, which granted in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants in California. Findings demonstrated that the student identity of undocumented youth provided a neutral, socially acceptable label that hid their stigmatized undocumented immigrant status. Abrego suggested that academically high-achieving undocumented immigrants were strongly shaped by U.S. social values, such as objective meritocracy and individualistic upward mobility, and thereby were motivated to become involved in immigrant rights activism.

In a follow-up article consolidating the findings of two separate longitudinal qualitative studies, Abrego (2011) highlighted the intersection between legal status with factors such as generational status, gender, national origin, race, order of migration, and educational attainment. For example, 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants experienced their legal status as a source of stigma rather than as the fear experienced by first-generation undocumented immigrants. She posited that many members of the 1.5 generation were often “too young to participate in the decision to migrate, [did not] often recall details of the migration journey, and [occupied] legitimized spaces in the [U.S.] as students in educational settings where they [were] safe from ICE raids and deportation” (p. 363); therefore, they were unwilling to view themselves as marginal or disenfranchised members of society. As such, these youth, particularly when they are academically resilient, are moved to become active in the immigrant rights movement, demanding full inclusion in U.S. society.

### **Current Study**

Given the growing population of undocumented Latina/o/x immigrants who came to the United States as children, there is a need for research that explores the risk and protective factors of their experiences growing up in the United States. As methodological and legal issues affect accessibility to this population, educational settings continue to be an excellent source of protection against risk factors. As undocumented immigrants transition through adolescence, they emerge as adults in a very different world. Since they are no longer protected by a non-adult status against deportation, they must take more serious risks with illegal employment if they intend to go to college without financial aid. They must also face the reality that they may never be able to utilize their American education in the United States.

As a growing number of undocumented youth are exposed to the proposal and passage of rights-granting legislation, their strong ties to American cultural values via the U.S. education system propel them to seek out support systems through various student groups and community organizations. As activists in the immigrant rights movement, these youth are in a unique position to advocate for undocumented immigrants who face even greater risks for deportation and stigmatization. However, the mental health risks associated with undocumented Latinas/os/xs are increasingly apparent, forcing mental health professionals to broaden their understanding of how best to support them.

The current study explored the psychological impact of immigration documentation status on DACAmented Latina/o/x immigrant rights activists. A qualitative method was used as a way to construct a rich conceptualization grounded in the voices of participants who are members of this vulnerable, yet resilient, population. Employing a method based on constructivist and feminist frameworks called Consensual Qualitative Research, this study attempted to give voice to a growing and politically engaged population of undocumented immigrants. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this investigation was to contribute to the psychological understanding of the consequences of activism among Latina/o/x 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants. Therefore, the study hoped to explore whether activism served as an aggravator of and/or a buffer from the psychological stress associated with immigration documentation status. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How has immigration documentation status affected the psychological functioning of Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants?
2. What role does activism in the immigrant rights movement have on their psychological health?

3. How do Latina/o/x cultural values intersect with their experiences as undocumented immigrants?

## Chapter III

### METHOD

Words have no borders. Every experience deserves a hearing. Everyone has a story to tell and we are all better for the telling.

–Edwidge Danticat

The qualitative research methodology used in this study is Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) (Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). CQR is rooted in the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967), an iterative methodology of analyzing research, allowing for continuous comparison until the core ideas have been verified. This method is also consistent with feminist theories in its attention to power dynamics and belief that participants are the experts of their experiences. Although CQR shares many features of other qualitative methods, including conducting research in natural settings, emphasizing description rather than explanation, and stressing the importance of context when deriving meaning, it is unique in its use of multiple researchers to reach consensus and a systematic approach of examining the representativeness of results across cases (Hill et al., 1997). The ultimate aim of CQR is to integrate the strongest features of the existing qualitative methods within a rigorous and easy-to-replicate model (Hill et al., 2005).

The essential components of a CQR study include the use of: (a) open-ended semi-structured questions, focusing on consistency of data across individuals while allowing for in-depth examination of individual experiences; (b) several judges throughout the data analysis

process, fostering multiple perspectives and minimizing bias; (c) consensus to arrive at judgments about the meaning of data; (d) at least one auditor who verifies the work of the primary team and minimizes the effects of groupthink; and (e) domains, core ideas, and cross-analysis in the data analysis. Philosophically, CQR is mostly constructivist, with postpositivist elements, in the sense that researcher and participant are viewed as having a mutual influence on each other (constructivist), while using a standard protocol to uncover consistencies (postpositivist) (Hill et al., 2005).

### **Participants**

Hill et al. (1997) recommended that the researcher randomly select from a homogeneous population participants who are very knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation. For this study, participants who identified as Latina/o/x, DACA recipients, and activists in the immigrant rights movement were recruited. Since the DREAM Act has not yet passed, individuals who had already received a protection from deportation and work permit were recruited. DACA recipients were ideal participants for this study for the following reasons: (a) the requirements for DACA are based on the DREAM Act, (b) DACA recipients are protected from deportation and therefore more likely to be willing to speak about their experiences as undocumented immigrants, and (c) DACA recipients are also likely to be active in the immigrant rights movement.

According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website (<http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca>), an individual may request DACA if they: (a) were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012; (b) came to the United States before reaching their 16th birthday; (c) have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time; (d) were physically present in the

United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making their request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS; (e) had no lawful status on June 15, 2012; (f) are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and (g) have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety. Therefore, for the purpose of the study, the individuals recruited were between the ages of 18-34. Since activism can vary from membership in various political and student organizations, to involvement in protests and demonstrations, to community organizing, participants who self-identified as activists in the immigrant rights movement met the criteria for this study.

Hill and colleagues (2005) suggested the optimal number of participants in a CQR study is 8 to 15 participants. According to the authors, previous CQR studies involving fewer than eight participants tended to have more in-depth data per participant. However, when too few cases were used, results were less stable and consistent; that is, homogeneity among participants was harder to achieve. As such, for the current study, 12 participants were recruited to maximize the stability and consistency of the data.

The sample consisted of 12 Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants involved in immigrant rights activism, eight women and four men from Mexico ( $n = 10$ ), Guatemala ( $n = 1$ ), and Dominican Republic ( $n = 1$ ). Participants' ages at the time of interview ranged between 18-32 ( $M = 24.17$ ,  $SD = 4.43$ ). They reported living in the United States between 13-27 years ( $M = 18.5$ ,  $SD = 4.66$ ). Participants' highest level of education included a high school diploma/G.E.D. ( $n = 5$ ), Associate's degree (A.A.) ( $n = 4$ ), and Bachelor's degree (B.A./B.S.)

(n = 3). All listed various experiences in community organizing, protests/demonstrations, or memberships related to the immigrant rights movement.

## **Instruments**

### **Demographic Form**

Participants were asked to complete a demographic form that asked for the following information: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) country of origin, (d) age of migration to United States, and (e) level of education. Additionally, participants were asked to list any involvement in community organizing, protests, and demonstrations, or memberships related to the immigrant rights movement (see Appendix A).

### **Interview Protocol**

CQR literature suggests the use of detailed, semi-structured protocols, including both scripted questions as well as a list of suggested probes, to encourage interviewees to explore their experiences as deeply as possible (Hill et al., 2005). A semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was developed based on the literature review (see Appendix B). In keeping with Hill et al.'s (1997) suggestions for CQR data gathering, questions were developed to guide interviews, with the intention to remain open to participants' views, meanings, and experiences, and invite detailed discussion and reflection. Prompts were minimal and mainly focused on process and elaboration. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was based on key qualitative studies focusing exclusively on undocumented immigrant youth identity and mental health (Ellis & Chen, 2013; Gonzales et al., 2013). As recommended by Hill et al. (2005), both the demographic form and interview protocol were piloted with a minimum of two individuals from the target population in order to: (a) assist in refining the questions, (b) provide information



about the data that are likely to be obtained from each question, and (c) allow for practice using the protocol in the interview setting.

## **Procedures**

### **Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through word of mouth, flyers, snowballing techniques, and gatekeeper recommendations (Gonzales et al., 2013). They were recruited mainly from educational and community settings as well as national online communities (i.e., community colleges, university campuses, immigration organizations, and activist websites) that target undocumented youth (e.g., IDEAS, United We Dream, DREAM.US, Immigrant Youth Justice League, Define American, etc.). Although the numbers of undocumented immigrants from countries outside of Latin America have risen slightly since 2000, immigrants from Latin American countries, especially Mexico, continue to account for the majority (Passel & Cohn, 2009). As such, given that participants who identified as Latina/o/x were recruited for this study and already represent a majority of the undocumented immigrant community, immigrant rights organizations that are Latina/o/x-specific were not targeted.

### **Confidentiality and Informed Consent**

Each participant was informed of the nature and purpose of the research and their rights as participants. Individuals were asked to participate in a face-to-face interview with the primary investigator at a location agreed upon by the interviewee, whenever possible. Given that participants were recruited from all over the country and in-person interviews were not always possible, they were offered the option to conduct the interview via video call (Skype, Google Chat, etc.). Despite concerns regarding the quality of the investigator-participant rapport in telephone interviews, Hill and colleagues (2005) highlighted the potential for telephone

interviews to allow for participants' increased sense of privacy. This option was considered given participants' vulnerability regarding their immigration status. The interviews were conducted between the months of July 2015 and July 2016. The interviews lasted approximately 90-120 minutes. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed with the participants' consent. The transcriptions were analyzed consistent with CQR procedures outlined hereafter.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To provide the maximum protection of confidentiality for participants who, although currently protected from deportation because of an executive order, may lose such protection in the future if such executive order is discontinued, written consent was not collected. Although the participants' immigration status is low-risk compared to other adults who do not have protection from deportation, there was also a concern that in describing their experiences as activists in the immigrant rights movement as well as growing up undocumented, they may mention others, particularly parents and other family members, who do not have protection from deportation. Although all participants were given pseudonyms, waiving the written consent further protected the confidentiality of participants and increased their comfort in discussing this sensitive information. Consent was confirmed verbally and recorded, with a signature from the investigator. Finally, in keeping with protective strategies employed by Gonzales et al. (2013), the following additional procedures were adopted in this study: (a) pseudonyms were used to avoid use of identifying information; (b) last names, addresses, names of schools, or employment were not collected; (c) audiotapes were destroyed after transcription; and (d) all records of correspondence were destroyed. Participants were notified of these measures during the recruitment process.

## Data Analysis

### Methodology

In CQR, data analysis involves three central steps: (a) topics used to group interview data, or *domains*; (b) summaries of the data within domains, or *core ideas*; and (c) common themes across participants, or *cross-analysis* (Hill et al., 2005). The primary investigator recruited participants and conducted and transcribed all interviews. Once the primary investigator conducted the data collection, a small team of researchers conducted the data analysis by reaching consensus about the meaning of the data. A separate auditor experienced in qualitative research then reviewed the data analysis. In a review of previous CQR studies, Hill and colleagues (2005) recommended the use of primary research team members who are at the same level of power to mitigate the potential for power struggles. Additionally, to establish the trustworthiness of the data analysis and accuracy of findings, the authors recommended the use of participants to verify the accuracy of the data either before or after data analysis. Therefore, two team members and one auditor who were also doctoral/postdoctoral researchers in counseling psychology and had experience conducting qualitative research were recruited for the data analysis. Participants were offered the opportunity to share feedback at three stages of data analysis. The following documents were offered: (a) initial transcripts, (b) a draft of the final results, and (c) a copy of the final dissertation and any future publications. Three participants reviewed their initial transcripts.

The following section discusses the process of data analysis using CQR. First, the development of domains is described. Next, the process of identifying core ideas within each domain is followed by a description of the cross-analysis phase, highlighting the role of the auditor throughout. Lastly, the biases and expectations of the CQR research team are identified,

including a description of how the research team worked to process these issues throughout the data analysis phase.

### **Domain Development**

Once the 12 interviews were completed and the audio-recordings transcribed, the CQR team began the process of developing domains, by which the raw data were grouped into broad themes. Per guidelines by Vivino, Thompson, and Hill (2012), the initial domain list was based on the interview protocol. For example, domains for the study regarding participants' migration experience (interview protocol section 1) included "reason for migration" and "educational experiences." Once the team developed the initial domains, each member worked independently to code the first interview transcript or first "case" and then reconvened to compare their domain lists and reach consensus on the initial domain list. By focusing on one case, the team worked together as a group in the consensus-building process before proceeding with the subsequent interviews.

Hill and colleagues (1997) noted that domains often change to reflect the data more accurately. In this study, domains were eliminated when no data appropriately fit an initial domain; domains were added that emerged from participants' responses not directly addressed in the interview protocol; and domains that were "double-coded" were merged when possible. For example, two themes that emerged from the analysis that were not explicitly stated in the original interview questions included "impact of pre-migration factors" and "impact of DACA."

### **Generating Core Ideas**

The next step of the data analysis process of CQR was the generation of core ideas. According to Hill and colleagues (1997), the creation of core ideas is the process of distilling the participants' words in each domain into a few select words. Team members independently read

the data of the first case within all domains and identified the corresponding core ideas. For example, a core idea of this study was “become involved with activism through experiences of discrimination and a desire to promote the rights of undocumented workers.” After the generation of core ideas, the team created a consensus version after they agreed on the core ideas’ content and wording. The consensus version was then sent to the auditor, who checked both the organization of data into domains and the faithfulness of the core ideas. The team incorporated this feedback into the consensus document before proceeding to create consensus versions of the remaining interviews.

### **Cross-analysis**

During the cross-analysis phase, the team compared the different cases to determine whether similarities occurred across participants’ experiences. At this stage, the team generated categories, or patterns, across cases but within a single domain. Members then divided the domains equally and developed the categories for the cases within their assigned domains. Next, the team members independently reviewed each other’s proposed categories and met to discuss them until reaching consensus. Lastly, the auditor reviewed the categories and made recommendations that were then considered by the team.

### **Frequency Labels**

Hill and colleagues (2012) recommended using frequency labels to describe how often the categories represented the experiences of the entire research sample. For instance, a category consisting of data from: all participants or all but one participant is labeled *general*; more than half of the participants up to the cutoff for general is labeled *typical*; between two and half of the participants is considered *variant*. For this sample, a demographic variable occurring 11-12 times was labeled *general*, seven or more was labeled *typical*, and 2-6 was labeled *variant*. Per

guidelines by Hill and colleagues (1997), categories representing only one of the cases were discarded because they were not considered representative of the sample. Additionally, the research team made attempts to reintegrate these categories by developing broader categories (Hill et al., 1997).

### **Research Team**

An important aspect of the data analysis process was the acknowledgment of the social identities, including those relevant to this study, as well as the bias of all team members. Hill and colleagues (2005) highlighted the potential of the researcher's preconceived notions, beliefs, values, and biases to influence the data analysis. As such, the authors recommended consistent exploration and challenging of potential bias with team members prior to and throughout the research process, as well as including a section on researcher bias in both the Methods and Discussion section of the study (Hill et al., 2005).

Additionally, attention to team composition and interpersonal dynamics was an important component of the data analysis phase, given the collaborative nature of the consensus process. The primary investigator (PI) is a cisgender female, heterosexual, working-class, second-generation Mexican American, first-generation college student, and advanced doctoral student in counseling psychology. To remain connected to the data throughout the study, the PI conducted all data collection and transcriptions, and led the research team during the analysis phase. The PI intentionally recruited team members who were interested in the research topic and who represented diverse social identities, such as gender, ethnicity, and generational status (first-, second-...generation immigrants). Per Hill et al.'s (1997) recommendations, the PI recruited members with qualities inherent in consensus-building research, including the ability to resolve power differences, to challenge each other freely, and to negotiate and resolve differences.

Lastly, the PI recruited team members who were able to commit to a long and intense process of data analysis, including familiarizing/re-familiarizing themselves with CQR via selected journal articles and books.

In hopes of reducing the bias associated with social identities and clinical/research experiences, the PI invited an advanced doctoral student in counseling psychology and a postdoctoral counseling psychologist to the CQR team. Both team members shared a few social identities. For instance, they both identified as White, working-class, native born-U.S. citizens, married, first-generation and transfer college students. However, one member identified as cisgender female and heterosexual, while the other member identified as male-presenting, non-binary, genderqueer, and pansexual.

Hill and colleagues (2005) also recommended the selection of a strong auditor. Given their role of reviewing the work of the team and providing feedback to strengthen the analysis, auditors who are detail-oriented and experienced in CQR are ideal. In this study, the auditor included an early-career psychologist with CQR research experience, clinical experience working with Latina/o/x immigrants, and personal experience as a first-generation Latina/o/x immigrant.

**Biases and expectations.** Vivino, Thompson, and Hill (2012) suggested the research team process the potential for power differences among team members before the data analysis phase. As such, the team committed to discussing their process and any emerging group dynamics during team meetings. The CQR team also explored their individual and shared goals and expectations (Vivino et al., 2012). Team member goals included an enhanced perspective on the role of activism on the development of DACAmented Latinas/os/xs and professional development of qualitative research skills.

In hopes of processing their biases, team members discussed political affiliations, beliefs about immigration policy, and personal values surrounding the impact of activism on psychological functioning. For instance, the team members discussed their shared bias as advocates for marginalized communities, including experience working with and advocating on behalf of undocumented clients in various clinical settings such as hospitals, community clinics, and university counseling centers. The team members also spoke about their diverse cultural identifications, including the unearned privileges and experiences of oppression based on these identities. The PI shared her family's immigration story and its potential impact on her ability to challenge her assumptions. Lastly, the team members explored the expectations they had regarding the themes they anticipated would emerge during the data analysis phase. For instance, the team shared the expectation that participants would report experiences of oppression based on their immigration status and the corresponding negative impact on their psychological functioning. The PI anticipated that activism would serve as both a buffer against and a coping mechanism for dealing with this oppression.



## Chapter IV

### RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of the study data, analyzed using the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) process described in the last chapter. As recommended by Hill and colleagues (2012), the study data were organized first into domains and finally into categories. Next, the categories were assigned frequency labels that represented common experiences among the 12 research participants. Categories that were common among 11 to 12 of the participants were labeled general, categories common among 7 to 10 participants were labeled typical, and categories common among two to six participants were labeled variant. The categories that only applied to one of the participants were labeled as rare and were discarded because they were unrepresentative of the experiences of the study sample. Whenever possible, the author followed the recommendation of Hill and colleagues and included direct quotes from participants.

#### **Typical Case Narrative**

Vivino, Thompson, and Hill (2012) suggested that the results of a CQR study begin with a case narrative that illustrates a typical participant's experience. Categories with general or typical frequencies were used to construct a case that represented experiences shared by a majority of participants. In this study, participants were mostly women and immigrants from Mexico; as such, the typical case narrative is of a Mexican DACAmented woman involved in the immigrant rights movement.

The typical participant of this study can be represented as a 24-year-old woman who immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Her parents and older brother arrived first to join family already settled in the United States and working as migrant workers. She was raised by extended family in Mexico until her parents arranged for her to cross the border without inspection. As working-class Mexicans faced with stricter border enforcement and a worsening economy, her parents decided to settle permanently in the United States with the hopes for a better quality of life.

The typical participant described significant stressors related to her migration experience, including the impact of her age and mode of entry to the United States. She crossed the border at age 5 without her parents and reunited with them after a long period of separation. Once in the United States, she experienced significant educational and environmental stressors, including difficulty learning English in elementary school, having to move multiple times before settling into long-term housing, separation from her parents once in the United States due to high work demands, and poor living conditions upon arrival. However, she noted the positive impact of having supportive staff and peers at school, parents with high educational aspirations, neighbors who shared some of her social identities (race, ethnicity, immigration status, and social class), and a living environment that was significantly more diverse than Mexico. She credited these educational and environmental protective factors with her ability to cope with acculturative stress.

Additionally, the typical participant noted the impact of certain family dynamics on her migration experience. Although she referenced her family's level of connectedness, including growing up around family already settled in the United States, as protective against acculturative stress, her migration experience also isolated her from her family. For instance, her older brother

arrived to the United States as an adolescent and dropped out of high school, entering the workforce early to help his parents with household expenses and remittances sent to Mexico. By the time DACA was passed in 2012, he did not qualify due to his age of arrival and level of education. Her younger sister, on the other hand, was born in the United States and enjoyed the privilege of citizenship yet lived with the fear that her parents and/or siblings could be deported at any time. This participant, as a DACAmented immigrant who completed K-12 education in the United States, had educational and immigration status-related privileges yet faced immigration status-related risks distinct from her own family members. Within a mixed-status family, this participant's DACA status and increased cultural capital (higher English language ability, knowledge of the U.S. educational school system, etc.) also propelled her into a parentified family role. For instance, as a child, she was called on to translate for her parents, work alongside her parents during school breaks, and take care of her younger sister, while as an adult, she provided significant financial support to her family when they were unexpectedly unemployed due to job instability, health issues with limited healthcare access, and increased immigration enforcement.

During her senior year in high school, she experienced a “rude awakening” when she began to experience firsthand the barriers related to her immigration status. Deeply disillusioned by the exclusion from late adolescent milestones (e.g., getting a driver's license, travelling out of state for school trips, and applying for financial aid), she became depressed. She felt especially hopeless regarding her experience of educational barriers since school had always been a “safe haven” for her as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. She also noted that during this time, she coped by clinging to her ethnic identity, resenting her life in the United States in

comparison to her childhood memories of Mexico, which included more leisure and quality family time and significantly better housing conditions.

This participant described a keen sense of the risk of deportation and discrimination that is associated with being undocumented in the United States. She reflected on the messages passed down by her parents regarding the “reality” of being undocumented. Specifically, her parents warned that living as undocumented immigrants meant being cautious of others, not being fully accepted in American society, and ultimately, risking deportation. As such, she learned to hide her status, further isolating her from her peers.

Her strong connection to her family and her cultural values, including *familismo* (loyalty to family), *respeto* (respect for elders), collectivism (value of collective over individual needs), and *orgullo* (cultural pride), cushioned the blows of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies as well as discrimination by uninformed and unsupportive educational stakeholders. For instance, in an effort to maintain a balanced perspective towards immigration status-based stressors, she developed the skills of comparing herself to others. Although she acknowledged that she likely matured too quickly because of her status, her coping mechanism of comparison was consistent with the Latina/o/x cultural value *collectivism*, in which one’s existence is always relative to that of their entire community.

She further described her immigration status-related challenges as buffered by the presence of a supportive social system, much like when she first moved to the United States. Despite her friends not fully understanding the extensive impact of her immigration status, she was ultimately comforted by their sincere show of support. A strong network of social support was so instrumental, in fact, that it helped her persist in the face of these barriers. As an organizer, she met other undocumented youth and began to become increasingly more open

about her immigration status. She even quoted the DREAMer advocacy slogan “undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic” to describe her growing identity as an undocumented activist, who was “out” about her immigration status in order to advocate on behalf of undocumented immigrants still in the shadows.

This participant followed a nontraditional path to college as an undocumented immigrant. Rather than go to college after graduating high school, she joined her parents in the service industry full-time while helping her brother raise his two children. She became a leader in an immigrant rights organization and, as a result, gained the confidence she needed to pursue her educational goals once again. In her view, organizing inspired her to return to school and focus her organizing on opening educational opportunities for other undocumented students. In addition to providing her with leadership skills and the motivation to pursue her educational goals, with the trust of her community, she was able to use her own positive experiences to mentor other youth through the DACA and college application process. She was particularly inspired by the trust she gained from the elders within the immigrant rights organization, given that in Latina/o/x culture, *respeto* (respect for elders) is extremely valued.

As an organizer, she deemed that the benefits of “being out” as an undocumented activist outweighed the risks. Although difficult for her at first, since she was introverted and accustomed to concealing her immigration status, she realized the necessity of activism and the impact of firsthand narratives within the immigrant rights movement. She felt empowered by the act of sharing her story with non-immigrants who may not fully understand the issue, while also empowering other undocumented immigrants who are still in the shadows. Despite the benefits she experienced as an organizer, her experience was not a one-size-fits-all model for coping with immigration status-related stressors. In her view, the biggest challenge in organizing was

helping others understand that her story is not representative of everyone in the community. Even in her own family, she and her siblings were on different paths due to their access to postsecondary education and DACA. In a sense, by being in the safety of the “college bubble” and fitting the stereotype of the “good immigrant,” she understood well the compromises involved in organizing efforts that often promoted the rights of a “deserving” group of undocumented immigrants at the expense of others.

Despite experiencing hardships as an undocumented immigrant, she maintained her focus towards the future and the ways in which she can continue to use her educational and work opportunities to help her family, first and foremost. In reflecting on her experience as an undocumented immigrant from Mexico who came of age in the United States, she took pride or *orgullo* in identifying with being a survivor. Her optimistic lens helped her appreciate her experience in the United States, particularly the diversity and privileges that are not available to immigrants living in resource-poor and anti-immigrant environments.

### **Domains**

The following section includes the results of the CQR analyses. The team’s CQR analysis yielded a total of 14 domains, or discrete topics, providing a basic format for understanding and organizing the participants’ experiences. Within the domains, the data were assigned to categories, which describe the interview content in more detail. Categories are noted below in italics. See Appendix F for a table that summarizes the domains. Gender-neutral pronouns, they/them/theirs, were used to protect participants’ privacy.

#### **Domain 1: Reason for Migration**

The first domain captured participants’ responses regarding the factors that led their families to move to the United States. Responses within this domain fell into three general and

one variant category. Almost all participants reported that their parent(s)' reason for migration was for a "*better life*." One participant commented:

Since the day that we came here, my mom made it known that the reason we came here, the reason they sacrificed everything, even their own education, was so that we can have a better life than they did because they did have degrees and they were able to pay for private schools for us back in Guatemala but they didn't feel like it was enough to what they would want their kids to have. They wouldn't want us to have to go through working all these hours and taking so many buses just to get to a school.

It was also general for participants to report that their parent(s) were *migrant workers* and had *extended family settled in the U.S.* before emigrating to the United States permanently. One participant described having a strong social network of relatives already living in the United States, easing their parents' transition from migrant work to permanent settlement in the following way:

My earliest memories of coming to the U.S. is family. Full of family. This is the main crux of my memories. I have a huge family. [My neighborhood] was the landing patch for a lot of my family when they first came to the U.S. They used to come back and forth; it used to be much easier.

The variant category included responses that parent(s)' reason for migrating to the United States was to escape *trauma*. As one participant explained, "there was an increase in violence within our village, a very major drug route up north. So our village and the region was subject to a lot of violence."

## **Domain 2: Age at Arrival to the United States**

Responses within this domain captured the age when participants first arrived to the United States and, as such, reflected the amount of schooling they completed in the United States. Responses fell into one typical and two variant categories. No general categories emerged within this domain. It was typical for participants to arrive to the United States when they were of *school age*, resulting in a mixed educational experience in both their home country

and the United States. Variant responses included participants arriving to the United States as *infants/early childhood*, resulting in completing all of their K-12 schooling in the United States and as *adolescents*, signifying a majority of schooling completed in their home country.

### **Domain 3: Mode of Entry to the United States**

Responses within this domain captured the process of migrating to the United States and included two typical and four variant categories. There were no general categories in this domain. It was typical for participants to report *entering the U.S. without inspection* and *without their parent(s)*. It was variant for participants to report entering the United States on a *tourist visa* and *with parent(s)*. A variant number of participants also described experiencing a *traumatic crossing* as they migrated to the United States. One participant recounted attempting to cross the border multiple times with their mother. During the second attempt, they were separated from their mother, who was detained and deported, leaving them alone to cross the border hidden in a stranger's vehicle. They recalled:

I was very disoriented by the whole migration trip. I remember when my mom told me we had to do it, I cried. I was just very sad. Really, honestly, I feel like the first time I was really sad in life, like really sad, not just crying over some things, but a real sadness, almost existential, very deep, was when I heard we were gonna migrate. And that whole event of us doing the physical crossing and everything. It was deeply impacting I think.... I always felt like my memory loss was significant and impacted by the migration. 'Cause when the migration starts, that's when my memories start folding like movies. That's when I start remembering real days and events. So I feel there was a moment of this was you before, this is you after.

Two participants described the impact of *multiple crossings* between their home country and the United States. One noted:

I did go back and forth to Mexico after I arrived. I went back to Mexico in 2000, I was seven. Then I went back to Mexico in 2002, so I was like nine. I do remember the sounds, I do remember having a gut feeling in my stomach that was not my home.



#### Domain 4: Migration Educational Experience

Responses within this domain captured the educational experiences of participants shortly after moving to the United States. Responses fell into two general, one typical, and five variant categories. Almost all participants described perceiving *school as a safe haven*. One participant remarked:

I think [my migration experience] was kinda nice, because I've always been a fan of school. My experience with school has been great since the beginning. I like school. I like learning. So, for me to go to school here was difficult, but at the same time, very exciting. The language was the difficult part. New people, new friends, new teachers. So, that was really cool for me personally.

Additionally, almost all participants' responses included perceptions of *high parental educational aspirations*. One participant commented:

My mom was a teacher in Mexico. So education was paramount in my household. It was never a deep pressure, but I needed to get straight As. There was a huge value on education and what it meant.

It was typical for participants to identify *difficulty learning English* as one of the most significant barriers throughout their early migration experience. One participant noted:

So just being around and living in different places led to uncertainty and I wasn't even focusing in school. I wasn't doing that well in high school because I was also struggling with the language. I was trying to learn English, so it was a very difficult time. Really, really, hard times. So, my depression didn't really go away. If anything I think it just got worse.

Variant responses regarding educational experiences that had a positive impact on their migration experience included *academic resilience* and *advanced academics in home country*, while *negative educational experiences*, *attended majority White schools*, and *worked while in school* had deleterious effects. In describing the impact of working while in high school, a participant remarked, "My parents have always had their little cleaning business. We all worked there. I started helping them out at 14. They paid us. I always thought, I don't want to stay like

this all the time.” Regarding the impact of attending majority White schools, one participant noted:

I went to another school on the other side of [my neighborhood], the rich White people side. It was there that outside of the comfort of our neighborhood, because my school used to be two blocks from my house, and so now I had to go across town to the rich White side. In that process a lot about my status was communicated to me. I learned about being cautious, about where I could speak Spanish, or being cognizant of not telling people where I was from or where I was born.

### **Domain 5: Environmental Factors in the United States**

Responses within this domain reflected neighborhood and other environmental factors affecting participants’ migration experience. Responses fell into three typical and one variant category. General categories did not emerge within this domain. Similar to their difficulty learning English, it was typical for participants to identify *moving multiple times* and variant for them to identify *poor living conditions* as significant barriers throughout their early migration experience. One participant described the significant impact of moving multiple times on the quality of their interpersonal relationships. They commented:

The constant moving didn’t help. It made it feel very unstable. The friends I made in [my old neighborhood] I lost when I moved to [another neighborhood]. It contributed to this feeling of like even when I’m around my friends, I didn’t have a deep connection with a lot of them. That’s something that the pattern of forced migration developed a pattern of loss following me throughout the U.S.

While some participants reported the environmental factor *diversity as protective*, others noted that living in a majority *immigrant/POC/working class community* had a positive impact on their early migration experience. For instance, one participant commented:

I was in a school with Latina/o/x students and Black students. I don’t remember White students. I grew up seeing kids who looked like me, I had friends in the apartment complex I grew up in and they were all kids of color. I also know there were a lot of migrants in our apartment complex. The lady below us sold popsicles, and different chips. I know she spoke Spanish. So, I know that transition was easy.

## Domain 6: Family Dynamics in the United States

Responses within this domain captured the family characteristics and shifts related to immigration. Responses fell into two general, two typical, and three variant categories. Almost all participants reported being members of a *mixed-status family*, either because siblings were born in the United States or an immediate family member(s) became naturalized. Another general category included participants' reflections on the impact of their *parent(s)' long work hours*. A participant noted:

It was different in Mexico, but I know here all the years I was growing up here, my mom would work a lot. Every day. [Both of my parents] would work 14, 16 hour days. They would work insane amount of hours. At this point since they're getting much older they're still working at it. But their bodies are gone. Their bodies are wasted. It's just taxing work.

It was typical for participants to be members of an *intact family*. An additional typical response included participants describing their position in their families as a *parentified role*. As one participant stated:

My role became caretaker of my siblings. I had to learn to clean and cook. I had to watch my siblings whenever needed. I had to be translator in the family. I also had to help my mom with doctor visits. I had to share everything I had, like a bag of Cheetos. I had to share with my cousins and uncle, with everyone. So I did have the responsibility that older siblings tend to have.... There have been times I've been frustrated. Like OMG why do I have to be so responsible and do so many things all the time. So, I do get really upset, especially if I have so many things to do and I feel overwhelmed.

One variant response related to family dynamics included the impact of *reuniting w/ parent(s)/sibling(s)* as they joined family members already settled in the United States. One participant recalled:

It was kinda weird. Because I think it was the first time I lived with my dad because he was absent a lot before that.... By the time I get to the U.S., I'm meeting my uncle for the first time, my dad I wasn't that close to. And I just had to be with them. It was disorienting. I missed my mom all the time.... Eventually my mom was able to make the trip successfully. It was just us for about two months again. And after that, my sisters

made the trip. Took them a span of a couple months between each of them. Then about two or three years later after that my brother finally came.

Other variant responses included participants' reports of *intergenerational trauma and bereavement*. One participant noted:

My mom went back to Mexico in 2003 and when she crossed the border, she's like yeah, *ha cambiado* [things have changed], things are worse. It broke my heart, because she was talking about her experience when she crossed the border for the second time. A guy fell in a pothole...they left him in the desert. My mom was like, that was tough. This man, I don't know him, I don't know his family, but he's a human being, and to say, you're on your own, it was hard. I did my best. I left him extra food, all my painkillers. *Pase sin painkillers, le deje agua* [I left him painkillers and water]. I tried to do the best I could. *Pero hasta hoy* [Until now], I don't know if he made it or not.

Unlike the above participants' experience of secondary trauma through their mother's traumatic border crossing, other participants experienced more direct trauma during their migration experiences. One participant remarked:

There was a period where my dad was really abusive, both verbally and physically, so that was also hard to deal with. And that's always been in the culture, you're taught to not speak up, so that also affected me growing up. Just having to step in and take care of my siblings, so there was a lot of that going on and having to adjust to transitioning.

### **Domain 7: Reactions to Immigration Barriers**

This domain captured participants' reactions to the barriers related to their immigration status. Responses within this domain fell into two general, three typical, and three variant categories. All participants reported that the central message they received regarding their immigration status was that it was a "*dangerous secret*" resulting in them *feeling "different."*

One participant commented:

The initial fear of "*Que estamos haciendo aqui? No tenemos papeles.*" [What are we doing here? We don't have papers.] I didn't really know what that meant but it was a secret I had to keep that was dangerous for me and my family. Immigration status was always something so dangerous to us, without really understanding at that age, but needing to keep my family safe at a very basic level.... In my elementary school and at that age I was very solitary.... There would often be very real tangible limitations to my participation. There was also just pure distress. I would get invited to have play dates

with my friends or invitations to birthday parties or other invitations and then I think my parents' general wanting to keep me safe prevented a lot of that, from me being able to go too far. So I think I was very insulated in my upbringing.... It was [a friend's] birthday and I had bought him a T-shirt, a nice T-shirt, but everyone else that came bought him like toy robots and really large, lavish, expensive things. When I gave him my present, I literally cried. I started crying and ran out of the house. I just felt such deep shame and disappointment. I wasn't able to offer him the same kind of offering that everyone else did because I couldn't afford it. It was this sense of not belonging. That was probably a very consistent theme in my life up until I graduated from college. I never felt like I really belonged.

A typical response from participants was their experience with *mental illness*. As one participant put it:

I've never been diagnosed or anything, I recognize the importance of it now as an adult, but growing up, I'm pretty sure I suffered from a lot of depression. We've hinted at it I think throughout this interview talking about migration traumas, family traumas, undocumented traumas—just being undocumented and how it relates to self esteem and so on. All those traumas are related to the status, I think. It affected me in terms of stigma, feeling like I don't belong, feeling like I'm not all there.

Participants' experiences with mental illness were often linked to another typical response, their *rude awakening* regarding the impact of their immigration status. One participant noted:

The moment when it really hit, and that I realized what it feels like [to be undocumented], was this experience of waking up every day for four years not knowing if my mother and father were going to be there. It's a type of weight and suffering and trauma that I don't even have words to put on. That first year in college was one of the hardest years of my entire life. I was in a deep depression that entire year. I don't remember most of that entire year, it was about coming to realize the weight of my status and what it meant. I didn't deal with it in the most healthy way, but didn't deal with it in the most destructive ways. I was in college, by myself. I could have done a lot of things but I was definitely in a deep hole, depression.

Another typical response regarding participants' reactions to barriers included their use of *cultural resilience*, or the use of racial/cultural, spiritual, and/or family values to cope with immigration status-related barriers. Through the use of *familismo* (loyalty to family), *orgullo* (cultural pride), and *respeto* (respect for elders) to cope with the barriers, participants found

solace in their religious faith while others were guided by their parent(s)' resilience as first-generation immigrants. One participant noted:

When I graduated from college and a lot of my peers were all having early twenties' crises about what to do with their life and what is this degree gonna go to and because I couldn't actually be employed, because I didn't have a directed path, that meant that I could create my own path. Rather than that being scary or intimidating it was incredibly liberating, to ask myself the question, "What was I gonna do if I wasn't going to get paid for it?" and the answer would be if I'm not going to get paid for this, it better feed my soul. So I dedicated my life to things that feed my soul, and that's what I've been doing for the past six years since I graduated from college. So that is the emblematic way that I've reframed and internalized what the limitations were of my status for myself.

Variant responses regarding participants reactions to barriers included "*growing up too fast*," *self-deportation as an option*, and *resentment*. Participants reflected on the impact that immigration status had on their development, particularly during adolescence. As one participant put it:

I guess in middle school it wasn't so much of "I'm undocumented and I know it," but I've always been very mature for my age, which I think is a good thing but at the same time it's a bad thing because when my friends were in love with some artist or something. I would be like "I don't know who that is, I spend most of my time cleaning and looking after myself because I don't have time to catch up on that." So there was always a gap between social media and pop culture and me never knowing about it. So I've always been very detached and even until now, when my roommates bring up references I don't know what they're talking about and they are like "Oh my god, didn't you have a childhood?" and I'm like "No, even if you're saying it as a joke, I didn't."

Another participant included the additional challenge that poverty placed on their experience as an undocumented immigrant:

The reality of having to grow up really fast was a result of our immigration status because we were poor. Everyone had to help out and everyone had to do it. I think the fear, distress, and anxiety is where a lot of things manifested. Especially when I was young, I would translate my parents' nervousness or anxiety, or distrust about something or someone, that I would often automatically think that it was due to our immigration status.

The impact of immigration status on educational aspirations left some participants considering *self-deportation as an option* to pursue their goals. One participant recalled:

In my head,...I was never going to college so what was the point. I thought of school, but in Mexico. I thought, I'm gonna graduate high school and then go back! That was my plan back then.

One participant reflected on their decision to remain in the United States upon learning that they aged out of eligibility to naturalize. They stated:

I thought "OMG, this is terrible!" Junior year to the first two years of community college, I had to figure out what I really wanted to do. It got to a point, where I really wanted to self-deport in 2011-2012. I took a step back, reflected in what role I played with my family. I thought, my brother is on the verge of diabetes, and I was the one taking care of his diet. I thought about not self-deporting.

Other participants' responses reflected on their *resentment* regarding their immigration status. Often this bitterness was directed towards family members and non-undocumented peers. One participant stated, "I resented my mom a little because I didn't understand the full impact of this. But now, to a certain extent, she would say that she just wanted to give us a better quality of life." Another participant reflected:

I think in the beginning it was a little bit of envy and resentment towards my immigration status and towards others. Because I'm thinking to myself, I'm trying just as hard as they are. Why can't I have that driver's license, why can't I apply for FAFSA.... I felt those reality checks were telling me I couldn't go beyond what I wanted to do.

## **Domain 8: Experiences of Oppression**

Within this domain, responses captured participants' experiences of oppression related to their immigration status. Responses fell within two typical and two variant categories. There were no general categories within this domain. A typical response included participants' reflections of *internalized racism*. One participant observed:

Mexican-Americans sometimes look down on Mexicans as *paisa* [derogatory word for new immigrants] and all that. And sometimes Mexicans themselves look down on Mexican-Americans for being very ghettoized or this and that.... Thinking about it deeply, it's a political thing too. In a way, many immigrants engage in respectability politics a bit. Because of their marginal status, being put in positions where they put themselves in danger, there's a respectability politics that is engineered from all of that in terms of them expecting that super-humanness from everyone. I admire and respect and

owe my entire life to the superhuman capacities of immigrant parents. It's intense. It's amazing. But at the same time, I can understand how people growing up here can succumb a bit to the forces of these ghettos/hoods and this and that. So it's a tough jarring experience.

While most participants noted internalized racism that they witnessed or were impacted by indirectly within their communities, some participants reflected on the impact it had on their own views regarding immigrants. One participant reflected:

I've never looked down on anybody for not having papers. I see legal status as necessary but not the ultimate. My parents support the house and they're not legal. I know people who are citizens and live off the government. Papers are needed to be stable but they're not necessary to survive. It's in the person—how bad do you want your goals? There are some people who are not oriented enough to get to where they want to. My parents are financially stable, they're smart enough to make a living here. As opposed to someone who's a citizen and they struggle way more than we do. People's hatred against Hispanics—oh, they're taking our jobs!—Donald Trump, for example. I don't agree with what he says—but there's some truths to it like how there are some bad Mexicans who live here, I've seen them. But just like there are bad people there are good people and that's who he is not mentioning. So I have had my perspective changed. Because I know both sides—having nothing to having something.

*Discrimination by stakeholders* was another typical response from participants regarding their experiences of oppression. One participant reported:

When I had to go apply to a job...I got there and said, "I came here to fill out a W-9" and [the work study office receptionist] says, "Yeah okay, can I see your Social Security number?" I gave her my employment authorization card and Social Security card and she just grabbed it and said "What is this?" And I told her, "It's my employment authorization card, it has the title right there," and she goes, "Is this your green card?" And I think I took it very personal.... I told her "I'm supposed to get a job with that" and she said, "We don't accept those kind of cards here," and I was like "Okay...no, you do" and she said, "Oh, so we're doing that now? All of a sudden we're granting [undocumented immigrants] jobs?"... Later, I saw my mentor, one of the mentors that got us the DACA thing, and the first thing I did was cry to her. I told her that I had just gotten discriminated against for being undocumented at a private Catholic Jesuit school, a school that is valued in social justice.

Two variant responses regarding experiences of oppression included *threats of deportation* and *shame regarding the criminalization* of their immigration status. One



participant described the heightened fear of deportation following near-deportation experiences of their father:

A very sad experience was when one of my cousins passed away.... The first reaction from my father was drive over there...he got stopped by the cops.... They asked him "Are you documented?" And my father was like, "No...the reason why I'm heading to [another state] is because one of my nephews passed away.... We need to go help with funeral costs." The cop was like, "Okay, I understand, but I need to call immigration." Apparently, he called immigration and they were too busy. So, they let him go.... The cop was like, "I'm not gonna drive you guys over there. If they don't wanna do their job, it's not mine to do theirs." This was before my brother got deported, so it was a fear, that day, I could've lost my cousin, my father, and my sister at the same time.

One participant reflected on the impact of the derogatory terms commonly associated with immigration status:

I really was introduced to the undocumented term not too long ago and frankly it's a better term. Because "illegal" is like you're a criminal...something wrong. And also it was actually even worse, "illegal alien." It's even more derogatory, like you don't even belong.

Another participant reflected on their emotional reactions regarding perceptions of undocumented immigrants as criminals:

It made me feel almost like I wasn't entitled to anything or I wasn't allowed to have anything because, since I was here without permission, it was like, how dare I take a position in class where someone, who is here legally, could have it. I almost felt like my position in the class wasn't valid, because I wasn't supposed to be here and I feel like I owed it to the students to maybe them have the things in class or them to be able to have positions in clubs.

### **Domain 9: Impact of Immigration on Cultural Identity**

Responses within this domain captured the impact of immigration on participants' cultural identities. Responses included four typical and three variant categories. There were no general categories within this domain. Typical responses regarding cultural identity included (a) *acculturative stress*, (b) *disillusionment with American identity*, (c) *romantic notions of home*

country, and (d) *pride regarding their immigration status*. One participant reflected on their experience dealing with intergenerational cultural clashes with their mother:

With my mom, a lot of the time she expects my brother and I to adhere to certain traditions that my cousins in Mexico do. For her, it's all about how it's done in Mexico and it's caused certain friction between the way I go about things. I tell her that maybe if I was in Mexico I would agree with her as something that needs to be changed but to a certain extent, I tell her that she brought me here and I've learned things this way and I think it should be this way.

Another participant noted the impact of their immigration status on their *disillusionment regarding their American identity*:

At a young age you're forced to love America. As a young kid you pledge allegiance. You do American things, you go see American football, you get your driver's license, you read American history. You do so many things that are American and when you find out you're not American, you're like, well, what am I? I speak more English than Spanish, I grew up here. This is where I call home. Like, I am not good enough to get citizenship? I felt like I was the only one. I felt isolated.

A typical response from participants related to cultural identity included *romantic notions of their home country*. Participants shared the impact of longing for their home country on their relationships. As one participant put it:

Over [in my home country] it's more simple and homey. Whereas here, people are just always busy. It is really a city because no one is paying attention to anyone else, they are paying attention to what they can do to better themselves. So, I believe it was a bit harder to even make friends because it was a completely different attitude than over there. I believe that over there since you don't have that many things, you are not worried about who has the next best phone or toys, you just want to be friends with someone and over here it's almost a competition.

Another participant remarked on the cultural differences regarding attitudes toward education:

Over [in my home country], I remember being in class and at the end of a class and at the beginning you would stand up and you would thank your teacher for teaching you that day. Whereas over here, students almost try to challenge the teachers and give them a hard time in class. And that, I never understood it. Like you have the advantage of being educated and have an education and you're giving that person a hard time. The attitudes were completely different. One was more thankful and the other one was "let me see how hard I can make your day today."

Despite not having many personal memories of their home country, one participant remarked:

I feel and from what I hear from my sisters and my brother, there's just so much more freedom. We lived close to our family, our grandma lived down the block, our *tias* [aunts] to the side of us, everyone in the neighborhood knew each other's grandmas, their *tias*...over here, it's like, nah, you don't get that. There's a separation between everyone.

Another typical response from participants reflected their *pride regarding their immigration status*. One participant noted that “being undocumented to me means being a survivor because a lot of people look at us and they're like, ah, *pobrecitos* (poor things) and I'm like no, we're not victims, we're survivors.” Their cultural identities are unique in that immigration status affects their various cultural identities. For instance, one participant remarked:

Compared to other undocumented folks who I know a lot of, I do think my experience—I like to say I'm undocumented Mexican because it's a particular experience. At some point, I think I was rebellious about the whole American thing and I would say I'm not American, I'm Mexican. Now I'm a little more settled with my identity and I can look more honestly at myself, and to be honest, I grew up here, like that's American. If it's a particular American experience—there's different American experiences, there's some that are very assimilated about it, some very conflicted, some angry about it. So I think it is an American experience, I have to keep it real. I don't feel I'm super Americanized but it's there. It's an undocumented Mexican living in America experience, you gotta be real about it. [I'm] definitely the most Americanized at the home.

Variant responses regarding cultural identity included the sentiment “*I'm not only undocumented,*” having a *strong connection to their ethnic identity*, and feeling “*caught between two worlds.*” One participant remarked:

I'm undocumented, that's part of who I am, that's a big part of the work that I do. But, it's not the only thing that's important about me, or the only thing I have to offer. It's held in balance with the rest of my identity and that's where I am at now in terms of my identity reflection.

While some participants reflected on a preference for a holistic cultural identity, other participants highlighted the added acculturative stress associated with multiple marginalized identities. For instance, one participant noted:

School, it was almost like a job to me. I knew that I had to be perfect all the time and I didn't have the time to even screw up. I remember there was kids that would go to school in like their pajamas and I would make sure to look good because it's my education, I need to get it done. I wouldn't go to a job with drool on the side, so I have to be presentable. After coming out, I felt like great, another problem. You know, not knowing I am an immigrant, but I'm also gay. It's like can it get any worse? I felt like with either community you're bound to get hate from one side, so I almost felt like, there was no break for me in there.

Another variant response regarding cultural identity was the hesitation towards a *strong connection to their ethnic identity*, out of fear of facing added discrimination. As one participant noted:

It's affected how I approach the beginning of a new relationship. Not necessarily a romantic relationship but any relationship in general, from even walking into an office or meeting a new person. I had always been afraid of identifying as a Latina/o/x. I have always been hiding behind the fact that I could pass off as not being Latina/o/x. Because people didn't necessarily have to ask me where I was from. I appreciated that to a certain extent. I didn't have to endure people asking me certain questions. And so, to a certain extent when people would ask me, "where is your accent from?" I tried to make it into a guessing game of where it would be me not trying to tell them where I was from. Until recently, like five years ago, when I started to meet more Latina/o/x people and interact with them and everything. I was like this is also part of me. It's part of who I am. It's not just me trying to hide or blend in or me trying to conform to this other culture because I think part of me is also my other culture. A big part of me tried to assimilate so much that I tried to also forget about that part of me in order to not wear it. That was also hard for me to realize that and I was not necessarily ashamed of it, but more afraid of it. Afraid of letting people realize and start asking questions, like "Why are you here?" I never wanted that and so...I would downplay that part of myself. It's not that I'm ashamed, there are lots of things about my culture that I love, I was just afraid to portray any of that.

Some participants also reflected on feeling "*caught between two worlds*," or experiencing rejection from multiple support systems for a number of reasons, including their educational attainment or skin-color privilege. One participant noted:

College was just hard when I came back home, from friends telling me that I sound so white-washed, that I didn't even know how to speak Spanish anymore. And that became a thing, because I spoke so much English when I was away from home and I was living on campus and when I would come back I would forget how to say basic things in Spanish. And I would get so frustrated because that is my first language and I'm forgetting to speak it. So then I would tell my parents to be patient with me too, because my mom would be like "*Cómo que se te olvidó como decir esto?*" [how could you possibly forget how to say that?]

## **Domain 10: Impact of Immigration on Education**

Responses within this domain captured the impact of immigration status on participants' educational trajectories. Responses included six typical and one variant category. This domain did not generate any general categories. Typical responses regarding the impact of immigration status on participants' educational trajectories included: (a) the usefulness of "*survival*" skills, (b) their experience as *non-traditional college students*, (c) the impact of having a *strong network of peers*, (d) the impact of *familismo* on their educational and career goals, (e) their experiences of *college feeling like a "bubble,"* and (f) their tendency to *defer their educational and career dreams*. One participant reflected on the usefulness of her self-advocacy skills in enrolling in college despite unsupportive and uninformed high school counselors:

It was the typical counselors saying "Sorry, there isn't much we could do." It was up to me deciding what to do. I remember thinking, well everybody could go to community college. And I ended up getting help from the Migrant Ed office and they couldn't help me more because I was not eligible for their program. They ended up telling me to email somebody from the community college and I did. I got a student ID number and began the process. But if it weren't for those Migrant Ed teachers, I wouldn't have gone to college. I had this vision of just working in the fields my entire life and maybe moving up into a job. And it would be like very basic and I would live a decent life. If my mother would have explained [the implications of my status], I don't think I would have been as open. I am very glad she didn't because I would have never said it. For example, if I didn't talk about being undocumented, I wouldn't have connected with people. If I didn't talk about my status, I would have not gotten help by the Migrant Ed office. I would have not gone to community college.

Participants tended to follow a *non-traditional college student* path following high school due to their status. One participant remarked:

So in HS, I wasn't trying really because I realized, I saw my sister having graduated high school and gone to community college, and she was directionless. So, I figured if that's my future, I don't see the point in trying so hard. Whatever, I was very unmotivated. I took the community college route cause I didn't have the grades to go to university. But once at community college, I buckled down, no messing around. I treated it like a business. And then obviously I took that break [from school]. Fortunately, I was able to go to [a local public university] after. But, in terms of non-traditional paths and everything, there was a point where I thought, I was not gonna go back to college.

Participants also described the significant impact of having a *strong social support* on their ability to cope with the immigration status-related barriers. One participant noted:

One thing that was incredibly powerful and transformative was, at least in my mind, the beginning of a deep spiritual journey, that I'm still on, of just letting people in.... I actually saw that it was not normal for someone my age to hold in everything that I was holding.... The depression and the feelings and thoughts that I had weren't healthy—it's what I always knew and was common in my family and community. It wasn't until I let folks in that I was able to understand how much I was carrying and that I didn't have to carry it. There was nothing I could do about my parents' immigration status. Accepting that was a really deep, powerful, and transformative process. I thank god for one of my Buddhist teachers. She was a religious teacher but she also taught Buddhism. She's the one that introduced me to Buddhist practices.... So I got put with an amazing counselor that now works at [a public university], and it totally transformed so much of that thinking. That I don't have to carry all this. I don't have to be responsible for all these things. So all these things that I had learned to be, slowly started to unlearn and what it really means to call people into my life and what it really means to talk about my life. What it means to accept the things I don't have control of and that what really matters most is how to respond to situations and not what the situations are. It was a deep moment of maturity.

Another typical participant response within this domain included *familismo/family-focused goals*, in which participants described educational and career goals that were strongly tied to using their privileges to give back to their parents and/or siblings. One participant stated:

So priority number one for me, for example, and not just me but for my sisters and brother as well.... We have these discussions where our priority really is to get [our parents] out of work ASAP. It's to be able to have enough money amongst ourselves to basically retire them. To have them stop working. Because it's insanely inhuman the degree they've had to work their whole lives. It is what it is but it's not good.

A typical experience that participants shared included the *deferment of their educational and/or career dreams*. One participant noted how immigration status dampened their career aspirations. They reported, “I feel for education I felt like I had to have a realistic career. I didn’t feel like I had the space to say, I don’t know what I want to do with my life, I’ll just see where life takes me.” Another participant described the process of moving away from their long-term career aspirations to adopting a more short-term approach. They remarked, “I remember I wanted to be a lawyer, or a gynecologist, and then I was like, I just want to be able to work. To work and survive.” Another participant remarked:

I was always fascinated by law. When I applied to college I didn’t apply for a legal field major. At this point, I knew I was going to go to college, but this specific field was an impossibility. I actually applied as a human resources major.

Participants also described that their time in college was an extension of the “safe haven” they perceived through high school. One participant highlighted the sense of stability and normalcy that college provided. They noted:

I’m going to college, I know what I’m doing the next four years.... I kind of lived in a bubble for four years, that I totally forgot I was undocumented and I was only reminded when I couldn’t study abroad. But, for the most part I was just like everyone else, I was getting a college education.

Once out of *the college “bubble,”* they reported concerns about the risks of entering the workforce. As one participant put it:

Being in community, being in such a supporting and warm loving place with people who really cared about me and were looking out for me in a protected place. So, that was the gift. The curse was when I got out, because there was a very steep learning curve that the rest of the world actually does not operate like that and that there was no more cohort of undocumented folks, that the world is a little harsher and a little more challenging and all these things. So, I’d kinda lose track of the grind and the hustle that was actually very necessary, and as I was transitioning out, I kinda lost it because I had become so comfortable in this reality that wasn’t reality. It was a created space for me.

Variant responses regarding educational and career goals included immigration status-related *decreased academic performance* and differences in access to *resources based on geographical location*. One participant reflected:

I didn't too well largely because I was an immigrant child in certain neighborhoods. It's tough.... I was an intelligent kid, for better or worse, just circumstantial really. I didn't too well in high school but teachers always did kind of see through me, and see that there was this kid that could...every now and then there'd be a paper and I would actually try and they'd see, oh okay, this kid can think.

One participant reflected on the immigration status-related lack of educational access based on geographical location:

I don't live near a public university. The university that is in my city has three thousand students and out of those three thousand students, only six are undocumented. And, out of those three thousand students, only sixty of them are transfer students from the community college. So, again, those numbers are ridiculous. It really reflects what my educational experience is and is going to be. And how that is going to shape out.

Another participant reflected on the impact that moving across states had on access to formal employment. They noted:

Well, in North Carolina, all you had to do was show some type of ID.... One of the things was your birth certificate, but it doesn't specify that it has to be a U.S. birth certificate. It just says your birth certificate and something else. When I got my learner's permit, they took my school transcripts and they took my birth certificate.... In Virginia, you couldn't get anything like that at all. So, once that expired, if you wanted to get a job, you need an actual driver's license, so she couldn't get another job. It's kinda hard.

### **Domain 11: Impetus for “Coming Out”**

This domain captured participant responses regarding the impact of leaving the shadows and coming out as “undocumented.” Responses within this domain fell into one general and two variant categories. Almost all participants reported that the impetus for coming out as undocumented was out of a sense of “*survival*,” or feeling forced to disclose their status in order to access resources, financial aid, and other college-related information. As one participant put



it, “the college process really caused me, forced me to begin to disclose my status. I just had a lot of questions and I didn’t know the answers to most of them.” Another remarked:

If I wouldn’t have spoken up, they would’ve never known about me.... When I went into school I knew that if you don’t talk, you’re screwed. You have to tell everybody you’re undocumented, so they can get resources for you. At least I knew that. I had learned from staying quiet that it wasn’t going to get me anywhere. So, I made sure that everybody in school knew that I had DACA, that I had problems, and that I needed money.

Variant responses regarding participants’ impetus for “coming out” included an increased sense of stability via *DACA* and experiences of *oppression*. One participant reflected:

The solidarity against [Donald Trump’s presidential campaign] was really strong. Now with a clear adversary and the political and philosophical backing, it became really easy to discuss immigration since that’s one of the major conservative talking points. I became the star of the show so let me step up to the plate and show what’s up. Everyone in my circle was shocked because I started sharing posts on my social media outlets. So then I really became involved in social media aspects of it. Once I disclosed my status, I started being a strong proponent of the immigrant rights movement. I also went to Congress for [an immigrant rights organization]. I also participated in that delegation to Mexico [via advanced parole]. I took it serious ever since.

Another participant described the event that prompted them to “come out” as undocumented:

Being an undocumented street vendor is very hard.... The media...always painted the undocumented as being criminals.... My parents were street vendors and they always got criminalized for not having an ID, or not having a vending license. [One instance], the cops came and asked my mom for a license and she’s like, “I don’t have one” and they were like, “Give me an ID,” and she was like, “I don’t have my ID.” At that point they were like, “Well, you can’t sell here, we’re gonna pick up your cart.” So, instead of just taking her car and giving her a ticket, they called backup.... It went from one police car...to eight police cars with armed officers picking up this cart with this woman and two little girls. The scene was like if somebody had been murdered. To be criminalized that bad, I think that was the worst experience that I have experienced here as undocumented. To see how cruel it was towards my mother. I mean, even up to today, when we speak about it, it hurts! She’s like, “I wasn’t stealing, I wasn’t hurting anybody, I was coming out to make money to feed you guys. The fact that they made it seem like I was doing something so horrible, like selling drugs,” she’s like, “it really hurt.” But that same day she also learned that she wasn’t alone because even though she got surrounded by so many cops with her [children], she saw that the community backed her up.... Even though we were unable to sell, we didn’t give up. The next day my dad was like, “You know what, *como dicen, hoy me sacan, manana estoy de regreso* [like they say, today they push me out, tomorrow I’m back at it again], same thing.” So I’m like, something’s

gotta change! Something has to give. So, I guess, that's where we started opening up more about being undocumented and unafraid.

## **Domain 12: Benefits of Immigrant Rights Activism**

Responses within this domain captured participants' perceptions about the benefits of becoming involved in immigrant rights work. Responses fell into one general, three typical, and five variant categories. Once participants became involved in immigrant rights activism, almost all reported a *decrease in isolation*. One participant noted the change after she received a scholarship from an immigrant rights organization and was connected to other scholarship recipients:

Now...I see that there is 100 or more people in the same position as me, it makes me feel like I'm not alone.... It definitely makes me feel like I'm part of something, that they will not judge me. Because, if I'm in the immigrant community, I still have to worry if I'll be judged for being gay. And then, if I'm in the gay community, I have to worry about if I'm being judged for being an immigrant. But in there, I feel like everyone is just who they want to be and there are no questions about it. It doesn't even matter.

Another participant noted a similar sentiment when they joined an immigrant rights organization:

It was incredible to be in a space where I didn't have to say anything about my status. It was assumed the group would be undocumented, because that was the reality of our community. It was amazing and profound. So it was really warm and welcoming in a different way than [my college] was. It was the knowledge that other people understood my reality, out of a sense of solidarity to transform my reality rather than some sense of wanting to protect or coddle me.

Typical benefits of involvement in immigrant rights activism included reports that activism (a) helped participants *find their voice*, (b) provided *leadership development*, and (c) was *consistent with their cultural values*. One participant reflected on the empowering effect of activism:

Once I got out and started doing organizing work and being in social justice spaces, it was absolute liberation for me. Understanding my status as something that was connected to a system and to something with history and to something that was a component of oppression and exploitation. [It] gave me a whole new layer of being able to understand my experience.... To be out and see and understand what it means and not

just theorize about these systems, but act in a way that can transform them, was deeply liberating. To see everything within myself, the ways in which I had been conditioned to uphold the status quo, and not understand certain things. So, it was a whole process of...re-education that was really, tremendously helpful and part of that was my status.

The same participant also noted the significance of *leadership development* as an organizer:

It wasn't until I got to [an immigrant rights organization] where I went fully in and would be part of an organization that's helping undocumented folks. This means I'm going to tell people I'm undocumented, I'm going to help develop the leadership of other undocumented folks, I'm going to be a voice. Which is weird, because it's something I've never done before. So, it was a rapid experience of being in constant reflection of my status and doing that in community, but differently, because I was viewed as a leader. Which was weird, because I didn't quite understand what that meant. But with each cohort that I led and trained, I came to understand my status, principally as a component of who I was.

Another participant reflected on the congruence between activism and Latina/o/x cultural values, such as *respeto* [respect for elders]:

That was very powerful as an organizer for people who are older than you and look at you and think of you as someone important, to me, it was like wow. Even until today, whenever I talk to anybody they always tell me, you sell yourself short. I still don't understand what it is but I feel special in a way. Because the fact that we were able to get my DACA and get [undocumented youth] to apply for DACA it was like, I made the move. Played a role.... That was the type of reaction a lot of [elders] said they appreciated from me, because every time I have information, I pass it down. I guess that's part of what makes me feel good that when I know something and believe in it, I'm able to share it.

Variant participant responses regarding the benefits of activism included (a) *increased academic motivation*, (b) *clarification of career goals*, (c) *decreased fear of deportation*, (d) *increased awareness of privileges*, and (e) *increased motivation for self-care*. Regarding the impact on academics, one participant noted:

After working with the community for a while, I was able to lose my fear from whatever it was now. Like, [I thought] you know what, the most I could lose is either I'm able to go into school and finish it or just straight up they're gonna tell me no, and I'll just continue my life, whether I have to work or do something but I just have to get it out. 'Cause I remember my mom always tells me *no pierdes nada con preguntar* (it never hurts to ask). Organizing opened the doors for me to apply to the scholarship. I was like, this is what I wanna do, I wanna go to school, I wanna graduate. I'm getting

this help [scholarship] and I want to one day be able to give back so another person can get this opportunity. It makes me so happy to help people. I guess that's why I enjoyed the job of organizing. Being able to sit down and tell somebody that it's gonna be okay, there's gonna be hope, I think is the most rewarding thing for me. I think because of all of the struggles we've lived through, when I'm able to help them, makes me very happy, very satisfied.

Another participant reflected on the impact that activism had on her emotional well-being:

The first two years of college when I first started to organize and I think it's always been a journey of being angry. But, reflecting and learning about myself, being angry by myself, to now being angry with more people. Now I have a really good relationship with myself. And I think it's helped to understand that it's intersectional. All these feelings I have aren't just about status but about my low income, about being a woman. Let's talk about it and let's process together. I do keep a journal. It has been helpful to reflect with people who I love, that ground me. And also the access to articles has been awesome. I was just reading an article by a Black mother on how current feminism is bullshit. Now I have access to more things I like.

### **Domain 13: Costs of Immigrant Rights Activism**

Responses within this domain captured participants' perceptions about the costs of becoming involved in immigrant rights activism. Responses fell into one typical and six variant categories. This domain generated no general categories. A typical participant response regarding the costs of activism included the pressure to fit the stereotype of the "*good immigrant*." Participants remarked on their conflicted feelings about this image because it tended to exclude the experiences of undocumented immigrants who did not have the same access to resources, including their own siblings. For instance, one participant noted:

[The hardest part of being an activist is] talking to people who can't relate and don't understand. Like, letting them know my experience is not a single story but a full book of stories. My experience is one of millions of experiences. A lot of people think if you can make it everyone can make it! And no! It's not like that. School isn't for everyone. I know a lot of kids who get frustrated and drop out or go back to their country and can't do nothing. I wish every story was like mine. [My sister] could apply for DACA but she hasn't been able to because school is not for her. She says, "I can't, all these years I haven't been to school, I have kids, it's difficult." I'm like, I get it. I try to push her but I can only push her so far.

Variant participant responses regarding the costs of activism included (a) *advocacy* “burnout,” (b) *disconnection with other immigrants*, (c) *increased deportation risk*, (d) “one-size-fits-all” (e) *pressure to “get out of shell,”* and (f) “*cultural embeddedness.*” One participant described their frustration with meeting other undocumented childhood arrivals who are resentful towards their parents for bringing them to the United States without inspection. In their view, this perspective does not account for the sacrifices of their parents and is out of touch with Latina/o/x cultural values. They noted:

I have talked to a couple of kids that feel like oh, it's my parents fault that I'm here... and I'm like, yes, it's their fault for wanting better for you, but I mean you should be grateful, you made it here alive for one, and two, you have more opportunities than you had back in your country. And I guess sometimes, they feel like I'm a little bit cold when I talk to them. But I'm like, the truth is...we have people that didn't make it here, we have people that are still trying to get here...your parents give you everything, you don't do nothing, you're going to school, your life is easy...compared to other people who are here by themselves...and they have to work, they have to clothe and feed themselves, and they don't got nobody to hug them and tell them I'm here for you, you know.

Some participants struggled with overcoming interpersonal shyness to become effective organizers, while others compared themselves to leaders in the movement or to immigrants who “had it worse.” For example, one participant noted:

I understand that talking about [my status] was gonna be difficult. But it was needed...once you get intimate with people about it. Their points of view change. Because you're not talking about an undocumented person out there, you're saying to me, I'm here in front of you and I'm telling you I'm undocumented, these are the things I'm facing.... Once we started talking to the councilmembers about it and they were listening to stories first-hand from me, from my mother, from the [community], it was more personal.... [Activism] gives you that extra push that you need to feel comfortable and to talk about stuff and not be fearful. There's other people that are facing it the same way and you know them.... I've always been a shy person. To talk. So that face-to-face has been difficult. But, I mean, I had to take my thirty seconds, breathe in, breathe out. This is why I'm doing it. This is why you have to do it. I always spoke to myself about why it's important that I spoke or that people spoke. Because it was important for me to talk about it, because I knew if I spoke other people would come out as well. Other people will feel empowered even though they were not speaking.

One participant also reflected on the burnout within activist spaces:

Organizing statewide with immigrant youth has been very privileged but it's too fast-paced. It's heartbreaking. It's toxic how we talk to each other and [are] expected to produce. I reflected on how much I have done that to people, and how I don't like that.

#### **Domain 14: Impact of DACA**

This domain captured participant responses that included information about the impact of having DACA. Within this domain, responses fell into one typical and six variant categories.

There were no general categories within this domain. Although not explicitly elicited in the interview protocol, most participants noted a significant impact that DACA had on their educational, professional, and personal trajectories. With DACA, many highlighted an increased sense of hope regarding the future, an increased sense of stability about their ability to pursue their educational and professional goals, and an increased sense of freedom regarding their lifestyle options. It was typical for participants to refer to DACA's impact as "*DACA to the rescue*." For instance, one participant noted, "before DACA, I viewed marriage as the only option to becoming legal." Another remarked:

When DACA was passed, that's when I was like "I can finally share with people who I am and where I come from." My dad and mom were unemployed, we were pretty poor, my sister wasn't working, and we were pulling our hairs. Figuring out how to get money.... DACA was announced at that time. It was such a relief. Now we're gonna be able to legit work. Stable work spaces.

For some, DACA had a legitimizing effect:

I became a real American after that. Well, relatively. Voting and all that is still restricted so I don't get those rights. The way I would compensate for this was by trying to influence my friends to go out and vote in favor of policies and parties that would contribute to the immigrant's cause. Having a driver's license was all I cared about. The identification is everything in this country. Travel throughout the U.S. was now open, I could drive and go out to clubs without fear of tickets, jail, or being rejected. I finally felt I could have a normal life.

Yet another participant reflected:

DACA changed my life completely because I was really living as a zombie kind of. You never lived doing anything with your life. You're not discovering your potential.

You don't know what you're good for and not being able to explore things makes you feel like you're not capable of doing anything. You just start developing fear so you don't want to try anything because you think that you can't do it. So that was really my problem. Just because I couldn't try things I thought that I wasn't good enough to do it. That made me feel like a loser.

Variant participant responses regarding the benefits of DACA included (a) *increased access to education*, (b) *“white collar” job opportunities*, and (c) *reconnection to home country*.

One participant reflected on the type of work they were able to do as a result of having DACA:

At one point I worked three jobs while going to school.... But they were also white-collar jobs so it was weird, I would come home and they would be like, oh what job did you get? I would just be like...basically White people work. So it was weird because I had to hustle and struggle, but it was basically white-collar jobs.

Given the opportunity to travel abroad through advanced parole as a DACA recipient, some participants highlighted the positive impact that traveling to their home country had on their relationships with loved ones. One participant remarked:

It has been good of me visiting to let my mom know [my grandmother] is good. I also didn't have a good relationship with my grandmother while she was in the U.S. because of how hard she works. And the reality of working seventeen hours a day, you don't have extra to give to your kids and grandkids. So I understand that and respect that a little bit more.... I was able to see how [my grandparents] were pioneers for their whole family. I relate to that a lot.... My relationships have changed. Now I want to call my grandfather and be like “Hey I found work!” Things are changing because I went to Mexico!

Variant responses regarding the costs of having DACA included (a) *changes in family role*, (b) *guilt regarding non-DACA*, and (c) *DACA as a “Band-Aid.”* Participants noted the pressures that came with having increased employment opportunities in terms of being able to provide significant financial support to immediate and extended family members. This pressure was sometimes strong enough that participants took time off from school to work full-time to assist their parents and other household members with expenses. One participant took 2 years off from school when their parents became unexpectedly unemployed. Some also noted the guilt

that is associated with mixed-status families, where members of the same household have varying levels of access to resources based on their immigration status. As one participant put it:

My dad not see his mom for like twenty years, and not know when is the next time he's gonna see her. I always kind of feel guilty about that. I complain and I do all these things about me not being able to do more, but I have a bachelor's degree that a lot of people can't get. I have the opportunity to follow my passions and follow my dreams and although they're limited, I still have that opportunity. So sometimes I do feel really guilty and I wish other people had that and sometimes I wonder why do I get to be this lucky? And why do my parents have to take the bad parts? My parents have always been the original dreamers, the dream didn't start with me, it started with them.

Finally, some participants endorsed concerns about the temporality of DACA and an increased awareness that they may lose some or all benefits associated with having a work permit, a Social Security number, and a state identification card if DACA were to be rescinded, especially given the growing anti-immigrant rhetoric surrounding the 2016 presidential election.



## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION

Almost two million undocumented immigrants who arrived as children currently live in the United States (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Despite equal access to K-12 educational institutions by the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* (Olivas, 2012), they lose protection and face the harsh reality of their immigration status once they leave high school and transition into adulthood (Gonzales, 2011). As only 17 states have policies allowing them to pay in-state tuition and merely three provide access to state-funded financial aid (National Immigration Law Center [NILC], 2015), they also face significant financial barriers to their postsecondary pursuits. Their social participation and upward mobility are further limited by the increased fear and risk of deportation as they leave the protected status of childhood (Abrego, 2008). Against these odds, an increasing number of undocumented immigrants are civically engaged in the immigrant rights movement, as members and leaders in campus and community organizations, “coming out” from a status of invisibility and exclusion to the forefront of the immigration debate. By giving voice to a politically engaged subset of undocumented immigrants, this study aimed to address the critical role that activism has on their psychological functioning, with the hope that mental health professionals will be better equipped to address their needs. Given that Latinas/os/xs make up a majority of undocumented immigrants (Krogstad & Passel, 2015), the ways in which Latina/o/x cultural values intersect with the participants’ experiences as undocumented activists was an additional focus of the study.

Moreover, as many undocumented childhood arrivals became eligible for a temporary reprieve from the threat of deportation through DACA in 2012, they were more likely to join their peers in the immigrant rights movement. As such, this study focused on the experiences of Latina/o/x DACAmented activists.

In an effort to understand what helped them navigate life as undocumented immigrants in the United States and risk “coming out” as “undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic” activists, the study’s findings are discussed in the context of each of the three original research questions, addressing the relevance of the findings to the existing literature throughout. First, the impact of immigration documentation status on the mental health and well-being of Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants will be discussed. Next, the role that activism in the immigrant rights movement plays in mitigating this impact will be explored. Additionally, the ways in which Latina/o/x cultural values intersect with their experiences as undocumented immigrants will be presented. Implications for mental health professionals then will follow the discussion of the findings. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research also will be explored.

First, the ever-changing political climate in which the study took place frames this discussion, providing some context to the participants’ narratives at the time of the interviews as well as a glimpse into the potential impact of recent changes. The study took place between 2014 and 2016, during the Obama presidential administration. President Obama was deemed the “deporter in chief” by leaders in the Latina/o/x and immigrant communities (Sakuma, 2017), due to record-breaking deportation rates, while simultaneously being credited with introducing sweeping executive actions, each impacting millions of undocumented immigrants and their families. According to the Department of Homeland Security’s (2017) *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, the Obama administration deported more immigrants than any other administration in

history. Between 2009 and 2015, the Department of Homeland Security removed over 2.5 million people, not including those who self-deported or were turned away and/or returned to their home country at the border by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (Department of Homeland Security, 2017). Janet Murguía, president of the National Council on La Raza (NCLR), one of the largest Latina/o/x advocacy groups in the country, first coined the term *deporter in chief* in 2014. Meanwhile, leaders in the immigrant rights movement, like Greisa Martinez, advocacy director for the pro-immigrant group United We Dream, acknowledged the mixed legacy that the Obama administration left behind, noting that the radical impact of DACA was tainted by increased deportation rates and Congress' inaction regarding immigration reform (Sakuma, 2017). Although President Obama promised to keep families together through the expansion of hardship waivers in 2012 and two executive actions—Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012 and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) in 2014, such changes were temporary and subject to termination by successive administrations. The Supreme Court, for instance, blocked DAPA in 2015, during Obama's own administration.

The presidential election of 2016 was characterized by polarizing stances on immigration: comprehensive immigration reform and a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants represented one set of attitudes; and the termination of DACA, increased immigration enforcement, reduction and elimination of existing pathways to legal immigration, and travel bans for citizens from certain countries formed the other side. The anti-immigrant rhetoric leading up to the 2016 election of President Donald Trump negatively affected many communities through threats to existing protections and promises of antagonistic policies. During his campaign, candidate Trump used the criminalizing terms “rapists” and “drug-dealers” to describe Mexican immigrants, despite research showing immigrants as more law-abiding and

committing fewer crimes than their native-born citizen counterparts (Ghandoosh & Rovner, 2017, as cited in Cadenas, 2017). During Trump's first year as president of the United States, immigration arrests increased by 40% from the same time the previous year, according to statistics released by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Blitzer, 2017). In the fall of 2017, President Trump also announced the phasing out of programs including Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and DACA, impacting nearly 300,000 and 800,000, respectively. Given the psychological consequences of existing race-based laws and xenophobic narratives, including Arizona's SB1070, the recent changes in immigration law by Executive Order, including travel bans and increased enforcement, have led immigrants and People of Color, especially Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants, to experience significant psychological distress (Cadenas, 2017). According to Peña, Hernandez, and Zamudio (2017), as undocumented immigrants are increasingly involved in advocacy, this hostile climate has likely heightened their fear of deportation and sense of responsibility to more vulnerable loved ones, while reducing their sense of safety regarding being "out" and the likelihood they will seek support.

It is expected that recent changes to legislation, enforcement, and political climate since the time of these interviews have negatively affected participants, particularly as some may have lost DACA's protection from deportation and work authorization and may have experienced detainment or deportation. Although the future of DACA continues to remain uncertain, with recent legal challenges to its termination, ICE's targeted enforcement efforts in sanctuary cities/states, and lack of comprehensive immigration reform, the impact on the mental health and well-being of millions of immigrants and their loved ones, especially the participants of this study, is clear.

## **Impact of Immigration Documentation Status on the Psychological Functioning of Latina/o/x DACAmented Immigrants**

The results of this study suggested that Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants feel the impact of their immigration documentation status even before they arrive to the United States. Participants identified pre-migratory factors that shaped their experience growing up undocumented in the United States. Beyond the challenging journey to the United States as an undocumented immigrant, participants also identified social, educational, and environmental factors surrounding their journey and transition to the United States that mitigated the impact of acculturative stress and immigration trauma. Later, as participants left the protection of U.S. public schooling, they continued to rely on this resilience as they discovered the reality of their status as undocumented adults, particularly the barriers to their postsecondary educational and professional goals. Lastly, as participants became DACAmented, they experienced transformative changes to their immigration status and experienced positive shifts in their mental health and well-being. The following sections review the domains relevant to the psychological functioning of participants, including the impact of migration experience, immigration documentation status, and DACA.

### **Migration Experience as Mitigating the Impact of Immigration Documentation Status**

The results of this study suggested that protective migration factors during childhood help Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants set the stage for postsecondary educational attainment, strong connection to Latina/o/x cultural values, and risk-taking as activists in the immigrant rights movement. Almost all participants' parent(s) were migrant workers, joining family in the United States to work for extended periods of time due to limited upward mobility and increasing violence and corruption in their home countries. This meant participant(s) were separated from their parent(s) and sometimes siblings for extended periods of time, finally

reuniting with them once they arrived in the United States to settle permanently as a family unit in an already established community of relatives and other immigrants. The findings in this study suggested that the presence of the support network in the United States was protective against the deleterious psychological effects of acculturative stress and immigration trauma.

The decision of participants' parent(s) to move to the United States to improve their quality of life is consistent with existing research on Mexican and Central American immigrant families (Chavez, 1992; Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2002). The current findings also supported previous research on the impact of the declining or unstable economies of native countries as contributing to migrant workers' decision to bring their children to settle in the United States, often to reunite with family members who had previously settled in the United States or gained legal status, for example, in the case of Mexicans, as a result of the Bracero Program (Borjas, 2007). For some, the hope for "a better life" included escaping the increasing violence and corruption along the drug routes between Latin America and the United States. This decision is often made after parents' multiple trips to the United States as migrant workers became more challenging. This finding is echoed by existing studies stating that the decision to create permanent homes in the United States was made as multiple migratory trips became increasingly costly and dangerous (Gonzales, 2011; Nevins, 2010).

According to APA (2012), immigration trauma includes experiences of family separation, traumatic border crossings, and fear of and interaction with immigration enforcement officers. Participants reported traumatic experiences in their descriptions of their clandestine entry to the United States, failed border crossings including detention at the border, and separation from their parent(s) after failed attempt(s). Participants' pre-migratory experiences of separation from their loved ones, especially their parent(s), including during their journey to the United States,

increased their likelihood of experiencing psychological distress (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). However, since most had extended family already living in the United States, participants described family support in the early days as buffering against this distress. This finding is echoed by previous research noting that immigrants residing in communities with family support networks were more likely to receive personal, social, and economic support, and experienced reduced acculturative stress and risk of mental illness (Hernandez & Charney, 1998; Hovey & King, 1997; Kao, 1998).

**Family dynamics as protective.** The transition to a new country is one fraught with many challenges to family dynamics (APA, 2013). Participants identified ways in which moving to the United States had a negative impact on their family, including (a) new parentified family roles, (b) lack of quality family time due to parents' working conditions, and (c) feelings of isolation due to family members' varying documentation statuses. However, the current findings suggested that family connectedness as a result of finally being together as an intact family in the United States can be protective against these challenges.

Almost all participants reported being members of a mixed-status family, either because siblings were born in the United States or immediate family member(s) became naturalized, consistent with the figures in Fortuny et al.'s (2007) study. The authors suggested that mixed-status families pose special concerns since different family members' varying eligibility for government programs could result in a reluctance on behalf of parents to seek services even when their children needed them and met eligibility requirements. However, the participants did not identify this challenge, instead focusing on the isolation resulting from "feeling different" than their sibling(s) or parent(s) based on the varying privileges related to their status and

resulting access to resources. Experiences linked to being a member of a mixed-status family were not directly assessed and therefore did not emerge as a challenge in this study.

Existing research supports the finding that family role reversal and poor working conditions are common among immigrant families, especially undocumented immigrants (APA, 2013; Lipman, 2006; Passel & Cohn, 2011). As many undocumented immigrants work in the service industry and have few to no worker rights due to their immigration status, they are often subjected to low wages, long work hours, and poor health due to lack of employer-provided healthcare. This situation forces parents to leave older children to care for younger children as well as manage other household duties. Given the lower levels of English language acquisition by undocumented immigrants who arrive as adults, the burden of navigating communication with stakeholders (school personnel, healthcare providers, landlords, government agencies, and financial institutions) often falls on their children. In a study by Cabrera and Padilla (2004), the new role of linguistic broker was a protective factor for undocumented college students, since frequently being asked to translate important legal documents, medical diagnoses, and parent-teacher communication allowed them to gain access into a world normally reserved for adults. Although these findings were inconsistent with those of Cabrera and Padilla (2004), it is possible that serving as a language broker provided participants with an early exposure to skills useful in adulthood, such as independence and communication skills. Moreover, participants reported a high level of connection to their parent(s), especially since their reunion after years of separation, as well as a high level of respect for their parents' work ethic and dedication to their children, thus helping to ameliorate immigration-related challenges to their family dynamics.

**Environmental factors as protective.** Undocumented immigrants struggle more than their documented counterparts for basic necessities and are often confined to the lowest-wage



jobs (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; APA, 2013; Perez & Fortuna, 2005). As such, they are more likely to face housing discrimination, live in poor housing conditions, pay higher rents due to lack of credit/bank accounts, and move frequently. Although the findings of this study were consistent with existing literature on environmental challenges related to immigration documentation status, the participants identified living in communities with other immigrants and People of Color as protective against these challenges. The participants noted that having immigrant neighbors helped ease the transition to the United States, make friends more easily, and make them feel more connected to their home country, particularly if they lived in communities with immigrants from their home country and/or spoke the same language. Additionally, when having to move frequently to new neighborhoods, and being forced to create new peer networks each time, living among peers who shared their marginalized identities was especially helpful.

**Impact of early educational experiences in the United States.** The findings of this study suggested that early educational experiences in the United States have a strong impact on the mental health and well-being of Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants. The participants identified significant educational challenges, especially difficulty learning English, as they transitioned to life in the United States. However, the results suggested that the protective environment of public schooling and high parental educational aspirations might mitigate these barriers and ultimately help Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants beat the odds by graduating high school and pursuing a postsecondary education.

Given that public schooling in the United States provides undocumented youth with an experience of inclusion and protection unlike their undocumented adult counterparts, they spend their childhood in a buffering stage of what Gonzales (2011) termed “suspended illegality,”

where they are legally integrated due to *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) and not yet hampered by their immigration status. As such, the longer they are in this “safe haven,” the less likely they are to experience the negative outcomes associated with acculturative stress (Hernandez & Charney, 1998). Most participants were of school age when they arrived in the United States, providing the protection and sense of inclusion for the majority of their K-12 schooling. A few participants arrived as infants or in early childhood, affording them the highest level of protection from the negative impact of this difficult transition, as they had few to no memories of the transition, and providing them with a full K-12 education in the United States. As such, the participants who arrived in the United States at an early age were able to acquire English earlier than their older counterparts, providing them with an advantage as they adjusted to school, tried to fit into peer groups, and more generally navigated within American culture (Kao, 1998).

Participant reports of the buffering effects of high parental educational aspirations were consistent with existing literature on its protective role in the academic resilience and achievement of Latina/o/x immigrant students (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Fuligni, 1997; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Perez et al., 2009). According to Delgado-Gaitan (1992), the transmission of educational values from parent to child may be shaped by the perception that the U.S. educational system is a means of economic mobility, given their low socioeconomic condition and low to no formal education in the United States. For undocumented immigrants, the financial and educational barriers to economic mobility are even greater, and the participants echoed the supportive role that prioritizing education had during the early transition to the United States.

## **Facing the Reality of Immigration Documentation Status**

The results of this study suggested that protective educational factors may help young Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants cope with the reality of their status, particularly postsecondary educational and professional barriers. As they enter adolescence and begin to conceptualize their postsecondary plans, they go through a challenging “discovery” period, become increasingly aware of oppression related to their status, and begin to experience significant barriers to their future pursuits. Ultimately, the challenges force them to advocate for themselves, seek additional social support, and take advantage of the stability and sense of safety that a college education provides.

The participants reported that they became keenly aware of the risk of deportation associated with their immigration documentation status, and as such developed a high level of interpersonal guardedness to shield themselves and their loved ones. This had obvious implications for garnering social support and often much-needed guidance by educational stakeholders. It also increased their level of isolation from their native-born and naturalized peers and increased the stigma of being an undocumented immigrant. As such, they became hopeless about the uncertainty of their future and often developed mental health issues.

In contrast to their native-born and naturalized peers, Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants face limits to upward mobility, inclusion into society, and social support (Abrego, 2008; Gonzales, 2011). These findings were confirmed by the participants’ experience of the “rude awakening” upon facing these challenges. Gonzales (2011) referred to this as the period of discovery, around age 16, when undocumented youth experience dramatic shifts in their daily lives and future outlooks. During childhood, in U.S. public school settings, undocumented youth developed aspirations based on the acceptance they experienced in school and the belief that they

would have better opportunities than their parents. However, upon discovery of limits due to their immigration documentation status, important adolescent transitions like finding a part-time job, obtaining a driver's license, and applying for financial aid for college suddenly became impossible. Much like the "rude awakening" that the participants in this study noted, Gonzales found that reactions to barriers included confusion, anger, frustration, and despair, and were followed by a period of "paralyzing shock."

The findings in this study regarding the mental health risks related to the increasing awareness of the impact of immigration documentation status during the transition to adulthood were consistent with existing research (Abrego, 2006; Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Raymond-Flesch et al., 2014). Given that the transition to adulthood is already marked by the development of autonomy and increased legal and social responsibilities, the risk of developing mental health issues may be magnified for undocumented immigrants who are simultaneously coming to terms with their own immigration status-related barriers. Previous research confirmed the participants' experience of mental illness following their "rude awakening," citing that these destabilizing experiences can lead to depression, anxiety, trauma, externalizing behaviors such as impulsivity in relationships and drug use, suicidal thoughts, and even suicide (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013; Menjivar, 2006; Perez & Fortuna, 2005; Plascencia, Leyva, Jaimes Pena, & Waheed, 2015; Raymond-Flesch, 2014; Stacciarini et al., 2014). There have been reports of suicide among undocumented young people who felt they could not overcome the barriers imposed by their status (Patler & Laster Pirtle, 2017). Additionally, much like the participants' reports of having to keep the "dangerous secret" of their immigration documentation status, Gonzales et al. (2013) found that concealment of status, self-censorship, and hyperawareness about others discovering their status led the young people to spend less time

in public spaces, have difficulty trusting others, and struggle to build and maintain healthy relationships.

Undocumented immigrants are frequently subjected to traumatic experiences in the United States, such as discrimination, racial profiling, indiscriminate checking of family and community members' immigration documents, separation or removal from their families, relocation of family due to the possibility of immigration raids, and deportation (APA, 2012). The psychological impact of anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric are detrimental because the exposure to rejection and hostility leads to high levels of fear, anxiety, and lack of trust in interpersonal relationships (Chavez, 2007; Perez et al., 2009). Following the period of "discovery," the findings in this study suggested that Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants become increasingly aware of the stigma and risks associated with their immigration status, often leading them to internalize some of the negative attitudes. This heightened awareness of the oppression of undocumented immigrants is exacerbated by their increased risk for deportation once they reach adulthood. This finding was consistent with research citing deportation fears, threats, and experiences which place Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants at a higher risk of experiencing emotional and health problems than their native-born and naturalized counterparts (Brabeck & Yu, 2010; Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, & Spitznagel, 2007). Lastly, the findings of this study were consistent with Gonzales' (2011) second period of transition for 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants, *learning to be illegal*, in which they experienced identity shifts and exclusion from important rites of passage. The participants in this study noted that these experiences of oppression and exclusion, including discrimination by stakeholders and threats of deportation, contributed to internalized racism and shame regarding the criminalization of undocumented immigrants.

**Coping with postsecondary educational and professional barriers.** Immigration documentation status restricts access to and experiences in higher education (Abrego, 2008; Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). Only 5-10% of undocumented childhood arrivals attend postsecondary institutions (Gonzales, 2007). Existing studies have suggested this trend is likely due to several reasons as undocumented childhood arrivals, including: (a) the inability to afford college tuition without access to federal financial aid (Bruno, 2012); (b) dampened academic motivation in the face of educational barriers (Abrego, 2006; McWhirter et al., 2013); and (c) a lack of awareness of supportive educational policies due to weak networks of school officials, community leaders, or other undocumented students. Financial barriers are especially detrimental as they lead undocumented college students to sacrifice study time to work, enroll in less expensive community colleges instead of 4-year universities, take time off when they cannot afford tuition, or stop attending school altogether (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Terriquez, 2015).

Additionally, undocumented students are often discouraged by institutional neglect with schools lacking adequate training to meet their needs, limited social and emotional support when they hide their immigration status to peers and important stakeholders, realization that their lack of work authorization prevents them from using their degree to work in their field of interest, and widespread anti-immigrant sentiment (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012). In the face of these stark educational realities of undocumented childhood arrivals, the current results suggested that a number of protective educational factors may help Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants become the exception to the rule. The participants in this study all graduated high school, pursued and achieved postsecondary degrees and professional licenses, pursued and/or worked in careers that matched their educational background and interests, and ultimately

became immigrant rights activists. They credited the development of survival skills to cope with educational barriers, strong social networks in college, and an appreciation for the safety and stability afforded by the “college bubble” as being protective against challenging educational and professional trajectories and uncertain futures. Many of the participants followed a nontraditional path to college, either because they attended community colleges before transferring to a 4-year institution, taking breaks in college to work, or putting college off altogether to work.

The protective factors cited in this study were consistent with previous literature. For example, research has shown that states with in-state tuition policies have higher undocumented students college enrollment rates and lower high school dropout rates (Flores, 2010). Several participants live in these states, and others noted an awareness of the differences in educational experiences across different states and their varying levels of access to aid and reduced tuition for undocumented immigrants. For instance, one participant remarked on their experience living in a resource-poor area for undocumented immigrants, limiting their access to knowledge about available resources, and increasing their level of isolation among their peers.

Gonzales (2011) also identified protective factors against legal barriers for undocumented youth that were consistent with participants’ experiences, including the significant role of extra-familial mentors, access to information about postsecondary options, and financial support for college. The participants noted the importance of developing “survival skills,” which included seeking out information about college enrollment and financial aid options, and garnering the social support of mentors in college in the form of more advanced undocumented students and undocu-friendly college faculty and staff members. The protective role of social support for undocumented students was cited frequently in the literature (Abrego, 2006, 2008; Ellis & Chen,

2013; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2013; Perez et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). The intervention of caring adults was especially helpful in reducing anxiety by providing a safe and stable environment as they delayed entry into legally restrictive adult environments (Gonzales, 2011). Although participants cited concerns about entering the workforce, they felt safe and temporarily secure about their future in what they called the “college bubble,” where they enjoyed the support of their peers, escape from immigration status-related stressors, and the opportunity to join student organizations that promote immigrant rights.

### **Impact of DACA on mental health and well-being**

As of the first quarter of 2017, 925,921 individuals applied for DACA, with the vast majority of applicants originating from Latin America (Patler & Laster Pirtle, 2017). Therefore, DACA had the most impact on Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants, particularly those with existing protective factors, since they could capitalize the most from the benefits afforded to them by access to a temporary work authorization permit, a Social Security number, and the opportunity to travel abroad under advanced parole. Current findings suggested that DACA offered increased educational and professional opportunities and an overall improvement in mental health and well-being. This change in immigration status, however, is temporary and subject to termination by the current administration, and as such, its positive effects seem tenuous.

As a result of DACA, the participants highlighted an increased sense of hope about the future, an increased sense of stability about their ability to pursue their educational and professional goals, and an increased sense of freedom regarding their lifestyle options. This was consistent with a study by Siemons, Raymond-Flesch, Auerswald, and Brindis (2016), in which DACA recipients noted that DACA smoothed their integration into U.S. society by providing



them with increased access to resources, greater autonomy, and an improved sense of belonging. As they were able to engage in normal travel and employment activities given their access to a Social Security number, driver's license, and work permit, they described feeling less shame about being undocumented, improved sense of comfort in disclosing their status, and greater hope for the future. A study by Patler and Laster Pirtle (2017), the first to compare differences in psychological well-being between immigrant young adults as they transitioned from undocumented to DACAmented status, found that becoming DACAmented was associated with significant reductions in distress and negative emotions and an improved sense of security about the future, thus indicating DACA's legitimizing effect on recipients.

DACA's short-term impacts indicate that it has increased recipients' access to new opportunities (Batalova et al., 2014; Gonzales & Bautista-Chavez, 2014; Gonzales et al., 2014). Since receiving DACA, 60% of recipients have obtained a new job, 45% increased their earnings, 57% obtained driver's licenses, and 49% opened their first bank accounts, with benefits greater for students enrolled in or graduated from a 4-year college (Gonzales & Bautista-Chavez). The participants noted having increased access to "white-collar jobs," typically jobs with higher pay and benefits than the "blue-collar" work more commonly associated with undocumented immigrants. One opportunity not mentioned in the literature was the ability of DACA recipients to travel abroad through advanced parole. Two participants cited this opportunity as being transformative in terms of allowing them to reunite with family after many years of separation and see a glimpse into their early childhood, as they were both preschool age when they arrived in the United States. As such, their ability to travel to their home country through DACA strengthened their cultural identity and sense of connection and pride regarding their home country.

Despite the substantial benefits reported, DACA also has unintended negative mental health consequences, including the stress associated with increasing family responsibilities, shifting concerns about deportation risk from oneself to ineligible family members, and a new sense of precariousness as they move from the tenuous existence of being undocumented to their temporary DACA status. The participants described how DACA also influenced the nature of their relationships with their families, resulting in shouldering additional responsibilities. Many welcomed their increased ability to contribute resources to their families. The participants also took on increased emotional responsibility for their undocumented parents and siblings who remained ineligible for the protections bestowed by DACA. This transfer of worry from their own survival to their families had mental health consequences. The participants noted the pressures that came with having increased employment opportunities in that they were often called upon to provide significant financial support to immediate and extended family members. This pressure was sometimes strong enough that the participants took time off from school to work full-time to assist their parent(s) and other loved ones with expenses. One participant took a 2-year break from college when their parents became unexpectedly unemployed.

The participants also reported that DACA, as a temporary status, imposed a new precarious identity that proved stressful. The awareness that they may lose some or all benefits associated with DACA was distressing, worrying that it may be rescinded, especially given the growing anti-immigrant rhetoric surrounding the 2016 presidential election. This finding was consistent with Patler and Laster Pirtle's (2017) assertion that the likelihood that the mental health benefits of DACA could decrease over time if access to permanent status and citizenship remain elusive or if DACA was discontinued.

### **Impact of Activism on DACAmented Latinas/os/xs**

The results of this study suggested that postsecondary educational attainment and strong connection to Latina/o/x cultural values, resulting from protective migration factors, DACA-related privileges, and strong coping skills, may increase the likelihood that Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants will “come out” and become activists in the immigrant rights movement. The participants reported that civic engagement provided a number of benefits to their overall mental health and well-being, including a strong network of undocumented and undocu-friendly allies, a sense of empowerment, and leadership skills. These benefits outweighed the costs of activism, particularly the increased deportation risk of “being out,” advocacy “burnout,” elitism within activist communities, and advocating for policies that exclude other undocumented immigrants.

As the participants learned to navigate their world as an undocumented adult, particularly in postsecondary educational and work spaces, they became increasingly aware of the discrimination against immigrants and the need to disclose their immigration documentation status to access resources. With DACA, a temporary but legitimate status, the participants felt emboldened to face the perceived risk that visibility may pose on them and their loved ones. Similar to the trend that Abrego (2008) found with the passage of Assembly Bill 540 in California, a policy granting in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants, the participants felt that DACA provided them with a less stigmatizing label. This finding was also consistent with research highlighting the improved sense of comfort DACA recipients felt in disclosing their status in a study (Siemons et al., 2017). Additionally, given that high academic achievement is linked to higher participation rates in civic engagement (Abrego, 2008; Perez et al., 2009), the participants’ academic resilience also supported their trajectory into social justice advocacy.

According to Abrego, academically high-achieving undocumented immigrants are motivated to become involved in immigrant rights activism due to the influence of U.S. social values, such as objective meritocracy and individualistic upward mobility.

The migration experience of undocumented childhood arrivals is also important in understanding the factors that lead them to become immigrant rights activists. Abrego (2011) highlighted the impact that generation status, order of migration, and educational attainment had on the civic engagement of undocumented immigrants. According to Abrego, undocumented childhood arrivals, as members of the 1.5 generation, tended to be young when they arrived to the United States, did not participate in the decision to migrate, and had less traumatic migration journeys than their parents, if they could remember them at all. Additionally, since they spent a large amount of their childhood in U.S. public schools, protected from the risk of ICE raids and deportation, they were less willing to view themselves as marginal or disenfranchised members of society. As such, these youth, particularly when they were academically resilient, were likely to become active in the immigrant rights movement and demand full inclusion in U.S. society. Participants in this study had similar migration experiences, arriving to the United States at an early age, spending most of their childhood in U.S. public schools, and reaching high levels of academic achievement. This experience likely opened the path toward a future in immigrant rights activism.

The findings in this study also suggested that activism provides a positive mechanism for coping with the challenges of being undocumented. For the participants, becoming involved in the immigrant rights movement provided them with a way to cope with the mental health impact of their immigration status, a finding consistent with existing literature (Perez et al., 2009; Vaquera, Aranda, & Sousa-Rodriguez, 2017). Vaquera et al. found that undocumented youth

experience a loss of “ontological security,” or the ability to count on the stability of the future. To protect against the mental health challenges related to this uncertain future, these youth relied on their membership in immigrant rights organizations to provide opportunities for empowerment and belonging. The participants also highlighted the healing power of the meaningful social connections they developed in their activist communities. They noted that, for the first time, their immigration documentation status was a given, and they could more freely express other aspects of their identities.

Despite the resilience of the participants and the significant additional benefits of civic engagement, the participants identified several challenges to their participation in immigrant rights activism. Although there was much variability in identifying the costs of activism, the participants agreed that the stereotypes surrounding undocumented childhood arrivals due to the DREAM ACT campaign and later DACA dampened activism’s benefits to their mental health and well-being. This finding was consistent with Nicholls’ (2013) assessment of the pressures that the immigrant rights movement placed on undocumented childhood arrivals to fit the trope of the “good” immigrant. According to Nicholls, the immigrant rights movement used the image of the high-achieving, innocent, Americanized undocumented childhood arrivals to garner support for the DREAM ACT, with the goal of eventually leading toward comprehensive immigration reform. According to the participants, although they were aware that in many aspects they fit the stereotype of the “good” immigrant, they struggled with the ways that the stereotype criminalized their parents and excluded their peers who did not qualify for DACA or had low educational attainment.

The variability in participant experiences with activism, especially in identifying its costs, was likely due to the wide range of activities that are considered immigrant rights advocacy. For

those involved in organizing on college campuses, for instance, rather than in the community, they may have varying experiences regarding their level of burnout or elitism. Although a few participants noted the increased risk of deportation as a cost of activism, a finding consistent with existing literature (Chavez, 2013), the risk was not mentioned as frequently as expected. It is possible that DACA provided participants with a temporary reprieve from deportation, and as such, was not a prominent concern for participants.

### **Impact of Latina/o/x Cultural Values on DACAmented Latinas/os/xs**

Latinas/os/xs are comprised of a very large and diverse group of immigrants in the United States. Their cultural identities are shaped by their migration experience, generational status, gender, class, sexual orientation, skin color, and immigration documentation status, among other things. DACAmented Latinas/os/xs are especially impacted by their experience as 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants. The participants in this study identified protective factors related to their Latina/o/x cultural identity, particularly as their immigration documentation status seemed to override their other identities. Notably, the collectivistic cultural values of *familismo* (loyalty to family), *orgullo* (cultural pride), and *respeto* (respect for elders) emerged as protective against immigration status-related barriers, including educational barriers. They developed integrated cultural identities that included multiple marginalized social identities and experiences that helped them navigate life as an undocumented immigrant. Most importantly, the participants cited their cultural values as congruent with the tenets of social justice advocacy.

In contrast to their U.S. citizen and naturalized peers, undocumented young adults experience acculturative stress that challenges their inclusion in U.S. society while simultaneously limiting their connection to their home country. Cavazos-Rehg et al. (2007) described undocumented status as a “persistent and insidious psycho environmental stressor,”

increasing Latina/o/x immigrants' vulnerability to acculturative stress and other socioemotional problems. Beyond the typical immigration-related barriers, undocumented childhood arrivals must balance their memories or perceptions of their home country, the influence of American cultural values, and the stigmatized identity of being undocumented in the United States. The participants reported feeling disillusioned regarding their American identity, holding onto positive images about their home country for comfort, and pride regarding the resilience associated with their immigration status. These challenges to their identity were consistent with existing literature (Abrego, 2008; Gonzales, 2011).

A few participants remarked on the impact of other marginalized social identities, including class and sexual orientation, on their ability to navigate immigration-related challenges. They described the additional threat that having multiple marginalized identities had on their mental health and well-being which was consistent with Perez et al.'s (2009) notion of undocumented youth's triple minority status due to their ethnicity, economic disadvantages, and lack of documentation. Existing research offered two explanations for how immigration status intersects with other marginalized identities to influence the well-being and educational trajectory of undocumented childhood arrivals. Some researchers posited that immigration status is a "master status," wherein undocumented status overshadows the impact of other social identities (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2015; Terriquez, 2015). Enriquez (2016) found that undocumented status emerged as a "final straw" in determining an immigrant's trajectory due to the significant legal barriers that weaken resistance to the limitations created by other marginalized identities. Given that the participants in this study had educational attainment beyond high school and were constantly thinking about the impact of their immigration status as activists in the immigrant rights movement, it is likely that they are more in touch with the severe

restrictions of their immigration status. According to Radford, Berkner, Wheelless, and Shepherd (2010), of the 44% of undocumented Latinas/os/xs who attend college, more than half will likely not obtain a degree, given that 42% of all Latina/o/x college students leave college without a degree. As such, it is also possible that participants' immigration status might be the "final straw" as they may eventually leave school or work in settings that do not match their educational background and interests because of the compounding inequality with their other marginalized identities.

To cope with the barriers related to their immigration status, particularly during the discovery period, the participants developed cultural resilience, using cultural values as a way to make meaning of their struggle. For instance, one participant recalled the value of their strong spiritual beliefs, inculcated by their parents and common among Latinas/os/xs, in helping them find comfort in the isolation and hopelessness related to their immigration status. The participants used *dichos*, or Latina/o/x sayings, to make sense of their experience as undocumented immigrants. Examples of *dichos* cited by the participants included: *no hay mal que por bien no viene* (every cloud has a silver lining) and *no pierdes nada con preguntar* (you lose nothing by asking). These sayings served both to connect participants to their Latina/o/x identity and families, while also providing comfort and motivation through meaning making. Although no research has yet examined the specific impact that Latina/o/x cultural values have on the experience of undocumented childhood arrivals, this finding was consistent with existing literature on the role that strong ethnic identity has on the mental health and well-being of immigrants generally (Berry, 1997).

The participants also cited Latina/o/x cultural values, particularly *familismo* (loyalty to family), as important in shaping and motivating their postsecondary educational and professional



goals. Their strong connection to their families and ethnic identity, as well as their sense of responsibility to more vulnerable family members, led the participants to make decisions about their future that benefitted their loved ones. This finding was further supported by Matute-Bianchi's (1991) assertion that the familistic orientation of Latina/o/x culture, characterized by an emphasis on strong emotional ties, respect for, and obedience to the family, has a strong impact on academic outcomes. As such, the findings in this study suggested that Latina/o/x cultural values are protective against the deleterious effects of immigration documentation status, especially educational barriers, and continue to be protective as they engage in immigrant rights activism.

### **Implications for Practice**

The participants in this study identified a number of significant protective factors in helping them navigate life as Latina/o/x DACAmented activists that have implications for mental health practice. The participants were not only able to beat the odds of educational attainment for Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants, graduating high school and pursuing postsecondary educational and professional goals; they were also actively engaged in the immigrant rights movement, “coming out” of the shadows, sharing their stories, and speaking out for the rights of all immigrants. They did so with the help of their families, peers, communities, allies, and strong connection to their Latina/o/x cultural values. They faced a host of barriers along the way, and despite these challenges, they persisted. With DACA, they were emboldened to take advantage of their assets and give back to their community, especially more vulnerable members. However, given that the anti-immigrant climate continues to worsen, with increased enforcement, direct targeting of sanctuary cities and states, and threats to DACA, the current

findings are especially important in considering ways that mental health clinicians can highlight existing strengths while protecting Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants.

First, mental health providers need to consider the barriers to accessing services. According to Peña et al. (2017), as the hostile climate has likely heightened Latina/o/x DACAmented activists' ever-present fear of deportation, placed additional constraints on them as organizers, and reduced their sense of safety about being out, they may be less likely to seek support from allies. Developing trust in the community by being a visible ally is vitally important in outreach and provision of mental health services. Additionally, since mental health providers who come in contact with undocumented immigrants often scramble for the latest federal, state, and institutional policy and strive to advocate for nontraditional support services, they are at risk for burnout or not having up-to-date information. These serve as additional barriers to accessing quality care and call for intervention at the institutional level to support clinicians' efforts to provide culturally competent and quality care. Additionally, providers with experience working with undocumented immigrants are often members of marginalized communities themselves and tend to be in high demand, reducing their availability to provide specialized services (Peña et al., 2017).

According to a recent report by the California Psychological Association (CPA) Immigration Task Force, Hernandez, Cadenas, Mejia, Zamudio, Peña, and Lopez Beltran (2018) delineated clinical recommendations for working with undocumented immigrants that take these challenges into account. Using tenets of Liberation psychology, like those outlined by Martín-Baró (1994) and Espín (2015), the authors posited that understanding how the combination of sociopolitical factors and provider limitations impact undocumented immigrant wellness is critical in evolving existing models to account for the many layers of intersecting identities,

histories, memories, and language of undocumented immigrants. According to Montero (2009), Liberation Psychology provides a framework for addressing the underlying power dynamics in human relations and social systems, with the aim of transforming inequality and oppression to meet the basic needs of all people. Given that anti-immigrant narratives criminalize undocumented immigrants by creating a “stigma of illegality” and perpetuate racism toward communities of color, Liberation Psychology is uniquely suited for clinicians seeking to provide culturally competent mental health services to their undocumented clients.

CPA’s Immigration Task Force recommendations are closely aligned with the updated APA’s (2017) Multicultural Guidelines in its emphasis on ecology, context, and intersectionality, and principles for culturally competent psychological practice, research, education and training, and organizational change. In terms of clinical practice, practitioners are encouraged to reflect on their attitudes towards undocumented immigrants and continuously engage in experiences that allow them to challenge any inaccurate or detrimental attitudes and beliefs. They are also encouraged to understand the evolving and fluid nature of cultural competence as they integrate ethical considerations, indigenous and community-based healing practices, spirituality, and alternative forms of healing into their practice. They are also encouraged to understand systemic issues surrounding immigration status and incorporate resources trusted in the community into their practice, such as Family Preparedness Plans and Know Your Rights resources. In terms of education and training, practitioners are encouraged to engage in formal, informal, and experiential learning opportunities that enhance their work with undocumented immigrants, and maximize their training in multiculturalism and diversity to educate clients, colleagues, students, and lay audiences using accurate information about immigrants to promote ally development. When conducting and using research, mental health providers are encouraged to consider the

methodological limitations of scientific practice regarding undocumented immigrants and the ways in which research may serve as a tool for empowerment for their clients. Lastly, practitioners are encouraged to participate in institutional change impacting undocumented immigrants.

As mentioned earlier, barriers to accessing mental health services combined with provider limitations leave practitioners feeling hopeless about making a significant impact at the individual level. Instead, focusing efforts at the organizational level may be the most efficient in meeting the mental health needs of undocumented immigrants. The CPA's Immigration Task Force made specific recommendations regarding the role that practitioners can take in effecting change at the institutional level. For example, mental health providers can encourage institutions to clarify their commitment to a social justice framework that conceptualizes presenting concerns, addresses service gaps, and reaches undocumented immigrants from an understanding of their current realities. They can also design staff trainings to address documentation practices that do not "out" immigrant legal status, culturally sensitive and collectivist-oriented interventions, implicit bias, and legislative and policy awareness. Additionally, providers can foster a culture of collaboration between community partners to build a network of support and consultation. Most importantly, practitioners can increase points of entry to mental health services and decrease the stigma and fear associated with receiving services. Examples of ways to reduce barriers to mental health services for undocumented clients include: (a) using anonymous drop-in hours, (b) informal consultation support, (c) increased staff visibility at community level, (d) increased support for community-led initiatives and activities, and (e) public statements of solidarity that clearly delineate where intuitions stand on political matters (Hernandez et al., 2018).

Another useful resource for mental health providers that is specific to Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants emerged following President Trump's announcement on September 5, 2017, that DACA will be phased out by March 5, 2018; this resource was created by the National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA) (2017). The resource targeted Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants, providing 11 strengths-based mental health recommendations for coping with the announcement along with specific examples and resources. The recommendations encouraged Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants to validate their feelings, recognize symptoms of distress, identify their triggers, build on their strengths, connect with their joys, learn and practice new skills for healthy coping, take their mental health seriously and seek help, know their rights and available resources, protect themselves from immigration scams, share their knowledge to help others, and know that they are not alone. Rather than targeting mental health practitioners, NLPA created a resource that directly empowers Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants to practice self-care, acquire the necessary resources to maximize their level of safety and protection, and destigmatize mental health treatment. In this way, NLPA created a resource that integrates the tenets of Liberation Psychology, while also providing Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants with psychoeducation about mental health treatment so that they can decide when to seek additional mental health services.

The participants in this study experienced many of the typical stressors that previous research has identified as being tied to their immigration documentation status. DACAmented activists, especially Latinas/os/xs, are especially vulnerable to the threats to their protected status given their increased visibility. However, they identified the many aspects of their migration experience and transition to adulthood that promoted resilience and autonomy, a sense of purpose, and hope for the future. Beyond integrating Liberation Psychology into their clinical

practice, education and training, research, and advocacy for organizational change, mental health providers can strive to incorporate the assessment of immigration status-related protective factors into their practice, understand how these work together to promote resilience, and provide their clients with the tools to take their mental health and well-being into their own hands. As such, mental health providers can provide Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrant clients with the additional tools of empowerment and a sense of control of their future.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The primary researcher of this study took special care in ensuring that the method and analyses met the standards set forth by the designers of Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) (Hill, 2012; Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). Nonetheless, the limitations of this study should be considered in interpreting its results. As noted by Hill (2012), qualitative research requires careful consideration of the sample and its composition. For example, of this study's 12 participants, only two were non-Mexican. It is unclear how the homogeneity of the country of origin of the participants may have impacted the findings. In light of the reality that Mexicans are overrepresented in research on Latinas/os/xs immigrants, including Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants, the current findings should be interpreted with some caution regarding more ethnic-specific variables. The study was also majority female, with only a third of the sample identifying as male, and it is unclear how the gender homogeneity of the participants may have impacted the findings. Additionally, the study did not include an option for participants to identify as gender non-conforming or transgender. Given the lack of research on gender non-conforming and transgender individuals generally, the findings were biased toward cisgender experiences of Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants.

Hill (2012) cautioned against the generalization of results to a larger population due to the small samples typically employed in qualitative research, particularly in CQR. The sample consisted of Latina/o/x DACAmented activists, a subset of a relatively small population, given recent estimates of the total number of DACA recipients (Patler & Laster Pirtle, 2017). As activists in the immigrant rights movement, they are likely to be experienced telling their migration story and experience growing up undocumented in the United States as a tool for social change. As such, their narratives focused heavily on the impact that immigration documentation status had on their experience of barriers as a means to promote comprehensive immigration reform that removes these barriers. Consequently, it is unclear whether the sample of activists interviewed in this study was unintentionally skewed towards this focus.

Regarding the research team, all three were members of marginalized social groups and were trained in counseling psychology programs that focus on social justice issues. It is possible that their experiences as members of marginalized groups and counseling psychology training affected the analysis of the data. It is fair to assume that another research team, comprised of members with different social identities and different educational backgrounds, might have come to slightly different conclusions about the study's findings.

Unlike the issues of generalizability and validity common in quantitative studies, qualitative researchers must consider the trustworthiness of their data. Trustworthiness refers to accurate reporting of the findings and the replicability of the study's method (Hill, 2012). As mentioned in the method section, this study followed the recommendations of Hill et al. (2005) in delineating the various steps taken to carry out the study. The primary investigator described the composition of the research team members and their biases and expectations, provided evidence for the adequacy of the research sample, and discussed the recruitment strategy along

with the interview process. The PI included a copy of the demographic survey, interview protocol, recruitment material, and consent form in the appendices. Furthermore, the PI presented a discussion of the transcription process, the steps in the data analysis, and other information needed in the event that other researchers choose to replicate this study's procedures.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Several recommendations for future research are suggested by the results of this study. First, using Liberation Psychology as a framework for conducting future research on the experiences of Latina/o/x DACAmented activists, methods that mitigate the power differential between researcher and participant and take into account both existing methodological limitations and sociocultural factors such as *testimonios* and Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be considered. According to Burciaga (2007), *testimonio* is a qualitative method developed in Latin America that incorporates political, social, and cultural histories into narratives, similar to the method of oral history. The author states that *testimonio* has traditionally focused on the experiences of Latinas/os/xs who have been persecuted by governments and other social-political forces and has more recently focused on Chicanas and Latina experiences in the United States. Given its link between oral narratives and social action, *testimonios* is a culturally responsive research method that takes into account the voices and social realities of Latina/o/x DACAmented activists.

Despite the value and cultural relevance of *testimonios*, some researchers have cautioned that it is simply another form in which the story of a marginalized individual is ultimately filtered through the researcher. According to the Latina Feminist Group (2001):

*Testimonio* is often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere. Thus, scholars often see *testimonios* as dependent products, an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves



as political subjects through others, often outsiders, and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity. (p. 13)

As such, PAR may be well suited for uplifting the voices of Latina/o/x DACAmented activists through their direct participation in the research process. For instance, according to Herr and Anderson (2005), one way to achieve this would be by presenting the results of this study to a group of Latina/o/x DACAmented activists, in collaboration with experienced researchers, to identify areas of further research considered important for relevant social action. In this way, the goals of both experienced researchers and the community of focus would be included in the study. Additionally, since the focus of PAR is action-oriented using a project model to carry out the study, community members, now co-researchers, as the experts of their experiences, can participate in contributing to the literature while also continuing to engage in immigrant rights organizing.

Beyond new methods of exploration, researchers can use the findings of this study as a jumping-off point in a number of ways. First, a novel finding in this study was the impact that Latina/o/x cultural values has on the mental health and well-being of Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants. Rather than a secondary focus, future research can focus on the ways in which undocumented activists use cultural values to cope with systemic barriers related to their immigration documentation status. Second, given that this study largely confirmed Gonzales' (2011) three-stage developmental model for 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants, a study that includes the role of migration factors, activism, and/or cultural identity could help expand the model to include more attention to ways they help navigate through these phases.

Additionally, given the impact of DACA on participants' mental health and well-being, a follow-up study to this one or a new study that looks at the aftermath of the proposed termination of DACA would be useful for understanding the impact of losing this status. Lastly, this study

focused on the experiences of a largely Mexican-origin sample. Studies that highlight the unique experiences of other Latina/o/x DACAmented activists would be helpful in identifying any variation in the findings.

### **Conclusions**

This study sought to explore the impact of activism in Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants' thwarted transition to adulthood, as well as to highlight the ways in which Latina/o/x cultural values mitigated the impact of activism. Existing research has largely focused on the legal and educational barriers that 1.5-generation immigrants face once they graduate from high school. Less research has focused on the mental health implications of these barriers. Additionally, as DACA has only been in effect since 2012, only a few studies have focused on the ways that DACA has buffered against these effects. The current study helped to expand existing research on 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants by highlighting migration factors, DACA, activism, and cultural values, as potential protective factors for this population. Notably, the findings in this study not only suggest that these protective factors contribute to Latina/o/x DACAmented immigrants' decision to become activists, but they also provide evidence that participating in the immigrant rights movement is been a protective factor in and of itself. The results also showed the ways in which Latina/o/x cultural values helped participants make sense of their unique experiences and were consistent with the values within their activist communities. Additionally, existing clinical recommendations, resources, and research methods were highlighted as ways in which mental health providers can apply these findings in their clinical, training, and research practice. Finally, as the future of DACA, among other immigrant protections, continues to be threatened by anti-immigrant legislation efforts, the results make

clear the urgency to develop large-scale efforts to meet the mental health needs of undocumented immigrants and their loved ones.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Survey

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your country of origin? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you lived in the U.S? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

\_\_\_ No High School diploma

\_\_\_ High School diploma/G.E.D.

\_\_\_ Associate's

\_\_\_ Bachelor's

\_\_\_ Master's

\_\_\_ Doctorate

5. Please list any involvement in community organizing, protests/demonstrations, or memberships related to the immigrant rights movement (include name of organization, brief description and date(s) of involvement):

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## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol

#### Migration Experience

1. In general, what was your experience like when you first arrived to the U.S.?
  - a. How does it compare with life in your country of origin?
  - b. What have your social experiences been like?
  - c. What have your educational experiences been like?
  - d. What roles/responsibilities do you have in your family?
2. How, if at all, has your relationship with family members changed since your arrival in the U.S.?
  - a. Please describe any adjustments that were made with family members after periods of separation.

#### Impact of Immigration Documentation Status

3. When did you first realize your immigration documentation status?
  - a. What was your initial understanding about your status? First reactions to it?
  - b. How has your understanding evolved over time?
4. How has your immigration documentation status affected your view of yourself/others?
  - a. How have you interpreted messages from others (peers, teachers, the media)?
5. What impact has your immigration status had on your educational/vocational experiences?
  - a. Have you made any adjustments to your educational/career aspirations as a result of your status?



- b. If you decided to pursue higher education, what made you decide to attend/complete college?

#### Cultural Identity

6. How has your immigration experience impacted your cultural identity?
  - a. Describe any experiences of oppression based on your cultural identity.

#### Experience with Social Justice Activism

7. How did you become involved in the immigrant rights movement?
  - a. Describe your “coming out” experience.
  - b. How has activism impacted your ability to cope with the challenges presented by your status?

#### Personal Reflections

8. How has your actual experience in the U.S. compared with the expectation you had prior to coming here?
9. How does your experience as an undocumented immigrant compare with the experience of other undocumented immigrants?
10. In light of your status, what hopes and fears do you have about your future?

## APPENDIX C

### Recruitment Email Message

Dear Prospective Participants:

Hello, my name is Elizabeth Hernandez, and I am a graduate student in the Counseling Psychology doctoral program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I work with and care about undocumented immigrants and am interested in gaining a better understanding of the relationship between activism, coping, and development among DACAmented Latinas/os/xs. I am emailing to invite you to participate in an interview about DACAmented Latinas/os/xs who identify as activists in the immigrant rights movement. Your responses will help us understand the way activism and Latina/o/x culture influence coping and development of DACAmented Latinas/os/xs. Findings from this study will help us develop culturally sensitive services and prevention programs for DACAmented Latinas/os/xs.

Eligibility:

- 1 Must be a DACA-recipient
- 2 Must self-identify as Latina/o/x, Hispanic, or Chicana/o/x
- 3 Must self-identify as an activist/organizer in immigrant rights movement
- 4 Must feel comfortable responding to questions regarding your experiences before and after participating in activism related to your identity as a DACAmented Latina/o/x.

The interview will take place in person at a location selected by the participant. The interview will take approximately 60 - 90 minutes to complete.

The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. The audio-taped file will be deleted shortly after it is transcribed and the transcript will be provided to you for your review and will be kept completely confidential. You will not be asked to provide your name during the interview. Your email address will NOT be linked to your responses on the questionnaire. NO IP addresses will be recorded. The investigator will take all reasonable steps to protect your identity.

It is possible you may experience some discomfort while answering the questions related to your experiences as a DACAmented Latina/o/x. For those who experience discomfort and would like to obtain some help, I will provide a list of resources that will be accessible at the beginning and the end of the interview. You are also free to end the interview at any time both during and after the interview. Other than discomfort, there are no known risks involved in this study beyond those of everyday life.

Thank you in advance for your participation! Please feel free to forward this email to anyone who would be interested in participating in our study.

For more information about the study and to participate, please contact:  
Elizabeth Hernandez at (818) 939-3071 or [eh2479@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:eh2479@tc.columbia.edu)

## APPENDIX D

### Participant's Rights

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Hernandez, M.S.

Research Title: Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic: Exploring the Role of Activism in DACAmented Latinas/os/xs' Thwarted Transition into Adulthood

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (818) 939-3071, and email is [eh2479@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:eh2479@tc.columbia.edu).
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
- If video and/or audio taping is part of this research, I ( ) consent to be audio/video taped. I ( ) do NOT consent to being video/audio taped. The written, video and/or audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator and members of the research team.
- Written, video and/or audio taped materials ( ) may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research ( ) may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.

\*OPTIONAL\* Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### Informed Consent

**RESEARCH TITLE:** Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic: Exploring the Role of Activism in DACAmented Latinas/os/xs' Thwarted Transition into Adulthood

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH:** You are invited to participate in a study of the experiences of DACAmented Latinas/os/xs who identify as activists in the immigrant rights movement. Your responses will help clarify the way activism and Latina/o/x culture influence coping and development of DACAmented Latinas/os/xs. Findings from this study will help develop culturally sensitive services and prevention programs for DACAmented Latinas/os/xs.

You will be participating in an audio-taped interview lasting from 60–90 minutes conducted by the researcher. The audio recording will be transcribed and used in the researcher's dissertation. Please know that if you decide to participate, all identifying information will be removed from the interview transcript, both with regard to yourself and any other persons you may have mentioned, and replaced with pseudonyms. In addition, last names, addresses, names of schools or employment will not be collected; You will have the opportunity to view this redacted version to make sure that you are comfortable that no individuals are identified.

The narrative analysis of interview transcripts will be conducted by Elizabeth Hernandez and members of her research team. Elizabeth Hernandez is the primary investigator for the study and is a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at Teachers College, Columbia University. You are invited to speak with her about any questions you may have; she can be reached at 818-939-3071 or eh2479@tc.columbia.edu.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The risk of participating in the project is not believed to be significantly different from participation in activism activities, interviews or meetings where personal issues, such as your immigration documentation status, are discussed. As all identifying information will be removed and your signature is optional, it is unlikely that this data could be used against you. Additionally, it is possible that some participants may experience the information they share in their interviews as sensitive. In that event, you are encouraged to talk to Elizabeth Hernandez about any concerns that you may have. In addition, you may refuse to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and you are free to withdraw your participation at any point. There are no direct benefits of participation in this study.

**PAYMENTS:** Participants will not be reimbursed for participating in the project.

**DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY:** To protect confidentiality, participants will never be identified personally in any way in analyzed material, nor will their names ever be associated with this material. All materials, including a digital voice recorder, will be stored in locked cabinets and all files will be destroyed following analysis. In addition, audio recordings will be deleted after transcription. Lastly, all email communication between the primary investigator and participant will also be deleted following analysis.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation in the interview will take approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Within two weeks following the interview, you will be offered an opportunity to review the transcript of the interview for any edits or to withdraw any portion/all of your responses.

HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED: This project is part of a dissertation study. The results of the study may be used to help counselors (and others) who work with DACAmented Latinas/os/xs better understand the role that activism has in their developmental trajectory. As such, the results may be presented in meetings or published in scholarly articles. Since all participants will be given pseudonyms, there will be no way to identify the participants in the publication of the research data.

## APPENDIX F

Table 1: Domains, Categories, and Frequencies\*

| <i>Domains</i>                      | <i>Categories</i>                     | <i>Frequency</i> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Reason for Migration             | “A better life”                       | General          |
|                                     | Migrant work                          | General          |
|                                     | Extended family settled in U.S.       | General          |
|                                     | Trauma                                | Variant          |
| 2. Age at Arrival to U.S.           | School age                            | Typical          |
|                                     | Infant/early childhood                | Variant          |
|                                     | Adolescent                            | Variant          |
| 3. Mode of Entry to U.S.            | Entry without inspection              | Typical          |
|                                     | Entry without parent(s)               | Typical          |
|                                     | Tourist visa                          | Variant          |
|                                     | Entry w/ parent(s)                    | Variant          |
|                                     | Traumatic crossing                    | Variant          |
|                                     | Multiple crossings                    | Variant          |
| 4. Migration Educational Experience | School as safe haven                  | General          |
|                                     | High parental educational aspirations | General          |
|                                     | Difficulty learning English           | Typical          |
|                                     | Negative educational experiences      | Variant          |
|                                     | Academic resilience                   | Variant          |
|                                     | Advanced academics in home country    | Variant          |
|                                     | Attended majority White schools       | Variant          |
|                                     | Worked while in school                | Variant          |
| 5. Environmental Factors in U.S.    | Moving multiple times                 | Typical          |
|                                     | Immigrant/POC/working class community | Typical          |
|                                     | Diversity as protective               | Typical          |
|                                     | Poor living conditions                | Variant          |
| 6. Family Dynamics in U.S.          | Mixed-status family                   | General          |
|                                     | Parent(s) long work hours             | General          |
|                                     | Parentified role                      | Typical          |
|                                     | Intact family                         | Typical          |
|                                     | Intergenerational trauma              | Variant          |
|                                     | Reuniting w/ parent(s)/sibling(s)     | Variant          |

Table 1 (continued)

| <i>Domains</i>                                | <i>Categories</i>                      | <i>Frequency</i> |
|---|--|------------------|
| 7. Reactions to Immigration Barriers          | “Dangerous secret”                     | General          |
|   | Feeling “different”                    | General          |
|   | Mental illness                         | Typical          |
|   | “Rude awakening”                       | Typical          |
|   | Cultural resilience                    | Typical          |
|   | “Growing up too fast”                  | Variant          |
|   | Self-deportation as option             | Variant          |
| 8. Experiences of Oppression                  | Resentment                             | Variant          |
|   | Internalized racism                    | Typical          |
|   | Discrimination by stakeholders         | Typical          |
|   | Threats of/Deportation                 | Variant          |
| 9. Impact of Immigration on Cultural Identity | Shame re: criminalization              | Variant          |
|   | Acculturative stress                   | Typical          |
|   | Romantic notions of home country       | Typical          |
|   | Disillusionment of American identity   | Typical          |
|   | Pride re: immigration status           | Typical          |
|   | “I’m not <i>only</i> undocumented”     | Variant          |
|   | Strong connection to ethnic identity   | Variant          |
| 10. Impact of Immigration on Education        | “Caught between two worlds”            | Variant          |
|   | “Survival” skills                      | Typical          |
|   | Non-traditional college student        | Typical          |
|   | Strong network of peers                | Typical          |
|   | <i>Familismo</i> /Family-focused goals | Typical          |
|   | The college “bubble”                   | Typical          |
|   | “Dreams deferred”                      | Typical          |
|   | Decreased academic performance         | Variant          |
|   | Resource-poor geographical location    | Variant          |
|   | 11. Impetus for “Coming Out”           | Survival         |
| DACA  |  | Variant          |
| Oppression as catalyst for activism           |  | Variant          |
| 12. Benefits of Immigrant Rights Activism     | Decreased isolation                    | General          |
|   | “I found my voice”                     | Typical          |
|   | Consistent w/ cultural values          | Typical          |

Table 1 (continued)

| <i>Domains</i>                            | <i>Categories</i>                  | <i>Frequency</i> |
|---|------------------------------------|------------------|
| 12. Benefits of Immigrant Rights Activism | Leadership development             | Typical          |
| (Cont.)                                   | Increased academic motivation      | Variant          |
|   | Clarification of career goals      | Variant          |
|   | Decreased fear of deportation      | Variant          |
|   | Increased awareness of privileges  | Variant          |
|   | Increased motivation for self-care | Variant          |
| 13. Costs of Immigration Rights Activism  | “Good immigrant” stereotype        | Typical          |
|   | Advocacy “burn-out”                | Variant          |
|   | Disconnection w/ other immigrants  | Variant          |
|   | Increased deportation risk         | Variant          |
|   | “One-size-fits-all”                | Variant          |
|   | Pressure to “get out of shell”     | Variant          |
|   | “Cultural embeddedness”            | Variant          |
| 14. Impact of DACA                        | “DACA to the rescue”               | Typical          |
|   | Increased access to education      | Variant          |
|   | “White collar” job opportunities   | Variant          |
|   | Reconnection to home country       | Variant          |
|   | Changes in family role             | Variant          |
|   | Guilt re: non-DACA                 | Variant          |
|   | DACA as “Band-Aid”                 | Variant          |

\*General (11-12 cases), Typical (7-10 cases), Variant (2-6 cases)