

Ni de Aquí, Ni de Allá:  
Sense of Belonging among Latinx DACA recipient University Students

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## **Abstract**

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This study was conducted in order to more accurately understand the relationship between sense of belonging in the U.S., self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and mental health and well-being for Latinx DACA recipient college students in the United States. Additionally, results were intended to assist in providing critical information regarding: (a) adequate support to Latinx DACA recipient college students, (b) informed consulting for policy shifts and changes with legal status, and (c) ethical psychological care to Latinx DACA recipient individuals. Ten participants were interviewed and given self-report measures (BDI and BAI) in order to glean insight on the aforementioned relationship. Data analysis included consensual qualitative research (CQR) analysis for interview transcripts and averages of self-report measures as compared to general university student population scores (BDI and BAI). Qualitative results are organized under eight overarching themes. Clinical implications, considerations for immigration policies, and considerations for university policies are discussed and explored.

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*“Nosotros somos como los granos de quinua – si estamos solos, el viento lleva lejos; pero si estamos unidos en un costal, nada hace el viento. Bamboleará, pero no nos hará caer.”*

– Dolores Cacuango

*“Hay que luchar por todos equitativamente, bonitamente, honradamente, y racionalmente.”*

– Tránsito Amaguaña

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## Dedication

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

According to Pew Research Center, in 2017 there were 10.5 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. In a country built on the idea of creating a ‘land of opportunities,’ that, as famously described by poet Emma Lazarus, asked for “your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” this statistic does not seem unordinary. The United States (U.S.) has experienced four main waves of immigration that created a demographically diverse country, including individuals from Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (Martin, 2014). One of the core tenets of American values, meritocracy, presumes a land for all to succeed, as long as hard work and dedication are exercised. Meritocracy, often portrayed as the “American Dream,” is one of the most persuasive factors in immigrants’ decision to come to the United States, but unfortunately, the presumed consequences of meritocracy still are not attainable for all. In addition to this false notion of the American Dream, the widely held idea that immigrants come to the United States for a better life is often misleading. As best described by Tinoco (2018), for many immigrants, the American Dream is not “a pathway to a better life,” but may more accurately be described “as a running away for survival.” In order to maintain a life in the United States, most undocumented immigrants live in the shadows and therefore, do not benefit from core resources that provide a path to success, such as adequate health care, appropriate working conditions, educational resources, and low-income resources.

Immigrants are often silenced and dehumanized by the media, and even the government. Terms used in the media to describe immigrants such as “illegal” or “alien” depict one of the most common ways undocumented immigrants are dehumanized. According to New York Times writer, Lawrence Downes, the term “illegal” is typically “a code word for racial and ethnic



hatred” (2007). In addition, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, asserted the term “illegal alien” “implies that a person’s existence is criminal” (1985; Moreno, 2016). Moreover, these terms center negative preconceived notions on the actual individuals, rather than their actions or situations. Another phrase that is frequently used against immigrants is “go back to your country.” Going back to the country in which one was born can have extremely different meanings for undocumented immigrants: some eventually settle back into a country they consider home while others may have to become accustomed to a country they have never known. The latter group includes undocumented immigrants that came to the United States as infants or young children, and therefore consider the U.S. their home. Undocumented youth, or presently referred to as “DACAmented” individuals, a term that later will be explored more in depth, are a group of immigrants that have a very particular situation: they go through most of their entire lives, from childhood to their adult years, in a country they *legally* do not belong in. While movements such as the DREAM Act and DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) have attempted to provide a pathway for childhood immigrants to citizenship, these efforts have failed multiple times and there continues to be explicit and aggressive pushback.

The DREAM Act was first presented in 2001 as a clear pathway to American citizenship for undocumented individuals who immigrated to the United States before the age of 16, but the legislation did not pass through Congress. In 2012, the Obama administration signed and passed DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), as a “temporary stopgap measure that [lets the U.S. focus its] resources wisely while giving a degree of relief and hope to talented, driven, patriotic young people” (Obama, 2012). Although DACA has aided many communities, it has had a profound effect on the large group of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the United States, estimated by Pew Hispanic Center (2004) to be 8.4 million or 81% of the immigrant

population in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of July 2015, Latinx individuals were the largest ethnic or racial minority group in the United States, constituting 17.6% of the U.S.'s total population (Bureau, 2015). In addition, the projected Latinx population in the U.S. in 2060 is 119 million (as compared to the current 56.6 million). With this being said, the following literature review will provide information about undocumented immigrants overall, while also focusing specifically on Latinx immigrants. Figure 1 (Appendix B) describes what the DACA process provides to undocumented youth in the United States.

Despite this positive move forward as a country for undocumented youth, many states took actions against the policy, and placed restrictions, per their legal right, on the benefits from DACA. For example, in Arizona, the first state to oppose DACA, Governor Jan Brewer issued an order that restricted DACAmented individuals from receiving any state benefits promised through DACA. Although the 2014 court case held that this action was unconstitutional, the original actions by Governor Brewer clearly depicted the state's sentiments towards this population (Kurtz, 2012). In a slightly different approach to opposing DACA, Texas Governor Rick Perry distributed a letter to all state agencies to notify them that DACA did not change their state policies in regards to "alien" legal status (Aguilar, 2012). In addition to various state restrictions, the Trump administration also engaged in explicit and forceful pushback. On September 5, 2017, the Trump Administration announced plans to phase out the DACA program. This action resulted in an uproar of activist communities and allies, and the implementation has been put on hold by several courts. Today, DACA eligible individuals are still encouraged to renew their DACA status, but the future of DACA remains unclear (United We Dream, 2017). It is obvious that the success of DACA and other legislation that supports undocumented youth depends enormously on legislators and policy makers. Despite the fact that proponents of DACA

created this policy in order to aid undocumented youth, there are many potential costs, including psychological and emotional impacts, of being DACAmented.

One issue that arises with DACA eligibility requirements is the stipulation that the individual not be convicted of a felony or significant misdemeanor. While a few may believe that this is an important and fair requirement for DACA eligibility, there are many social injustices within the law enforcement and court systems that make this requirement questionable. Latinx and Black individuals are disproportionately arrested and convicted in the United States, when compared to the rest of the population. Although Latinx and Black individuals make up 29% of the U.S. population, they make up 59% of the U.S. incarcerated population (Sakala, 2014). In addition, since many courts in urban areas (which are typically populated by mostly Latinx and Black individuals) are extremely backed up with trials, individuals are encouraged to agree to plea bargains, even if they are innocent or wrongly convicted, so that cases do not have to go to trial (Kalief Browder Series on Spike, 2016). As a result, ascertaining that an individual was rightfully arrested or convicted is a difficult task.

**1.1 School and career.** One of the most important aspects of DACA is to provide resources for DACAmented students to be able to receive an education. The two main resources that make a college education more attainable for DACAmented individuals are the ability to apply for and receive loans, and the opportunity to pay in-state tuition prices. These two factors provide students the financial means to possibly pursue a higher education. In general, attending college is most commonly accompanied with future plans and aspirations. Various career counseling theories such as Social Cognitive Career Theory, Theory of Work Adjustment, and Super's Life-span Life-space Theory all include a process that involves exploring how individuals plan for and/or perceive future aspirations. Because all of these theories maintain the

assumption that if an individual both likes and works towards one's future, it is attainable, the career journey of DACAmented students are not adequately accounted for in these theoretical frameworks. In other words, DACAmented students can both love and work towards their goals, but in reality, since the stability of DACA in the U.S. is uncertain it is nearly impossible to continue pursuing one's goals.

Besides this aforementioned reality, many factors during DACAmented students' college education journey create serious barriers that impede DACAmented students from truly succeeding. In a large scale review and analysis of administrative data on DACAmented students attending college and working in the United States, Hsin and Ortega (2018) reported the *real life* impact of DACA "benefits" to DACAmented individuals. Results indicated three main outcomes from the DACA program temporary benefits: (a) DACA incentivizes work over educational attainment (due to the emphasis on temporary work-permit benefit), (b) four-year colleges typically do not adequately accommodate DACA students and therefore logistically require students to choose between attending school full time *or* working full time, (c) in general, community colleges provide DACA students with more flexibility to reduce course work and increase work hours. Overall, Hsin and Ortega (2018) reported that the uncertain and temporary nature of the DACA program creates serious barriers to education attainment.

**1.2 Mental health and well-being.** Despite the large population of Latinx immigrants in the United States, there is a lack of research on the mental health and wellbeing of this population (Gonzales et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2004; Kamal & Killian, 2015; Martinez et al., 2013, Vega et al., 2004). Immigrants play a vital role in the values, economy, and diversity in this country, and becoming aware of their psychological needs is pivotal to the ongoing success of the United States. The literature on mental health and wellbeing for undocumented Latinx

immigrants indicates that they often suffer from high rates of depressive symptoms, anxiety, and PTSD (Gonzales et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2004; Kamal & Killian, 2015; Martinez et al., 2013, Vega et al., 2004). Research has demonstrated that the outcomes of these aforementioned symptoms are not positive, and affect everyday tasks such as maintaining a job and/or relationships. Unfortunately, immigrant populations, such as Latinx immigrants, do not actively seek out mental health services, and often underutilize the services they do find (Chavira et al., 2014). In addition, the lack of health care services for undocumented immigrants, and immigrants in general, only exacerbates these issues; not receiving treatment for either mental or physical illness eventually worsens symptoms and can even result in more symptoms (Chavez, 2011, Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012).

**1.3 Sense of belonging.** Following the 2016 U.S. Presidential election that took many by surprise, a xenophobic platform in the public discourse was centralized. Building a wall between the United States and Mexico, providing more funds for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and increasing deportations of undocumented immigrants became themes of this renewed xenophobic discourse. Instead of depicting immigrants as hard-working individuals who added merit to this country, immigrants were described as “rapists” and “criminals” by the 45<sup>th</sup> U.S. President. As reported by Menjivar (2016), during the Trump administration, immigrant criminalization became the norm in law and in many media outlets. This extreme xenophobia, or fear of anything foreign, was a precursor for the recent rise in hateful intimidation and harassment (the majority of crimes against immigrants), as reported by Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, 2016). One poignant report from the SPLC illustrates the climate, “a student in an English IV course told his teacher, who is Mexican-American, that he needs to take his family and get out of our country. The student mentioned [the teacher] wasn't welcome any longer. He

supported this argument by citing comments from our President-elect [Trump].” In addition, immigration policies within the last five years have shattered any sense of safety or sense of belonging in a country many undocumented immigrants consider home. Thus, despite the new Biden Administration’s current initiatives regarding immigration reform, many immigrants continue to experience a lack of safety and belonging in the U.S., given the up-and-down nature of immigration politics across the decades.

An important consideration of these sociopolitical events is the psychological impact of hateful public discourse on new immigrants, particularly DACAmented students. For example, according to research conducted by Lambert et al. (2013), there is a strong correlation between sense of belonging and meaningfulness in life. In addition, Lambert et al. stated that meaning in life has an array of positive outcomes in terms of mental health and wellbeing. Although Lambert et al. reported convincing findings, these were based on a population of elderly White women. Thus, the validity of these findings with other populations, such as undocumented immigrants, is questionable. There currently is little research that attempts to explore sense of belonging with immigrants (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Benuto, Casas, Cummings, & Newlands, 2018; Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife, 2013; Golash-Boza, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2013). The main theme throughout these studies is that immigrants typically do not experience a positive sense of belonging in host countries, and this may indicate issues with mental health and wellbeing. Other scholars also have explored how sense of belonging plays a role in youth’s school and career outcomes, and as expected, results indicate that lower sense of belonging correlates with negative academic outcomes. There are obvious ties between sense of belonging, mental health and wellbeing, and school/career variables, and as a result, it is important for psychologists to

turn their attention to populations, such as undocumented immigrants, that may be suffering in terms of their sense of belonging in the U.S., especially due to the prevailing political climate.

As reported by Martinez et al. (2013) through a systematic review of the literature, there is a direct relationship between anti-immigration policies and access to health care services, a harmful trend, given that undocumented immigrants commonly suffer from high rates of depressive symptoms, anxiety, and PTSD (Gonzales et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2004; Kamal & Killian, 2015; Martinez et al., 2013, Vega et al., 2004). Although there are a handful of studies on the mental health and wellbeing of undocumented immigrants (Gonzales et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2004; Kamal & Killian, 2015; Martinez et al., 2013, Vega et al., 2004), there is a dearth of literature on the sense of belonging among undocumented immigrants in the United States (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2014; Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife, 2012; Golash-Boza, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2013; Kirova, 2001; Peters, Stodolska, & Horolets, 2015), and no literature, of which the author is aware, on the sense of belonging for undocumented youth who have spent most of their lives in the United States (DACA eligible youth). Exploring DACA youth's sense of belonging is an integral part of understanding their overall mental health and wellbeing, and as a consequence, what health care services should be available to them. In addition, it is also important to explore how DACAmented students' sense of belonging interacts with their self-efficacy and career/school goals. Sense of belonging for this population is important to study now more than ever, given that attacks have been made and their safety questioned. With this, as psychologists, it is vital to deeply understand this population's concerns and fears and assist in creating a safer environment. In order to take steps towards creating a safe environment for DACA eligible undocumented young adults (DACAmented), this research project aimed to explore their sense of belonging in a country they know as home, but legally do not belong to.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

The review of the literature includes topics that are integral to the experience of DACAmented Latinx college students, including: (a) sense of belonging (SB) theory and research, (b) school and career theory and research, and (d) mental health and wellbeing with Latinx individuals. A review of the SB theoretical framework (Hagerty et al., 1992) is provided as well as several SB models that contextualize the concept. This framework and models then are applied specifically to the Latinx DACA population. Next, a brief review of career counseling theories is provided with a deeper focus on Social Cognitive Career Theory (Brown & Lent, 2012). A portion of this section is dedicated to reviewing the literature on mental health and well-being with Latinx individuals, incorporating the limited available research focused specifically on DACAmented populations. Finally, a review of the literature on SB, as it applies to school, career, and mental health, is presented.

### **2.1 Sense of Belonging Theory**

Scholars have referred to sense of belonging (SB) as a *vital* mental health concept that influences mental health and wellbeing (Anant, 1967; Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife, 2013; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992; Young, Russell, & Powers, 2004). While SB may seem similar to concepts such as loneliness, alienation, and hopelessness, it is a unique construct (Hagerty et al., 1992) because there are many levels of SB, and individuals may feel SB on one level but not another. For example, a student may feel SB within their classroom, but not SB within their school overall. In 1992, Hagerty et al. observed the minimal focus on sense of belonging in the mental health literature despite its potential usefulness in developing effective interventions. Today, over 25 years later, this trend still is the case. SB researchers describe a positive correlation between feeling SB and life satisfaction, which as a result leads to



favorable mental health outcomes (Lambert et al., 2013). Despite such findings (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Anant, 1967; Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife, 2013; Hagerty et al., 1992; Young, Russell, & Powers, 2004), more research still must be done with larger and more diverse pools of participants.

In order to place sense of belonging within a conceptual framework, Hagerty et al. (1992) utilized a hybrid model of concept development proposed by Madden (1990) (see Figure 2, Appendix B). According to the model, two elements define SB. The first element is explained as experiencing being “*valued, needed, or important with respect to people, groups, objects, organizations, environments or spiritual dimensions*” (emphasis added; Hagerty et al., 1992). One example is when an employee feels valued within their workplace. Feeling valued, needed, or important permits an individual to feel like they belong. The second element is described as experiencing a “*fit or congruence with other people, groups, objects, organizations, environments, or spiritual dimensions through shared or complementary characteristics*” (emphasis added; Hagerty et al., 1992). An example of this element is when a first-generation student is part of a group for first-generation students. Sharing characteristics with others allows individuals to feel connected, a key component of belongingness. In order for the preceding elements to become a reality for an individual, *antecedent* incidents first must occur. Antecedents are described as “energy for involvement, potential and desire for meaningful involvement, and potential for shared or complementary characteristics” (Hagerty et al., 1992, p. 174). An example of an antecedent is a soccer player’s endless training prior to trying out for major league soccer (MLS). The *potential* for involvement creates the possibilities to get involved and belong. Finally, incidents that happen as a result of the attributes mentioned above, or consequences, are reported as “psychological, social, spiritual, or physical involvement,

attributions of meaningfulness to that involvement, and fortification or laying down of a fundamental foundation for emotional and behavioral responses” (Hagerty et al., 1992). For instance, a youth leader who enjoys teaching Sunday school for children is a consequence of SB. Once SB develops, there is an even deeper level of involvement beyond physical involvement, such as psychological and emotional involvement. Overall this framework describes three basic stages of sense of belonging: (a) antecedent, (b) experiencing the elements that define SB, and (c) consequences, that set forth a detailed understanding of SB. By demonstrating a potential to belong, then experiencing being valued in various settings and sharing characteristics with others, individuals are able to experience even more connectedness with other individuals and communities (Hagerty et al., 1992).

The theoretical framework of sense of belonging that includes antecedents, elements, and consequences provides researchers and clinicians an empirical basis and language to discuss and examine what sense of belonging looks like. In order to research sense of belonging within the DACAmented (DACA eligible youth) population, the following passage includes the application of the Hagerty et al. (1992) framework to this population. As stated above, the antecedent portion of the Hagerty et al. (1992) sense of belonging framework requires individuals to demonstrate “potential and desire for meaningful involvement.” When applying this framework to DACA eligible youth, participation in groups such as *United We Dream*, *Dreamers Without Borders*, and *Immigrant Youth Justice League*, reflects a clear desire and potential for *meaningful* involvement in the United States as hopeful future citizens. These three organizations are groups of activists (typically DACAmented activists) that are involved with communities of undocumented immigrants to disseminate information regarding immigrants’ rights, assist immigrants in incidents with ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), and provide a

support group for DACAmented individuals. Despite the fact that being a DACA recipient does *not* assure undocumented youth a path to permanent citizenship, these inspiring individuals continue to take advantage of the opportunities DACA does grant them in the hopes of possible future policies that provide a path to citizenship. Although DACAmented individuals engage in these antecedents in the SB model, such as going through the complicated DACA application process, it is unclear if they also engage in the two other stages of the SB framework: elements that define SB and consequences of SB.

There are few articles that address sense of belonging in immigrants (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Golash-Boza, 2016; Kirova, 2001), and no known or available research that focuses specifically on DACAmented individual's sense of belonging (SB) in this country. Studies that focus specifically on SB for immigrants reported the following outcomes: life satisfaction is a major predictor of immigrants' sense of belonging (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015), often immigrants feel SB primarily to their family and community (Golash-Boza, 2016), and a lack of acceptance and belonging within school negatively impact motivation and cognitive areas (Kirova, 2001). Of the studies that look at SB for Latinx individuals, most focus on Latinx participant's SB within a school context (Holloway-Friesen, 2019; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lamont Strayhorn, 2008; Maestas et al., 2007; Nuñez, 2009). Most of these aforementioned studies found that perceived racially/ethnic hostile school environments negatively impact SB, and campus diversity positively impacts Latinx students' experience of SB (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lamont Strayhorn, 2008; Maestas et al., 2007; Nuñez, 2009). In addition to these findings, other studies that focused on SB for Latinx immigrants reported the following outcomes: Latinx graduate students who are mentored reported significantly higher levels of SB and academic self-efficacy than unmentored students (Holloway-Friesen, 2019), membership in religious and social

community organizations are strongly associated with students' SB (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and faculty interest in student development positively impacts Latinx students' SB (Nuñez, 2009). Finally, one outcome that stood out from other studies was the *critical paradox* presented by Nuñez (2009). In the study, Nuñez (2009) described the *critical paradox* as the tendency for Latinx students who feel a greater SB at the university to also perceive the university as having a more exclusionary climate. Furthermore, Nuñez (2009) stated that this “seemingly contradictory” finding was indicative of Latinx students' critical consciousness, explaining their movement to become engaged in community and social issues due to feeling marginalized. The next section reviews longstanding SB models, providing some critique as to their applicability with DACAmented individuals.

## **2.2 Sense of Belonging (SB) Models**

One of the earliest references to the importance of a sense of belonging dates back to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs that places love and belonging within a pyramid thought to capture some of humans' most important needs. While physiological needs are thought to be the most basic needs, the need for love and belonging follows closely, coming up right after the need for safety. In the pyramid, it is clear to see that the three needs aforementioned are critical to be able to reach self-actualization. According to Maslow's (1943) pyramid, an individual must maintain a sense of belonging in order to reach self-esteem and confidence, and eventually achieve one's full potential. In reviewing the language Maslow utilized within his model, it is evident that the word *need* was presented to portray the fundamental necessities for an individual to become the greatest version of themselves. The pyramid does not impose suggestions on how to reach one's full potential, but instead provides vital needs to reach a state most individuals hope to reach, self-actualization. With this framework in mind, an assumption can be made that

without feeling a sense of belonging, an individual does not have the opportunity to self-actualize.

Following Maslow's concept came Anant (1967), who described sense of belonging as a "personal involvement (in a social system) to the extent that the person feels himself to be an indispensable an integral part of the system" (p. 391 – 392). Despite the problematic examples of sense of belonging cited throughout Anant's (1967) work, his definition allowed other researchers to work within a framework that highlighted the importance of belonging within a social system. For Anant (1967) sense of belonging had a greater purpose than just feeling at home with one's friends and family; sense of belonging was a manner in which individuals portrayed their place within their social system (i.e. their country).

The final framework that has been cited in many articles addressing sense of belonging is that of Baumeister and Leary (1995). According to their theory, the need to belong is a *fundamental* human motivation. Baumeister and Leary (1995) go on even further to state that there are both physical and mental health repercussions in connection with not forming interpersonal attachments. In working with this framework, researchers are able to draw connections between an individual's sense of belonging and mental health.

Due to both the history of research and time period in which these researchers published, the frameworks were created with White, non-Latinx individuals' sense of belonging in mind. As a result, the experience of undocumented Latinx youth has not been thought of within the frameworks previously mentioned. When understanding the term *self-actualization*, or fulfillment of one's talents, for the immigrant population, it is important to think of its parallel to fulfilling the "American Dream." For many, the "American Dream" simply refers to being able to work towards a specific goal that is set without being deterred by a lack of resources and legal

restrictions (i.e. meritocracy). Examining undocumented immigrants' situation in the simplest terms, it is clear that since Maslow's fundamental needs of physiological safety, and sense of belonging are not met, self-actualization, at least in terms of achieving the "American Dream," can never be met. This inability to self-actualize may bring forth a sense of hopelessness for many undocumented immigrants.

In terms of Anant's (1967) definition, belonging within a social system, such as one's 'home' country, is important for the DACA eligible youth within the United States. This idea is prevalent with this specific population due to the fact that their true 'home' country is the country that they grew up in for much of their lives, regardless of their actual legal status within the country. When differentiating between 'home' country and country of origin, it is evident that these two terms do not always coincide. The part of Anant's (1967) definition that resonates the most with describing DACA eligible youth's sense of belonging is the idea that the individuals are an "*indispensable* and *integral* part of the system." During the Trump administration, it seemed as if no undocumented immigrant was safe from harm or exploitation. For example, in a statement regarding immigration plans, he stated: "Anyone who is in the United States illegally is subject to deportation." With a handful of detrimental policies and messages sent to the DACA population during the Trump administration, it became clear that immigrants in the U.S. may not always feel *indispensable* and *integral*, relevant qualities for SB.

Finally, when thinking of undocumented immigrants' sense of belonging within Baumeister and Leary's (1995) framework, it is clear that these individuals, just as all other humans, share the motivation to belong. It is imperative that DACA eligible youths' motivation to belong in a country that they have considered 'home' for their entire lives not be counteracted

by sending them “back to their country,” or more properly stated, country of origin. Such actions likely will interfere with their mental well-being.

### **2.3 School and Career Theory**

An important factor of succeeding in the U.S. is the quest for higher education. In focusing on DACAmented students, it is important to view these students’ school and career trajectory within a conceptual framework. Within the field of career counseling, there are a surplus of models to describe school and career development in the lifetime of children and adults. Brown and Lent (2012) presented five major career development theories in the field including: (a) Holland’s Theory of Vocational Choice and Adjustment, (b) Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), (c) The Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, (d) Gottfredson’s Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation, and (e) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). A brief review of key concepts of these theories are provided next as well as their potential applicability with the DACAmented population.

Holland (as described in Brown & Lent, 2012) has provided the field with two critical concepts, especially utilized in career assessments, including RIASEC (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional) types and the Holland Code. RIASEC types describe work environments and personalities/preferences. One’s Holland Code consists of the three highest RIASEC type scores. With these two concepts, Holland focused on the processes of congruence, differentiation, and consistency between the person and the work place (Brown & Lent, 2012). Due to the focus on congruence between person and job types, this theory is most applicable during and after an individual’s first exposure or experience in the workforce.

The Theory of Work (TWA) focuses specifically on one’s adjustment at a work place and the factors necessary to reach satisfaction, correspondence, and overall retention (Brown & Lent,

2012). Due to its specific focus, TWA is most applicable when an individual is already in the workforce. In contrast, two other career theories, Life-Span, Life-Space and Gottfredson's theory, focus on career development throughout the lifetime. The Life-Span, Life-Space theory, proposed by Super (1973), consists of five developmental periods throughout a person's career development lifetime. Gottfredson's theory, although similar to Super's, highlights the importance of accessibility, gender, and prestige to one's experience within their career development lifetime (Brown & Lent, 2012).

Although many of these early career theories can be adapted to somewhat fit the experience of a DACAmented student, there is a plethora of integral factors that may be missed. For example, there was a strong focus on an individual's agency and choice when it came to career aspirations (Brown & Lent, 2012). To illustrate, Super explored developmental periods in one's career whereas Holland described RIASEC types; both theorists assumed that there was an even playing field for individuals to pursue a career that fulfills needs and values (Brown & Lent, 2012). That is, Super and Holland, as many other early career theorists, presumed incorrectly that the experience of White, mostly middle-class males was the experience of all individuals, and contextual factors, such as race, gender and social class did not enter in their original formulations.

In contrast, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was one of the first frameworks to create a space for psychologists and researchers to take cultural context into serious consideration (Brown & Lent, 2012; Brown & Lent, 2017). Much of the current literature on communities of color, including Latinx individuals, utilizes SCCT to discuss career development (Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, & Scanlan, 2006; McWhirter, Hackett, & Bandalos, 1998; Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017). In a direct assessment of the validity of SCCT



for Latinx individuals, specifically Mexican-American women, Flores and O'Brien (2002) found that many tenets of SCCT were supported by their data, including impact of self-efficacy on career interests and perceived support and few perceived barriers. Their results demonstrated a strong correlation between: (a) self-efficacy and career interests and (2) perceived support, few perceived barriers, and career goals. In addition, Flores and O'Brien (2002) discussed the ability to explore cultural factors including traditional career aspirations and familial expectations with the framework of SCCT in their study. In two other studies conducted with Latinx high school students, Gushue et al. (2006) and Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017) utilized SCCT to frame their research stating that this career development theory has been supported by various other researchers to be useful in studying career development with people of color. Gushue et al. (2006) discussed core tenets of SCCT that were supported by the study's findings, including: (a) career decision-making self-efficacy was related to student's career identity and exploration activities, (b) perceived barriers were related to career identity, specifically for this Latinx high school student population, and (c) the perception of more obstacles influenced a less defined career identity for these students. Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017) also reported that SCCT concepts were supported by the data including: (a) positive identification with one's ethnic (Latinx) group directly impacted student's beliefs in their ability to reach career related goals, (b) higher self-efficacy influenced fewer perceived barriers to achieving career related tasks, and (c) positive attitude towards one's ethnic identity is vital in one's perceptions of career barriers. The authors of both studies highlight the importance of using SCCT to adequately explore career trajectory and concepts for Latinx students as it provides them the opportunity to consider variables that vary depending on race, ethnicity, gender and various other identities.

Finally, in a study conducted specifically with Latinx DACAmented college students (as well as Latinx citizen and non-Latinx White citizen students), SCCT was used to frame the main research question of how does critical consciousness impact persistence in college (Cadenas, Bernstein, & Tracey, 2018)? Although Cadenas et al. (2018) focused specifically on the impact of various aspects that make up critical consciousness (i.e. political involvement, critical action, etc.) on persistence in college, their outcomes indicated the importance of using a theoretical model (SCCT) that encourages researchers and clinicians to consider various factors and barriers that impact one's career journey. A few outcomes in the study held true for the three groups of students in the study, but there were also outcomes that indicated important differences between the groups. For example, the relationship between political self-efficacy and political outcome expectations was stronger for Latinx and Latinx DACA students than for non-Latinx White students. Another important outcome that specifically highlighted the experience of Latinx DACA students was the lack of a relationship between high risk action (i.e. civil disobedience) and political self-efficacy/outcome expectations. Cadenas et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of this outcome, stating that the extreme risks associated with high risk action may be more detrimental specifically to Latinx DACAmented students due to the possibility of detention and deportation. In addition, one of the research outcomes, also a core tenet of SCCT – higher self-efficacy results in higher expected outcomes – was especially true for Latinx students, both citizens and DACAmented individuals (Cadenas, Bernstein, & Tracey, 2018). With these outcomes in mind, the current study incorporated SCCT as the guiding theory to most accurately and specifically depict Latinx, DACAmented student's career experiences within the United States.

SCCT draws from both person-environment fit and developmental theories and focuses on how individuals develop interests, make choices, achieve success, and experience satisfaction in the workplace. Foundational principles of SCCT come from Bandura's social cognitive theory that emphasized how environments (background contextual affordances) are influential (Brown & Lent, 2012). In addition, Brown and Lent (2012) described three person variables that inform behavior: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. The aforementioned variables are explored through four models in SCCT, including interest, choice, performance, and satisfaction models. All these models take cultural context such as race, ethnicity, gender, environment, and SES into consideration when utilized to describe a client's career history and path. Brown and Lent (2012) describe self-efficacy as confidence and judgment of abilities in terms of occupations. Self-efficacy is influenced by past performances, vicarious learning, and society. Outcome expectations are described as imagined consequences and extrinsic rewards, and are influenced by past outcomes, observations from family, media, and self-efficacy. Finally, SCCT goals are broken down into two types: choice-content goals (i.e., the what), and performance goals, (i.e., the quality or level).

Although every DACA student experiences their own career path differently, all of these students share a few factors that tie them together: temporary protection in the United States, temporary access to resources utilized by American citizens, and overall instability of their DACA status and therefore, uncertain legal protection. With these mutual factors, DACAmented students are briefly described under SCCT's four models. According to the interest model, an individual's interest is heavily influenced by the environments they are exposed to as children and adolescents (Brown & Lent, 2012). In addition, self-efficacy and outcome expectations also drive interests. For DACAmented students, there are varying factors that could affect their

exposure to various resources that influenced their interests; the only issue that gets in the way of *all* DACAmented individuals is the inability to utilize those resources only granted to American citizens. In the choice model, Brown and Lent (2012) state that “environment plays a very important role in determining who gets to do what, where, for how long, and for what sort of rewards,” and this idea is particularly true for DACAmented students. The environment that all DACAmented individuals share is that of undocumented status, and this label plays the most important role in deciphering what individuals can do, where they can do it, and the rewards they are presented. For both the performance and satisfaction model, self-efficacy and outcome expectations play a large role. As mentioned by Brown and Lent (2012), self-efficacy highly influences outcome expectations. As a result, the way an individual perceives possible outcomes from performing a task is highly informed by how they feel they performed in that task. While SCCT proposes that self-efficacy and outcome expectations are guided by personality and ability, Brown and Lent (2012) also leave room for background contextual affordances such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and/or legal status to be factored in. In the case of DACAmented students, legal status plays an indisputable role in their career trajectory.

When viewing self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals within DACAmented students, there are a few common factors that one must consider. Although these students’ self-efficacy may be high due to their past performance, self-efficacy is also informed by society. With this in mind, it is possible to see how a DACAmented student’s self-efficacy, regardless of personal factors and experiences that promote high self-efficacy, may be negatively affected by how they feel accepted within the host country, the United States. Similarly, outcome expectations are also highly impacted by one’s place in society. Since outcome expectations are *imagined* consequences and extrinsic rewards, a foreseeable future must be somewhat present.

While a foreseeable future for DACAmented students can be imagined, a realistic future may not be possible. *Temporary* protection and resources in the United States for undocumented students leaves them with an unpredictable and threatening future. If DACAmented individuals are only guaranteed protection under DACA, how practical, let alone adaptive, is it to maintain high outcome expectations? This idea further affects how goals are described in SCCT. Finally, SCCT goals are broken down into two types: choice-content goals, the what, and performance goals, or the quality or level. Thus not only can DACAmented students' goals be described, but the quality level of the goal(s), and what may impede this quality level, can also be explored.

#### **2.4 Mental Health and Well-being with Latinx Individuals**

As previously stated, there is minimal research on the mental health and well-being (MHWB) of Latinx individuals in the United States (Gonzales et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2004; Kamal & Killian, 2015; Martinez et al., 2013, Vega et al., 2004), and even less research that specifically focuses on Latinx DACAmented individuals (Siemons, Raymond-flesh, Auerswald, & Brindis, 2017; Stacciarini et al., 2015; Uwemedimo, Monterrey, & Linton, 2017; Venkataramani, Shah, O'Brien, Kawachi, & Tsai, 2017). As compared to the general public, Latinx individuals typically suffer from higher rates of depression, anxiety, and/or PTSD (Gonzales et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2004; Kamal & Killian, 2015; Martinez et al., 2013, Vega et al., 2004). In exploring the precursors to these mental health outcomes, Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, and Zapata (2014) provided a comprehensive list of possible *situational stressors* that plague many Latinx individuals in the U.S. In this list, Arredondo et al. (2014) explored stressors such as: racism/colorism, classism, poverty, lack of health care access, legislative impediments, negative societal portrayals of Latinx individuals, hate crimes, psychological stressors, workplace stressors, and acculturative stress as the overarching stressors

most Latinx individuals face. In addition to these stressors, Latinx immigrants commonly suffer from immigration trauma and constant fear of deportation (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013; Siemons et al., 2017).

Although all these factors have an effect on MHWB for the general Latinx population, the DACAmented status is unique, and therefore presents these individuals with an additional, extraordinarily distinct stressor that includes the experience of growing older and acquiring more familial responsibility, but receiving increasingly fewer legal options and resources (Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, and Dedios-Sannguinetti, 2013). In addition, Siemons et al. (2017) reported that in a focus group of DACAmented young adults, mental health and well-being emerged for most participants as a primary health concern. In their study, Siemons et al. (2017) found that DACA status had a positive impact on Latinx DACAmented individuals' MHWB by lowering stressors such as fear of deportation. Uwemedimo et al. (2017) also pointed out the positive impact DACA status had on MHWB, especially the reduction in stress associated with possible deportation. In yet another study, Venkataramani et al. (2017) reported a reduction in symptoms of psychological distress for Latinx DACAmented individuals. Although research demonstrates that DACA status has mitigated a few of the stressors that undocumented youth and young adults face, current research also indicates the detrimental impact the temporary status and termination of DACA can and will have on individuals (Siemons et al., 2015; Uwemedimo et al., 2017; Venkataramani et al., 2017). Siemons et al. (2017) further reported that there are still major stressors that negatively impact MHWB including: added familial financial stress, constraints in upward mobility, and uncertainty around the temporary DACA status.

Almost all of the literature on immigrants and mental health suggests that depression and anxiety are the two most common negative mental health outcomes (Kamal & Killian, 2015). In

a study conducted in Canada, Kamal and Killian (2015) explored the mental health impacts of living in constant fear of deportation. Kamal and Killian (2015) further asserted that the severe lack of mental health services to immigrant populations in turn leads to untreated anxiety and depression that often worsens. According to the Latina/o Adolescent Migration, Health, and Adaptation (LAMHA) study (conducted in the United States), the risk of anxiety in Latinx youth was 28.8% higher than anxiety disorder estimates for the general public (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). Although Potochnick and Perreira (2010) did not find significantly higher rates of depression in Latinx youth, as compared to other ethnicities/races, they cited two studies, Kleykamp and Tienda (2005) and Saluja (2004), that reported higher rates of depression: 11% and 22%, respectively. In sum, although mental health outcomes and situational stressors for Latinx immigrants are the most commonly discussed factors in Latinx individuals' mental health, sense of belonging, a positive mental health variable, has not yet been seriously considered or measured as an integral factor in DACAmented individual's mental health and wellbeing.

## **2.5 Sense of Belonging and School Success**

The ties among sense of belonging (SB), school success, and motivation have been explored extensively (Chiu, Chow, McBride, & Mol, 2016; Georgiades, Boyle, and Fife, 2013; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Ham, Yang, & Cha, 2017; Kirova, 2001; Osterman, 2000; Slaten, Ferguson, Allen, & Brodrick, 2016; Walton & Cohen, 2011). In a review of the school belonging literature history and current trends, Slaten and colleagues (2016) provided a thorough description of theoretical background, variables related to school belonging, predictors of school belonging, school belonging within universities, and suggestions for future directions. Within the review, Slaten and colleagues (2016) highlighted various articles that discuss integral aspects of school belonging. For example, Osterman (2000) found that SB is vital to a student's success in

the school community. More specifically, Walton and Cohen (2011) demonstrated that social-belonging interventions improved academic (and health) outcomes for students of color. These two sets of findings reveal the overall importance of SB within a school community, especially for students of color. A gap noted by Slaten and colleagues' (2016) within the review was studies exploring the difficulty for marginalized students to experience a true sense of school belonging. Of the few studies that specifically address sense of belonging within the school context, all studies highlight the impact sense of belonging has on marginalized students' success. In their study on urban adolescent students, Goodenow and Grady (1993) similarly confirmed the importance of SB for minority students' success in school. According to these results, SB was significantly associated with many motivation-related measures, including expectancy of success, valuing schoolwork, general school motivation, and self-reported effort (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). As the largest minority in the U.S., these findings seem relevant for Latinx student success as well.

Two additional studies focused specifically on immigrant students' experiences with SB in school settings (Georgiades, Boyle, and Fife, 2013, Kirova, 2001). Through analyzed transcripts from immigrant elementary school students, Kirova (2001) found that students who described their school culture as unaccepting, or not feeling that they belonged, also described symptoms of loneliness, lowered self-esteem, lack of desire to go to school, and expectations to fail. On the other hand, Georgiades et al. (2013) attributed slightly different negative outcomes to a lack of belongingness in school. In an exploration of data collected through the Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the U.S., Georgiades et al. (2013) found that adolescents who displayed lower levels of school belongingness also displayed emotional and behavioral issues. The authors further stated that there was a strong link between perceptions of belonging and



emotional and behavioral issues in school. These symptoms can have a profound effect on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of any immigrant student. Unfortunately, although there has been an initial exploration into how SB affects immigrant students' success, motivation, and behavioral issues in school settings, no known work has focused specifically on DACAmented students' sense of belonging in college and the effect on self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

## **2.6 Sense of Belonging and Mental Health and Well-being Research**

Few studies have focused on the effect of SB on mental health, despite the fact that Anant (1967) proposed an inverse relationship between SB and anxiety. Although Anant (1967) discussed the importance of studying SB as a vital mental health concept, there has been a dearth in the literature exploring the significance SB holds in an individual's mental health and well-being. In a preliminary literature search for researchers discussing SB and mental health, the research of Young, Russel, and Powers (2004) was among the few studies to directly question the relationship between SB and mental health, specifically with older women in Australia. Their results indicated that when an individual experiences SB, they also demonstrate better mental health levels (Young et al., 2004). Due to the fact that the participants included only elder White women, results cannot be generalized to other populations, but can be utilized to guide further studies with other populations.

In a broader literature search of the effects of SB, two research studies indirectly discussed the integral role SB plays in an individual's mental health. In a study conducted by Lambert et al. (2013) that incorporated a more eclectic group of participants, SB was positively correlated with meaning in life. Despite the fact that Lambert et al. (2013) did not specifically use the term "mental health," one can look deeper into the manner in which meaning in life is

defined in the study. One general precursor for clinical depression is the lack of meaning in life, or hopelessness, whereas having meaning in life is the opposite of depression. With this in mind, SB, which positively correlates with meaning in life, might be viewed as a deterrent for clinical depression.

In the final study that indirectly addressed the effects of SB on mental health and well-being, Gonzales et al. (2013) conducted a research study that attempted to understand the effects of SB on the “1.5 generation” of immigrants, that is, DACAmented immigrants. Gonzales et al. (2013) discussed the barriers faced by DACAmented youth which impede them from participating in important “adolescent rites of passage” (i.e. going to dream colleges, driving, or working) in the U.S., which often results in social isolation. More specifically, Gonzales et al. (2013) state that 1.5 generational (DACAmented) interviewees reported the feeling of having “no place to belong,” eliciting feelings of uncertainty and stress. Although most of the current literature describes how SB has a significant impact on mental health in general, Gonzales et al. (2013) specifically explored how DACAmented individuals’ mental health and wellbeing is influenced by SB. Unfortunately, this was the only published study that directly explored this relationship with DACAmented individuals.

## **2.7 Aims of the Study**

Although a few researchers have explored sense of belonging (SB) with immigrant students and how it interacts with success in school, barely any researchers have considered SB affecting Latinx immigrants’ mental health and well-being, and no known work has focused specifically on DACAmented college students’ SB and how it may affect their self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and mental health and well-being. The current study explored how DACAmented students’ SB within the host country, the United States, interacts with self-

efficacy, outcome expectations, and mental health and well-being. In order to understand this connection, a qualitative study was conducted. The inclusion criteria for participants was individuals eligible for/with DACA status, age 18-30, college student status, and of self-identified Latinx heritage. Participants were asked to engage in a conversation with the researcher through a semi-structured interview process. After the collection of data, interviews were explored through CQR, and themes will be examined.

The main purpose of this study was to more accurately understand the relationship between sense of belonging in the U.S., self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and mental health and well-being for Latinx DACAmented college students in the United States. With the relatively recent increase of undocumented college students (because of resources provided by DACA), the uncertainty of DACA status within the current political climate, along with the minimal understanding of MHWB with this specific population, this study may assist in providing critical information regarding: (a) adequate support to Latinx DACAmented college students, (b) informed consulting for policy shifts and changes with legal status, and (c) ethical psychological care to Latinx DACAmented individuals. This research project attempted to provide a humanistic and *real* edge to current immigration policies and issues. In addition, this study attempted to provide a platform for DACAmented students to tell their story, and for clinicians, researchers, and policymakers to listen to the concerns, plights, and aspirations for the future. The main research questions were:

1. How is sense of belonging defined and experienced by Latinx DACAmented students?

2. How does sense of belonging in the host country (United States) affect undocumented (DACAmented) Latinx college students' mental health and wellbeing, specifically their level of anxiety?
3. How does sense of belonging in the host country (United States) affect undocumented (DACAmented) Latinx college students' self-efficacy and outcome expectations as it applies to their career aspirations?

## Chapter 3: Method

The proposed research questions were explored through a qualitative study using the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, & Hess, 2005). Hill and colleagues' (1997) CQR method to analyze qualitative data is partially informed by the Grounded Theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Both CQR and Grounded Theory share the important quality of analyzing qualitative data by continuous comparison until the core themes have been identified and verified. In addition, there is a shared belief that participants are the experts of the research questions being posed and therefore places intentional emphasis on power dynamics within the researcher – participant relationship (Hernandez, 2018). A few ways in which CQR is similar to other qualitative methods includes emphasizing the importance of context when discussing meaning, focusing on description rather than explanation, conducting interviews in natural settings, and working from an emic perspective.

One vital aspect of CQR that differs from other qualitative methods includes the use of a team of researchers to conduct a systematic analysis of reoccurring themes (results) across cases (interviews) (Hill et al., 1997). The use of multiple researchers to reach an agreement on themes within the data is presumed to minimize the principle investigator's bias. Per Hill and colleagues (2005), the ultimate goal of CQR is to combine the core tenets of other qualitative methods within a model that is both rigorous and easy to replicate. A few key components of CQR include: (a) using open ended questions to allow for non-restrictive answers, (b) building conclusions directly from the data (instead of testing prior theory or belief), (c) working on a research team to come to consensus on themes within the data, (d) utilizing auditor(s) to review team consensus on themes, and (e) continuously going back to the raw data to ensure results are

based on the actual data (Hill et al., 1997). The CQR method is composed of three basic steps: (1) each individual case is reviewed to create domains (themes), (2) core ideas are created for each domain from each case, and (3) a cross analysis of domains and core ideas from all cases is conducted. These steps are completed through consensus with multiple researchers and at least one auditor (Hill et al., 1997).

**3.1 Participants.** The experts/participants that were recruited for this study were individuals eligible for DACA or current DACA recipient, ages 18-30, college student status, and of Latinx heritage. For eligibility requirements for being a DACA recipient, please refer to Chapter 1 and Figure 1 (Appendix B). Per Hill and colleagues' (2005) recommendations, 10 participants were recruited in order to maximize consistency of the data. Of the ten participants, all identified their birthplace as Mexico and reported currently being DACA recipients (refer to Figure 3, Appendix C). Age at time of immigration to the United States ranged from 3 months of age to 11 years of age; the average age was 3.9 years of age. When asked about racial identification, six participants identified as Latinx/a/o, three identified as Hispanic, and one identified as Indigenous. When asked about ethnic identification, four participants identified as Latinx/a/o, three identified as Hispanic, and three identified as Mexican.

Participants ranged in age from 21 to 30 years of age; the average (median) age is 25.8 years of age. Eight participants identified as female and two identified as male. Eight participants identified within lower to lower middle class and two identified within middle to upper middle class. Nine participants identified as heterosexual and one as bisexual. When asked about religious identity, three identified as agnostic/atheist, three identified as Catholic, three identified as not religious but grew up Catholic, and one identified as Christian. Six participants reported that they were single and four reported that they were married. Six participants were currently in

graduate school and four in undergraduate. As for major and/or area of study, five participants were in a psychology/mental health program, and the other five participants were in music education, sociology, political science, communications, and law programs. Four participants were attending school in Texas, four in California, one in Illinois, and one in New Jersey.

**3.2 Instruments.** This study included four main instruments for each participant: demographic form, interview protocol, BAI, and BDI.

*Demographic Form.* Participants were asked a series of demographic questions including birthplace, current immigration status, racial identity, ethnic identity, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, current level of education, and major/ focus of study.

*Interview Protocol.* Participants were also asked interview questions from the interview protocol created prior to the interview (Appendix A). As recommended by Hill and colleagues (2005), the semi-structured protocol included open ended questions, guided by the literature review, that encouraged deep exploration of topics being presented to participants. Questions were utilized to facilitate conversations and were continuously molded to reflect the wisdom and exploration of participants. With guidance from SB theories and career theories (as previously discussed) and the review of the literature, the questions in this study included items regarding introduction/orientation to the study, sense of belonging, mental health and well-being, and closing/termination of interview (see Appendix A for interview protocol).

*BAI and BDI.* In addition to semi-structured, in-depth interviews, the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck & Steer, 1997) and Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck et al., 1961) were used to measure level of anxiety and depression for participants. The BAI and BDI are 21-item, self-report rating inventories that measure attitudes and symptoms of anxiety and

depression, respectively. Due to the higher rates of depression and anxiety within Latinx individuals (Gonzales et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2004; Kamal & Killian, 2015; Martinez et al., 2013, Vega et al., 2004) *and* the lack of research specifically focusing on Latinx DACA recipient individuals, it was important to compare participants' scores on the BAI and BDI to the national average to gain a deeper understanding of the MHWB as compared to others and each other.

Reliability and validity of the BDI and BAI with Latinx individuals was explored by Contreras, Fernandez, Malcarne, Ingram, and Vaccarino (2004) in a quantitative study with over 1,000 Latinx college students. Statistical analyses of White (non-Latinx) and Latinx college students' BDI and BAI results were conducted, revealing similar outcomes. According to Contreras and colleagues (2004), cross-cultural reliability and validity of the BDI and BAI with Latinx college students were established as evidenced by internal consistency coefficients and alphas exceeding .82.

**3.3 Procedure.** Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis from all over the United States via social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) from November, 2019 to March, 2020. Of note during the recruitment and data collection phase were two relevant events: (1) an important Supreme Court decision to terminate or continue DACA was in process and (2) the first months of the national shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic had begun. As a result, there was the possibility that this deterred more individuals from participating in this study due to the fear of being identified as undocumented as well as overall stress from the pandemic. Ten participants were recruited and the researcher carefully reviewed with each participant the informed consent form and their rights as participants, as well as providing the opportunity to ask questions. These individuals participated in interviews via Zoom that lasted about an hour to hour and a half long. Precautions and safeguards that were incorporated into the



study's design to minimize risks and ensure confidentiality included the following: (1) All participants were identified by pseudonyms in all transcripts and publications and presentations arising from this research. (2) Following the transcription of interviews, audio recordings were immediately deleted (in order to reduce the risk of linking the data to specific participants). (3) All data generated during this project were stored on a password-protected computer in password-protected files belonging to the principle investigator; no other individuals had access to this data.

Due to the varying degrees of documented (legal) status of participants, only verbal informed consent was collected. Although the participants were emailed a hard copy of the informed consent, they were only required to verbally acknowledge the informed consent via Zoom (names were never verbally reported or written). The informed consent process included a form with a specific area that prompted participants to either agree or disagree to be audio recorded. Due to the interview-focused, qualitative nature of the study, participants were not able to be part of the study if they did not agree to audio recordings. Of the ten recruited participants, all agreed to audio recording. All participants were given pseudonyms to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Once interviews were transcribed, the data was analyzed on a team of researchers utilizing the CQR methodology (described above).

**3.4 Data Analysis.** As previously discussed, CQR involves 3 major steps with a team of researchers (about 3 members) and at least one auditor: (1) review individual cases to create *domains* (themes), (2) review all domains from each case to create *core ideas*, and (3) cross analyze domains and core ideas from all cases (Hill et al., 1997). In addition to this analysis, Hill and colleagues (2005) suggest utilizing participants to verify the accuracy of the data analysis conducted by the research team in order to establish transparency of the analysis and accuracy of

the findings. For this CQR study, a team of three researchers from Teachers College, Columbia University (including this writer) and auditor analyzed the data collected from May, 2020 to September, 2020. Additionally, participants from this study were offered the option to provide feedback on the final draft of this dissertation and any future publications with the data.

**3.5 Ethical Considerations.** Potential risks to participants involved in this research study were increased feelings of anxiety and ensuring anonymity. Both risks were serious in nature but were minimized with the following precautions:

- Only verbal acknowledgement of the informed consent was required.
- All participants were identified by pseudonyms in all transcripts and publications and presentations arising from this research.
- Following the transcription of interviews, audio recordings were immediately deleted (in order to reduce the risk of linking the data to specific participants).
- All data generated during this project was stored on password-protected computer and password-protected files belonging to the principle investigator; no other individuals had access to this data.
- A list of referrals for social support services was provided.

**3.6 Researcher Positionality.** In recognition of Hill and colleagues' (2005) recommendation for researchers to disclose biases and pertinent information of the researcher in order to acknowledge and hopefully minimize influence on the data analysis, the bias and pertinent information of the primary investigator was disclosed. In addition, as suggested, exploration and challenging of potential biases within the research team was continuously attended to before, throughout, and after data analysis (Hill et al., 2005). The principle investigator of this study is a second-generation, Ecuadorian-American, biracial, cis-gender

woman, doctoral student in counseling psychology. In addition, the principle investigator has been a supporter of DACA and related policies and ally of the undocumented, Latinx community for many years. The principle investigator of this study conducted all interviews, data collection, and transcriptions, and led the research team in data analysis. The research team consisted of two Masters students from Teachers College, Columbia University. The first student identified as a Latina, cis-gender woman, DACA recipient who came to the US at 11 years old. She wanted to be part of this research as she believed it was important for members of the community to have a voice present at the table and the opportunities for this to occur are often limited. The student has dedicated her career to the advancement of stories of minoritized groups and understanding in depth the experiences of this population allowed her to continue her advocacy on a larger scale. The second student identified as a White, transgender/nonbinary person from a working class background. Their interest in this study was informed by their experience working alongside Latinx immigrants for 10+ years in the service industry, and their commitment to using their position as a researcher/clinician to better understand the mental health of Latinx immigrants. The student aimed to be a more effective resource and advocate for this population and believed self-education as well as access to Latinx personal narratives were necessary for this process.

## Chapter 4: Results

Due to the mixed nature of the findings, the results from this study are divided into two sections: (a) results from the qualitative Zoom audio interviews portion and (b) results from the two self-report measures of depression and anxiety (BDI and BAI). The qualitative results (from interviews) were organized into domains and categories, utilizing the structure recommended by Hill and colleagues (2012). There were eight overarching domains, each composed of categories by which the interview data was organized. In order to understand how common an experience was within this dataset, each category was assigned a frequency label: *general* to represent 8 to 10 participants sharing the experience, *typical* for 5 to 7 participants, and *variant* for 2 to 4 participants. For categories that only had one participant, the experience is considered *rare* and therefore not reported in the data because they are considered to be unrepresentative of the data.

### 4.1 Qualitative Results.

*Composite Case Narrative.* In order to illustrate the most commonly shared experiences across the study sample, Hill (2012) suggested creating a prototypical case narrative. For this study, the typical participant was Anita, a 26-year-old, heterosexual, single, Latina woman of lower socioeconomic status, who was a graduate school student in a service oriented field living in either Texas or California. Her birthplace was Mexico, she immigrated to this country at about 4 years old, and she had DACA. Anita had a desire to shape others' understanding of DACA by sharing her experiences and challenging perceptions that exist about DACA, and therefore participated in this study. When describing her immigration journey, Anita shared that her family decided to immigrate to the US due to financial difficulties in the home country, and they experienced family separation due to different times of migration. When she was younger, she was not completely aware of her undocumented status.

Today, Anita feels as though the instability of DACA is contributing to her uncertainty of future goals and increased emotional stress. She experiences financial barriers including lack of funding for school. As compared to those who are documented, Anita feels having an undocumented status comes with more challenges and barriers including limits to one's time to accomplish goals and opportunities. Regardless of these barriers, she is committed to continuing her education and pushing forward. Anita often urges others to engage in civic duty and discourse because of her own inability to do so.

Regarding the study variables, Anita believes sense of belonging means being included and accepted, and she finds this within her community. She does not always identify as American because she is often made to feel like she does not belong. At the same time, Anita sees herself as American because that is all she knows. She finds difficulty in feeling belonging when she has different identities than others around her. As a result, Anita feels more comfortable in spaces where she shares identities with others (i.e. race, SES, and immigration status). She does not always feel like she belongs in the US but also does not feel like she belongs in her home country, leaving Anita feeling a sense of *ni de aqui, ni de alla* (neither here nor there). As for her mental health, she experiences depression and describes it as physical and emotional exhaustion and sadness. Anita also experiences anxiety and describes it as uneasiness, discomfort, and stress of the unknown and uncertainty.

Finally, Anita's success has been impacted in both positive and negative ways by professional/institutional social support that has either been present or lacking. Despite this, Anita has the ability to adapt in diverse contexts. Her academic skills have led her to success and she creates her own space through creativity, resilience, and motivation.

## 4.2 Domains and Categories.

Participants' narratives (from interviews) were organized into eight overarching domains that were created by the CQR research team: Journey to the US, DACA Perceptions, Awareness of Identity Compared to Others, American Identity and Sense of Belonging, Barriers Experiences, Emotional Experiences, Perspective of Future, and Resilience. The list of domains was created collaboratively among the three research team members after a general review of all participant transcripts. The eight domains were extrapolated from overarching themes that arose from all participants' transcripts. Participants' experiences within these domains were then organized into categories specific to each domain. Finally, categories were given a frequency label to describe how common this experience was between participants in this study. As a reminder, *General* label refers to categories that are applicable to 8 to 10 cases, *Typical* label refers to categories that are applicable to 5 to 7 cases, and *Variant* label refers to categories that are applicable to 2 to 4 cases. Appendix C, Figure 4 contains a table of domains, categories, and frequency labels.

As discussed in the Method section, each step of the data analysis was led through a consensus process among the research team of three members. For instance, if one group member did not agree on an interpretation of a participant's transcript, the research team would discuss point of views until a consensus was made by all three team members. An example of the consensus process was the discussions that were held regarding the term "DACAmended." As noted in the introduction, DACAmended is a term often utilized in the media and throughout academia to refer to DACA recipient individuals. Early on in the transcript review process, one team member who identified as a DACA recipient noted that the term DACAmended was not utilized by any of the participants. This observation resulted in a team consensus process in

which team members discussed why or why not the term *DACAmented* should be utilized. As a DACA recipient, one team member was able to utilize her personal experience and observations to inform her discussions, the second team member, not identifying as a DACA recipient or an individual who is immersed in the literature, was able to provide an objective understanding of the term, and the third team member (author) was able to discuss the media and academic literature's use of the word. In weighing out the pros and cons of utilizing the term *DACAmented*, and ultimately relying on participants' personal narratives, the team was able to reach that consensus that the phrase "DACA recipient" would be utilized to describe the participants' immigration identity. As noted, this was a part of the process for each step (i.e. domain, core ideas, and categories) and therefore, the analyses proved to be long and arduous in order stay as true to participants' narratives as possible. A summary table of the findings is contained in Figure 4 in Table C.

*Journey to the U.S.* The first domain captured participants' and participant family's stories of immigration to the U.S. The two categories within this domain were both *Typical* experiences among participants. Participants reported (1) their *family immigrating to the U.S. due to financial difficulties in their home country*, further sharing their experiences with (2) *family separation due to different times of migration* as a *Typical* experience. An example of this experience is: "My family comes from rural farmers and there weren't jobs available in Mexico, so my father immigrated to the US in search of work. My mother was pregnant with me so we came to the US to be reunited with my father when I was three months old."

*DACA Perceptions.* This domain encompassed DACA perceptions broadly including perceptions around DACA itself and perceptions of those who have DACA. In the context of this domain, perceptions referred both to how others perceive DACA and those with DACA and how

participants viewed DACA and themselves and others with DACA. Within this domain were two categories – one a *General* experience, and the other a *Variant* experience. The General category was *desire to shape others' understanding of DACA through sharing experiences and challenging perceptions*. As one participant stated, “DACA is only viewed in the wrongs and people often hold many assumptions about students with DACA. So I want to be a part of a study for undocumented students that brings awareness to the good things about DACA.” Another participant noted, “I appreciate research that is DACA related because there is a lot of anti-immigrant rhetoric. I didn't realize what it meant to be undocumented till my father was deported, and it wasn't until high school that I felt comfortable sharing my experiences and advocating for DACA.” Yet another stated, “I want the opportunity to share my story with others. There has not been enough focus in mental health of being undocumented in the current climate.” The Variant category was *unawareness of own undocumented status*. A participant who shared an experience within both categories stated, “when I was in high school I felt ‘normal,’ until I found I wasn’t here with a real status when I was about 18. People should be cognizant of the insensitive things they say, particularly professors, who may have a DACA student in their classroom.”

*Awareness of Identity Compared to Others*. The experiences within this domain spoke to participants’ awareness of their own identity as compared to others’ identities. These experiences were organized under three categories: (1) *feeling more comfortable/belonging in spaces where there are shared identities (i.e. race, SES, and immigration status)*, (2) *difficulty belonging because of different identity*, and (3) *having an undocumented immigration status comes with more challenges and barriers than those who are documented*. Category one is a *Typical* experience related to participants’ tendency to feel a greater sense of belonging when they are



around others who have similar identities. One participant stated, “when I am in spaces that are more diverse, I feel a greater sense of belonging.” Another participant noted the importance of pushing forward with others stating, “I belong in spaces with other racial minorities, and I feel it is important to build ties of solidarity with other oppressed people even if we don’t experience the same types of oppression in order to continue moving forward.” Other participants focused on their undocumented status and reported, “I have less privileges than individuals who have citizenship in the US, but my undocumented status also connects me to help other undocumented folks.”

The second category, difficulty belonging, is a *Variant* experience and describes participants’ struggle in finding a sense of belonging when they feel they have a different identity from others. For example, one participant shared, “It’s often hard to feel like I belong at my school because I am one of the only Latinas, and the only student with DACA” and another stated, “I learned when I was young that I wasn’t a citizen like my siblings and it’s hard to feel like I belong even in my own home.” The third and final category, challenges and barriers of undocumented immigration status, was a *Typical* experience and encompassed participants’ report of having more challenges and barriers than those who are documented, including having limits on one’s time to accomplish goals and opportunities. A participant shared this sentiment by stating, “As an undocumented, low-income, person of color, my experience, privileges, and access to resources are very different than my peers and those around me. I feel like I have to accomplish as many things as possible in the two years I have DACA because I don’t know when my time is going to run out, while everyone else has time to plan things out.”

*American Identity and Sense of Belonging.* The fourth domain reflected participants’ sense of belonging in many spaces and their feelings around an “American” identity and was

organized under four categories. The first category, *sense of belonging is to be included and accepted*, is a *General* experience and covers participants' description of the term sense of belonging further encompassing the experience of feeling a sense of belonging in one's community and/or institution. A few definitions of the term, sense of belonging, that participants shared included: "to be included and not just in society, but within yourself and your hopes and dreams," "being able to take part in things unconditionally and without any rules they have to follow differently than other people," "you have a place both physically and emotionally where you feel like you can be yourself," and "I can fully be myself – that I don't have to hide aspects of myself, I am valued, and I am heard, not just listened to." When sharing experiences of feeling a sense of belonging in one's community and/or institution, participants stated: "I feel so welcome at my school with other undocumented and low income students" and "accepting who I am has helped me gain a sense of belonging, and I feel that within my family, my marriage, and among other marginalized communities."

The second category, *not identifying as American because one is made to feel like they do not belong*, is a *Typical* experience. Within this category, one participant stated, "I never identify myself as Mexican American because I don't feel welcomed, or a sense of belonging to truly embrace the American part." Another participant stated, "I feel I am American because I was raised here but I know in reality we are not a part of this country so I usually say Mexican." The third category, *ni de aqui, ni de alla (not from here nor there)*, was a *Typical* experience and was comprised of participants' experience of lacking a sense of belonging in the US based on feeling unwelcome and/or not accepted by society as well as not feeling a sense of belonging to one's country of origin. An example of this is an experience shared by one of the participants: "I don't feel like I belong in the US because I don't feel this acceptance, but I also don't belong in Mexico

because I don't remember any of it.” The final category under this domain, *seeing oneself as American because that is all one knows*, is a *Variant* experience. One participant stated, “I feel like I belong in the United States because it’s all I’ve known. If I were to go back to Mexico, I feel like I wouldn’t belong there. I feel just as American as anybody else that lives here because I contribute to our society but I’ve always felt like I had to do more to try to belong.”

*Barriers Experiences.* This domain focused on participants’ experience with barriers, especially including institutional and financial barriers, and included four categories. The first category, *overall financial barriers, including lack of funding for school*, was a *Typical* experience. One participant reported, “DACA creates many opportunities, however, it’s *not* something that is automatically given to us, and it’s not secure. We don’t get federal aid for tuition and in order to fund my education I’ve had to work multiple jobs - it’s been difficult.” The second category, *lack of stability with DACA*, was also a *Typical* experience. A few reported experiences include: “due to the uncertainty of DACA, I feel like I can never really enjoy things...,” “with the uncertainty around DACA, I often have to think of worst case scenarios...,” and “the constant legal fluctuation of DACA makes it difficult to reach my goals but I’ve continued to move forward.” The third category, *civic duty - pushing others to engage in discourse because of own inability to*, was a *Variant* experience. One participant described this stating, “I have had limited opportunities in the U.S., and although I can’t vote, I push others to get involved.” Finally, the fourth category, *lack of institutional support*, was a *Variant* experience. A couple participants shared their experience with this specific barrier stating: “when I started exploring college as an option, it was frustrating to hear "no" everywhere - even my counselor saying I shouldn't think about college due to lack of financial aid” and “my educational institution isn't a place for low income folks, it's like they're giving us scraps.”

*Emotional Experiences.* The sixth domain encompassed participants' experiences with anxiety and depression and includes three categories. Category one, *increased emotional stress related to uncertainty of DACA*, is a *General* experience. A few shared experiences within this category illustrate this increased emotional stress related to DACA uncertainty: "anxiety feels like the stress of the unknown, and not knowing what the future could look like for me and other DACA recipients, especially when the DACA program ended," "anxiety is a feeling of uneasiness and rumination and I've experienced it a lot, especially when I lost my DACA status. When it comes to the uncertainty of DACA, the feeling is indescribable – I feel uncomfortable like my whole life is on the line," and "having DACA affects me emotionally on a daily basis, the anxiety is always there. It's depressing when I can't take advantage of similar experiences offered to my friends and colleagues who are citizens."

Category two, *experienced depression*, is a *Typical* experience and includes experiencing depression as physical and/or emotional exhaustion and sadness. One participant stated, "Sometimes I feel symptoms of depression including low levels of energy, darkness, and despite a desire to accomplish something, an inability to do so." The final category, *experienced anxiety*, was a *Typical* experience and included experiencing anxiety as uneasiness, discomfort, and stress of the unknown and/or uncertainty. In describing this anxiety, one participant stated, "anxiety is being on edge and uncomfortable, and I feel this anxiety when it comes to financial matters, professional things, and the uncertainty of my future."

*Perspective of Future.* This domain includes participants' experience with future goals, likelihood of achieving goals, and uncertainty of the future. There were two categories within this domain including (1) *continuing education in service oriented career paths* and (2) *DACA instability contributing to uncertainty of future goals*. The first category refers to the field in

which participants reported wanting to continue their education and career and was a *General* experience. In this study, all participants reported wanting to continue their careers in a services oriented career path in order to give back to their community. One participant stated, “I’m involved in my community and politically because I want to make everything around me a better place not just for myself, but for everyone.” The second category was also a *General* experience and spoke to uncertainty of future goals specifically because of DACA instability – some participants had a hopeful outlook whereas others were more doubtful. For example, one participated shared, “with the uncertainty of DACA, I feel I won’t be able to do what I love doing or be able to use the degrees I will have.” On the other hand, another participant stated, “I am working on, and I believe I will be able to achieve my goals if DACA is continued.”

*Resilience.* The final domain included the manner in which participants described their resilience including social support given and received, and feelings of mastery/control. There were five categories within this domain: (1) *ability to adapt to diverse contexts*, (2) *utilizing academic skills for success*, (3) *commitment to continue regardless of barriers*, (4) *professional and institutional social support impacting success*, and (5) *ponte las pilas – creating one’s own space through creativity, resilience and motivation*. Category one was a *Typical* experience, and one participant described their experience as “the skills I have in order to accomplish my goals include resilience and being able to flourish in whatever situation I’m put in.” Category two was also a *Typical* experience and referred to participants’ identities as students. Six of the participants specifically spoke of their educational experiences and/or academic skills as aspects of themselves that were integral to their future success. Category three was a *Variant* experience and described participants’ dedication to push forward, despite the barriers. One participant

specifically stated, “I will continue with my goals regardless if DACA gets rescinded or canceled completely.”

Category four is a *Typical* experience and accounted for the impact of professional/institutional support that was present or lacking. Many participants spoke of the positive impact of visible support that was present within their institution. One participant shared, “having a good support system is important; at my school there are many resources for DACA students and I feel supported and included.” Two other participants stated, “the mentorship and advocacy through my university allows me to feel supported” and “resources for Latinx folks make me feel like I belong on campus.” On the contrary, another participant spoke of the lack of institutional support stating, “when I faced institutional barriers, I made my own space and told myself yes--such as the support group I started at school.” The final category was also a *Typical* experience and describes participants’ abilities to create their own spaces in various ways. Several narratives from participants illustrated below:

“Although I’ve faced barriers because of my DACA status, I’ve never let it define who I am as a person – whether I have it or not, I still would have continued my education. The skills I have that have helped me succeed include motivation, being knowledgeable, being financially independent, and the desire to continue and move forward.”

“I think the obstacles I face being undocumented kind of pushes you to your limits and to do more than a citizen. As an immigrant, I’ve done a lot of jobs and am willing to learn, so I feel I have a little bit of skills for each field in order to succeed. I also believe my education, bilingual ability, and motivation will bring me more opportunities and help the Latinx community.”

“Some of the skills I have in order to succeed are, my ability to advocate for myself, establish my own sense of community, being a resource for my own community by creating change, my educational experience, my own experience as an undocumented Latina, healing from my traumas, and my values.”

#### **4.3 Self-Report Measures Results.**

As noted in the Method section, the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) were administered after interviews to measure levels of anxiety and depression for participants in order to later compare to national averages and gain a deeper understanding within the Latinx DACA community. On the BAI, participants had an average score of 22.4, indicating a *Moderate Anxiety* level. On this measure, scores ranged from 7 (*Low Anxiety*) to 38 (*Potentially Concerning Levels of Anxiety*). On the BDI, participants had an average score of 15.9, indicating a *Mild Mood Disturbance* level. On this measure, scores ranged from 4 (*Normal Ups and Downs*) to 29 (*Moderate Depression*). Appendix C, Figure 5 contains a table of participants' BAI and BDI scores. In the literature of anxiety and depression, BAI and BDI are often administered to college age students in order to glean some insight into their experience with mental health. In order to gain a deeper understanding about what participants' scores from this study indicate, BAI and BDI scores of college aged students from three studies were examined. In 2014, Lepp, Barkley, and Karpinsky reported an average BAI score of 14.50 (*Low Anxiety*) among 469 undergraduate college students from a large, Midwestern US public university. In 2005, Carmody reported an average BDI score of 12.75 (*Mild Mood Disturbance*) among 502 “ethnically diverse” college students. Finally, in a study with 1,110 Latino identified college students, Contreras, Fernandez, Malcarne, Ingram, and Ruiz Vaccarino (2004) reported an average BAI score of 9.86 (*Low Anxiety*) and an average BDI score of 7.79 (*Normal Ups and*

*Downs*). Objectively, participants in this study scored higher on both the BAI and BDI than participants in all other reported studies. Furthermore, participants from this study had a significantly higher average BAI score compared to participants in the Lepp, Barkley, and Karpinsky (2014) and Contreras and colleagues (2004) studies.

Quantitative results from the self-report measures provided another layer of insight to DACA recipients' mental health and wellbeing that aligned strongly with the qualitative results (i.e. narratives shared through interviews). With an extra layer of immigration status stressor, all participants spoke to the toll it had on their mental health, especially their hope for the future. This specific qualitative finding reflected the overall higher BDI and BAI scores from the participants. Throughout the transcripts, the participants also highlighted their resilience and need to push forward in their lives. This qualitative result, described under the domain *Resilience*, was reflected in the difference between average BDI and BAI scores. In other words, participants' overall higher lower BDI scores (as compared to BAI scores) described how their resilience may be a buffer to depressive symptoms. Meanwhile, participants' overall higher BAI scores may be reflective of how their many stressors (i.e. desire to succeed, immigration status, SES level, etc.) present themselves.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

Research has been an integral tool in gleaning insight into important issues and current events, the results of which often lead to important changes, such as public policy development. A major downfall of much research is that questions and decisions may be guided by those who are considered the “experts,” but instead are individuals who: (a) may not be part of the community with whom they are conducting research and/or (b) may not regard the community they work with as experts of their own experiences and what changes they may need. In general, one goal of qualitative research is to understand phenomena and issues that are not well known or understood in the larger society. By utilizing Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), researchers attempt to come to a deeper understanding of issues via participants’ narratives. Despite this attempt to be guided by participants’ expertise in their own experience and understanding of their issues, the CQR method of qualitative research does not require that researchers be part of the communities they are conducting research with and therefore power differentials and faulty ideas around “expertise” can be present within the research.

In summary, CQR researchers attempt to lessen power differentials and provide an “expert” voice to the communities they conduct research with by allowing their narratives to guide and understand of the questions posed. Despite this intentional attempt to acknowledge a major issue around research, it is still vital to explicitly acknowledge identities and biases of the research, including the CQR research team, and analyze the data by staying as close/truthful as possible to the original narratives, and be effortful in using participants’ narratives to guide questions and implications on policies. Community members have invaluable knowledge and are the ultimate experts in their own plights and experiences, and as a result the following discussion and implications will be ultimately guided by their words and stories from this research project.

**5.1 Research Questions.** The three major question posed in this research project were:

- (1) How is sense of belonging (SB) defined and experienced by Latinx DACAmented students?
- (2) How does sense of belonging (SB) in the United States affect DACAmented Latinx college students' mental health and wellbeing (MHWB), specifically their level of anxiety? and (3) How does sense of belonging (SB) in the United States affect DACAmented students' self-efficacy and outcome expectations as it applies to their career aspirations? These questions were addressed via the interview protocol questions (Appendix A) as well as widely used instruments measuring anxiety and depression. As aforementioned, the research project questions and implications were ultimately developed on participants' narratives. Although these research questions each were answered, additional important themes and questions arose during interviews and analysis of the data that were indicative of the Latinx DACA recipient experience.

*Sense of belonging (SB) defined.* Of the 8 CQR domains from the data, "American Identity and Sense of Belonging," addressed participants' definition and experience of SB. Most participants described this phenomenon as being "included and accepted" and stated that they felt SB in their communities and/or education institutions. Notably, many participants shared that they did not identify as American because they often were made to feel like they do not belong in the U.S., further explaining that they feel a sense of "ni de aqui, ni de alla" because they do not feel a sense of belonging either in the US or their countries of origin. Other studies with DACA recipients share similar findings noting that DACA recipients often experience polarized sentiments about their sense of belonging (Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, and Coronado, 2010; Kosnac, 2014). From participants' narratives, it is important to highlight that SB was almost always tied to communities in which they felt welcomed and supported. Rarely did participants

speak of their experience of SB in the US, unless they were directly asked, and even then, participants typically redirected the conversation to speak of their SB within their communities (i.e. ethnic community, family, school community, immigrant community, etc.). Community as an important aspect of sense of belonging (SB) is also present in multiple studies that explore DACA recipient's SB in and out of academic settings (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019; Kosnac, 2014; Perez et al., 2009; Pérez et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). This finding has important implications for therapy and school policies, which will later be discussed.

*Sense of belonging and mental health and well-being.* Regardless of how they identified their community (i.e. ethnic, family, school, immigrant, etc.), all participants reported feeling a SB within a specific community. Overall, participants shared that when they were in spaces with others who shared their identities (i.e. race, ethnic, SES, immigrations status), they felt a stronger sense of belonging and support. This finding aligns beautifully with Chavez-Dueñas and colleagues' (2019) Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma (HEART) in Latinx Immigrant Communities Framework that has a major emphasis on healing within communities. When asked specifically about their mental health and wellbeing (MHWB), participants spoke most often about the anxiety associated with barriers they face from their immigration status, especially including the fear of the unknown. Although most participants reported not feeling a sense of belonging (SB) in the US, they did not speak about their being emotionally impacted by this. Instead participants often focused on the spaces and communities with whom they did feel SB. In some ways, participants' ability to find SB in their own spaces and communities served as an important buffer for the impact not feeling SB in the US. As previously noted, SB within community was also an important topic highlighted in various studies with DACA recipients (Kosnac, 2014; Perez et al., 2009; Pérez et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

*SB effect on self-efficacy and outcome expectations.* When speaking specifically about outcome expectations, participants most often spoke of how their hopes and plans for the future were most heavily impacted by the uncertainty that being a DACA recipient entailed. Although many researchers highlighted the opportunities DACA provides undocumented individuals (Aguilar, 2019; Perez et al., 2009; Slaten et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2015), fewer studies provide sufficient dialogue on the stressors having DACA has on individuals' plans for the future (Kosnac, 2014; Pérez et al., 2010). The manner in which participants spoke of self-efficacy typically focused on their ability to adapt to diverse contexts and searching for as well as creating spaces in which they found SB. Perez and colleagues (2009) also discuss this ability to adapt to diverse contexts and other aspects of academic resilience. Despite most studies exploring SB in various communities, the current study specifically highlights participants' experiences of creating spaces where they feel a SB. Participants also spoke of the importance of institutional support in the success which encompassed both their self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Finally, all participants spoke of following a service oriented career path to give back to their community and/or stay part of it. These two aforementioned points similarly were highlighted by Ramos, Lieberman-Cribbin, Gillezeau, Alpert, and Van Gerwen (2019) in their study with DACA recipient medical students who aspired to work with marginalized communities.

Although the three research questions were addressed, a vital aspect of CQR research is unfolding and sharing participants' expertise in their own experience. As a result, it is important to highlight common experiences among participants that were not directly asked through the original research questions. Moreover, these common experiences among Latinx DACA recipient student participants may be utilized to inform considerations and changes in DACA and educational policies as well as clinical implications. In addition to the qualitative portion of this

study, quantitative results from participants' BDI and BAI will be utilized to explore depression and anxiety specifically for those who identify as Latinx DACA recipient students.

**5.2 Important note on DACA.** Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the temporary benefits DACA includes is frequently misunderstood by the larger US society. Part of the purpose of this study was to provide a platform to DACA recipients to challenge these misconceptions and share their own truth about DACA. With this, important sentiments about DACA recipient identity and temporary benefits associated with DACA were shared among most participants. Most importantly, no participants used the term *DACAmented*; instead most participants focused on other aspects of their identity or utilized the term *DACA recipient*. This distinction is important because it sends an essential message: although having DACA is a major part of individuals' lives, it is not the *only* part of their lives. In other words, participants truly spoke to the idea of intersectionality and how other parts of their identities (i.e. race, ethnicity, SES) combined with their DACA recipient identity to impact their experience in the world. With this important distinction in mind, the Results and Discussion sections of this dissertation do not include the term *DACAmented*. Due to the use of the term *DACAmented* in the media and much of academia, no studies were found that spoke specifically to the use of the term *DACAmented* and/or DACA recipient individuals' sentiment about the term. Another significant point brought up by participants, connected to temporary DACA benefits, was this feeling of uncertainty due to the unstable nature of DACA. Since DACA is not a documentation status, DACA recipients are provided *temporary* benefits that can be stripped at any time because of either/both systemic changes or individual situations. Furthermore, in some ways, being a DACA recipient can feel like being in limbo due to being slightly more stable than undocumented status, and less stable than full citizenship. Most researchers who explore DACA recipient identity touch upon this

point but it is most deeply explored by Kosnac's (2014) study with DACA individuals and their lived experiences.

### **5.3 Depression and Anxiety (BDI AND BAI)**

In this study, participant mean scores for anxiety indicated moderate levels, whereas their mean depression scores indicate mild mood disturbances. As noted in the results section, participants from this study scored higher on average for both the BAI and BDI when compared to, mean scores from participants from previous studies (Carmody, 2005; Contreras et al., 2004; Lepp et al., 2014). This important finding is integral to understanding how stressors associated with being a DACA recipient may impact individuals' mental health and well-being, especially levels of anxiety.

*Impact of COVID and Supreme Court decisions.* A unique aspect of this study, that was not yet present within the literature, were the two simultaneous events of the global pandemic (COVID-19) and the major U.S. Supreme Court case on the continuation of DACA, and their impact on participant experiences both within and beyond the study interview. Even without specific questions to target these topics, all participants spoke of the impact of COVID and the Supreme Court case in their lives. Most participants spoke of these two topics as major stressors in their lives while others were able to specifically pinpoint how these stressors brought forth higher levels of anxiety. This finding was two-fold: on one hand, one can argue that BDI and BAI scores may have been inflated due to these two major stressors; on the other hand, one can also argue that this finding actually underlines the psychological impact of chronic instability associated with DACA recipient status. Regardless of how one looks at this, it is evident that these two stressors played a significant role, and likely will continue to do so, in participants' anxiety levels and feelings of uncertainty.

*Resilience and multicultural considerations.* Resilience, or the tenacity to push forth regardless of barriers, was a set of skills discussed among all participants. Specifically, resilience included: (a) the ability to adapt to diverse contexts, (b) the use of academic skills for success, (c) a commitment to continue regardless of barriers, and (d) the development of one's own space through creativity, persistence, and motivation. As previously noted, Perez and colleagues (2009) speak specifically to academic resilience among undocumented Latinx students and share similar findings regarding utilizing academic skills for success. As compared to other studies that explore resilience with DACA recipients, the present study focused more specifically on adapting to diverse contexts, the commitment to continue regardless of barriers, and the development of one's own space. A possibility for this difference is the impact of the major events (COVID and Supreme Court decision) that were occurring during data collection. It is likely that these two major stressors encouraged DACA recipients within the current study to think more deeply about adapting and pushing forward. It is evident that resilience serves as a protective factor but what is less evident is the possibility of it becoming a barrier. Since being resilient requires individuals to push past adversities, "pushing past" can also take the form of detaching from painful emotions, such as sadness or anger, and placing a societal expectation on marginalized folks to see struggles as a normative experience. In other words, resilience can become a barrier to full emotional connection and societal movement towards equity (Torres-Mackie, 2020). Resilience might thus pose as a barrier to therapy because individuals may be unwilling or resistant to experience painful emotions they minimize by "pushing forward." From the studies with DACA recipients that were found, no study specifically discussed the possible downfalls of resilience.

Another important factor to consider when interpreting the BDI and BAI scores from the participants in this study is how culture may affect expression of emotions and what one shares with various people. In particular, in this study with Latinx identified participants, one might ask how Latinx cultural socialization affects both emotional expression and stigma surrounding mental illness. Although there is individuality and diversity within the Latinx community, many Latinx individuals can identify common experiences, especially when it comes to the topic of mental health and wellbeing. Two commonalities under this topic include overall mental health stigma and somatization of symptoms (Arredondo et al., 2014). Due to mental health stigma, Latinx folks often shy away from directly expressing emotions, especially those associated with sadness, loss of hope, and low motivation in fear of these experiences being interpreted as weakness and laziness. Furthermore, physical symptoms are much more accepted within the Latinx community, such as heart racing, palms sweating, body aches, and headaches (Arredondo et al., 2014). Since anxiety is often associated with physical symptoms (as evidenced by questions on the BAI), Latinx folks often feel less shame in admitting to experiencing physical symptoms of anxiety (e.g., body aches). This information is vital in contextualizing participants' elevated BAI scores within this study and for Latinx DACA recipient students overall.

#### **5.4 Clinical Implications**

In addition to evidenced based treatments, it is imperative for clinicians to consider how research can also impact the focus and trajectory of therapy with various communities. Results from the current study have shed light on four major areas in therapy with Latinx DACA recipient students: (1) identity, SB, and MHWB, (2) experiences of anxiety and depression, (3) major stressors with DACA, and (4) approach to therapy.



*Identity, sense of belonging, and MHWB.* One finding that was repeatedly stressed by participants was their awareness of their own identity compared to others and how this impacted where they felt a sense of belonging. Participants recognized that their documentation status presented them with greater challenges and barriers than their documented counterparts. They also recognized that they felt a sense of belonging (SB) in spaces where they felt accepted by those who shared some of their identities (i.e. ethnicity, race, immigration status). Despite recognizing where and with whom they felt SB, they still struggled with a feeling of “ni de aqui, ni de alla,” meaning that they did not feel they truly belonged anywhere, either the US or their country of origin. In considering these findings through a clinical lens, it is vital to consider not only what brings forth anxiety and/or depression for Latinx DACA recipient students, but also what is therapeutic and protective within their lives. For example, participants’ abilities to search for and create spaces in which they feel a SB is resilient, therapeutic, and protective. A sense of community was integral for participants’ MHWB, and since the practice of psychotherapy in the US is individualistic in nature, it is imperative for clinicians to be intentional in incorporating community-based interventions for their Latinx clients, especially those who are DACA recipients. As previously noted, a framework that would incorporate the importance of identity and community is the HEART framework presented by Chavez-Dueñas and colleagues (2019). Specifically, the HEART framework explores healing from ethno-racial trauma within four different phases: (1) establishing sanctuary spaces for Latinxs experiencing ethno-racial trauma, (2) acknowledging, reprocessing, and coping with symptoms, (3) strengthening and connecting to individuals, families and communities to survival strategies and cultural traditions that heal, and (4) liberation and resistance.

*Experiences of anxiety and depression.* As discussed in the Results section, participants shared their personal understanding of anxiety and depression. Depression was described as physical and/or emotional exhaustion and sadness, whereas anxiety was described as uneasiness, discomfort, and stress of the unknown and/or uncertainty. Overall, participants focused more heavily on their experiences of anxiety, an important finding for clinicians to consider. As aforementioned in discussion of BDI and BAI findings, Latinx individuals often have an easier time discussing their anxiety because it is associated with less mental health stigma than depression within the Latinx community. Another pivotal factor to consider in discussing depression with this specific population is participants' resilience. Although resilience is essential for survival and success for many marginalized communities, it can also be a barrier to fully experiencing painful emotions such as emotions associated with depression (Torres-Mackie, 2020).

*Major stressors with DACA.* Since stressors impact the onset of most, if not all, mental health issues, it is important for clinicians to be cognizant of what these stressors may be. Although all individuals may find certain experiences stressful (i.e. financial hardships, death, etc.), it is crucial to understand what specific stressors may look like for DACA recipient individuals so that one can be knowledgeable on such topics. Participants in the study expressed three major stressors that were specifically associated with DACA: (1) overall financial barriers, including lack of funding for school, (2) lack of stability with DACA which contributes to uncertainty of future goals, and (3) overall increased emotional stress related to the uncertainty of DACA. Countless studies explore the major stressors associated with undocumented status (Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, and Dedios-Sannguineti, 2013; Kosnac, 2014; Ramos et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2015), and a few studies also highlight the difficulties faced specifically by DACA

recipient students (Pérez et al., 2009; Pérez et al., 2010; Ramos et al., 2019). Although other studies similarly explore barriers presented with DACA and being undocumented, few provide and exploration of the emotional impact.

*Approach to therapy.* In order to practice from a multiculturally competent and cognizant approach, clinicians must consider what approach may be beneficial for their DACA recipient clients. In the study, participants highlighted two points related to approach to therapy: (1) the desire to shape others' understanding of DACA through sharing experiences and (2) their own resilience as an important skillset for their success. With these two points in mind, it is very likely that Latinx DACA recipient individuals may benefit from strengths based and narrative therapies. These two approaches would provide Latinx DACA recipient individuals with the opportunity to share their own stories and gain support through emphasizing their strengths. Within the literature, narrative therapy has been utilized with many marginalized communities, including undocumented students, in order to create meaning from various adversities (Farrell & Gibbons, 2019; Kropf & Tandy, 1998). Another framework of therapy that supports patients through strengths based approach with an emphasis on relationships with multiculturalism and social justice at the forefront is Relational Cultural Therapy (RCT; Comstock et al., 2008). By utilizing RCT clinicians are able to encourage relationships and connections to heal and explore new behaviors and manners of approaching the world that may better suit a patient's life. RCT avoids shame, recognizes an individual's many strengths, and encourages relationships and connections with others. Although these considerations are important, it is also integral to acknowledge that not every Latinx DACA recipient individual will benefit from the same form of therapy. Since every individual has unique life experiences and a unique intersection of

identities, it is simply impossible to assert a “one size fits all” approach to therapy. Instead, clinicians should work towards understanding each patient and their specific needs.

## **5.5 DACA Policy Changes and Considerations**

Although the study addressed psychological aspects of being a DACA recipient, the findings also point to important implications regarding public policies affecting DACA status and higher education. These will be addressed in this section as well as the following section.

*Immigration journey similarities.* Of the ten participants in this study, more than half reported: (a) immigrating to the US due to financial difficulties in the home country and (b) experiencing family separation due to different times of migration. The aforementioned immigration similarities have also been presented in other studies with undocumented immigrants in the U.S (Aguilar, 2019; Benuto et al., 2018; Kosnac, 2014; Pérez et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2015). These two findings are important to consider when updating current DACA policies and creating new immigration laws and public policies. Although financial difficulties may be present in the home country, most participants also reported continued financial instability in the US. This commonality among many DACA recipients should inform the costs associated with DACA fees and the temporary financial benefits provided (i.e. loans). Since DACA policies currently focus on individuals, there is a need for policy makers to consider the immigration of families and mixed-status families in general.

*Changes as informed by DACA recipients.* As previously mentioned, a major adjustment that needs to be made to DACA policies is less financial burden and more access to financial benefits, especially including government loans for school. Another important consideration brought forth by participants is that the two-year renewal period and instability of DACA limits one’s time to accomplish goals and opportunities. Although the purpose of DACA may be to

lessen stressors and open opportunities for undocumented individuals that immigrated to this country at a young age, the lack of financial assistance and continuing uncertainty of DACA produces further stress and anxiety. As a result, changes to financial benefits, renewal periods, and overall documentation stability (i.e. a pathway to citizenship) must be seriously considered when revising DACA policies. The push for changes such as these is not a new concept – various researchers and activists have fought for similar adjustments to immigration policies and more, including policy changes that benefit all immigrant communities (ACLU; Aguilar, 2019; Benuto et al., 2018; Families for Freedom; Immigrant Defense Project; Kosnac, 2014; Pérez et al., 2010; National Immigration Law Center; RAICES; United We Dream; Wong et al., 2015).

*What DACA recipients want Americans to know.* Most participants in the study spoke of U.S. society's misconception of the DACA process and DACA recipients and therefore, participants' common desire to better shape others' understanding of DACA through sharing experience and challenging these perceptions. In other words, participants indicated that DACA recipients desire to share their own experiences with the intention of creating a more accurate narrative about DACA recipients in the US. Another significant sentiment that most participants shared was not identifying as American because they are made to feel like they do not belong. Specifically, most participants stated that they know they are as American as anyone else in the US, but do not feel comfortable identifying as exclusively American because society often sends messages that they do *not* belong. Of important note, the aforementioned sentiment may also be impacted by participants' ethnic and racial identities. Since American is most often synonymous with White, many ethnic and racial minorities have an othering experience and less often identify as solely American. This concept of belonging within the U.S can be explored under the Undocumented Critical Theory formalized by Aguilar (2019). Within this framework, Aguilar

(2019) described how “different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality.” When considering DACA recipient identity, although the goal of DACA may be to create a greater sense of belonging for these individuals, the *reality* may be completely different. In summary, DACA recipients’ experience and expertise should be highly considered and appreciated when changing DACA policies.

## **5.6 Higher Education Policy Changes and Considerations**

*Self-efficacy and future career.* All participants spoke of continuing their education in service oriented career path within their own communities. This point highlights the need for leaders in higher education institutions to value and invite community based events and support. Higher education policies should reflect the power of communities in the success of their students, especially including students from marginalized communities. Suárez-Orozco and colleagues (2010) also highlight the need for relational engagement in order to for students to successfully adapt to various school environments. In addition, the need for positive feedback and a sense of belonging for students is highlighted within the study with undocumented students in the U.S (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). As for self-efficacy, most participants focused on their resilience as specifically including their utilization of academic skills for success as well as their focus on the support they received from various spaces within their institutions. This valuable finding demonstrates that higher education policies and procedures need to ensure adequate support and encouragement for marginalized student communities within their institutions (i.e., clubs, student organizations, counselors and mentors from marginalized groups). The results from this study and other studies with undocumented students suggest the need for community and family based engagement in order to positively impact students’ success. Examples of these types of interventions include: (a) providing students the option to include family members for

various meetings and events, (b) holding school functions within various communities (and not solely on school campus), (c) providing students the options to complete internships within their own communities, and (d) encouraging and inviting students to include their families and communities in various steps of their academic careers.

*Impact of DACA on self-efficacy and outcome expectations.* As previously mentioned, most participants shared that DACA instability contributes to their uncertainty of future goals and limits their time to accomplish goals, especially when compared to other students. This point should be highly considered when creating/updating policies that focus on students' accomplishments during their educational careers and careers post-graduation. For example, higher education student advisors and mentors should be especially attuned to these concerns when aiding students in planning for life post-graduation. Furthermore, time constraints and stress to accomplish goals quickly should be taken into account when creating requirements and standards for students. Also of equal importance, participants spent a significant amount of time describing their financial barriers, especially the lack of funding for school. Financial burdens and barriers for all low-income students should always be a crucial factor when creating policies for financial aid, full-time student requirements, and work-study programs. When thinking specifically of DACA recipient students, higher institution leaders should be especially cognizant of these individuals lack of access to government loans and assistance. The need for universities to provide undocumented students with greater financial aid and supportive mentorships/groups is documented in many studies with undocumented students (Benuto et al., 2018; Kosnac, 2014; Perez et al., 2009; Pérez et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). In the present study, results indicated that there is a specific need for changes to academic policies regarding graduation requirements.

## 5.7 Limitations and Future Directions

The narratives shared by participants in this study of sense of belonging among Latinx DACA recipient students are a starting point in informing what changes need to be implemented in policies and clinical work. Due to limitations within this study and new ideas brought forth by participants, research must continue with this group of marginalized individuals. Below is an exploration of limitations within this study and possible future directions for research.

*Limitations.* The most evident limitation is the number of participants in this study. Although a sample size of 10 may be an adequate size to start the conversations examined in the Discussion section, a larger sample size is needed to truly understand commonalities among participants and what needs to be changed regarding both therapy approaches and relevant public policies. A related limitation is conducting research during a global pandemic while the continuance of DACA policy was in question. As previously discussed, these factors explicitly impacted recruitment and most likely impacted participants' emotional experiences and willingness to disclose within the interviews. Furthermore, although conducting interviews via Zoom allowed for individuals to participate regardless of their geographical location, it also created a less personal interaction as compared to in person interviews. An additional limitation in this study is the lack of Latinx diversity represented in the 10 participants. Since all participants identified as Mexican, narratives from individuals who identify from other parts of Latin America were not included. Moreover, no participants in this study identified as Asian, Black, and/or Afro-Latinx. Due to this mostly racially homogenous group of participants, topics regarding colorism and racism were only minimally discussed. This is a major issue since the results of this study do not speak to the multiple levels of marginalization racial minority Latinx DACA recipient folks face. Similar to this point, all participants identified as cis-gender, and



most identified as heterosexual, and as a result, the results from this dissertation did not focus on any major LGBTQ issues/barriers. The final limitation in this study is the principle investigator's (PI; aka, this writer's) identity as a documented U.S. citizen. Although CQR accounts for researcher bias through a research team, the PI's privilege in her documentation status likely influenced the questions that were asked throughout the interviews and how the data was understood (i.e. initially referring to DACA recipients as DACAmented and overlooking the levels of privilege within undocumented statuses).

*Future Directions.* With the aforementioned limitations in mind, there are many areas to direct for future research. First and foremost, there is a need for a larger sample size. More participants in a study would result in a better understanding of BAI and BDI scores, more Latinx diversity (i.e. racial diversity, gender diversity, sexual orientation diversity, etc.), and a deeper understanding of commonalities across Latinx DACA recipient students' experiences. As previously noted within the limitations, there is a significant need for research with Latinx DACA students to further explore intersectionality of ethnicity and race, and therefore the added stressor racial discrimination and colorism. Additionally, there is a need for further exploration of LGBTQ identities and the impact of gender and sexual orientation discrimination within the Latinx DACA recipient community. More deeply exploring identity intersectionality and multiple layers of marginalization will also provide a better understanding of mental health and wellbeing with Latinx DACA recipients. Another addition that would be an asset to future research is a measure of sense of belonging (SB), such as the one created by Hagerty and Patusky (1995). This quantitative measure would provide an opportunity for researchers to understand this population's experience with SB especially as compared to other groups of people. In thinking specifically of DACA recipient folks, future research should also focus on

other groups of DACA recipient folks such as non-students and non-Latinx folks. Research with other groups of DACA recipient folks would permit the opportunity for future researchers to compare DACA recipient folks' experiences across many dimensions and identities.

Furthermore, the comparison of studies will provide a deeper understanding of aspects of marginalization and privilege within the DACA recipient community. Finally, in an attempt to provide as much voice and agency to DACA recipient individuals as possible, future qualitative research with this population should also include Participatory Action Research (PAR). This method of research would not only give DACA recipients a voice, but also aid in informing policy makers and clinicians what exactly DACA recipient folks want society to know and what they want and need.

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# Appendix A

## Interview Protocol

*Hi, thank you very much for participating in this qualitative study looking at sense of belonging for Latinx DACA students. We appreciate your time and willingness to be a part of this important project. My name is Cassandra Calle and I am the principle investigator for this research project. First, I will ask you a number of open ended questions and to finish the interview I will ask you specific questions to complete two short self-assessments of anxiety and depression. Before all this, I will review a few points on the informed consent form you have looked over previously.*

Queries are followed up by possible follow-up prompts.

1. After reading the description of the study, what piqued your interest and made you agree to participate?
2. All participants being interviewed for this study identify as Latinx college/grad school students with or eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Please tell me a little bit about your journey to the United States.
  - a. What year are you in school?
  - b. What is your major?
3. What does it mean to you when you hear the word “belong?”
  - a. Where do you feel like you belong?
4. How would you describe your sense of belonging in the United States?
  - a. Do you see yourself as American? Tell me more.
5. How would you describe your sense of belonging as a student at (name of institution).
6. What does anxiety mean to you?
  - a. Have you experienced it? (If yes) Tell me more.
7. What does depression mean to you?
  - a. Have you experienced it? (If yes) Tell me more.
8. What are your future career goals?
  - a. Tell me about the likelihood that you will achieve this goal?



9. What skills do you have to succeed in your future career goals?
10. I understand this next question may be emotionally difficult to respond to, so please take your time to answer: Thinking about how DACA looks right now and it's uncertainty within the Supreme Court and also just thinking of how unfortunately DACA is not a pathway to citizenship. What do you imagine your future looking like?
11. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you believe are important to understanding your experience as a Latinx DACAmented college student?

## Appendix B

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### Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

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<b>Eligibility</b>	Undocumented, under the age of 31 (as of June 15, 2012)  Currently in school, have graduated from high school, or have obtained a GED  Have not been convicted of a felony offense, a significant misdemeanor, or more than three misdemeanors of any kind, and do not pose a threat to national security or public safety
<b>Temporary Benefits</b>	Working permit  Driver’s license (in most states)  Ability to apply for private loans (for school)  Eligible for in-state tuition prices for state colleges (in most states)
<b>Cost of Application</b>	\$495 (no fee waivers)

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For more in-depth information [immigrationequality.org](http://immigrationequality.org) (“DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals),” 2015)

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Figure 1. Resources provided to those who qualify for and are accepted under DACA.

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**Hagerty et al.'s (1992) Sense of Belonging (SB) Model**

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<i>Model (in ascending order)</i>	<i>Example</i>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Antecedents</b></p> <p>“energy for involvement, potential and desire for meaningful involvement, and potential for shared or complementary characteristics”</p>	<p><i>Zoe is a Afro-Latina first generation college student at a PWI. During her first year at college, she feels isolated and out of place. In her second semester, she decides to join a first generation college student organization led by students of color on campus.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SB Elements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- experiencing being “valued, needed, or important with respect to people, groups, objects, organizations, environments or spiritual dimensions”</li> <li>- experiencing a “fit or congruence with other people, groups, objects, organizations, environments, or spiritual dimensions through shared or complementary characteristics”</li> </ul>	<p><i>After a few meetings and events held by the organization, Zoe begins to feel like an important addition to the group of first generation students of color.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, Zoe feels her experience on campus is validated and valued. She begins to feel more “at home” and resonates with other students’ fears and aspirations.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Incidents</b></p> <p>“psychological, social, spiritual, or physical involvement, attributions of meaningfulness to that involvement, and fortification or laying down of a fundamental foundation for emotional and behavioral responses”</p>	<p><i>During her second year at college, Zoe runs for a position on the board of the first generation college student organization on campus. As the newly elected event coordinator, Zoe feels excited to create and host events that make other students feel “at home.”</i></p>

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Figure 2. Hagerty et al.'s (1992) SB Model depicted in a table form with an example.

## Appendix C

Demographics		# of participants
<b>Birthplace</b>	Mexico	10
<b>Current immigration status</b>	DACA	10
<b>Age at time of immigration to the US</b>	3 months old	1
	1.5 years old	1
	2 years old	3
	4 years old	3
	9 years old	1
	11 years old	1
<b>Race</b>	Latinx/a/o	6
	Hispanic	3
	Indigenous	1
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Latinx/a/o	4
	Hispanic	3
	Mexican	3
<b>Age</b>	21 years old	2
	23 years old	1
	24 years old	2
	28 years old	2
	29 years old	1
	30 years old	2
<b>Gender</b>	Female	8
	Male	2
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>	Lower to Lower-middle	8
	Middle to Upper-middle	2
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	6
	Married	4
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Heterosexual	9
	Bisexual	1
	Atheist	1
<b>Religion</b>	Agnostic	2
	Not religious, grew up Catholic	3
	Catholic	3
	Christian	1
<b>Current level of education</b>	Undergraduate school	4
	Graduate school	6
	Psychology/ mental health	5
<b>Major/ focus of study</b>	Music Education	1
	Sociology	1
	Political Science	1
	Communications	1
	Law	1

Figure 3. Demographics table.

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Label (frequency)</b>
1. Journey to the U.S.	Immigration due to financial difficulties in home country	Typical
	Family separation due to different times of migration	Typical
2. DACA Perceptions	Desire to shape others' understanding of DACA through sharing experiences and challenging perceptions	General
	Unawareness of own undocumented status	Variant
3. Awareness of Identity Compared to Others	Feeling more comfortable/belonging in spaces where there are shared identities (i.e. race, SES, and immigration status)	Typical
	Difficulty belonging because of different identity	Variant
	Having an undocumented immigration status comes with more challenges and barriers than those who are documented <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having DACA limits one's time to accomplish goals and opportunities</li> </ul>	Typical
4. American Identity and Sense of Belonging	Sense of belonging is to be included and accepted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feeling a sense of belonging in one's community and/or institution</li> </ul>	General
	Not identifying as American because one is made to feel like they do not belong	Typical
	Ni de aqui, ni de alla <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lacking a sense of belonging in the US based on feeling unwelcome and/or not accepted by society</li> <li>- Not feeling a sense of belonging to one's country of origin</li> </ul>	Typical
	Seeing oneself as American because that is all one knows	Variant
5. Barriers Experiences	Overall financial barriers, including lack of funding for school	Typical
	Lack of stability with DACA	Typical
	Civic duty – pushing others to engage in discourse because of own inability to	Variant
	Lack of institutional support	Variant
6. Emotional Experiences	Increased emotional stress related to uncertainty of DACA	General
	Experienced depression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experienced as physical and/or emotional exhaustion</li> <li>- Experienced as sadness</li> </ul>	Typical
	Experienced anxiety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experienced as uneasiness and discomfort</li> </ul>	Typical

	- Experienced as stress of the unknown and/or uncertainty	
7. Perspective of Future	Continuing education in service oriented path	General
	DACA instability contributing to uncertainty of future goals	General
	- Hopeful outlook	
	- Doubtful outlook	
8. Resilience	Ability to adapt to diverse contexts	Typical
	Utilizing academic skills for success	Typical
	Commitment to continue regardless of barriers	Variant
	Professional and institutional social support impacting success	Typical
	Ponte las pilas – creating one’s own space through creativity, resilience, and motivation	Typical

Figure 4. Table of domains, categories, and frequency labels.

*Note.* General = applicable to 8-10 cases; Typical = 5 to 7 cases; Variant = 2 to 4 cases.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>BAI score</b>	<b>BAI descriptor</b>	<b>BDI score</b>	<b>BDI descriptor</b>
1	14	Low anxiety	8	Normal ups and downs
2	38	Potentially concerning levels of anxiety	23	Moderate depression
3	32	Moderate anxiety	17	Borderline clinical depression
4	21	Low anxiety	4	Normal ups and downs
5	18	Low anxiety	4	Normal ups and downs
6	12	Low anxiety	10	Normal ups and downs
7	25	Moderate anxiety	27	Moderate depression
8	28	Moderate anxiety	29	Moderate depression
9	7	Low anxiety	8	Normal ups and downs
10	29	Moderate anxiety	29	Moderate depression
Average Score	22.4	Moderate anxiety	15.9	Mild mood disturbance

Figure 5. Table of participants' scores on self-report measures of depression and anxiety, BDI and BAI.