DWELL IN POSSIBILITY: A NARRATIVE STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING IN THE UNITED STATES

by

ASHLEY L. BROWN

(Under the Direction of Darris Means)

ABSTRACT

Most undocumented students have indicated they do not feel a sense of belonging on their respective campuses (Gonzales et al., 2013; Mangan, 2018; Múnoz & Maldondo, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). However, with the passage of DACA, universities have seen an increase in undocumented students attending college (Cervantes et al., 2015). Current literature indicates undocumented students' retention and graduation rates are low (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Múnoz & Maldondo, 2012; Terriquez, 2015). Currently, students' sense of belonging is correlated with student success (Strayhorn, 2019). By understanding undocumented students' sense of belonging on college campuses, university leaders can cultivate an environment that creates conditions that positively foster belongingness and student success. As a result, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of undocumented students who are attending U.S. colleges. In particular, I shared stories about undocumented students' interactions with faculty, staff, and students and how those interactions influenced their sense of belonging. In this study, I used

Strayhorn's (2019) Sense of Belonging theory and definition of belongingness. For the research design, I used a narrative methodology and critical paradigm. Additionally, I collected data through semi-structured interviews and participant-driven drawings. Last, I presented my findings using composite counter-storytelling in the format of a stage play script. The data in this study was analyzed using holistic and categorical data analysis. While the categorical data analysis was used to identify various themes across each participant, the holistic analysis helped develop participant profiles, which were presented in the format of a stage play script. The major findings included the following: negative interactions reinforced a lack of belonging while positive interactions promoted a stronger sense of belonging; although students may or may not feel like they belonged to their university as a whole, they were able to identify groups or spaces that helped them foster belonging; and, the spaces and groups that fostered belongingness were places and student organizations/departments that affirmed their undocumented, racial, or student identities. The findings of this study produced implications for practice, policy, future research, and theory.

INDEX WORDS: Undocumented students, belonging, composite counter-storytelling, art-based pedagogy, critical pedagogy

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the undocumented people in the United States who dream to truly belong on a land that reminds them daily that they are not welcome. This land is as much yours as it is mine. You are love. You are hope. You are enough and I see you.

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Zoom writing sessions helped me write while providing a space to vent, process, reflect, and heal. Nicole, there are not adequate words created yet to express how much your support has meant to me during this process. Your friendship is not only how I survived 2020 but thrived in that year.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since 1980, the United States' undocumented population has grown from less than a million to approximately 11.3 million people (Teranishi et al., 2015). The majority of undocumented people residing in the United States also hold various marginalized social identities (such as race, ethnicity, and class,) creating and experience racism, classism, and other forms of oppression, which create additional barriers to success (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Among the undocumented population, undocumented students face many risks due to their immigration status, and due to systems of oppression, they are unlikely to persist through graduation (Contreras, 2009). Maestas et al. (2007) found that a significant aspect of retaining minoritized students is to increase their sense of belonging. Although undocumented youth hold a deep desire to belong (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011), many are frustrated with the overwhelmingly present hostility towards undocumented people and the ever-present negative social, political, and media representations of whom society frames them to be (Suárez-Orozco, 2004).

While I was born in the United States and therefore hold citizenship privilege, both of my parents are Jamaican natives, and my mother was an undocumented person in the U.S. Being the daughter of an undocumented person exposed me to the lived experiences of some undocumented people throughout my childhood and adult life. Growing up in a mixed-status household meant that my brother and I often lived in fear of the government learning about my mother’s status and my father’s application for

citizenship being denied. Although my mother was deported, my father received citizenship two years later and our family has lived in different countries for the last 14 years.

Although my family has found ways to adapt to our new family dynamic, the wound of a parent being forcibly removed from the country I call home and detained in a detention facility has never fully healed. This became even more clear in 2018 when President Donald Trump implemented a zero-tolerance policy towards immigration and signed an executive order that directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to begin separating undocumented immigrant families at the Mexico-United States border (Vinson, 2020). As a result, more than 4,300 undocumented children were separated from their families and held in locked cages in warehouses with minimal, inadequate supplies (Vinson, 2020). As I began this study on undocumented students, videos, photos, and articles of the impact of Trump's new immigration policy were prominently posted in the news and on social media; thus, triggering memories of my mother's experience with deportation and the realization of how such a tragic situation impacts the whole family, children included. As I continued to work on this study, there have been consistent reports of verbal and physical abuse to detained undocumented people, as well as challenges with reunification that have caused thousands of undocumented children to experience life-changing trauma (Vinson, 2020). Reading these reports has been emotionally exhausting and evermore crucial as I reflect on my privilege as a person with U.S. citizenship.

Due to my intimate connection to the undocumented experience, I have been conscious of undocumented people's experiences and an advocate for undocumented

peoples' access to U.S. citizenship. Further, with the increased negative focus on undocumented people and the amplification of vilifying their existence in the U.S, it is vital to understand the unwelcoming environment undocumented people in the U.S. navigate daily (Mangan, 2018; Quilantan, 2018). Xenophobia, irrational fear or hatred of people from other countries, is not a U.S. centric term or concept. However, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, America saw an abrupt increase in individual and structural forms of xenophobia that negatively impacted Black and Brown immigrants (Awan, 2010). Some of the individual forms of xenophobia included racial and religious profiling, violence, and stereotyping (Awan, 2010; Haner et al., 2019). Forms of structural changes included increased border security policies that specifically discriminated against immigrants as well as strict and unreasonable immigration laws, which made acquiring U.S. residency and citizenship improbable (Haner et al., 2019). While much of the immediate individual and structural forms of xenophobia were directed at Muslim identified individuals, unreasonable fear of Black and Brown immigrants quickly spread through America (Awan, 2010). Eventually, these negative experiences spread to undocumented peoples' treatment in higher education (Muñoz, 2013).

In a poem about the negative impact unwelcoming environments have on students with minoritized identities on college campuses, Kanke (2001) stated, "If only the seeds were stronger, then the marigolds would grow" (p. 25). Kanke (2001) argued that most colleges were not innately environments where minoritized students could be successful. Consequentially, since the start of the Trump era, there has been an increase in xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the country, which has amplified

undocumented people's feelings of fear and uncertainty (Mangan, 2018; Quilantan, 2018; Schmalz, 2018).

Statement of Problem

Most undocumented students have indicated they do not feel a sense of belonging on their respective campuses (Gonzales et al., 2013; Mangan, 2018; Múnoz & Maldondo, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Pérez Huber (2009) argued that the negative dominant framing of the immigration debate in the United States shapes how individuals perceive undocumented people. Often even the language used to describe immigration, such as illegal, criminal, reform, deviant, and/or alien, dehumanizes undocumented people and further excludes them from society (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Moreover, society commonly racializes and politicizes immigration issues in the United States (Haas, 2008). Even though undocumented people have migrated from various countries, individuals typically equate undocumented people to individuals from Latin America (Pérez Huber, 2009; Teranishi et al., 2015). Therefore, individuals with an undocumented status tend to experience an amplification of the negative stereotypes associated with their racial and ethnic identity. Since societal trends impact college environments, these beliefs are present within university communities and shape how faculty, staff, and students engage in the immigration debate and/or about undocumented students (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006). Undocumented students' mindsets about self are overcome with an awareness of their citizenship status, the ambiguity of their futures, concerns about attending and remaining in college, worries about their family, as well as being bombarded with fears about how the world perceives them as an undocumented

person (Gonzales, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). In addition to navigating the many other challenges individuals with marginalized identities navigate, these concerns create a real barrier for undocumented students' success.

Further, the political debate around access to citizenship rarely considers the challenges faced by undocumented people, especially undocumented youth (Pérez Huber, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). For example, a significant portion of the debate centers undocumented people's choice to enter the United States without documentation (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006). However, migrating to the U.S. is an expensive, ambiguous, and unreasonably long process (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) significantly slowed the immigration process and placed many individuals into interminable waiting periods (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). For context, the average wait period for a U.S. citizen's family members applying for a U.S. visa in the Philippines is four to six years (Anderson, 2010). The current wait time for business-sponsored green card requests is six to twenty years (Anderson, 2010). Often, people chose to enter the U.S. without documentation due to extreme financial concerns and fear for their safety or their family's lives (Chan, 2010; Menjívar, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). As such, waiting up to 20 years may not be a realistic option. Moreover, most undocumented youth leave their countries of origin during childhood and have spent the majority of their lives in the United States (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Teranishi et al., 2015). Since these individuals arrived as minors, they often are unaware of their undocumented status until high school; thus, they were not actively participating in the complex and challenging choice to come to the United States (Suárez-Orozco et al.,

2011; Teranishi et al., 2015). By shaping the immigration debate around negative assumptions about undocumented people, especially youth, individuals engaged in the debate tend to miss the complexity of undocumented people's lived experiences (Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera, 2015).

Currently, most of the literature on undocumented students' experiences focus on their lack of access to post-secondary education (Bjorklund, 2018). While this is important, there is a need to understand undocumented students' lived experiences in college. Today, many undocumented students attending college are also a part of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (Cebulko & Silver, 2016). DACA, a federal program created through an executive order from former President Barack Obama, provides a temporary reprieve from the threat of deportation as well as work authorization for two years to undocumented people who entered the U.S. before the age of 16 (Cebulko & Silver, 2016; USCIS, 2018). The DACA program requires $495 in application fees and may require additional costs if the individual needs assistance from a lawyer with navigating the process (USCIS, 2018). If admitted to the DACA program, the individual will need to submit a renewal application every two years, which costs $495 and potential additional costs depending on the support required (USCIS, 2018). With the passage of DACA, universities have seen an increase in undocumented students attending college (Cervantes et al., 2015). However, current literature indicates undocumented students' retention and graduation rates are low (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Múnoz & Maldondo, 2012; Terriquez, 2015). Separately, several studies indicated the challenges undocumented youth face in relation to stress,

anxiety, isolation, and fear (Gonzales et al., 2013; Muñoz, 2013; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007).

There is little exploration of how the various perceptions of undocumented people affect undocumented students' sense of belonging on college campuses. Despite the absence of literature on sense of belonging and undocumented students, Strayhorn (2019) found that sense of belonging for students with marginalized identities could positively impact retention and success in college. Teranishi et al. (2015) found that undocumented undergraduate students reported high levels of negativity and unfair treatment from peers, faculty, and administrators on their campus and expressed a strong sense of isolation. Strayhorn's (2019) research on sense of belonging found that students' peers, faculty, and staff members' words and actions mattered and were powerful influencers on the students' sense of belonging, mattering, and ability to see themselves as capable. Further, undocumented students make significant sacrifices to attend college. These sacrifices include leaving their families, which often impacts their ability to support their families financially, as well as increased risk of exposure of their undocumented status (Contreras, 2009). Once admitted, undocumented students continue to experience challenges while attending college (Contreras, 2009). These challenges often lead to undocumented students experiencing isolation, which inevitability impacts their success academically, socially, and personally (Cervantes et al., 2015; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Therefore, understanding undocumented students' lived experiences while attending college and their sense of belonging will not only help undocumented students be successful in college but will ultimately grant them improved political, economic, and social mobility (Huerta & Ocampo, 2017; Portes & Rambaut, 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Purpose of Study & Research Questions

The purpose of this narrative study is to explore the lived experiences of undocumented students who are attending U.S. colleges. In particular, I shared stories about undocumented students' interactions with faculty, staff, and students and how those interactions influenced their sense of belonging. This narrative study considered the following primary research questions:

- How do interactions with institutional actors influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
    - How do interactions with faculty influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
    - How do interactions with staff and administrators influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
    - How do interactions with peers influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
- What spaces influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
- What groups influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?

Strayhorn (2019) defined sense of belonging as:

> Students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers. (p. 4)

Strayhorn (2019) found that most college students who held marginalized identities struggled to have a strong sense of belonging. To gain an in-depth understanding, I collected stories from undocumented students regarding their lived experiences on campus and how these experiences impacted their sense of belonging. I used interviews to collect stories and conducted a holistic analysis, which is a thorough analysis of each participant's narrative, and thematic analysis, which is an analysis that provided me with a chance to look across all participants' experiences and search for shared experiences or themes (Lieblich et al., 1998). Additionally, with minimal literature on undocumented students' sense of belonging, I believed asking general questions regarding their experiences provided the needed data to further our knowledge in this area and potentially open up opportunities for continued studies. Also, while undocumented students face significant barriers, they are wildly resilient (Yasuike, 2019). Their ability to sustain their resilience is supplemented by positive encouragement and support from institutional agents such as staff and faculty members (Yasuike, 2019). However, for undocumented students to gain support in relation to their citizenship status requires a vast amount of trust as they would need to disclose their undocumented status first (Gonzales, 2011). As a result, structured practices and policies that guide institutional agents and protect undocumented students are a vital contributor to undocumented students' success (Huerta & Ocampo, 2017; Pérez et al., 2010). Learning more about undocumented students' experience in college will guide administrators to better understand the needs and promising practices necessary to create an inclusive, equitable environment for these students (Huerta & Ocampo, 2017; Pérez et al., 2010; Yasuike, 2019).

Moreover, since perceptions of undocumented students' citizenship status are often intersected with other minoritized identities, it is essential to consider how the intersection of their minoritized identities influence systemic oppression. Collins (2000) believed that acknowledging how multiple social identities intersect provided the most inclusive and accurate understanding of how oppression impacts people on an individual, group, and community level. In other words, since people do not experience each identity in isolation, they also do not experience various levels of oppression separately (Adams & Zúñiga, 2016). Using a critical paradigm as my lens helped uncover xenophobia and nativism as well as other forms of oppression (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007; Pérez Huber, 2009). Critical scholarship focuses on the role of voice in bringing additional power to disenfranchised groups (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The stories provided by individuals with marginalized identities provide "necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13). Thus, when I decided to conduct research in this area, I believed it was essential to center the voices of undocumented students. Delgado (1989) indicated that there were at least three significant reasons naming ones' own reality is valuable: (1) a lot of our own reality is socially constructed and as such hard to explain and adequately identify as an outsider; (2) stories shared by an individual with marginalized identities provides a means for healing from internalized oppression; and (3) the process of storytelling can open the worldview of individuals in the dominant group. As a critical researcher, it is my role to acknowledge my own power, participate in intentional conversations, and utilize research to promote social change (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, when I analyzed the stories I collected, I used Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory in addition to a

critical lens for understanding structures of oppression that could be challenging to detect while trying to understand students' sense of belonging.

Operational Definitions

The terms undocumented and undocumented student has been and will continue to be used throughout this dissertation. For this study, the term undocumented is defined as a person who is currently residing in the United States and does not have legal authorization or has temporary authorization to remain in the country but are in a state of liminal legality (Menjívar, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). The term undocumented student is defined as any student who is currently enrolled in a U.S. college who also is of undocumented status. Menjívar (2006) defined liminal legality as the state of being in which the individual is waiting for legal authorization. This may include individuals who are a part of DACA or Temporary Protection Status (TPS) programs.

The DACA program is for certain people who arrived in the U.S. as children and meet very specific guidelines to request consideration for temporary deferred action from removal proceedings and work authorization (USCIS, 2018). To participate in the DACA program, the individual applying must meet the following guidelines: (a) arrived in the U.S. before reaching their 16th birthday; (b) continuously resided in the U.S. since June 15, 2007, until present; (c) does not exceed the age of 31 years as of June 15, 2012; (d) is considered undocumented as of June 15, 2012; (e) is currently enrolled in school, graduated from high school, received a diploma, or was honorably discharged from the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the U.S.; (f) has not been convicted of a felony, received a significant misdemeanor, multiple misdemeanors, or otherwise do not pose a threat; and (g) is present in the U.S. at the time of applying to the DACA program

(USCIS, 2018). Admission to the DACA program lasts for two-years prior to renewal and grants the individual a temporary reprieve from deportation and a temporary work visa (USCIS, 2018).

Alternately, the Temporary Protection Status (TPS)program is for individuals from select foreign countries, designated by the Secretary of Homeland Security, to be granted temporary residency in the U.S. until they are able to safely return to their home country (USCIS, n.d.). The Secretary may designate individuals from certain country entry into the TPS program for the following conditions: their country is experiencing ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary circumstances (USCIS, n.d.). Once granted TPS, the individual may not be deported; however, the status does not provide a means to acquiring permanent residency status or grant temporary U.S. citizenship rights (USCIS, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

A number of studies highlighted the fear and isolation experienced by undocumented students in college (Alif et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2013; Teranishi et al., 2015). Additionally, undocumented students experience a high level of stress and anxiety about their citizenship status (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Chen & Rhoads, 2016; Contreras, 2009; Muñoz, 2013). These studies indicated that the source of these feelings relates to their financial burdens and lack of access. We understand that students do not live in a vacuum. It is important to know how the climate on campus is also influencing undocumented students' experiences in college and ultimately if they feel like they belong. Since most undocumented youth learn of their status during high school, they indicate a feeling of isolation (Hernandez et al., 2010). Prior to learning of their status,

most undocumented students did not see themselves as vastly different from their peers. However, while their peers are graduating high school and applying to colleges, undocumented youth begin to realize their future is uncertain. Therefore, if undocumented students can secure funding and acceptance into a college, they enter with a heightened sense of imposter syndrome that many marginalized students experience as well (Hernandez et al., 2010). Approximately 68 percent of undocumented students identify as first-generation college students (Teranishi et al., 2015). Thus, in addition to challenges undocumented students experience, they are also navigating common first-generation student challenges related to navigating college successfully (Pyne & Means, 2013). Also, 61 percent of undocumented students shared their annual household income was less than $30,000 and 29 percent were between $30,000 and $50,000 (Teranishi et al., 2015). This is important to consider as Teranishi et al. (2015) found that over half of the undocumented students in their study experienced extreme fears about financially supporting their college aspirations. Further, due to financial concerns, approximately 74 percent of undocumented students stopped attending college intermittently to save for future semesters (Teranishi et al., 2015).

Most studies on undocumented students' experiences in college encouraged staff and faculty to develop a welcoming, supportive environment (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Cervantes et al., 2015; Chen & Rhoads, 2016; Contreras, 2009; Muñoz, 2013). With a lack of federal support, many universities have not developed an intentional environment that is welcoming and supportive for undocumented students. This study centers the voices of undocumented students' experiences on college campuses. I hope that by hearing these stories, staff and faculty will further understand the importance of

intentionally designing programs and practices that positively impact the campus climate for undocumented students and increase their sense of belonging. More importantly, universities want to retain students and increase graduation rates. Understanding how these experiences influence a sense of belonging completes a vital step towards recognizing ways we can minimize negative impacts and promote positive impacts of sense of belonging.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I briefly explored the heightened challenges facing undocumented students, undocumented students' barriers to feeling a sense of belonging, and the purpose of my narrative study and guiding research questions. Further, I defined a few important terms that will be used throughout this dissertation and reviewed the significance of this study. Before further discussing my research, it is vital to summarize existing literature on undocumented students' experience in college. By doing so, it will provide a thorough understanding of undocumented students' experiences.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although undocumented students have been a part of the U.S. education system prior to 1982, the ruling of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) allowed undocumented students to legally access K-12 public education within the United States (Pérez et al., 2010; Serna et al., 2017). Despite undocumented students' access to K-12 public education, access to post-secondary institutions is challenging and, in some states, nearly impossible. As a result, much of the research about undocumented students is focused heavily on access (Bjorklund, 2018). While the literature on access is important, with the passage and enactment of policies such as DACA and the rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric across the nation (Enriquez et al., 2018; Huerta & Ocampo, 2017), understanding the experiences undocumented students are having in our universities is vital. Thus, I focused on research that provided information regarding undocumented students' lived experiences in U.S. colleges. Since my study explored undocumented college students' sense of belonging in relation to their lived experience while attending college, I have synthesized the literature into five major sections. These sections will provide a holistic understanding of undocumented college students' lived experiences in U.S. colleges. The five sections are financial burdens, lack of support, mental health, academic performance, and resiliency. Further, because the mental health section was multifaceted, I chose to break it down into the following subsections: stress, shame, and fear. Lastly, I conclude the chapter by

providing an overview of my theoretical framework, Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory and express how this theory supports my study.

Financial Burdens

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was first introduced in 2001 and since its introduction was revised various times. By 2011, the DREAM Act stated that individuals between the ages of 12 to 29 who have also lived in the U.S. for no less than five years would be eligible to apply for conditional U.S. citizenship after a 10-year deferment period (Anguiano & Nájera, 2015). Additionally, the DREAM Act would have granted undocumented students access to federal student loans and federal work-study programs but not federal grants, such as the Pell Grants (Miranda, 2010). In order to qualify, individuals would have to complete two years of college or serve in the U.S. military for two years. Additionally, they were not allowed to have a criminal record and must have good moral character. Since Congress failed to pass the DREAM Act in 2011, undocumented students' rights to federal benefits, such as federal aid, are left to the states to interpret (Serna et al., 2017). For example, Texas has established tuition equity laws that allow qualified undocumented students to pay in-state tuition while enrolled in a public university and provide some state financial aid (National Immigration Law Center [NILC], 2019). Kansas has also established tuition equity laws but does not provide scholarships or state financial aid. Alternatively, Alabama and South Carolina have banned enrollment to all undocumented college students at public institutions. This disjointed response has led to various states limiting access to undocumented students to attend public universities while others have extended in-state tuition benefits to eligible undocumented students (Conger & Chellman, 2013).

This means most undocumented students pay for college without financial assistance and are forced to pay out-of-state tuition and fees when doing so. While many students are facing challenges paying for college, undocumented students experience more severe financial burdens than students with U.S. citizenship status (Serna et al., 2017; Terriquez, 2015).

Pérez et al. (2010) solely focused on undocumented students who identified as Latinx and low-income, and they found that undocumented Latinx students held a "triple minority status," which means that in addition to having a lack of documentation, they also held a minoritized racial and social class identity (p. 39). This status exasperated the socioeconomic distress that Latinx undocumented students face while in college. Many undocumented students do not receive financial support from their parents (Conger & Chellman, 2013); in fact, Terriquez (2015) found that most undocumented students tend to support their families. For example, most undocumented students select community colleges near their homes because they are more affordable and can continue to support their families by working (Terriquez, 2015). These students are sharing the responsibility of personal financial burdens while aspiring to save for college expenses (Terriquez, 2015). Many undocumented students are also first-generation college students; as a result, they often feel a responsibility to support their families financially and emotionally while also desiring a better life (Pyne & Means, 2013; Teranishi et al., 2015).

Undocumented students who worked while attending college are more likely to struggle academically as well as leave college intermittently to support their family and/or increase their savings (Teranishi et al., 2015). For example, Pérez Huber and Malagon (2007) interviewed a student who worked to save enough money to attend

college away from home. Prior to starting college, her mother became ill. Due to a lack of insurance, the student reallocated her savings to support her mother. This forced the student to take a year off to rebuild her savings. Additionally, undocumented students are less likely to participate in "on-campus employment and paid-internships that are directly allocated through state monies" (Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007, p. 854). As a result, students having to intermittently leave college to save money for the next term are less likely to enroll as a full-time student and complete their degrees on time compared to students with U.S. citizenship (Conger & Chellman, 2013). These various financial stressors contribute to barriers to academic success that students must overcome in college.

Lack of Support

While there are faculty and staff who publicly support undocumented students, there are also numerous institutional leaders who significantly oppose the presence of undocumented students accessing college (Chen & Rhoads, 2016). Pérez et al. (2010) highlighted an interaction a Latinx, undocumented student had with a college counselor while attending a public institution. The counselor was ill-informed about a law that provided in-state tuition for undocumented students. In this conversation, the student disclosed their citizenship status while explaining the law to the counselor. Rather than responding positively, the staff member questioned the student's choice to attend college and their likelihood of being successful in life. While this experience may seem extreme, undocumented students are apprehensive of disclosing their undocumented status with faculty and administrators due to fear of experiencing discrimination similar to what the student described (Chan, 2010; Pérez et al., 2010). Sometimes faculty and staff can

unintentionally create unwelcoming environments for undocumented students. Simple practices such as asking students to share where they are from during introductions are insensitive and further isolates undocumented students, as they internally battle with being honest and remaining safe (Pyne & Means, 2013). Using this example, by adjusting the question to "where is home for you" creates space for students to share information as they see fit while fostering cultural pride.

Further, understanding the intersections of ethnic, cultural norms and students' undocumented status is also important. A Filipino student from Chan's (2010) study indicated the practice of hiding their undocumented status at all costs as a cultural stigma within Filipino culture. Therefore, the Filipino student in the study did not even consider sharing her undocumented status with her counselor. In the absence of awareness of cultural norms, the counselor never asked the student about their status or provided necessary resources.

Administrators with a lack of knowledge on the challenges undocumented students face, the immigration process, and/or relevant policies and laws can be equally problematic. For example, a Nigerian undocumented student shared with their college counselor about their immigration status and the counselor held very little knowledge on the challenges and financial stressors; therefore, the student missed vital information and opportunities to obtain private scholarships (Chan, 2010). Moreover, the process of disclosing their immigration status for undocumented students is often forced rather than the desired course of action (Davidson & Preciado, 2017). While most student affairs professionals genuinely want students to succeed, most of their common practices are not supportive for undocumented students who cannot participate without documents such as

federal and state-issued identification (i.e. internships; Barnhardt et al., 2013). In these situations, undocumented students would need to disclose their identity to ask for help or miss out on the opportunity altogether.

Furthermore, the undocumented experience in the U.S. has been racialized and politicized (Pérez Huber, 2009). Due to the media's depiction of undocumented people, many faculty and administrators hold conscious and unconscious political views of immigrants in the United States (Pérez Huber, 2009). Pérez Huber (2009) stressed that these negative perceptions could unconsciously influence how those who engage with undocumented students treat them, which further isolates undocumented students in academic settings. Thus, Barnhardt et al. (2013) found that developing inclusive admissions practices was not enough; rather, universities dedicated to supporting undocumented students need to train and build awareness of the undocumented experience among staff.

Mental Health

Due to their status, undocumented students report tremendously high levels of stress, fear, and anxiety (Teranishi et al., 2015). Further, a combination of the political climate, excessive barriers, and fear of disclosure leads to feelings of shame and isolation (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Teranishi et al., 2015). The various forms of oppression undocumented students face on college campuses, in addition to living in the shadows, contributes to their mental state (Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007). Moreover, in comparison to undergraduate students with U.S. citizenship, undocumented students' anxiety rates were more than three times higher in women and seven times higher in men (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Stress

Undocumented students face familial and financial stress (Terriquez, 2015). Additionally, the lack of support in managing the bureaucratic processes around funding for higher education and citizenship also adds to their stress levels (Jacobo & Ochoa, 2011; Terriquez, 2015). In Jacobo and Ochoa's (2011) study, a student shared how leaving campus to drive to the grocery store became a stressful situation as border patrol increased their presence in town. In further support, Muñoz (2013) found that Mexican women who are undocumented experienced stress completing simple tasks such as completing job and scholarship applications. However, coping with stress as an undocumented student varied. While some of the women in Muñoz's (2013) study sought counseling, Terriquez (2015) and Gonzales et al. (2013) found undocumented students' stress more commonly went untreated and led to anxiety attacks or physical ailments.

Shame

Most undocumented students learn of their undocumented status after their K-12 education **(**Mangan, 2018; William, 2016). This causes internal embarrassment and shame as their documented peers easily prepare for college. In addition to feeling shame, students who learn about their undocumented status after secondary school can also bring forward feelings of judgment and/or frustration for other groups of undocumented people based on how they originally migrate into the U.S. Buenavista (2018) learned that undocumented Asians in her study tended to avoid feeling shame by indicating a clear distinction between entering the country through a travel visa and overstaying their visa rather than entering the country without a visa or U.S. government approval. In Buenavista's (2018) study, an undocumented Korean student validated this in their

memories of their mother repeatedly retelling their story of migrating to the U.S. 'the right way.' This student's mother would often compare their migration story to Latinx undocumented people who she believed all migrated to the U.S. without a visa or U.S. government approval.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students expressed similar embarrassment when having to disclose their DACA status (Sahay et al., 2016). These DACA students described their experience as being "legally illegal" in university systems (Sahay et al., 2016, p. 55). Further, Anguiano and Nájera (2015) found that financially poor, undocumented students who also identified as first-generation college students felt shame and guilt for leaving their family members to attend college, especially undocumented students who attend elite universities. Similarly, undocumented students who choose to live on campus felt guilt and shame for not returning home and helping their parents with bills (Davidson & Preciado, 2017).

Fear

Undocumented students fear others learning of their undocumented status due to the severe consequences they could face. Not only do undocumented students live with a constant fear of their own identities being outed, but they are also worried for their families. Pyne and Means (2013) highlighted a student's experience learning that her mother was flagged as undocumented and was being deported. Due to the student's lack of financial support, she was unable to see her mother prior to her deportation date and did not see her mother for another year. This sort of fear led to some undocumented students not talking about their status and thus their challenges with others (Alif et al.,

2019; Gonzales et al., 2013). The negative impact of such often meant missed opportunities, academic stress, and isolation (Contreras, 2009).

Buenavista's (2018) study highlighted a Filipina student who expressed difficulty reaching out for academic assistance due to a negative experience in her past when disclosing her undocumented status. The student explained that her mother disclosed their citizenship status to her mother's old boyfriend. When the mother tried to break up with her boyfriend, he threatened to report them. As a result, the student and her mother had to run away. This experience validated her previous fear of trusting others and resulted in her not accessing resources that may have helped her from dropping out of school.

Academic Performance

Studies completed by Alif et al. (2019), Terriquez (2015), Yasuike (2019) indicated that undocumented students' academic performance was no different than students with U.S. citizenship, while other studies' findings were vastly different (Enriquez et al., 2018; Muñoz, 2013). Terriquez's (2015) study focused on undocumented students in community college and explained undocumented students' academic success by highlighting the fact that U.S. citizens who attend community colleges tend to have lower grades. Undocumented students usually attend community colleges because they are more affordable regardless of being a high academic achiever. Moreover, Yasuike (2019) found that undocumented students actively tried not to stand out in class for fear of their citizenship status being revealed. This included avoiding situations that could lead to personal questions or close engagement with faculty or staff. Students cited not participating in faculty-led research projects or speaking up in class, despite knowing the answer. Nonetheless, the students in Yasuike's (2019) study still

indicated having good grades. In fact, Yasuike (2019) highlighted an undocumented student who received campus-wide recognition for her excellent capstone project. Rather than celebrating this academic success, the undocumented student received unwanted attention and was paralyzed with worry about someone investigating and uncovering her status.

Enriquez et al. (2018) found that the various stressors faced by undocumented students negatively impacted their academic performance. The lack of financial support often negatively impacted undocumented students' ability to have adequate time to study, attend class, or access resources for class (Enriquez et al., 2018). Moreover, the physiological distress of navigating anti-immigrant sentiments during classroom discussions led some undocumented students to disengage or lose academic motivation (Enriquez et al., 2018; Muñoz, 2013).

Resiliency

Despite the various challenges faced by undocumented college students, Yasuike (2019) found that the students in their study shared determination and perseverance in achieving their goal of obtaining a college degree. Undocumented Mexicana students in Muñoz and Maldonado's (2012) study expressed the need for high resiliency while navigating college and holding compounding marginalized identities. In a case study done by Borjian (2016), they found that a strong academic background and financial, emotional, and informational support were key in maintaining this undocumented student's resiliency. This finding was further validated in Contreras's (2009) study as he found undocumented students had an overwhelming desire to succeed, which they applied to their attitudes and behaviors towards their education, community, and general

lives. Furthermore, Anguiano and Nájera's (2015) study recognized the complexity of navigating elite institutions while being undocumented. Persisting at elite, selective institutions requires a variety of skills that surpass academic achievement (Anguiano & Nájera, 2015; Flores & Horn, 2009). Despite undocumented college students' uncertain futures, they remained vigilant to overcome the challenges they faced.

Theoretical Framework

The significance of belonging is not a new concept in the field of psychology, sociology, or education. In fact, the importance of sense of belonging for human beings is longstanding (Goodenow, 1992; Hagerty, Lynch-Bauer et al., 1992; Maslow, 1954). Further, Strayhorn (2019) has complied and conducted extensive research on college students' sense of belonging. Since my study is focused on college students, specifically undocumented college students' sense of belonging, Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory is most aligned with the needs of my research.

Strayhorn (2019) framed sense of belonging similarly to Maslow (1954) in that it is a basic human need and motivation. In the context of college, Strayhorn (2019) defined sense of belonging as:

> Students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers (p. 4).

While college students align feeling a sense of belonging to feeling supported, connected, and respected, they also believed a lack of a sense of belonging could lead them to feeling alienated and lonely (Strayhorn, 2019). Particularly for marginalized students,

such as students who identified as women, racial and ethnic minorities, low-income students, and first-generation students, sense of belonging is significant and can support them in identity development, retention, and student success (Strayhorn, 2019). These findings helped move Strayhorn's (2019) findings around sense of belonging from a concept into a framed theory.

Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging Theory

Modeling Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, in Strayhorn's theory for sense of belonging, students' baseline potential and functions are met when their physiological needs (i.e. air, water, food, shelter, sleep, and sex) are achieved. Afterwards, students need safety and security (i.e. physical, emotional, financial, and food) prior to being able to consider love and belongingness (i.e. care, support, mattering, and friends). By acquiring a sense of belonging, students are able to achieve esteem (i.e. respect and confidence) and eventually self-actualization (i.e. creativity, innovation, and morality). Students' ability to achieve self-actualization is representative of their ability to perform at their fullest potential and meets higher educations' mission of enhancing students' knowledge and character.

Core Elements

There are seven core elements that makeup Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory. The seven core elements are representative of Strayhorn's (2019) review of existing literature on belonging and how it connects to the theory. Unfortunately, researchers studying the collegiate experiences of undocumented students who explicitly focused on Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory is limited. However, there is literature describing undocumented students' experiences with social engagement and

overall experiences in relation to campus climate that connects to sense of belonging. Since I was unable to find research using the theory, I will provide a brief overview of each element as it will give necessary context for the aforementioned theory as well as review the literature on undocumented students' perception of belonging on campus and provide connections to Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory.

Core Element One. The first element is that "sense of belonging is a basic human need" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 29). Strayhorn (2019) described that fundamentally there are two kinds of needs: latent and expressed. Sense of belonging is considered both latent (meaning the person is unknowing or unaware of the need) and expressed (meaning the person is conscious and aware of the need; Strayhorn, 2019). As a result, there are times when sense of belonging is easily identifiable and able to be named as well as times when it is hard to track. Nonetheless, belonging is a need that is universal. Moreover, influenced by Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, a sense of belonging is needed prior to an individual achieving higher needs such as knowledge, understanding, and self-actualization (Strayhorn, 2019). However, before being able to achieve belonging, a person must have their basic needs (i.e. water, food, shelter, sleep, and safety) met (Maslow, 1954; Strayhorn, 2019). This is fundamental to Strayhorn's (2019) belonging theory as we consider higher education's mission for learning, knowledge acquisition, and self-discovery. These goals are not attainable without college students being able to feel a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2019).

Numerous studies found undocumented students felt supported when they were able to connect and build relationships with students and staff who understood the undocumented experience (Chen & Rhoads, 2016; Huerta & Ocampo, 2017; Raza et al.,

2019; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). However, many undocumented students reported challenges in making social connections (Davidson & Preciado, 2017; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Williams, 2016). Muñoz and Vigil's (2018) study found that undocumented/DACA students commonly relied on hidden and non-present communities of support at an individual level. As they found one staff member who they could trust, they would be directed by this person to another individual with the expertise they need. While this underground network allowed students to build positive relationships with some students and staff, it was still limiting as they had to know who to go to in order to access the network. These findings in the literature seem to connect well to the first core element of Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory, sense of belonging is universal and a basic human need. Undocumented students sought a latent need to connect through engaging in underground networks, despite the risk of exposure, to gain understanding and acceptance. Further, the fear of deportation leads me to believe the students' may be still navigating the safety and security section of Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory and, therefore, are unable to achieve a true sense of belonging.

Core Element Two. The second element is that "sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 32). In other words, a sense of belonging can influence students' behavior. However, the need for a sense of belonging does not always motivate an individual to act in positive ways (Strayhorn, 2019). All in the guise of belonging, students are drawn to take action best aligned with their feelings of building community, security, and support. The need to belong will stimulate students' behavior towards or against academic success depending on the activities designed to achieve it (Strayhorn, 2019). Strayhorn (2019) suggested

administrators establish student organizations designed to support marginalized students to foster a sense of belonging. This recommendation is also supported by numerous scholars studying undocumented students' experiences in college (Chen & Rhoads, 2016; Contreras, 2009; Davidson & Preciado, 2017; Gonzales et al., 2013). Although joining a student organization designed to support undocumented students can be risky, as their membership to the organization could disclose their undocumented status to others, the peer networks built in these organizations positively influenced undocumented students experience on campus (Chen & Rhoads, 2016; Contreras, 2009; Davidson & Preciado, 2017; Gonzales et al., 2013). As a result, the deep desire to belong to a student organization for undocumented students can sometimes negate undocumented students' fear of disclosing their status.

Core Element Three. The third element is that "sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts, at certain times, and among certain populations" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 34). For example, some Latinx students even suffer isolation within intragroup experiences. A student from Pérez Huber and Malagon's (2007) study expressed how she felt marginalized when attending a Scholars Day event. The student shared how she was unlike Latinx students who were born in the United States, which further indicated her feelings of exclusion as the event focused on the documented Latinx experience (Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007). These feelings of being the outsider within their community, a community they work very hard to join, can significantly impact undocumented students' mental health (Gonzales et al., 2013). Belonging is context-dependent and can influence students' ability to learn in spaces they feel alienated (Goodenow, 1992). To help students instill belonging, faculty, staff, and

peers must know about students' values, expectations, interests, goals, and attitudes (Strayhorn, 2019).

Core Element Four. The fourth element is that "sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 36). According to Schlossberg (1985), mattering is defined as feeling as though the person matters, is appreciated or valued by others. Similar to belonging, mattering can also serve as a motive (Strayhorn, 2019). Students want to feel as though they matter to others in their university community and will act (negatively or positively) to increase their perception of being valued or appreciated.

Hernandez et al. (2010) described a student who was attending a community college after being selected for the President's Leadership Scholarship at their institution. As a recipient of this scholarship, the student had to serve as a campus leader for two years. Through this experience, the student became highly involved in projects and activities on campus and their confidence increased. Eventually, the student decided to run for a student body officer position, which would provide them with free tuition and a stipend for their work. Although the student was elected for the position, the administration needed the student to complete hiring paperwork in order to compensate them adequately. Due to the students' undocumented status, the student was unable to provide this information and was fearful that the administration would make them step down from their office position if they learned of the student's citizenship status. Gratefully, the administration responded positively, and although they were unable to provide monetary compensation to the student, they encouraged the student to remain in the position. While the student was unable to receive the same financial benefit as their

peers who had U.S. citizenship, they decided to remain in the position because the student felt as though their role as a student leader mattered to the institution (Hernandez et al., 2010).

Core Element Five. The fifth element is that "social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 37). While belonging is universal and influences everyone, it does not impact everyone equally (Strayhorn, 2019). All of the many identities students hold make their relationship with belonging increasingly complex. Students' sense of belonging is contextual (Strayhorn, 2019). Depending on the context of each situation, the intersections of students' social identities and their most salient identity in a specific circumstance can shift how students perceive they belong. To achieve a true sense of belonging, students must push to find community within their university where they can be their full authentic selves (Strayhorn, 2019).

Ellis and Chen's (2013) study found that undocumented students enjoyed the benefits of belonging to two cultural worlds, while the undocumented students in Múnoz and Maldondo's (2012) study believed the best way to fit in in college was to suppress their Mexicana identities while on campus. In Múnoz and Maldonado's (2012) study, it is possible that the intersections of undocumented students' social identities were affecting their sense of belonging. Múnoz and Maldonado (2012) found that most undocumented Mexicana students identified as a "silenced outsider" on campus (p. 299). Múnoz and Maldonado (2012) described the undocumented college experience as a silenced outsider because the Mexicana students in the study were often perceived as being undocumented without disclosing their citizenship status due to their racial identity. As a result, these students experienced microaggressions from their peers, and due to fear of deportation,

they were unable to challenge their peers who were hurting them. This dynamic often led to the students choosing to isolate themselves from their college community. How the students in Múnoz and Maldonado's (2012) study experienced the intersection of their racial and citizenship identity explained how social identities could affect college students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2019).

Core Element Six. The sixth element is that "sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 39). By achieving a sense of belonging, students will see many positive outcomes such as joy, engagement, and positivity (Strayhorn, 2019). Moreover, universities will see that students who have a sense of belonging are more likely to be retained, academically succeed, and engage in the campus community. In fact, universities strive to create environments on campus that build such a strong sense of belonging that students feel it is nearly impossible to leave (Strayhorn, 2019).

Institutions with established student organizations created by and for undocumented students is a promising way to promote social engagement and help undocumented students feel a sense of belonging (Chen & Rhoads, 2016; Huerta & Ocampo, 2017; Raza et al., 2019; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Moreover, engagement in student organizations created by and for undocumented college students can also lead to identity development, activism and empowerment (DeAngelo et al., 2016). According to Strayhorn (2019), intentional spaces for students to engage can foster sense of belonging and engender other positive outcomes such as achievement, engagement, joy, and acceptance. However, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015) studied social engagement on a wide array of diverse campuses and found strong disparities of the presence of social organizations or general safe spaces. Undocumented students attending four-year

institutions indicated higher levels of peer support in relation to their undocumented status and general support in comparison to undocumented students attending community colleges. Undocumented students at these community colleges also reported stopping out more consistently than the students attending a four-year institution (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). As Strayhorn (2019) has connected that sense of belonging is directly connected to student retention, students' reports of stop-outs are not surprising.

Core Element Seven. The seventh element is that "sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 39). While some students can have years of feeling a sense of belonging to their campus communities, belonging is malleable and can change positively or negatively at any given time (Strayhorn, 2019). For some undocumented students, their sense of belonging is influenced by when they learn about their citizenship status (Buenavista, 2018). Many undocumented children spend their formative years assimilating into and finding acceptance in U.S. K-12 public education to later learn of their undocumented status (Mangan, 2018). The realization that deportation may mean the forced departure from the only home most undocumented students know to a foreign place they remember little about creates a new sense of isolation and fear. This concept aligns with the seventh core element of Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory, which is the idea that "sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change" (p. 39). Undocumented students may have felt accepted prior to learning about their citizenship status but shifted as the context and conditions changed.

Undocumented Students' Sense of Belonging

College campuses are microcosms of society; thus, the climate within the country tends to be mirrored on college campuses (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). While some undocumented students are proud of their American upbringings, the social climate continuously reminds them that they are unwelcomed (Gonzales et al., 2013). Most harmful is the dehumanization of undocumented students (Pérez Huber, 2009). The usage of language on campuses such as alien, illegal, or reform further ignores the humanism that undocumented students hold and their place within their university communities (Pérez Huber, 2009). As a result, the environment in the U.S. for undocumented individuals makes it challenging for undocumented students to foster a sense of belonging. However, Strayhorn (2019) found that interactions with faculty, staff, and students' peers, as well as campus climate, play a significant role in students' feelings around belonging on their campuses. As my study explores the interactions of undocumented students with faculty, staff, and students and its impact on their sense of belonging, I believe Strayhorn's theory is an important frame for my study.

Chapter Summary

The majority of the literature regarding undocumented students in colleges focused on the challenges they faced and how those challenges impact their experiences. This is important and useful for student affairs professionals as we begin to reframe how we see the undocumented experience and learn to support undocumented students. Additionally, undocumented students also contribute a great deal to the collegiate experience and hold multiple strengths (Anguiano & Nájera, 2015; Pérez Huber, 2009). Researchers focus on increasing our understanding of undocumented students' high

levels of grit and resiliency can help faculty and staff have a holistic view of undocumented students (O'Neal et al., 2016; Pérez Huber, 2009).

Nonetheless, my study focused on exploring the lived experiences of undocumented students in colleges and how their interactions with faculty, staff, and students impacted their sense of belonging within their college community. The literature highlighted in this review provides a good foundation for understanding how undocumented students experience financial burdens, a lack of support, mental health concerns (particularly stress, shame, and fear), and resiliency. Further, the literature on undocumented students' interactions with faculty and staff and how those interactions influence their academic performance is also valuable as I considered my study. Last, I provided a thorough overview of Strayhorn's (2019) sense of belonging theory and how this framework supports my study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting using the researcher as the key instrument in data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the nature of qualitative research, I must consider my subjectivity and positionality as a researcher (Wickens et al., 2017). Subjectivity and positionality are the naming of researchers' social and professional identities and experiences that may influence their beliefs in relation to a study (Berger, 2015). Therefore, I will begin this chapter by first articulating my relevant history, worldview, and professional experiences. Next, I will name the lens I used to frame my research, critical paradigm. I will do so by describing a critical paradigm and expressing how the ontological, epistemological, axiological, methodological assumptions framed my research on undocumented students. Then, I will describe the purpose of narrative research and how using a narrative approach aligns with my research purpose. Afterward, I will outline the sampling, recruitment, and data collection plan used in the study. The sampling plan will include my usage of purposeful, snowball sampling. The recruitment plan will explain how I recruited participants across the nation and gather recommendations using social media and personal networking. The data collection plan will describe each interview protocol as well as the participant-driven drawings. Lastly, I will provide a detailed data analysis plan that outlines steps in analyzing my data holistically and thematically. I will finish this chapter by sharing what strategies I used to increase trustworthiness in my research.

Positionality and Subjectivity

I identify as an Afro-Caribbean woman and first-generation American and student. While I hold U.S. citizenship, both my mother and father were undocumented persons from Jamaica. I did not learn about their citizenship status until I was approximately ten years old, and my mother, older brother, and I had to flee our home in Texas for approximately one year because immigration officers learned about my mother's undocumented status. When we returned to Texas, we moved to a new city and restarted our lives in secrecy.

Before attending college, my mother was deported from the United States. During my sophomore year of college, my father received his naturalized U.S. citizenship. Since my mother was our primary financial contributor in our household, her absence significantly impacted our family's social class standing. Before my mother's deportation, our family was middle class, and afterward, we moved to working-class status. As soon as my mother was gone, I began working at the age of 15 to assist with household bills, in which I both hold the privilege of being able to work and the reality of needing to work at such a young age. My experience as a child of an undocumented person is different from an undocumented person. However, my experience as a first-generation American and child of an undocumented person has allowed me to empathize with the challenges undocumented students experience. Nonetheless, as a United States citizen, I have privilege in this aspect of my lived experience.

Professionally, most of my experiences have been centered on equity, diversity, and inclusion work. My professional experiences are very connected to my commitment to social justice and liberation. Moreover, a majority of my work experience in student

affairs has been located in southern states that have exclusionary policies towards undocumented students. Thus, in the context of my work experiences, my exposure and intimate experiences with undocumented students are limited. Without federal guidance on undocumented students' rights to financial aid or access to post-secondary education, each state has made its determination (Serna et al., 2017). This was important to consider as I reflected on my research and how I entered relationships with the participants, primarily when they are located outside of the South. The experiences of undocumented students in various states differed depending on what their state's laws indicate for their access to financial support and attending college. Presuming undocumented students in California, a state that provides in-state tuition to undocumented students and some state financial aid, may have similar experiences to undocumented students in Georgia, a state that does not offer in-state tuition or state financial aid to undocumented students, and denies enrollment to select institutions, could negatively impact my ability to understand my prospective participants (NILC, 2019).

I participated in theatre activities for ten years, and in my equity, diversity, and inclusion work with staff and students, I often use contemplative practices and art-based pedagogy to teach about social justice, intercultural competency, and liberation. This can include deep listening activities, practicing the power of stillness, movement activities, or utilizing drawing, photography, music, poetry, dance, theatre or other forms of art to deepen learning and understanding. Contemplative practices are tools used in critical pedagogy, which is a form of teaching that integrates emancipatory learning to empower minoritized individuals so that they can equally contribute to the educational process (Berila, 2016). I have found including art-based pedagogy reinforces multiple ways of

knowing and encourages participants to seek deeper meaning connected to their lived experiences and who they are culturally. Further, Berila (2016) shared that art-based pedagogy can be liberatory, helps individuals "unlearn conditioned responses that uphold systems of oppression" (p.15), and increase individuals' curiosity to seek relational, empathic, and reflective responses. This is supported by Beyerbach (2011), who stated,

> "Art allows me to talk some things in deeper, imagine, the consequences, and dream of alternatives. It allows me to make a "statement" in ways that words do not, to empathize with strangers, to struggle with my role in issues of social injustice." (p. 3).

As a result, I commonly infused contemplative practices into this current study and included art as a means of data collection and organized my findings in the format of a play script.

Critical Paradigm

The critical paradigm focuses on the influence of power, inequity, and social change (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When using a critical paradigm, the researcher's goal is to understand the social issue so that recommendations for social action can be identified and implemented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to do so, the researcher must understand their own oppressed and privileged identities in relation to the study and be willing to engage in rich discussions with participants to understand not just the participants' experience but their experience in relation to the social structures the participants are a part of (Mertens, 2012).

By utilizing a critical paradigm as my lens, I was able to explore undocumented students' lived experiences while naming and critically analyzing the social structures,

power dynamics, and oppressive forces impacting their lived experiences. Moreover, the use of a critical paradigm also provides an opportunity to elevate the voices of undocumented students, a minoritized population in the United States, and articulate a call for action that may improve their lives and experiences in college. Nonetheless, in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary tool in the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, it is important to consider the beliefs I hold that may inform my research and the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological dimensions of the critical paradigm.

Ontological Assumption Using a Critical Framework

An ontological assumption relates to the nature of reality and the belief that multiple realities exist (Mertens, 2012). Using a critical paradigm, ontological beliefs are defined as reality being dependent on how privilege and/or oppression is influencing the participants' and researchers' experiences based on their various social identities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When considering my dissertation research, undocumented students experience oppression based on their citizenship status. Depending on the state in which the undocumented students aspire to pursue higher education, most undocumented students are restricted from federal and state funding needed to support their college aspirations (Conger & Chellman, 2013). This reality influences the feasibility of attending college as an undocumented person. If an undocumented student is able to acquire enough funding to begin college, most undocumented students work an excessive amount of hours off-campus in order to pay their tuition and/or take breaks between semesters due to a lack of continued financial support (Serna et al., 2017; Terriquez, 2015). Additionally, undocumented students struggle to reach out to

administrators for resources that could aid them in financial support due to fear of exposing their citizenship status and being deported (Contreras, 2009).

Epistemological Assumption Using a Critical Framework

An epistemological assumption relates to the idea that the researcher builds a relationship with the participants and acquires knowledge through the experiences of the people involved in the study (Mertens, 2012). Using the critical paradigm, epistemological beliefs states that knowledge is acquired through the "study of social structures, freedom and oppression, and power and control" (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 103). By co-constructing knowledge, the researcher is able to use the knowledge produced to influence changes to the existing oppressive social structures and promote liberation (Lincoln et al., 2011). I aspire to use the knowledge produced from my dissertation to share the experiences that undocumented students are having in their communities and how those experience are impacting their sense of belonging. This knowledge will help administrators and faculty members understand the experiences of some undocumented students and promote us to restructure how we provide support and resources.

Further, by using a critical paradigm, I am aspiring to develop critical pedagogy, which is pedagogy that contributes to emancipatory learning (Berila, 2016). As previously described, an aspect of critical pedagogy is the usage of art-based learning tools that challenge us to think outside of the dominant ways of knowing and increase our capacity for compassion and understanding (Berila, 2016). Some of these art-based learning tools are reading plays, coloring pictures, and completing drawings (Berila, 2016). By infusing these techniques into my study, I was able to honor the ability to co-

construct knowledge while presenting that knowledge in a way that promotes liberation and challenges oppressive social structures (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Axiological Assumption Using a Critical Framework

Axiological assumptions highlight that the "research is value-laden," and when considering the role of the researcher, their biases and values may influence the research being conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). When considering the critical paradigm, the axiological assumption is that the researcher has a voice and is using their research to amplify the voices of their participants (Lincoln et al., 2011). As a result, when using the critical framework, the researcher must share the diverse values held by both the researcher and participants (Lincoln et al., 2011). In relation to my dissertation topic, I believe that staff and faculty members have a responsibility to create inclusive learning environments. While I hoped that when I conducted my research that my participants provided examples of how staff and faculty have created inclusive learning environments, I also recognized that it is possible I will hear the opposite. Nonetheless, this value towards fostering inclusive spaces is something that may have influenced how we can change existing education, policies, or practices to foster inclusive learning environments for undocumented students.

Methodological Assumption Using a Critical Framework

The methodological assumption in research is defined as using inductive logic that is emerging and shaped by the researcher based on how they collect and analyze the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, this assumption refers to the process of how the researcher collects the experiences of different individuals and articulates their different perspectives and truths (Mertens, 2012). Using a critical lens, the methodological

assumption is that research should be a participatory and a collaborative process, which can empower the participants and support their liberatory process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2011). Often, the critical paradigm encourages ongoing dialogue between the researcher and participants so that the researcher and participants are able to identify how the participants are experiencing oppression, power and identity struggles and how they can implement social change (Lincoln et al., 2011; Mertens, 2012).

Qualitative research is focused on studying concepts and/or people in their natural environment so that the researcher (and participants) can make sense of the experience and how people make meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Usually, qualitative research is exploring the complexities of social or human issues. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is collected and analyzed by the researcher; therefore, requiring reflexivity as to ensure the audience understands how who we are maybe influencing the research (Ryan & Golden, 2006). Qualitative research aligns with critical paradigm because it empowers participants to share their lived experiences, amplifies their voices, and minimizes the power dynamic between the researcher and participants by working collaboratively (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Mertens, 2012). In addition, qualitative research aligns with critical paradigm because the research collected will provide a complex understanding of the social issue that will help the researcher identify what social action is needed to improve the participants' experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, narrative inquiry allows the researcher to share stories in rich and critical ways allowing for counter-storytelling and other critical tools to be used that advocate for change and disrupt the dominant ways of being (Lessard, 2018; Delgado, 1989).

Research Design

I used a qualitative approach that allowed me to have an open dialogue with the participants about their lived experiences. Specifically, I employed a narrative approach. Narrative research is the formal inquiry into individuals' lived experiences through the analysis of stories and the retelling and living of those stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Lessard et al., 2018). While we tell stories about our lives daily, narrative research provides an opportunity for those involved to reflect on the stories being told and make meaning of the experiences (McAlpine, 2016). Fraser (2004) described conducting narrative research as the act of sewing. The researcher and participants pull together various pieces of fabric, which is representative of various stories, with thread, which is representative of the process of meaning-making. According to McAlpine (2016), narrative research has been used in "sociology, organizational studies, gender studies, and education and is closely linked to life history and biography, because like them, it involves telling stories, recounting – accounting for – how individuals make sense of events and actions in their lives with themselves as the agents of their lives" (p. 34). Utilizing a narrative approach supported my desire to provide a platform for undocumented students by promoting their agency and fostering political and social change (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, a narrative research approach provides an opportunity for storytelling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Storytelling can promote liberatory consciousness as it encourages the participant to deeply reflect on their experiences, which can often lead to healing (Berila, 2016; Harro, 2013).

Conducting narrative research has the power to "validate the knowledge of 'ordinary' people" and influence how others see these individuals (Fraser, 2004, p. 184;

McAlpine, 2016). Since I sought to explore the lived experience of undocumented students and their interactions with faculty, staff, and students, a narrative approach supported my inquiry. Further, narrative research is a collaborative form of research (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). When conducting narrative research, the researcher and participants navigate a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space that allows room for the participants' experiences, the researcher's experience with the participants, and the co-constructed experiences of all involved (Clandinin, 2006). As a result, a collaborative approach was needed throughout each phase of the research study.

I aspired to hear stories about undocumented students' interactions with faculty, staff, and students as to better understand how those interactions influenced their sense of belonging. Using a narrative approach, I listened to the participants' experiences and sought a deeper understanding of their sense of belonging. McAlpine (2016) shared that there are three main methodological stances in narrative research: sociocultural, naturalist, and literary. McAlpine (2016) defined naturalist as focusing on "rich descriptions of the content of people's stories about significant issues" (p. 35). Using a naturalist methodological stance, I explored not only what experiences the participants had but also what those experiences meant to them within the context provided (McAlpine, 2016). By doing so, I attained a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and how those experiences connected to their sense of belonging. These data can help faculty, staff, and students at institutions in the United States reflect on the experiences and interactions they have with undocumented students and potentially reconsider their current practices to be more inclusive.

Moreover, by using a narrative approach, I was able to account for the complexities of the human experience. Undocumented students' interactions with community members at their institutions can be multifaceted (Huerta & Ocampo, 2017). A narrative approach encourages the researcher to consider temporality, which is the contextual details that influence the story being told (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative research also allows for the researcher to collect multiple forms of data, such as oral and written interviews, pictures, and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McAlpine, 2016). This further supported my desire to capture the complexity of undocumented students' lived experiences. By being able to collect and later analyze multiple forms of data, I was able to better understand the students' experiences and adequately restory their experiences for others. Ultimately, while other qualitative research designs could provide significant insight into the experiences of undocumented students, I believe a narrative approach provided a rich understanding that was reflective for students involved, my role as the researcher, and those who eventually read the study.

Sampling, Recruitment, Data Collection Plan

Sampling & Recruitment Plan

Due to a lack of federal guidance, each state determines its own policies and laws governing undocumented students' access to post-secondary education and state financial aid (NILC, 2019). While many states established restrictive laws and policies barring undocumented students access to college and/or financial support, several states elected not to establish laws regarding tuition equity for undocumented students (NILC, 2019). As a result, the public universities in those states are able to determine their own policies and change them at-will (Serna et al., 2017). The ambiguity and lack of consensus have

made it challenging for undocumented students seeking a college degree (Serna et al., 2017). The restrictive law and ever-changing policies related to undocumented students, who are likely the first in their family to attend college in the U.S., contributes to the small percentage of undocumented students actually admitted and retained in college (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Pyne & Means, 2013).

In order to increase my probability of recruiting participants for the study, I looked at higher education institutions throughout the United States. For this study, I used purposeful snowball sampling to gather recommendations from Facebook groups I was a member of and members of my professional network to recruit participants based on my participant criteria. Purposeful sampling is a sampling strategy that assists the researcher in selecting a sample group that is best informed on the research problem being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since this is a narrative study, selecting a purposeful sampling strategy aligned with my needs. Participants in my study were currently enrolled students at two-year or four-year institutions of undergraduate status who identified as an undocumented person residing in the United States.

My recruitment plan included reaching out to individuals in Facebook groups and individuals within my professional network who work at institutions that admit undocumented students. In addition to recruiting participants through Facebook groups, I shared the recruitment flyer on my personal Facebook page. I explained my study to individuals who responded and asked if they would be able to assist me in emailing undocumented students at their institution. I provided a recruitment flyer for the research study and suggested language for the email. The recruitment flyer and email encouraged interested participants to contact me directly. When I received communication from

interested participants, I asked them to share the recruitment flyer with other potentially interested participants and have those individuals contact me directly as well. Lastly, after I interviewed participants, I asked them to share the recruitment flyer with other prospective participants.

Rather than generalizing information, qualitative research studies focus on sharing rich data about individuals' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, by selecting a small sample size, I was able to conduct numerous interviews, spend additional time, and build a strong relationship with each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraser, 2004). As a result, even though seven students contacted me to participate in the study, I selected the first five undocumented students who contacted me to participate in the study (See Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender Identity	Year in College	Institution Type
Nena	Latina, Mixed (Bangladeshi & Honduran)	Woman	Senior	Private Research I Institution
Alex	Desi (Pakistani)	Man	Senior	Public, Land-Grant Institution
Emma	Latina (Mexican)	Woman	Sophomore	Community College & Public Land-Grant Research Institution
Veronica	Latina (Mexican)	Woman	Sophomore	Public Land-Grant Research Institution
Student X	Latina (Mexican & Guatemalan)	Woman	Junior	Community College & Public Research I Institution

Note. The race and ethnicities presented in the table are based on the participants' self-described race and/or ethnicity.

Data Collection

Once the interested participants contacted me, I scheduled a time for us to meet individually. During this meeting, I reiterated the purpose of the study and provided the consent form. The participant provided verbal consent to participate in the study in order to maintain confidentiality. For this narrative study, I conducted semi-structured interviews and collected participant-generated visuals. Each participant participated in a total of two interviews. Prior to formally conducting the interviews with participants, I completed pilot interview(s) to ensure the developed interview protocols for the first and second interviews would collect the desired data I was seeking. Based on the feedback given after the pilot interview(s), I adjusted the interview protocol as needed prior to collecting data via interviews. The interviews took place on a video calling application called Zoom. Lastly, each participant received $25 for each interview they participated in.

According to Patton (1987), interviews are an effective means to collect stories because they allow the researcher to access another individual's lived experience and gain an understanding of their perspective. By conducting interviews, I will be able to meet with each participant and explore their stories about their undocumented student experience. The initial interview explored the participant's experiences as an undocumented student and their interactions with faculty, staff, and students on their campus (See Appendix A for the first interview protocol). The second interview further explored the stories shared in the first interview, and I shared the initial findings (See Appendix B for the second interview protocol). As previously mentioned, Mertens believed (2012) using a critical paradigm allows for the researcher to engage in rich

discussions with participants to understand not just the participants' experience but their experience in relation to the social structures the participants are a part of. By using semi-structured interviews, I was able to remain flexible and truly explore the stories being shared. The semi-structured interviews allowed space for the participants and me to reflect deeply on their stories, name oppressive systems at work, and consider their impact on their sense of belonging.

During each interview, I documented observational field notes about the participants' and any emotional responses throughout the interview (Saldana, 2016). Moreover, I included reflections in my field notes about any thoughts, feelings, ideas, questions, and observations about my interactions with participants as well as their responses (Saldana, 2016). When using a critical paradigm, the researcher must understand their own oppressed and privileged identities in relation to the study (Mertens, 2012). Noting my reflection in my field notes assisted me in continuing to understand how my oppressed and privileged identities were intersecting with the study and engagement with participants. In addition, it helped me continue to be mindful of power dynamics as a researcher and person with U.S. citizenship.

Kortegast et al. (2019) believed that using visual research methods allows the researcher to capture the complexity of human connection and gain a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences. Participant-generated visuals allow the participant to share their experiences in the form of art. The usage of art can be a powerful form of reflection (Beyerbach, 2011). Additionally, using art-based pedagogy, which supports the use of a critical paradigm, challenge us to think outside of the dominant ways of knowing (Berila, 2016). Art-based pedagogy can include many forms

of visual art. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I needed to consider a form of art that was easily accessible virtually. Undocumented people are often in fear of disclosing their undocumented status due to the risk of deportation (Gonzales, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Photographs can sometimes show identifying markers that could give away indicators about the identity of participants. Therefore, to protect the identities of the participants, I did not want to encourage the use of photography. As a result, I utilized participant-driven drawings, drawings that participants completed once given a prompt to reflect on their sense of belonging to their institution (Kortegast et al., 2019). Specifically, I asked participants to provide a drawing that represented how they felt about their sense of belonging in the university community. After completing their drawing, participants provided me a description of the drawing and how the drawing personified their lived experiences. To be truly collaborative, I shared with the participants my own drawing of belonging. Participants were asked to complete their participant-driven drawings after their first interview and asked to send photographs of their drawings prior to the second interview, where we discussed the drawings further. If participants did not have materials of their own to use, I offered to send the participant an electronic card to purchase drawing materials and encouraged them to select whatever material(s) they felt most comfortable using. By using the various data collection strategies such as a researcher journaling process, interviews, and participant-generated visuals, I gathered a rich, deep understanding of participants' experiences.

Confidentiality Measures

In order to protect the identities of the participants in the study during the data collection process, I first used a consent form that did not require a signature. This mitigated the chance of the participant being identified by their name on documents such as a consent form. Rather than referring to participants by their name, I asked each student to select a pseudonym name that was used throughout the study. Additionally, I encouraged them to select a pseudonym name for the institution they attend as a student or refer to it throughout the interview without using the institution name.

Also, I asked participants which method they preferred to use for the interview. I offered to conduct the interview via phone or through a video application software such as Zoom, Skype, or Webex. My account with Zoom allowed for end-to-end encryption throughout each web session. All the participant's selected Zoom and were given a specialized link for the web meeting, and that was password-protected and locked once the meeting began. This meant that only the participant with the password had access to the meeting, and, once the interview began, no outside person was able to join the meeting. Additionally, the computer used for the interviews was also password-protected and on a virtual private network (VPN), which makes online actions untraceable.

Further, the email communication occurred through my University of Georgia student email address that is password-protected and is also protected through the Duo security protection program. After I completed data analysis for this study, I went through my email and permanently deleted all correspondence. Moreover, I used a recording device to audio record all interviews instead of using Zoom's transcription feature to ensure a copy of the interview was not saved on their cloud-based storage

system. Once the transcription was completed, I deleted the audio recordings for each interview. The audio files and written transcripts were saved on an external drive that is password-protected and stored physically in a safe location.

Additionally, I consistently reminded participants that their participation in this study was voluntary and that they could stop participating in the study at any point. Also, I shared with them throughout each interview and engagement that they could skip any question they did not feel comfortable answering. These reminders occurred at the beginning of each interview and/or request for engagement.

Data Analysis Plan and Trustworthiness

Data Analysis

Before collecting data, I developed a plan for managing and organizing the data collected. I created a file naming system to ensure I could easily identify each file (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I stored the data for this study in an external hard drive and in my University of Georgia SharePoint drive, which is a cloud-based software. The external hard drive served as a secure long-term storage option and a back-up for my files in case the cloud-based storage failed. Files I stored included: audio recordings from interviews, memos, journal entries, photos of the drawings completed by participants, and notes from the interviews and data analysis process.

Again, each interview was audio recorded using an audio recorder. Then, I used Rev, a company that specializes in audio transcription, to transcribe each interview. Rev was chosen because the company follows best practices when handling personally identifiable information, and their staff and transcriptionists are trained on the proper use of their systems and best practices for security & privacy (Rev, n.d.). Additionally, their

transcriptionists have all signed non-disclosure agreements and strict confidentiality agreements (Rev, n.d.).

Next, I had the first interviews transcribed prior to starting the second round of interviews for each participant. After the transcriptions were complete, I read through each participants' interview to become more familiar with the stories told in the interview and embody the essence of each participants' experience. After reading a transcription, I began the process of developing memos.

Memos are short, written descriptions of thoughts, ideas, and questions the researcher have during the data collection and analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I wrote memos and field notes during the initial read of my transcriptions and continued throughout the whole writing process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since I read each interview multiple times, there were numerous memos included. Further, I reviewed each memo prior to data analysis sessions to ensure I organized my thoughts prior to starting another session.

For the analysis of the data, I used holistic and thematic analysis. According to Lieblich et al. (1998), holistic analysis allows the researcher to analyze each participant's story to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant. A thematic analysis allows the researcher to look across the data at multiple participants' stories and identify themes (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Holistic Analysis

For holistic analysis, I used Clandinin and Connelly's (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) three-dimensional space approach. This approach instructs the researcher to analyze the data for three elements: interaction, continuity, and situation. Further, I used

this approach to analyze each participant's narratives and document my findings using memos and participant profiles. By doing so, I was able to keep each participant's narrative intact during the analysis process.

For interaction, I asked questions during the interviews and reviewed the answers in the transcripts to identify and understand the personal experiences of the participant and their interactions with other people (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). When considering my dissertation, a student's sense of belonging increases significantly among certain populations (Strayhorn, 2012). When exploring undocumented students' interactions with faculty, staff, and students, it was important to reflect on the internal motivations and feelings of the participant but also the potential perspectives, intent, and feelings of the individual the participant was interacting with. For example, when a participant shared a story about them disclosing their undocumented status with a faculty member, it was important not only to understand how the participant felt about the interaction but their perception of how the faculty member felt, the faculty member's motivations in the interaction, and overall perspective. Naturally, the participant's perceptions of the faculty member may not have been correct, but it still influenced the participant's actions, behaviors, and thoughts in the moment. Thus, by understanding the participants' perceptions of others throughout interactions, I gained a deeper understanding of the stories and the participants' motivations, feelings, and thoughts as well.

For continuity, I explored the participants' past experiences and what actions they desired to occur in the future (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Additionally, I listened to how the participants described their actions in each story. According to Strayhorn (2012),

"sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change" (p. 23). Sense of belonging is malleable, and by exploring participants' past, present, and future actions, I was able to understand how their belonging may or may not transition over time (Strayhorn, 2012).

For situation, I reflected on the participants' physical places and the places described within the stories (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). The goal of analyzing the situation is to look at the context, time, and place that may have influenced the intentions, purpose, and perspectives of those involved in the story (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Students may experience a sense of belonging in a classroom at the university but not in the dining hall across the street (Strayhorn, 2012). When considering undocumented students' sense of belonging, I had to consider the fact that belonging is domain- and situation-specific (Strayhorn, 2012).

Overall, by using this approach, I was able to analyze the stories told from the perspective of the participant, my own experience hearing the stories, and reflect on the co-constructed experience of retelling the story as participant and researcher (Clandinin, 2006). Also, by using a critical paradigm, I was able to further and view the complex stories from each individuals' experience as well as consider the systems of oppression the individual may have been navigating. According to Bell (2016):

> Oppression is institutionalized through pervasive practices grounded in history, law, economic policy, social custom, and education that rationalize and maintain hierarchies among individuals and groups. Individuals are socialized into this system and internalize the dynamics that sustain it. Woven together through time and reinforced in the present, these individuals, interpersonal, and institutional

> practices interact to create and mutually reinforce an all-encompassing, pervasive system. The more institutionalized, sophisticated, and embedded these practices become, the more difficult it is to see how they have been constructed in the first place and how they have come to be taken for granted as inevitable and unchangeable. (p. 6)

Due to the pervasive nature of oppression, people interact with systems of oppression daily without noticing the systems at work. Clandinin and Connelly's (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) three-dimensional space approach provided a thorough means for analyzing the various aspects of a story to allow me to identify outside influences that may be missed otherwise, such as oppressive systems. I completed the holistic analysis in two phases.

Phase One. Phase one of my analysis began after I have completed the transcription of the first round of interviews with each participant. I read through each interview and begin to analyze the data holistically using the three-dimensional space approach. Afterward, I reviewed the initial analysis and identified areas in each participants' story that may seem unclear or incomplete. Using these gaps in knowledge, I developed questions for the second interview with each participant.

Phase Two. During phase two, I reanalyzed the first interviews using the three-dimensional space approach as well as analyzed the second interviews for the first time using the same approach. Since I collected participant-driven drawings during the second interview with participants, I analyzed the drawings as a part of the interview. I reflected on the participants' description of the drawings as well as analyzed the drawings in the context of the stories shared in the interview itself. Next, using my analysis of each

participant, I created participant profiles for each individual. Participant profiles are cohesive descriptions of the participant's stories that highlight the participant's experience and how their experiences connect to the environment in which they operate (Seidman, 2006). Rather than presenting these profiles in a traditional format, I wrote each profile in the format of a monologue using composite counter-storytelling. Composite counter-storytelling are stories that the researcher creates by using multiple forms of data to present characters reflective of the experiences of participants in a study (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While the stories are fictionalized, they are based on the data collected and placed in similar experiences as collected in the study. By completing phase two, I completed the holistic analysis of the data and was ready to begin the thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

After using a holistic analysis, I used coding to conduct my thematic analysis of the transcript and participant profiles. Coding is the process of labeling pieces of data and identifying the meaning of those labels (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). I used a mixture of data-driven, in vivo, and structural coding. Data-driven coding describes coding that is generated from the raw data (Saldaña, 2009). Similarly, in vivo coding is also generated from raw data but uses direct descriptions and/or words from the participants (Saldaña, 2009). Lastly, structural coding emerges from the raw data and help the researcher answer the research questions (Saldaña, 2009).

To begin the thematic analysis, I completed two cycles of coding. The first cycle allows the researcher to process their initial thoughts about what the data are saying (Saldaña, 2009). During my first cycle, I wrote in my memo about my initial findings and

began to draft a codebook. “A codebook is a set of codes, definitions, and examples used as a guide to help analyze interview data” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 138). Particularly, I coded every time I would find references to belonging, feeling safe, feeling comfortable, or mattering. Additionally, I tracked when participants shared demographic information, stories of belonging, experiences starting college, information on their personal history, and general college experience related to their undocumented identity. Next, I went through each transcript and noted anywhere that systems of power, privilege, and oppression contributed to the participant’s experience. Then, I conducted a second cycle of coding the data, which helped me organize my codes and begin to synthesize and conceptualize the stories for a deeper understanding (Saldaña, 2009). By doing so, I was able to begin seeing themes across each participants’ experiences. To assist me in identifying themes, I reviewed the previously written memos, participant drawings, and the participant profiles to find themes found across all the participants’ stories, as well as continue the memo and note any additional themes found. Once I completed the coding process, I finalized the themes identified across the participants’ stories and named how those themes related to participants’ sense of belonging.

The use of a critical paradigm provides me the chance to elevate the voices of undocumented students, a minoritized population in the United States, and articulate a call for action that may improve their lives and experiences in college. By analyzing the data and presenting the findings holistically, I was able to amplify the voices of each participant and retell their stories as they were shared with me. While each individual story matters and needed to be heard and understand on its own, I wanted to also provide readers a clear call for action with a recommendation for what my participants indicated

would improve their lived experience and sense of belonging on college campuses. In order to do so, by using thematic analysis, I was able to identify shared experiences across their stories that helped me identify recommendations.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure I honored the participants and restorying their experiences adequately, I employed a number of different strategies for trustworthiness: participant involvement, member checks, peer review, and reflexivity. By using these strategies, I believe I was able to practice continuous, deep reflection on my role in the research and the students' experiences.

Participant Involvement

Participant involvement is when the researcher embeds chances for the participant to be engaged in the research process in numerous ways (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since research is more likely to be supported when it is co-created with participants, I asked the participants for their involvement throughout the entirety of the research process. Specifically, I asked the participants for their assistance in how I designed the data collection protocols and for their feedback on the research design. Prior to the first interview, I encouraged the participants to provide feedback on the interview questions for the interview. After the first interview, I provided the prompt for the drawings and asked for any feedback they have to adjust the prompt. One participant shared a desire to use a computer to make their drawing, and another participant wanted to reuse a drawing they recently completed that they felt reflected the prompt. Neither of these requests originally were in the prompt and therefore expanded the parameters originally set. Further, I provided context for the second interview and asked if there were any

additional questions I should add. One participant helped me clarify a question that seemed confusing for them. Then, during the second interview, I explained Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging theory and asked for their feedback on its application for this study. I was able to better understand their perception of the theory as well as identify parts of the theory they believed were not salient with their lived experience as an undocumented student.

Member Checks

Since participants were engaged in the research design and provided feedback throughout the data analysis, naturally, I implemented member checking as well. Member checking is allowing participants to review the themes and findings that the researcher has developed from the raw data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking also allowed me to be mindful of potential power differences and helped me remove barriers to authentic dialogue (Kornbluh, 2015). I began member checking during the second interview. Prior to beginning the second interview, I asked the participant to review the holistic analysis I drafted during phase one. Then, I contacted the participants to request feedback after I completed phase two. I explained the data analysis process and asked for their feedback on the findings generated from coding and the holistic analysis. However, due to the pandemic and other time constraints, I did not have a response from all participants in relation to data interpretation. I only received a response from two participants who shared the data interpretation was correct.

Peer Review

Remaining cognizant of my privileged identity as a U.S. citizen, it was important I use peer review. Using the peer review strategy allowed me to process my thoughts with

colleagues in the field who had experience working with undocumented students, had experience with storytelling and art-based pedagogy, and were willing to serve as a peer reviewer. There was a total of two peer reviewers in my study. In the peer review process, I checked-in with my peer reviewers to disclose my plans for data collection and conducted multiple meetings to share at each stage of analyzing my data. This allowed my peer reviewers to provide feedback about how I was structuring my data collection and challenge me on how I might have been positioning myself in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These individuals reviewed my research to challenge my findings and held me accountable as a researcher. My peer reviewers did so by making suggestions around inclusive language and recommendations for how I retold the composite counter-stories to ensure the participants were authentically represented.

Reflexivity

My personal history, identities, and worldviews are interconnected to my research topic. To remain aware of how I, as a researcher, am influencing my study, I used reflexivity (Ryan & Golden, 2006). Reflexivity assisted me in reflecting on my internalized bias, values, and experiences throughout the entirety of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I participated in journaling throughout my research process. Prior to starting my research, I reflected on my past experiences and connected identities. Further, I practiced journaling after each interview and/or significant interaction with the participants in my study as well as before and after each data analysis session.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I disclosed my positionality and subjectivity in regards to this research study. Then, I provided the definition of a critical paradigm and the benefits of

using a critical paradigm as my lens for this research. Following, I described the definition of a narrative approach and how using a narrative approach will assist me in exploring undocumented students' experiences in college. Next, I outlined my sampling, recruitment, and data collection plan; and, lastly, I presented an in-depth description of each phase of my data analysis as well as communicated my strategies for ensuring trustworthiness. In the next chapter, I will present the finding for this study using composite counter-storytelling in the format of a stage play script.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In chapter four, I explore the findings of my research using counter-story telling presented in the form of a play script. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), counter-story telling is a "method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 32). It is also a tool for naming, understanding, and resisting the stories told within the dominant narrative. Different types of counter-story telling include personal stories or narratives, other people's stories or narratives, and composite stories or narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Composite counter-stories are stories that the researcher creates by using multiple forms of data to "create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33). For this study, I have utilized composite counter-story telling and used the data collected to retell participant's narratives around their sense of belonging on their college campuses.

Further, I have presented the composite counter-story telling in the format of a play script. Each participant's story is represented as a monologue, and the thematic findings are showcased in a scene. While these scenes were designed from data shared by each participant, they are fictionalized scenes with characters that represent each participant's authentic story. Boal (1974) believed that theatre is a "weapon for liberation" (p. ix). Through Boal's (1974) work with a literacy program, they were able to design imaginative theatre exercises that proved people can become active participants in

theatre by using theatre to discuss the lived experiences and issues occurring within their communities. Rather than serving as a static spectator, individuals who are experiencing the play will transform into active change agents.

Moreover, the simple act of reading a play script can be considered a form of contemplative art and reading (Berila, 2016) and further supported by Boal's (1974) imaginative theatre exercises. The usage of contemplative art and reading is a tool used in anti-oppression pedagogy that allows one to be thoughtful in understanding systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Berila, 2016). Further, when one reads a script, similar to a novel, their minds imagine the character, contemplate the setting, analyze the historical context, and reflect on the author's why. Issues related to undocumented people are often centered around the politics of citizenship and not the individuals who identify as undocumented, which further dehumanizes their experiences (Pérez Huber, 2009). So while I could present my findings in the traditional format, I wanted readers of this study to center the humanity of the participants sharing their stories by imagining them as their full selves. By presenting their stories in the form of a play, it is my hope you imagine each of these characters set in each described scene and consider the contextual setting as well as this study's primary research questions:

- How do interactions with institutional actors influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
    - How do interactions with faculty influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
    - How do interactions with staff and administrators influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?

    - How do interactions with peers influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
- What spaces influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?
- What groups influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus?

As aforementioned, each participant profile is organized into individual character monologues. Using composite counter-story telling, each monologue is representative of each participant's stories but set in fictionalized scenes. To honor the format of a play script, I have organized this chapter similarly to how one would read a play, such as using single line spacing, and therefore it does not follow traditional APA formatting. After you are introduced to each participant's story, the chapter ends with a fictionalized scene where the participants meet each other and describe their sense of belonging through a drawing. While this scene is fictionalized, the drawings are actual drawings each participant contributed to the study. Finally, I will end this chapter by summarizing the overarching findings presented in the chapter.

Nena: Not a Commodity

(*Lights up on Nena. She is sitting in the lobby of the President's Office at her college waiting to be called into a meeting. She wears a pair of black slacks and a white dress shirt with worn black flats. Her hair is down and slightly frizzed from walking briskly across campus through the melting snow. Nena is looking in her planner at her graduation date, which is approaching quickly.*)

NENA: (*She breathes out deeply.*) You know I didn't see my college experience finishing this way, feeling like an outsider at the place I was supposed to call home for so long. Okay, that's kind of bullshit. What I am trying to say is that that is a lie. It is just that the last four years being a part of this college has been both exhausting and… (*She sighs and sinks into her seat in a resigned manner)*.

How can I explain it? I am the first in my family to even graduate high school and attend college, so my family was really stoked for me, so I was really happy too. My whole life, I've lived in predominately Black and Brown communities. While my biological dad is Bangladeshi, my mother and I were born in Honduras. My mother and I migrated to the U.S. as undocumented people when I was one-year-old. Now, my family is a mixed-status household. Just three years ago, my little brother was born here in the U.S. My mom was able to apply and receive legal residency just a few months ago because of my little brother. So now, my little brother is a citizen, my mom is a legal resident, and I am undocumented with DACA.

As I said, this wasn't always the case. Growing up in the south, my family associated more with the Latina communities in our neighborhood. A lot of the neighbors we were close to were undocumented, like me. I grew up watching people be deported and afraid of law enforcement, so that fear has been ingrained in me. But that fear doesn't overcome my mother always saying, "You need to work harder."

(*As though remembering the words gave her courage, Nena continues with more strength*.) So I did. I worked harder than the peers I was frustrated with in high school because they had citizenship. I would constantly see my friends fooling around and not taking school seriously while I was the magnet student who needed to be the most well-rounded student as possible in hopes of getting a scholarship because I knew, even as a little kid, I was going to college. I guess that was ingrained in me too. I owed it to my family. My mother was almost deported when I was in middle school. Despite the risks, she continued to make so many sacrifices so that I could attend college. So I did. I got the Posse Scholarship that covered tuition and became a full-time, undocumented student with DACA at this institution.

And since then… it's been difficult. I remember when I first got here, Trump started rescinding DACA. I had just got involved with a Latinx student org called Alianza. The president of Alianza, who has now graduated, was so vocal, so opinionated. (*She smiles to herself fondly.*) I loved her. I miss her so much.

Anyway, I told her, “I’m DACA,” and they quickly assembled a rally… it’s like they did it overnight. I remember telling her, “I would like to speak at the rally, but I’m a first year. I’m experiencing all types of culture shock. I mean, I am *just* getting my feet wet here, and I don’t know if I want to out myself on a campus that I don’t know is supportive of *me* yet. I don’t know how my peers will take it.” And she was like, “I would never pressure you into speaking, and if you don’t want to, you don’t have to. But if you feel a calling to do so, then I wouldn’t tell you to ignore that. If anything, that’s your passion. Your calling is your passion.” So I spoke that night. Those words started my activism career. I received immense support from my peers. After the rally, I was walking into my residence hall, and this white student opened the door for me and recognized me as the DACA student who spoke at the rally. He thought it was really cool. I mean, it made me feel really good and everything to share who I was, you know? I even went right up to the white woman who was my supervisor at my new job in the International Affairs Office and said, “Listen. I just got hired. I’m a DACA recipient. I don’t know what this means. There’s a lot of uncertainty for me right now. So if you’d rather hire another student with more security, without those issues, I totally understand. I wouldn’t hold it against you. I don’t mind stepping down.” (*Laughs to herself.*) Yeah, kind of bold, right? Well, she surprised me and said, “As long as you can legally work here, you will be working with us.” And it was like hearing someone say, “No, don’t worry. I got you!” It was the first time I got institutional support.

(*The administrative assistant enters the lobby seating area and clears her throat to get Nena’s attention.)*

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT: I am so sorry! (*Smiles kindly and continues her rehearsed speech*.) The President is running behind. Your meeting is important to him, but he is going to need to reschedule. I know this has happened… (*The administrative assistant's words trail off as she looks at the schedule and realizes this is the third time Nena’s appointment has been postponed.*) Well, his schedule is so full with everything going on, but I can email you with available meeting times in the next few weeks or so. (*The administrative assistant smiles again to reassure Nena and exits*.)

NENA: (*Nena’s whole body tenses as she stares at the audience as if looking for the Nena from her freshman year. As if absentmindedly, Nena begins to chant to herself.*)

You need to work harder.

You need to work harder.

You need to work harder.

(*Nena shakes herself slightly, and the audience sees Nena begin to pack up her things*. *Nena continues to speak but a bit more sadly.)*

This college will never feel like home. There are pocket communities that I get along in, and I appreciate being there. Those pocket communities are the ones I consider home. I am grateful for student organizations like Alianza and places like the Office of

Multicultural Affairs, that's home. It's definitely my safe haven. The Director, who is a Filipino immigrant woman and the staff there are like my family. I really love them, every single one of them. But this institution…

I always knew I was a minority growing up, but I wasn't constantly reminded of that. Being a student at my college… it's like every day I'm reminded that I'm a minority, and I'm reminded of it in all the ways. Just by looking at these people… hearing them talk. (*She sighs and rolls her eyes*.) I'm constantly reminded that I'm different and different is okay but, all the time?

(*She sits in silence for a few seconds*.)

It's intimidating and makes me think, "Oh wow. I'm so different that I don't belong here. I can't relate to anyone here." So no, I don't feel like I belong here as a whole. This institution is filled with performative activists who have all the best intentions, but that's how far it goes. I remember being in this political science course on immigration that was being taught by a Caribbean, Black man. Since he was a Person of Color, I just assumed we were going to be on the same page, you know? We started to have in-class discussions on immigration and I noticed that the class and professor were describing undocumented people as illegal. I asked them to use the word undocumented instead because referring to undocumented people as illegal is really triggering. Everyone was cool, but within a few months my professor was lecturing and was like, "yeah, illegal, blah, blah, blah." (*Nena rolls her eyes to herself.*) So, I confronted him after class and it was just so frustrating. I was like, "I would really appreciate it if you don't use illegal because if you use it, the rest of the class will use it! It's honestly dehumanizing and degrading." Afterward, he emailed the whole class, apologized, and explained that he never cared for quote-on-quote labels but that the group would be using the term undocumented moving forward. It wasn't until way later, during a campus event, that he learned that I was a DACA recipient. (*Nena closes her eyes for a moment to try and control her frustration.*) He was so embarrassed when he realized why using undocumented was so important to me. Like I said, they always say they will do better… but they never do.

(*Nena stands and pulls her book bag up and looks around the room.*)

I mean, the students are no better. I lived on-campus, and on my floor, there were a group of baseball players. One of them, in particular, would always say really ignorant, racist stuff. Like he didn't think cultural appropriation was an issue. Really? Well, remember the white guy who saw me at the DACA rally and said I was really cool? Yeah, he ended up becoming close friends with the really ignorant guy. I will never forget how a couple of weeks after the DACA rally my Posse mates and I wanted to watch the interview that was being broadcasted on a local news station about my speech at the DACA rally. We went to the lounge and those guys were watching the baseball game. My friends asked if we could change the channel really quickly to watch the interview and mentioned it was related to the rally. The same guy who was like, "You're so cool" just looked at me like he was really confused. He let us, but when it was done and all my friends were congratulating me, he was all serious and frustrated. He interrupted us and said, "Okay.

Can we change the channel back to the game now?" Everyone was taken aback because of how serious he got. (*Nena shakes her head to herself as she starts to get upset thinking about the memory.*)

Yep, I go to a white school and I hate it. (*Nena smirks to herself and laughs lightly.*) Most of them are really privileged, white, and double or triple majoring and doing the most. They are all about competing with each other for who's the smartest or who "belongs" here. They all were valedictorians and super nerdy, up-in-their-

(*Nena quickly stops herself from cussing again*.)

… *butt* kids who sit around and compare SAT and ACT scores.

(*Nena begins to speak louder.*)

WELL, GUESS WHAT! I GOT AN ACT SCORE OF 23 AND I'M HERE. I. DON'T. CARE. I'M GOING TO STILL TAKE THE SAME CLASSES AS YOU.

(*Nena slows her breathing and speaks quietly to herself.*)

You need to work harder.

You need to work harder.

You need to work harder.

If it wasn't for my Posse and the Posse Scholarship, I would have never picked this school and would have peaced out after freshman year when my mother was in labor and we didn't think my little brother was going to make it through the delivery. Posse made sure I could make it home and supported me in ways I expected this institution to support me. So yeah, I would have never come back if it wasn't for them. I mean, would you if you lived in a residence hall with students who in one breath, "thought it was cool" to bravely share your DACA status at a rally but in front of his friend acts the complete opposite? How about where financial aid staff shouts your undocumented status across the office in front of a bunch of students and staff you don't know?

The reality is I am really proud of my immigrant roots, but I also know that's all that attracted this institution to me. For all the times I've been highlighted in some admissions blog, university magazine or website, the very first thing that's said is, "Our immigrant blah, blah, blah student." They don't want me as a person; they want to highlight my identities and showcase how diverse they are. This institution has tokenized me, and whenever they need a Latina student or sob story, I feel like I'm the first person they go to. The more I can produce, the more I can sell, the more I am valued. To this institution, I am a commodity. And yet when I try to advocate for something good, to actually improve the experience of undocumented students on this campus like developing UndocAlly trainings or bring programs like Golden Door Scholars that recruit undocumented students… NOTHING! I get brushed off. I get rescheduled. I get, "yeah, we're listening to you," but listening comes with action and the action never comes. And

the best part was last year, the Vice President of Student Affairs stood up and applauded me for the hard work I do for immigrant, undocumented, and first-generation populations on campus while awarding me Outstanding Junior of the Year. Well, jokes on me because I've worked so hard and yet haven't accomplished any of it.

So yeah, being a part of this university has made me bitter, tired, and angry. I don't feel like I belong at this institution, but I deserve to be here. I earned my spot here. I very much earned my spot here!

(*Nena walks briskly to the Administrative Assistant's desk and looks her pointedly in the eye.*)

I know you shared the President is very busy, and you would email me in a few weeks, but I am graduating very soon, and I want to ensure we meet before then. I'll wait until you find a time that is good for him.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT: (*The assistant seems somewhat uncomfortable but recovers quickly.*) Oh. Oh okay!

(*Once Nena has the new appointment, she walks out of the office while speaking to herself.)*

NENA: You need to work harder.

You need to work harder.

¡Necesita trabajar más duro!

(*Lights down on the stage as Nena exits.*)

Veronica: More to Life

(*Lights up on Veronica, who is sitting on the train hugging her backpack filled with psychology books and homework. The seat next to Veronica is empty except for Veronica's journal and weekend bag frantically packed with clothes and toiletry items. Veronica is wearing a faded pink sweatshirt and black tights. Veronica's head is leaned against the train window as she aimlessly looks outside. Slowly, a tear leaves Veronica's eye, and she quietly tries to wipe it away before anyone sees it.*)

VERONICA: I am just so tired. (*Another tear slides down Veronica's cheek, and she quickly wipes it away, almost frustrated that she is crying.*)

What's the point of all this studying?
I can't do this.
It's just too much for me.
I don't belong here.

These are the thoughts that pushed me to miss my Friday classes, book a train and bus ticket, and spend the next six hours traveling home. Home. A place I know I will feel safe, comfortable, or familiar. It's like I just want to breathe easier. These last few months have just been tough. My university is so diverse, and that is a good thing, but it's also very scary. Sure, there are a lot of people who have lots of different identities, so you would think being undocumented wouldn't make you feel different, but it does. I am scared people will be xenophobic. I am scared of a lot of things. It's like when you are home, you are caught up in the little bubble that's your town and then when you go to a university filled with diversity, you start to think, "I don't want to tell anyone about my status" because what if they are xenophobic or I don't know, what if people don't like me because they find out I'm not from here? (*Veronica shakes her head slowly*.) There are so many political things going on that I get so scared, and I truly question, "Am I even supposed to be here?"

Usually, I can quiet these thoughts down by reminding myself that I am trying to do everything that I can do to deal with my status. I couldn't afford to apply for DACA before, and now that the Trump administration is trying to rescind DACA, I can't apply. But, I am staying up to date with all the changes going on with DACA and things happening within the immigrant community. I try to remind myself that I deserve to be here. (*Another tear falls down her cheek, and Veronica doesn't bother to wipe it away.*)

But it's so hard when I know how different I am. I remember when I first arrived on my campus and moved into the dorms. I met my roommates, who were white and African American women, and they were so different from me. They didn't speak my language. They weren't undocumented; so, there were so many things that I didn't want to discuss. Well, it is the beginning of the year, and students are starting to join clubs and stuff. They started sharing which clubs they were going to join, and I just replied kindly by saying, "That's cool." Eventually, I had joined the undocumented services program on campus. The flyer was sitting on my desk, so it was unavoidable to talk about it. They asked what

it was about, why I joined, and I just didn't know how to navigate it. I was anxious because my family taught me at a very early age that I wasn't supposed to talk about my status with people, but this was college, and they were sharing too, right? I was clearly hesitant, and I guess my roommate, who was white, picked up on it and seemed annoyed when she said, "You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to." It was like a scene out of *Mean Girls*! How do you explain to someone who may have never met an undocumented person that I am worried you will think I'm weird or start thinking badly about me because of my status? Yet, they judged me regardless, so I just kept to myself. Welcome to my new home, right?

Don't get me wrong… I've made some alright memories. Unfortunately, there seem to be a bit more bad memories, you know?. Like the faculty member, a white woman, who felt indifferent when I shared that I couldn't complete their internship or research group responsibilities because I do not have work authorization. It didn't matter that I had mentioned my status at least twice, but I get it she has a lot of students. She never really paid attention to it. Instead, she just kind of dismissed it. I am not saying she responded negatively; I just never knew how she felt about it and never got any real feedback, so I just always questioned where I stood with her. Maybe my status made her uncomfortable, and I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable. Gratefully, other faculty interactions haven't been like that. The DREAM Center is a center committed to supporting and providing resources for undocumented students. The head of the board of the DREAM Center, a Hispanic male, is also a faculty member, and he is so supportive. He constantly encourages me to apply for special research opportunities I can participate in without work authorization. Every time I come to his office, he is so resourceful and polite. He is very inspirational. It is clear he is here to help. So yeah, not all the faculty members are bad.

In fact, I don't have a lot of friends, but the few I have are great. Most of my friends I have met through Hermanas Unidas, a student organization for Latina women, or through the DREAM Center. That is also where I met my ex-boyfriend. While we aren't together anymore, that relationship really helped me get more comfortable with sharing my status with others and being proud of who I am. When we first met, the first thing we did was share our status, and we realized we were in the same situation. It amazed me how unafraid he was, and that relationship was really the first time I felt welcomed at my university. I mean, it was the first time I realized there were people that are not threatened by our status. It was just nice to know I wasn't alone and that we had each other's support. My experience with my ex-boyfriend helped me be more open with my friends. When I finally felt more confident to share that I was not born here, they responded compassionately. Yeah, they said things like, "Oh my God! Really? You look like you're from here," as if people look like they are from America, but I know they meant well.

Those experiences and people make the ignorance I experience manageable on most days. I have told some white peers about my status, and they were just like, "Well, why don't you just marry a U.S. citizen?" Or they just dismiss it and claim being undocumented is just not a big deal. In those cases, I know they just don't get it, and some likely don't want to get it. Regardless, I try to respond and be as respectful as

possible. Usually, I will reply and say, “You’re looking for solutions, and that’s great, but it doesn’t always work out.” You know, try and be informative and helpful rather than argumentative. The reality, though, is those moments and conversations with people (who I thought were the kind of friends who would understand) always remind me that I am different and I do not fit. It takes a lot more self-talk and reminders to say I belong here.

And then, there are days like today when there isn’t enough positive self-talk in the world to remind me I belong here. Can you blame me? There is so much emotional baggage I carry as an undocumented student, and for what? I don’t have work authorization, so even if I get through school, I don’t have the ability to get a job. A lot of people don’t realize that a work authorization is literally your life. Either you work and get money, or you don’t. There are just so many people who don’t realize that working is a basic right we all should have, including me, an undocumented person. And the reality I might not be able to get a work authorization after I do all of this… it makes me doubt myself and my abilities.

So yeah… school got to be too much. I hit my quota of people who just don’t get it, classes were getting hard, and I started to doubt myself and my future. All strong people break too, right? Wouldn’t you if you were not guaranteed a future?

(*The train comes to a stop, and Veronica has arrived in her hometown. Her hometown is small and being there reminds her of her childhood. As she gathers her things and walks towards the bus stop, memories of growing up in her town comes to mind. While she is feeling a sense of comfort, she also remembers her family and how hard they have to work to meet their needs. As she sits at the bus stop, she continues to reflect on her experience and breathes deeply.*)

VERONICA: I can’t, though. I can’t break. I can’t quit, returning home, and go to a local community college. I have a scholarship that pays for all of my tuition, and I don’t want to give all of that up. (*Veronica looks around her at the town she has called home for so many years.*) This town can’t be all that there is to life. I don’t want to struggle. My parents are unhappy. They are stuck working in their jobs because they have no other choice, and I have a chance to try and do better… be better. I am going to enjoy this weekend at home, and Monday… Monday, I will call Counseling Services and schedule an appointment. I need to talk things out and share my feelings. I want to be as healthy as possible. I want to be financially stable. I know I can do this, and while it’s hard, I was accepted there just like everyone else. I can do this. I may not feel like I fit all of the time, but I will make this work. I have no other choice.

(*Veronica sees the bus approaching and decides to stand and prepare to get on the bus. As Veronica stands, she pulls her shoulders back and feels more affirmed in her newfound realizations.)*

VERONICA: There has to be more to life…

Student X: Hurry Up and Go

(*Lights up on Student X, who is at the Counseling Center on campus. She is sitting on a worn blue couch in her new counselor's office. On the walls are what she perceives to be her counselor's family photos and posters with affirming messaging. Student X is nervous and is playing with the edge of her beige cardigan sleeve. Student X is wearing a red tank top, pair of light blue jeans, and black strappy sandals. Her long, dark brown hair has a slight wave and is flowing down the sides of her face. Her counselor is sitting in a soft, white chair in front of the wooden end table positioned parallel to the couch. In her counselor's hands, she sees a small notebook and pen. Her counselor has a soft smile on his face.*)

COUNSELOR: Hi there, I am glad you came in today. Tell me a bit about yourself.

STUDENT X: I am a junior here, and I am majoring in psychology with a minor in business administration. I used to come to counseling here before, and it really helped. The counselor I used to see left the university, and, at the time, I thought I was good and could use a break from counseling. (*Student X takes a pause.*) I can feel myself starting to regress, so here I am. I… (*Student X pauses but remembers on the intake forms that everything shared is confidential*.)

I am an undocumented student with DACA. I am sharing this with you because it is a huge part of who I am, and being undocumented has helped me build a strong work ethic. I know, in a way, I am like a ticking clock. My undocumented status means I have to take advantage of what I have right now and quickly try to get through college so that I can go on to the next, and the next, and the next, and get the absolute most I possibly can out of what this country offers me. (*Student X looks at the counselor recognizes the worried expression on his face.*)

I know what you are going to say, but this mindset pushes me. Growing up, my family lived in predominantly Hispanic towns, so I never felt discriminated against. I never felt small. I was always surrounded by people who looked like me and talked my language. My parents spoke Spanish at home while at school they spoke mostly English. While I was bilingual and proud of my native language, I did not speak English well. I felt really guilty about it. So, as I got older and had access to more books and resources, I made myself learn English in verbal and written communication perfectly. I mean, if I could make it perfect, then in an environment that's out of my comfort zone, I wouldn't be called out on it or labeled as an immigrant. And I did; I speak and write perfect English, and that's because of my hard work.

It's just that sometimes… it is a lot of pressure. I have been navigating a lot with family, friends, the unknown, and I am trying to use the time I have well. With the changes that the Trump administration is trying to make, there are a lot of what-ifs that can happen. The university is doing a great job of providing resources and creating space for us to talk about our concerns as undocumented students. So I know that I am not alone and that I belong here. I feel a lot of unity because I know it is not just me, and the undocumented

student services offered reminds me that there are other students willing to voice their concerns. It's just I am really hard on myself. Even to this day, I remember how I felt when I woke up and found out that Trump won the election. I just cried the entire day. I didn't know what that meant for me. I just knew that I felt like my future had ended right there and then. As time has gone by, I have channeled that energy into not being lazy. I can't waste time doing just anything. Time is valuable. Time is something I cannot lose track of. So, I guess that brings me back to my work ethic; I'm just very on top of my stuff. (*Student X laughs softly to herself.*) I even feel guilt for taking a day off or something as silly as taking a nap because I know my parents don't have that privilege.

My mom is from Mexico, and my dad is from Guatemala. They actually met in the United States, but when they wanted to get married, they went back to Mexico so they could get married with my mom's family present. Little did they know that she was pregnant with me. (*Student X laughs at herself for the irony of the situation.*) My mom tried crossing the border three times before giving birth to me, but it didn't work out. So I was born in Mexico, and when I was eight months old, my mom and dad used coyotes to help us cross. (*Student X notices the counselor's confusion at hearing the term.*) Oh, using coyotes are a form of (*Student X hesitates a bit*) illegal border crossing. They are people who help you use different routes like through train, walking through the desert, or using a bunch of tunnels. We used the tunnels and was finally able to return here. Eventually, my parents had my little brother, and since he was born in the U.S., he is American.

I applied and received DACA at 15 years old, but I didn't really understand what it meant to be undocumented until my freshman year in high school. I remember that at the time, I wasn't even thinking about going to college. I was just going with the flow. That changed when I was almost 13, and my Dad got detained because of me. He didn't know he had a deportation order filed for him. He did not have to go to work until later that day, so I asked him to take me to school. He went to his car to take me to school because I asked him and that's when they caught him. I know now it wasn't my fault, but at 12 years old, I felt really guilty about it. My little brother was six at the time, so he did not really understand what was happening, but I did. It was the first time I saw my mother be so… vulnerable. This was when I realized I had to grow up really quickly. Not just for the sake of my mother but for my brother so he could keep some type of childhood within him. It was a scary time because they could have easily come back and search his address and they could have found my whole family. Gratefully, with the help of a lawyer, my father was able to apply for asylum and has been released while a decision on his request is being made. It has been at least five years, and now with COVID-19, everything is still pending, and we are waiting.

My father's detention was my wake-up call. I realized that I couldn't have fun or play in school. I told myself daily, "Don't mess up. Don't do anything wrong because any little, small thing can mean that my family or I can be arrested." Once I received DACA, which granted me temporary legal status, my parents sat me down and told me, "If anything ever happens to us, you're going to be okay. We're going to leave you with our brothers and sisters, but when you turn 18 years old, you're going to be responsible for a lot of

things. You're going to seek custody of your little brother and take on certain financial responsibilities." I was only 15 years old at the time. (*Student X takes a deep breath.*) It was… it is a lot of pressure, but my family has done so much for me to be here. I've heard my parents' stories, I've heard their struggles, and I've heard all of the sacrifices that they went through to get here. I guess in a way, it was guilted into me that everything they've been through has to have a purpose.

I know it seems like a lot to carry, but that's why I decided to go to college, it wasn't because I wanted to. Like I said before, college was the unknown, and I didn't really think I could afford to go until my state passed a policy that allowed undocumented students to attend college using in-state tuition and receive scholarships. I went to an urban high school that promoted college but really pushed us to consider Ivy and big universities. The challenge was my high school wasn't prepared to help undocumented students apply, and I didn't know who to ask. I was also scared to leave my family after everything that happened. Luckily, I had two teachers, including one who went to an Ivy college as an undocumented student, who coached me through the application process. I originally was accepted and ready to go to a four-year university, but the cost was a lot more than my family could afford and a local community college was an easier path. (*Student X smiles fondly.)*

I loved my community college. I was a part of a program for undocumented students, and the program paid our tuition in full. It was great because everyone in the program at my community college was undocumented, so I didn't feel like an outsider. It was like, in some way, we all had experienced some type of encounter with immigration. We all knew what it felt like to be scared… to be vulnerable. It gave us a sense of community. We quickly built a family bond, and even after I graduated with my associates in social science and started attending this university, I still talk to all of them. You have to understand that I have never had that before. In the town where I grew up, I was one of few who were undocumented, and I didn't know any other students that were undocumented. So, to find an environment like that in a community college, I felt like I finally found my place. While the community college couldn't provide me the totality of my educational goals, it was the place that I finally found my group. I finally belonged.

Now that I am here, it's certainly a different experience. I have a couple of friends who were undocumented that also came here, so it has totally helped. They told me all about the university's undocumented services, which functions as a club. Since the university has a huge population of international students, they also offer a lot of services for undocumented students. This past semester, I was able to renew my DACA status for free because the office covered the cost. Getting that support after finally finding my place at my community college was important. I didn't want to feel like an outsider again. I mean, some of my friends who aren't undocumented and are able to travel and study abroad internationally can make me feel a little misplaced, but I also know they have their own struggles. Their struggles may not be the same as mine, but I know they are significant to them. So, I just have my friends tell me about their travel experiences and I kind of live it through them, which is all I can ever ask for.

Undocumented services truly made my transition to this school so much smoother. It also helps that all of my professors are People of Color, bilingual, or immigrants of some kind. In fact, in the last three years, I don't think I have ever had a white professor. As a Latina, bilingual undocumented person having faculty members who share my identities in some way helped me feel like I belonged here too. I know some of my friends from my community college that decided to go to less diverse schools have had horrible experiences with their professors. It just hasn't been my experience so far.

Don't get me wrong, I wasn't sharing my status and connecting with faculty at first. I don't think I started sharing my undocumented status until this past semester. I was beginning to apply for graduate programs and needed recommendations. The hard part is because of my status and being a first-generation college student, I needed help understanding the process. I needed to know with my undocumented status what I could apply for or not. Each time would be the same; I would go to my psychology faculty member's office and tell them a little bit about me and explain my undocumented status. For some reason, they would recommend I consider applying internationally, and I would have to explain that I can't leave the country. Always, they kind of pause a little bit…. And then readjust their resources to state and local options. I know they are doing the best they can, but it's certainly an awkward conversation.

The reality is that the university's resources provided to undocumented students help me feel like I matter, especially during a time I really needed it. My first two years here… (*Student X hesitates and takes a deep breath.*)

I was clinically depressed.

(*Student X waits and watches the counselor for their reaction. The counselor just smiles and waits to continue listening. Feeling it is safe to keep sharing, Student X continues.*)

I was in a romantic relationship that took an emotional toll on me. I experienced a lot of second-hand abuse. My partner had a really hard home life, and I felt like I needed to be there for him. I dropped everything to help him. I was so present in his life that I wasn't really present in my own life. It got so bad that I stopped going to classes, getting out of bed, isolating myself from my friends and family, and just stayed to myself. It wasn't just the relationship, though it was the largest factor. It was multiple factors all at once. As I said, I didn't talk about my undocumented status at this institution until last semester. So I would find myself kind of being vulnerable and crying out because of all the unknowns related to my status with no one to truly talk to about it with. It just kept piling up. I had remembered the Director of the Undocumented Services program mentioned there was free psychological help at the university. So, that's when I decided to start counseling. It got me back on track and helped me manage my depression.

It's just that now… graduation is near. I know I want to become a family and marriage therapist. I've experienced a lot of complications within my own family and families of friends from my community college who have had to deal with mental and physical abuse. Some Hispanic families don't talk about mental health. For a long time, my

parents just called it “going crazy.” So, I am strongly invested in trying to aid families to improve their overall mental health. I just have to get there. I have to make a name for myself. I just have to “go, go, go” before something happens, and I end up needing to “go, go, go” out of this country. It’s just… a lot of pressure.

(*Student X looks seriously at her counselor and silently pleads for help.)*

Alex: Unrequited Belonging

(*Lights up on Alex, who is sitting in his favorite coffee shop near campus. Alex is wearing a pair of jeans and a plain white t-shirt that shows his college logo on the left pocket. On his table near the window, he has a warm cup of coffee on the right and his closed laptop in the center of the table. After taking another sip of his coffee, he puts his hand through his Black hair, looks at his phone to check the time and then turns his gaze out the window at the people walking by.*)

ALEX: At my institution, each year, select student leaders are highlighted in the university yearbook and get their own full page. It's a huge deal, and any minute this student reporter will be arriving to interview me for my page in the university yearbook and ask me why I love my institution, and I still am not sure what I am going to say. So many people want a simple answer to a complex, multifaceted question. I am tempted to answer the question with a question. I love my institution very much, but does my institution love me the same way?

I have had some great experiences with faculty and staff on campus, and I know, as people, they care about me, but does my institution care about me?

Is the institution willing to fight for my rights?

Is my institution willing to protect me from deportation if it comes to that?

In 2017, when Trump was rescinding DACA, and undocumented students' futures were up in the air, there was a very real fear present. So, I'll say it one more time, is my institution willing to protect me from deportation if it comes to that? I don't know.

What I do know is I do love my institution. I knew it was the right place the minute I stepped foot on campus. I went to an international baccalaureate high school that had one hundred percent college attendance and acceptance rates. So, when the time came, I visited a few different universities. Since I am an undocumented person, the first institution I was considering in my home state wanted me to pay the same tuition rate that international students pay, and the second institution was in a state that doesn't admit undocumented students to public universities. So, even though I wasn't even considering this institution until a family friend suggested I take a tour, it ended up being the only institution I applied to. I had thought it was just a faceless school in the deep South that didn't really have any appealing factors.

The reality is I knew I would get in because I had great ACT scores and a high GPA that qualified me for scholarships. Not to mention, the application process was exhausting, and it took a lot of coordinating to ensure all the correct forms were filed, so applying to multiple schools just wasn't feasible. Most importantly, my institution admitted me with in-state tuition rates and since I received the Presidential Scholarship, which covered tuition. (*Alex laughs in disbelief to himself.*) To this day, I am not sure if I fell through the cracks (in a good way), and they are charging me the incorrect rate or if my institution

actually does support undocumented students, but I am not going to question it. (*Alex takes a sip of his coffee.)*

Now I am starting my senior year next week, and I'll be graduating with a Bachelors in Supply Chain Management with a minor in Accounting and French. I am a well-known student leader on campus. I have held multiple executive student leadership positions and worked throughout campus. I am that student on campus that knows just about everyone, and everyone knows me or about me. It's a pretty big contrast from when I was growing up. My parents were undocumented too and were super secretive. They would tell me, "Don't make waves. Don't make a scene. Keep your head down. Do your work." It worked somewhat because I am smart and was usually bored with the regular pace in classes. My parents knew this, so they pushed me to do even better. The hard part was they had these high expectations of me but didn't provide the emotional support to progress at those levels. They were busy working hard and doing what they had to do to survive and provide me with as many opportunities to be successful. The other hard part is when those opportunities presented themselves for me to go out in the world and show myself off and be in the spotlight and shine, they always hesitated. Even though I deserved it, me being in the spotlight also meant them being in the spotlight, which meant attention, and attention meant they could get deported. I hated things like that. I hated everything about it. Thankfully, DACA allows me the temporary protection I need from deportation so I can shine without worrying, and my parents decided to go back to Pakistan when I started my freshman year. So now, being the student leader everyone knows is pretty different for me, but in the best way.

Now, I am the type of person who creates space for myself. I'm that person that will walk in and say, "I am here. You have to accept it. No question about it." I make myself belong here. Don't get me wrong, being involved on campus helps me feel like I belong here too. On a good day, I spend six to eight hours hanging out in the Student Involvement Office. I usually talk to everybody working there, do my homework, and eat food. It's a space I can be myself and hang out with people I know wouldn't hesitate to help me out with anything I wanted or needed. I remember last year, a few graduate students who worked in the office saw me working on forms to renew my DACA status. I explained to them that usually, I would pay for a lawyer to complete the process but since my parents were gone, I was trying to fill it out myself since I couldn't afford an expensive lawyer. On their own, they found a lawyer to help me out without me having to ask for help. It ended up not working out because the lawyer wanted to charge me too. Regardless, just the fact that they went out of their way to try and help made me feel so welcomed and comfortable in the space.

The faculty here even surprised me with how much they care. Before attending this institution, I had a really bad experience with my high school administration. At my high school, I was named a National Merit semifinalist my junior year. In the whole country, only 16,000 students make it to semifinalist status, so it is a pretty big deal. In order to become a finalist, you have to send out an application, and the application requires you to prove that you are a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or have a valid I-94, which I had none of these. So, I went to my school's principal and told her my concern. She seemed

confused at first but then decided to call the corporate office and see what I should do. (*Alex takes a sip of his coffee and takes a moment to remember.*)

I don't think I'll ever forget when she asked them if I would be allowed to continue in the program, and they said no. I had to withdraw my name from consideration for final status. Since I was born in a different country and was undocumented, I lost the chance to become a National Merit Scholar. It was awful and completely out of my control. The high school administrators didn't push back or advocate for me. There was nothing I could do about it, and I still think about it all the time. Worse is that out of the 10 or 15 students at my school who were semifinalists, only me and one other person didn't move onto becoming a finalist. I told my friend at the time why I didn't get it, and she said, "Really? That sucks. Everybody just thought that it was because your grades sucked and you weren't a good student." (*Alex takes a long pause*.)

The fact that people made those assumptions about me or even thought that about me… (*Alex stops himself and shakes his head silently*). I learned that people make assumptions about you without understanding the reasons you do what you do. I stopped trying in school after that. At that point, I had already applied and got into my college, and the tradeoff for working hard just wasn't there. But this experience also made me a little wary when thinking about interacting with faculty in college. After my high school administrators didn't advocate for me, I just didn't expect much from college professors.

I wanted to study abroad internationally, and I knew it would likely be an expectation of faculty. I also knew that I wouldn't be able to as an undocumented student. I was worried they would make similar assumptions that people in high school did. I didn't want faculty to make the same assumptions that just because I didn't study abroad that I was, in some way, not a good student.

(*Alex smiles.*)

They didn't.

I have this French professor who takes students to Paris every year. I love this man to death. He singlehandedly saved me from losing my scholarship by rounding up my grade to an A without me even asking. He just simply told me, "You got this!" Anyway, every year he would push me to go to Paris with him, and I would tell him multiple times I can't go because I can't leave the country. (*Alex laughs to himself at the memory.*) He would always respond by saying, "Sure you can. It's fine, no big issue." I think he was just being forgetful or did not understand the archaic immigration rules of the U.S. I never really went into detail about why I couldn't go, and I know he didn't hold it against me. He is such an eccentric man and probably one of my favorite professors here.

Then there was my Accounting professor, I went to talk to him about getting a master's degree in accounting, and he took the time to talk to me about the program at my institution. It sounded great. Then he was like, "The best part is that the faculty take all the students on a trip somewhere out of the country every year. Last year they went to a

country in South America, and it was a really great trip." That's when I said, "Well, here's the thing, I can't leave the country because I'm on DACA." He didn't miss a beat. He was just like, "Oh, okay. Well, obviously, we would try to accommodate you and try and get you on the trip if we can, but if you can't leave the country, then you can't leave the country. We will make an exception." He is such a caring man. It meant a lot that they would make an exception for me, but it's also bittersweet. Sweet in that the school would make an exception when something is completely out of my control, but it's yet another experience I can't have because of my status, right?

Whatever… my status isn't something I like to think about a lot. My undocumented status is constantly on my mind. However, since I've spent the last three years ingraining myself in the culture here, I've built up this façade that allows for me to go about my day, not having to actively think about my status. I think it would be a lot harder if I wasn't the type of person that I am. Growing up as a Pakistani man in the South is not an easy task. I knew there wasn't going to be a space for me, so I made a space for myself. Not everyone can do that, but I am used to having to do it, so I did it at my institution too. What's good is that I haven't had any comments thrown at me like, "Go back to your country." My institution has the cliché of being overly accepting. There's this perception that everybody gets along with everybody. The reality is that there is just a lot of surface-level interaction and acceptance, and the second you try to have a real conversation with someone, they become disinterested. It happens every time I share my status with someone not in my friend group. They always say how super hard it must be for me and then proceed to ask me why I don't just become a citizen. I explain there aren't any pathways for someone like me, and they usually just say, "Well, if you need someone to get married to, hit me up." It's meant to be a joke, and I just try to remind myself that they're lost in their own privilege, and they just don't get it.

I remember being in this political student group, and we were having a discussion about the census. This was after Trump wanted to add a question about citizenship status to the U.S. Census. I was adamantly against it. I told them that the country would get millions of people who would not participate, which defeats the purpose of conducting a census. The general consensus responded by asking why people would be afraid. I remember one person said, "If they're here legally, they have nothing to worry about." At this point, I had not shared with this group that I am undocumented since they weren't close friends. The idea of having to explain that people are afraid of being deported felt so jarring. I made the decision to share about my status and that I would be afraid to fill out the census. I tried to explain that if I did not have DACA that I would be worried about mass deportations. How did they respond?

"How?"

"You're here. You work."

So, I explained how DACA provides a social security card and work permits. I was vulnerable. Then, three white students tried to explain to me that I *wasn't* an undocumented immigrant. It pissed me off.

Yes, I'm undocumented.

Yes, I have a social security card.

Yes, I pay taxes.

No, I'm not a drain on the economy.

No, I don't benefit from federal programs because I'm an undocumented person.

(*Alex takes a minute to calm down and collect himself.*)

People just don't get it. Instances like that shatter the façade I've created. It reminds me that no matter how much I try to create a space for myself, there will always be people that don't want me there. I can try my best to ignore them, but they still exist.

But then there are my friends. My people. They get that there are things I can't do. That there are risks I can't take. Recently, I turned 21, and before that, I chose not to drink alcohol for personal, religious reasons. Last summer though, I started getting used to the idea of drinking, but I wouldn't go to the bars with my friends because I was afraid of being deported. See, my friends would all get fake IDs to get into the bars. But with DACA and the way that police treat Black and Brown people… I couldn't take that risk. I had a lot more to lose if I got caught. Then a few months later, there were protests happening in town around the death of George Floyd. My friends were leading the organization that was organizing a protest in town. I really wanted to be out there, but I saw a lot of people getting arrested, and I knew I couldn't take the risk. I expressed that to them. I told them I was sorry. They were just like, "Alex…. You don't need to worry. We get it. It's fine. This is not a risk you can take, but we're taking it for you. We understand your support. We understand you're here and that you care about these things." They understood. They understand my undocumented status has real impacts, and they didn't villainize me for it. To know that they care enough about me to understand when I can't do something helps rebuild that façade. It reminds me that I do belong.

Which, I guess, brings me back to the question… why do I love this institution?

If I am being completely honest with myself… I love my institution, but I just don't know if I only love it because of the façade I've created to navigate it. My institution ignores systemic issues, and while most of my experiences on campus have been great, I know I also made it so. I never took no for an answer. I just stepped up and said, "No, this is what I'm going to be doing and fuck anyone who tries to get in my way."

Well, I guess the question isn't that complex; it's just a hard reality to realize.

I think I love it regardless of its flaws, which makes me feel like shit. I consciously know that this institution is not a safe place for Students of Color, specifically Black students, but I choose not to deal with it on a day-to-day basis because it doesn't affect me directly. To acknowledge it would break my façade, and by breaking my façade, I have to acknowledge that others, specifically higher-ups at the institution, see me as the model minority. Worse, I think I unintentionally set out to become the model minority.

(*Alex goes to take a sip of his coffee but realizes it's empty. He looks out the window and see's the student reporter walking towards the front door of the coffee shop. Alex takes a deep breath and sighs. Then, in a practiced manner, Alex puts on a professional, warm smile in preparation to greet his peer.)*

So yes, I love my institution because, for me, I've made myself space here. I've been able to be in the spotlight. I've made some great friends, and I feel like the staff and faculty care.

And I know the institution is more like a melting pot and not a salad bowl. And I truly wish it was more like a salad bowl but, I love it anyway.

Emma: Stuck in the Middle

(*Lights up on Emma, who is sitting in the Director of the Multicultural Center's office. Emma is wearing a pair of gray boots, black jeans, and a red long sleeve shirt. Her coat is laid on top of her backpack that is sitting in the chair next to her. Across from her is the Director's desk. Sitting behind the desk is the Director, an older, Black student affairs administrator. Emma's hair light brown hair is in a messy bun. Her face shows the discomfort she feels, and the Director's facial expression is mutually somber.*)

DIRECTOR: The undocumented student organization emailed my supervisor a letter saying all the ways I am not doing my job and not supporting undocumented students. Listen, I admit I fell short on helping, talking, and discussing with some of you, but you all never told me this four-page letter was going to get sent to my bosses. Nobody ever approached me with these concerns during the summer. I'm getting blamed for things I have no control over. (*The Director takes a deep breath.*) I want to talk to the DACA students, but I don't even know what to say. I don't know if what I'm doing is enough now.

EMMA: It feels like I have to play the middleman for both parties. I know you care, but undocumented students are really angry. You know I am new here, and my experience with you was from before I transferred here. I remember when you came to my community college to talk about the transfer process for us to come to this university. You explained what financial aid we could apply to, how to apply, how to get application waivers, and generally what the university was about. You were really nice and encouraging. (*Emma stops and tries to search for the words that might help the Director understand her experiences more deeply.*)

The experiences at my community college were not great. I felt like I belonged in some parts, but not all. (*Emma takes in the silence and looks around the office at the various mementos from student organizations hanging on the wall.*)

Do you know what influenced me to go to college? When I was small, my mom couldn't afford a babysitter and was working all the time. So, when she was home, we spent most of our time watching American movies. We would spend hours watching HBO. Then, one movie changed it all for me… *Legally Blonde*. I wanted to be Elle so badly. I told everyone, "I have to go to Harvard. I have to go to Harvard. I have to go to Harvard." I used to stay up and watch YouTube videos of people sharing about their Harvard experience. Then I learned that President Obama went to Harvard and Michelle Obama went to Princeton. Then I thought I have to go to an Ivy League school. I went on a few college tours, specifically one to a prestigious school, and I realized that some of the students there just weren't that smart. I said to myself, "In this room, there is only one Michelle Obama, and the rest of you are all here because of generational wealth."

Later, I had a really kind mentor, a Black woman, who sat me down and told me, "You don't have to go to an Ivy League just because you feel like that will make you happier or change your life. Going to an Ivy League isn't going to magically change your status.

You being a DACA student going to Harvard is not any different than being a DACA student working at McDonald's. Your placement in the United States is still the same. You don't deserve more because you went to Harvard, and you don't deserve less because you don't go to school and you work at McDonald's." I figured out I had this internalized notion in my head that if I followed the "right" path and went to Harvard and earned an MBA, MD, Ph.D. or something I would prove to myself and other people that I am an American person who needs to stay. I thought I would be more valuable than every other immigrant. Essentially, I was buying into the model minority myth, and I didn't want to be that kind of person. So even though I had a high GPA and tons of AP credits, I chose to start at my community college because it was cheaper, and I met some of the most amazing minds there. I also thought I'd get more support… jokes on me.

Did you know my community college has the highest percentage of undocumented students in the state? Yeah, I worked in the Multicultural Center there as a student worker who worked with undocumented students. I would look through lists and lists of undocumented students and recognize names of students who I knew told me they were born in various states. I realized quickly they didn't want to reveal their status to anybody. I found myself doing the same thing.

There is only one training program for faculty and staff to attend to learn about working with undocumented students between my community college and this university. It is a program that is run by the Multicultural Center at my four-year institution but is accessible to both my two-year and four-year institutions. Unfortunately, it is under-resourced and rarely used. This means the majority of staff and faculty do not know how to properly deal with problems that undocumented students face; even how to talk to us. Honestly, I don't think a lot of them want to know or care to figure out the difference. So that part of my identity, my status, I've always kept as a secret. It was reserved for a very specific time, very specific people, and I never revealed my identity to my professors or higher-level administrators.

I remember when I was first starting school at my community college, and I had to go to the financial aid office. I didn't feel safe disclosing my undocumented status, but I needed help with the parent dependent section. Something you don't know about me is my family situation. My mother was undocumented and got deported when I was young. I was given to my aunt after my mother's deportation, and she became my guardian but never formally filed for guardianship due to my status. It's already hard as an undocumented student when schools ask us to talk about our parents' finances, but for me, I don't even have my parents in the United States, and my aunt is not my legal guardian. As an undocumented person, I don't qualify for federal aid, but we are told to fill out the FASFA anyways. So, I researched the best way to submit the FASFA as an undocumented student and learned that institutions could process the paper version of FASFA since a lot of the questions online did not apply to my circumstances. I also had the question about how to fill out the parent dependent section.

So, I arrived at the Financial Aid office and said, "I have my paper FASFA," and the staff member, a white woman, immediately was like, "Why are you giving it to us? You have

to mail this out to FASFA." I responded and said, "Oh, I heard through other students that you can submit the paper FASFA to someone specifically." She was so dismissive of my comments and extremely rude. She didn't even bother to ask me who told me this or how I knew this information. She didn't even care to ask why I was filling out a paper version in the first place. I knew I was right too. I knew I could submit the paper version because I saw it on the website. So after she told me I was wrong, I simply told her I saw it on the website. Then she replied, "I don't understand why every student comes in here thinking they know how to do my job."

All I could say back was, "I didn't say that. I was just saying that I am aware of the policy. I'm not trying to make your life harder. Can I just see the specialist, please?" Instead of waiting, I left the office and scanned the papers to the financial aid specialist directly. It took significantly longer. What should have been a five-minute question turned into a four-day email exchange. The mere action of me having to go and print these papers, fill out the document, and bring them to the financial aid staff are all things that traditional U.S. students or permanent residents don't have to go through. I have to go through all these loopholes just to get one answer, and in the end, completing the FASFA only helped me establish my residency and prove I would have been Pell-eligible if I wasn't undocumented. I guess that was a good thing, but it took so much energy to later be told, "Okay, we can give you a free parking pass. That's it. That's all we could do for you."

Now, I don't go to the financial aid office. I only communicate with the office via phone or email. Also, I only speak directly to the financial aid specialists. Otherwise, I know they will dismiss my questions. I don't even feel comfortable spending time in the student lounge near their office. I know I don't belong in this part of the college.

I felt that way a lot at my community college, and it wasn't for lack of trying. Even my classrooms weren't safe spaces. I totally remember when the Heartbeat bill, a bill that would ban abortion after a fetal heartbeat was detected, passed in my state; I don't know why, but people in my history class were really excited about it. Eventually, the debate about the bill strayed into a conversation about immigration. Immediately, I felt like everybody's eye went towards me. So, I said, "Why is everybody looking at me? Do I look like an immigrant?" They just shrugged and waited. You've got to understand that as a business major, the majority of people in my classes are white males who love to play what they call "devil's advocate." Personally, I don't think they were playing devil's advocate. I think that it was always their opinion, and they just didn't want to say it was their opinion. It was clear they wanted a response, but I didn't want to debate my existence. So, I just said, "I don't want to have this debate right now. I'm worried about how I'm going to pay for this class. You guys can worry about having this debate." Ever since, I vetted all my professors on the Rate My Professor site and looked for women professors, I felt more comfortable with women professors because of the shared identity, and most of my negative experience with in-class debates happened in male-led classes. I also learned I didn't want to hang out with business students. I don't spend time on that side of campus. Instead, I studied in the liberal arts side or the Multicultural Center. The Multicultural Center was my place where I found my people. It was the only safe place I

could go as an undocumented student. My cousin told me to get to know the director there, and she ended up being the nicest, kindest person I have ever met in my life. She made sure that any worry I had as an undocumented student just went away. I only had one bad experience there, and even that experience wasn't intentionally harmful.

It was voter registration week, and all around campus, everyone would stop and ask you if you were registered to vote. I wanted to advocate for people to vote. I believe everyone who can register should register to vote. Unfortunately, that meant people would ask me if I was registered to vote, and as an undocumented person, I can't. I didn't want to lie to people, but if I said no, I know the next question would have been why not. People just kept pestering me while I was navigating campus, and so I asked myself, "What are the reasons people don't vote?" For some reason, 'people with felonies' first came to mind, and when I tried to think of other reasons, everything else didn't sound any better. So I just tried my best not to go anywhere on campus to avoid the conversation. I did go to the Multicultural Center though, and even there, everybody was pushing us to go vote. All my friends were registered voters, and it felt like everyone was doing it. I know voting is so important; I just wish I could vote. I really wish I could vote. Even with that happening there, it was still the only place I could go for support.

My community college ultimately was a minefield for undocumented students to be triggered. I remember I was participating in CPR certification training that was taking place near a political science class. Even though I wasn't in the political science class, everyone in the CPR training could hear the class going into a very deep and heated debate about immigration. For some reason, another woman-identified student and I in the training made intense eye contact. The debate eventually moved onto the topic of DACA and if it was good or bad. I noticed that the students in the debate were talking as though real people weren't involved; they spoke about the topic very technically. In my mind, I was like, "Okay, I know I pay taxes, but my life isn't worth just a tax number." They were debating about us like we were cattle. Like seriously, these are still human beings who you don't have to degrade and talk about as if we're just numbers. We ARE human. Even those whose opinions were that DACA students should be able to stay supported their opinion with how much DACA students pay in tax dollars.

Eventually, when the training session was over, the student who I made eye contact with approached each me. I said, "Are you…" and she just repeated my question too, and we realized we both were undocumented students with DACA. It made me feel like there was more of us. It made me realize I am not the only person who feels alone on this campus. I didn't have to feel alone all the time. At the same time, we bonded over yet another reminder of why we feel alone, why we didn't belong here.

I got to a point on campus where I was just tired—tired of being alone and not listened to by administrators and professors. I wanted to share my opinions. I wanted to belong in more places than the Multicultural Center. So I guess when the Governor planned a visit to my community college, I felt it was the time to speak up. I remember researching what the Governor's views were on undocumented people and learned that they hadn't taken a public stance. They also hadn't changed the law that allowed undocumented students to

pay in-state tuition fees, so I figured they just needed a push. Unfortunately, the Dean of Students office was organizing the Governor's visit, and you had to be a part of certain student organizations to meet with him. So, I emailed the Dean of Students and shared that I think the following questions about undocumented students should be shared with the Governor, and nobody emailed me back. I started to get really frustrated. This was also around the time that scholarship deadlines were coming up, and the majority of scholarships that were available were only for Pell Grant students. Since I am undocumented, I couldn't qualify for the Pell Grant, which meant I also couldn't apply to most of the available scholarships. I emailed multiple offices about my concern related to the scholarships, and none of those departments responded to my email either. So I got fed up and walked directly to the President's office. It just so happened that he was walking out as I was walking in. He asked me if I wanted an apple, and I was like, "No, I would like a minute of your time." It ended up being a positive conversation. He listened to my concerns. It was also the first time I shared my undocumented identity with a higher-level administrator. After our conversation, I got an email telling me a workaround for applying to a scholarship that originally was for Pell-eligible students only. It wasn't a huge win, but it was a win. It restored my faith in higher-level administrators. I started to realize that maybe it was the entry-level staff and faculty that were the barriers to change. Often they would tell me not to talk to the Provost or Vice President but to bring the problem to them instead, and that blocks a lot of the progress from happening. At least at my institution, this was true. I can't speak for everywhere.

And then I transferred here to this large, competitive four-year institution as an undocumented Mexican woman. I am one of the youngest people in the business program here and one of the very few community college kids that received direct admittance into the business college. Yet, I don't feel comfortable being in the Business school. I don't belong there.

Then I joined this student organization for undocumented students, became an executive board member, and then this letter comes out, and I feel torn. I recognize these types of letter's impact on people's livelihood, and I am also new here, and I don't want to discount other undocumented students' experience. I want you to know I advocated for a plan, something more than sending a letter. Ultimately, they felt like that wasn't our job as students. I get that you've been serving as the interim DACA Coordinator on top of your other job for three years, and the position hasn't been filled due to hiring freezes. I get it.

After everything at my community college… (*Emma stops and searches for the right words*).

I finally start here and... (*Emma stops herself again and takes a deep breath. She looks the Director right in the eye and continues*).

This institution is the place that I thought I would get real resources for undocumented students, and I am stuck in the middle. I feel like I've joined the wrong organization. You were one of the first people here that made me feel like I would get support, and this

organization was the first place at this institution I thought I would feel included, and now I am in between. So, I guess I don't know where I belong.

The Meet-Up

(*Lights up on Nena, Veronica, Student X, Alex, and Emma, who are sitting at a table in a restaurant near a conference convention center. After participating in a study on belonging, the students were invited to attend a conference on student success and meet up with the researcher at a restaurant for lunch. The table everyone is seated at is located in a private room within the restaurant. Each student was asked before attending the meet up to complete a drawing that represents their sense of belonging. During the meet up they spend time getting to know each other. The researcher sits at the end of the table as she prepares to ask them to share what they've created.*)

RESEARCHER: I am so glad you all were able to attend the conference, and it so nice to finally meet you all in person. Since you participated in the study, I know you've met me virtually, but this is your first time meeting each other. Hopefully, you have used the lunch as a chance to get to know each other a bit.

During our last call, I asked each of you individually to complete a drawing that represented your sense of belonging. As I shared before, I am a U.S. citizen from a mixed-status family as my mother was undocumented here before she was deported. I believe it is important to role model vulnerability when asking others to share about themselves. Therefore, I did my own drawing that reflects my sense of belonging in the U.S.

Figure 1. Researcher's Drawing. This figure represents the researcher's sense of belonging.

RESEARCHER: The paper used was stained with a teabag from my mother's favorite brand of tea. In the middle, you see a circle representing a nucleus that's slightly off-balanced with the colors of the Jamaican flag (yellow, black and green) and the colors of

the American flag (white, red, and blue). In the very center is a heart surrounded by my painted fingerprints using the various colors of each flag. Below the nucleus is fire. The stained paper is burned on the edges, and around the nucleus are ashes from sweetgrass and sage. Lastly, the same sweetgrass is pasted on top of the fire, and the sage is pasted surrounding the nucleus.

A nucleus is an organelle in our bodies that contains our DNA. I am by birth a U.S. citizen but spent my formative years growing up in a Jamaican household. Both are very much a central part of who I am. I recognize the privilege that being born in the U.S. grants me and hold a lot of hurt after experiencing my mother's deportation and absence. I often describe this pain as a consistent fire that, while it may dwindle, is still an ever-present burn. However, I have spent a lot of my time working to heal that hurt by focusing my energy into making a change within my community and profession. Sage and sweetgrass are used to cleanse negativity and bring positivity. I stained the paper with my mother's tea because I can't change my mother's experience (i.e. the page will never be white again), but I can try to dispel the negativity and look for ways to remain positive. Ultimately, my sense of belonging is complex; while I am proud of my cultural upbringing and grateful for being born in the U.S., I have to actively look for ways to heal from the hurts U.S. immigration laws have caused my family.

Now, I would love to hear about your sense of belonging in relation to your institution and undocumented status. Who would like to go first?

ALEX: I'll go. Belonging to me is putting yourself in a place or surrounding yourself with people that when you are there or when you're with them you don't feel out of place. You don't feel like there's somewhere they would rather you be. It's this idea of feeling comfortable in a space or within a group of people. So I drew this…

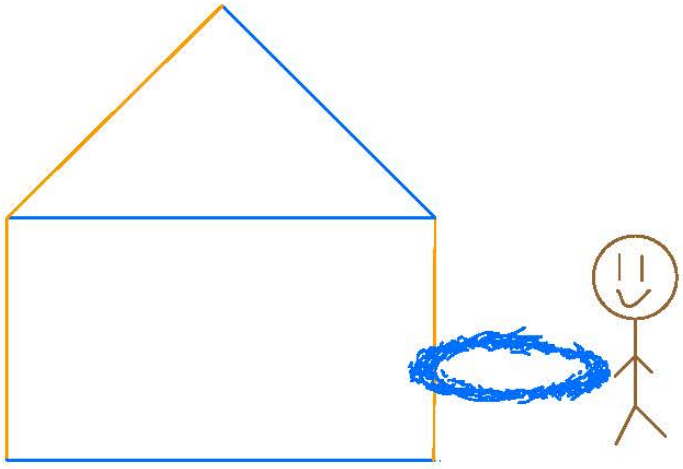

Figure 2. Alex's Drawing. This figure represents Alex's sense of belonging.

ALEX: It's fairly simplistic, both the drawing and also the symbolism behind it, but that's what I got. So the building is my institution. The stick figure is me, and the link, or the rope, or the thing connecting us is my sense of belonging. It's my literal connection to

the university and if you look at it, what I tried to get across was that it looks very strong. But really, it's built out of small, tiny pieces, like small strokes. The chain is only as strong as its weakest link, right? So, I feel like I have a strong connection with my institution, but I feel like if the façade was adequately shattered…

I feel like it could affect my relationship with the institution. It would impact my sense of belonging at the institution. I don't know how true that is, but that's kind of how it feels.

I have a well-known name on campus, and people know me. So, I do feel a sense of belonging at my university, but sometimes I feel like it's a fraud. It's made up of a bunch of tiny pieces that, if you pull at it hard enough it could all fall apart. But also, I don't know how true that actually is because I also feel like it is very strong, but then that goes in a continued loop of doubt, right? I feel like it's strong, but it could fall apart, and the feeling fluctuates on and on. I don't know. I did my best. I'm not a very visual person. I express myself through words and speaking.

VERONICA: I know what you mean. I'm not well known on campus or anything, but I feel connected to campus but unstable about it too. My university is really diverse, and I feel like the diversity is also… it makes me feel somewhat safe when it comes to the inclusion of undocumented students. Since people there understand there are different kinds of people in the world and so many cultural differences, I feel like they are more accepting. I know there is going to be fear and feelings of not belonging there. I mean, that's how I felt. But I also think we need to keep trying.

(*Emma, Student X, and Nena all nod in affirmation to this shared experience. As encouragement, Veronica decides to continue.*)

VERONICA: For me, belonging means a place of comfort. It's like a place where you can resonate with that you feel like you fit… like you belong there. I think you have to feel safe and secure. So, I decided to do a watercolor painting.

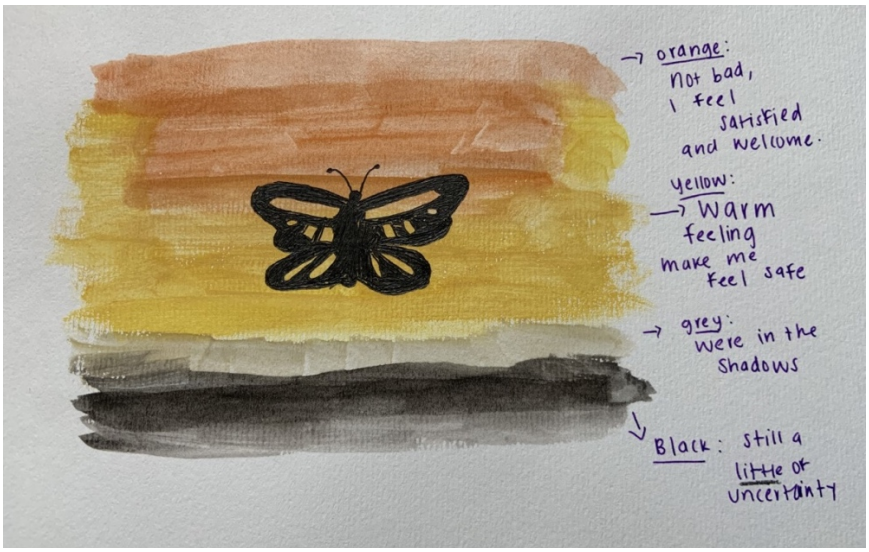

Figure 3. Veronica's Drawing. This figure represents Veronica's sense of belonging.

VERONICA: The colors represent how I feel about being welcomed throughout my university while being undocumented. So I put orange on the top because I do feel welcomed as an undocumented student at my university. It's not bad. I think when I got there, it was a little harsh, but overall, I feel satisfied with it. Then, I put yellow because I feel warm and safe there. Throughout my whole first year, I felt safe because of the program they had, the DREAM program. For most undocumented students, if you join the DREAM Center and get involved, you feel safe, but for a lot of people who choose not to be involved… (*Veronica lets the statement trail off. She takes a frustrated breath and continues*).

I just think we need more support. We need more encouragement that it is okay to be there. I got lucky, but I feel like others may not be as lucky.

So, as you go down, I put gray because I still feel like we are in the shadows. I feel like we're not heard enough. I think just because the state I reside in is pretty liberal and the university is too. I am so lucky to be so supported. And I still feel like we could do a little better. We still need some work. I definitely put black because I still feel a little bit of uncertainty. At the end of the day, do I feel safe? Yes. Completely safe? Not yet.

Then I painted the butterfly because it symbolizes DACA. I am an undocumented student, and I don't have DACA. It's my goal to be a Dreamer and to have work authorization here. I also painted the butterfly in black because even DACA students are in the shadows. It's just so hard to be undocumented. I think we go through a lot that strengthens us, and I think the color black is a strong color that represents that while also showing uncertainty. I was going to add extra lines of black to the bottom because, honestly, I don't think there is enough. I think I am lucky to live where I live and get so much support, and I also want to be honest that there is more to be done, especially with the whole current president thing.

NENA: Right? I think most of us see the impact President Trump's changes to DACA has made on our lives…

(*Alex, Veronica, Emma, and Student X all nod in response.*)

STUDENT X: I remember the day after the election night and learning about the results. I could feel time slipping away. I felt so much…

ALEX: Fear.

STUDENT X: Yeah.

(*The students take a few seconds to reflect.*)

STUDENT X: I guess I can go next. When thinking about belonging, the first word that comes to mind is feeling wanted—not feeling like an outsider. When I feel like I'm on the outside in a group, that's when I really feel like I want to belong. I want to feel wanted. At my institution, I don't think I have ever felt like I don't belong. Since I don't

go to a predominantly white institution, my professors are really diverse. Their presence helps me feel like I belong.

VERONICA: Same.

EMMA: I know I feel more comfortable with professors that share my identity.

NENA: Yeah, I use to think that. I assumed that professors who identified as a woman or Person of Color, like me, would get it. It didn't work out that way in my experience.

STUDENT X: That's a good point. Which kind of brings me to my drawing…

Figure 4. Student X's Drawing. This figure represents Student X's sense of belonging.

STUDENT X: In a way, this drawing is trying to promote mental health. The background is actually of my grandfather's ranch that we called campo. It was a place I thought was very warm and gave a very heartwarming feeling. And when I think about mental health and my future as a family therapist, I think about all the sacrifices that my family has made and everything that they had to do. This includes working in the fields, regardless of the weather, and all the efforts that were put into coming to this country. So when I think about me and my belonging… I think about if I can give back slightly and help my grandparents, help my mom and past generations not feel like their work was in vain. I want them to know I approve of their sacrifice. This idea validates so much of my decisions that I've made so far.

So, I remember seeing the quote, “Just like flowers, we need care too.” It made me think about how in our culture, we have a tendency to just go with it, take things as they are, or until they don’t feel real anymore. I want to break that stigma. The water is symbolic for self-care, doing what we have to in order to take care of ourselves if that care isn’t being provided. As a first-generation, undocumented student, that can be a daunting task. But when I think of my campus, I don’t think about the overwhelming class load. I don’t think about being disconnected. I just acknowledge that I am different, which is why I placed the plant on the stool away from the other flowers that are growing on their own. That plant is me. I feel like I had to figure out my own process of growing. It is not the same as others, but it’s my process. While it’s different though, I still don’t see myself in the field alone. In other words, “Everyone has different requirements. Try finding yours today!” So yeah, I belong because I figured out what worked for me despite my differences, and I still feel like I am a part of the group.

EMMA: I can agree with that… We have just had very different experiences. Belonging means you are a part of a group, and there’s no question as to why. I recently transferred from a community college to a four-year institution. I wasn’t receiving any scholarships at the time, so I owed a lot of money. Then, two weeks ago, I heard that my university partnered with a large, private company to provide free tuition to Pell-eligible students. I ended up reaching out through email to my new school’s financial aid office and learned that DACA students could apply as long as we fill out the FASFA as a paper form. I thought after my first semester, I would have to take some time off, but now that I received free tuition, I am able to stay in school. The only thing the scholarship doesn’t cover is my health insurance and books. The business school also charges a special fee to all business majors that aren’t covered. It may not seem like a lot since but books in the business school cost a ton.

That brings me to my drawing. Here it is.

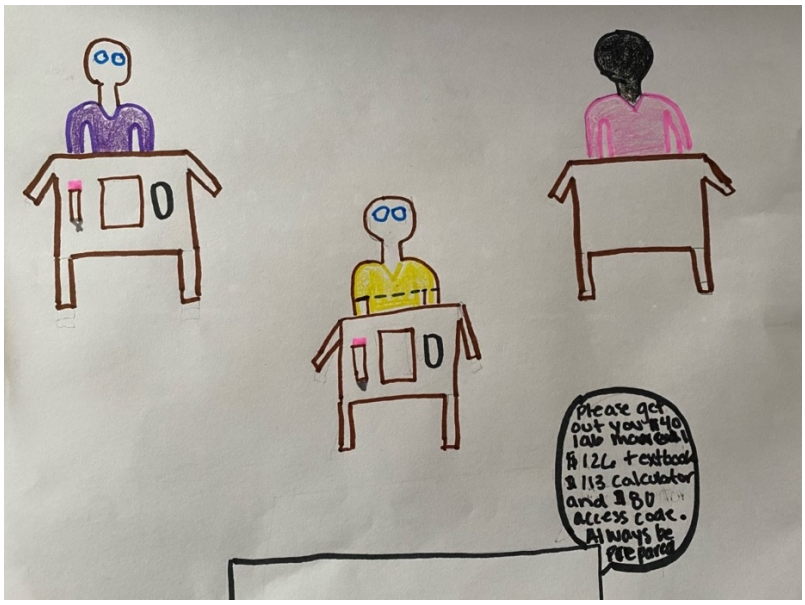

Figure 5. Emma’s Drawing. This figure represents Emma’s sense of belonging.

EMMA: Okay. Well, in classes, I feel like I'm behind other students. Especially at my new college since a lot of the students in my class came from better public high schools than I did. Mine wasn't the worst, but theirs were better by far. So often, when they are discussing certain things that I just can't, and I'm like, "Okay, give me a day, and I will figure out more than you."

Honestly, it all has to do with supplies. I know one class requires a textbook that costs $126, a calculator that is $118, an access code that is $88, and then a pricy lab manual you have to buy from the bookstore. Oh, and I need a lab coat too. All of those expenses are expenses that end up causing me to have to choose. Do I eat good today? Do I go out today? Do I pay for all of this? Often, I have to tell the professor, "I don't get paid until next week, is there any chance you would allow me to turn in my assignment just a week later? I promise it'll be the first thing I buy."

Then, I end up feeling like I'm always a week behind other students or rushing to get to the deadlines, while other students get to feel more comfortable and can go at their own pace. So in the drawing, I am the student in the pink shirt with nothing on their desk. I often sit in those lectures, but since I can't afford the supplies right away, I just sit there so I can be counted for attendance. Without the textbook and materials, often, what the teacher is saying doesn't make sense, so I'm not really present. While all the students who can afford to get their supplies in advance understand everything perfectly, I'm just taking notes, so it looks like I'm engaged. In the drawing, the teacher is behind the desk stating all the things we need to buy to be successful in their class and is telling us, "You always have to be prepared."

I wish I could be prepared.

This experience reminds me every semester that I don't belong, specifically in my math, business, and science classes. Those are the male-dominated classes, and I always feel like those professors are not going to take me seriously because I don't have the materials, and I'm always a week behind. (*Emma takes an exasperated breath.*)

NENA: I resonate with that. Similar to Emma, many students at my college will talk about money as if it is no big deal. Since they are affluent, they are able to do things and not stress or question their decisions and choices. As a first-generation, low-income student, I always have to budget and think about how I was going to manage my money. It was a really stressful thing, and I couldn't relate to anyone.

(*Student X and Veronica nod in acknowledgment and with shared understanding.*)

NENA: Having a sense of belonging is being able to relate to students and know that they get it. They don't get it because they are sympathizing, but they genuinely understand where you're coming from. Belonging also means that I feel like I have a voice at the table without having to demand it. I am just expected to be there, you know? It is like there is no doubt in anyone's mind, who already belongs there, that I belong there as well. It is just feeling comfortable and that I can be myself.

Anyway, here is my drawing.

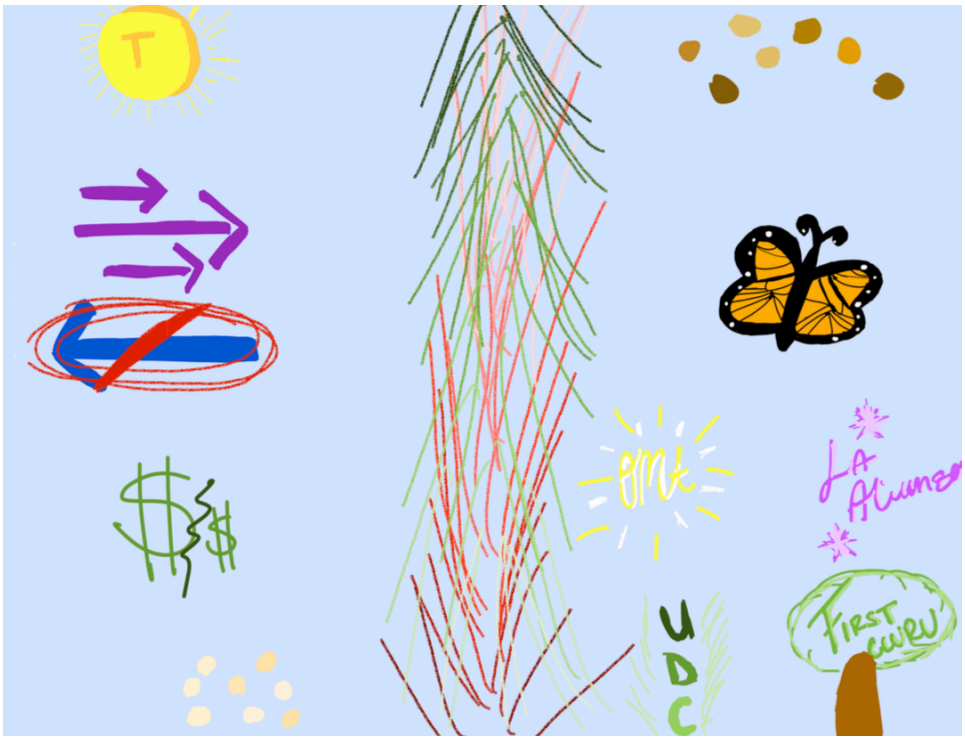

Figure 6. Nena's Drawing. This figure represents Nena's sense of belonging.

NENA: Since the prompt was for us to represent our sense of belonging on campus, I divided it into two. Don't mind the weird lines down the middle; I just didn't know how to create a cool division.

(*Everyone laughs softly.*)

Anyway, I wanted one side to show how my college believes they're making me feel like I belong and what has actually made me feel like I belong on campus. So on the left side, it's all the things that make me feel like I am tokenized. I feel like I've been very tokenized on my campus in a variety of ways, especially being one of the only DACA recipients who are very open about their status and serves as an advocate for the undocumented community on our campus. That's what the gold coin with a T represents.

The purple lines are of me constantly just giving and giving myself to the institution and not receiving anything in return. It is not mutual. It has been me constantly having to prove myself, showing that I have a place there or deserve to be there. In order to feel like I belong, I feel like I have to give this institution everything, but I don't receive the same level of resources or effort, which is what the blue arrow with the red mark shows.

Then, there is also the class issue that I talked about already. I have to navigate the university with very little resources and income in comparison to my peers, so I definitely feel like an outsider. I have tried to advocate for undocumented students to receive better financial support, but the university just doesn't listen.

Lastly, there is this expectation of me having to fit into a white institution with white culture and white beliefs. I don't belong there. All of these things have made me feel like I don't belong, but the college believes that I do because I'm a successful student, and I have been able to do everything that was not expected of me to accomplish.

On the right side are all the things that have actually made me feel like I belong. The variety of brown dots are representative of my diverse group of friends and being really connected with the individuals from the communities that I am used to and grew up with. Since I grew up in Black and Brown communities, most of my closest friends are also from those communities. Being an advocate and very open about my status has made me feel like I belong and have received support from my peers and people who genuinely want to see me succeed.

Then at the bottom are all the organizations and offices that have made me feel a real sense of belonging and truly cared for. The department is the Office of the Multicultural Affairs, and I think their core mission is to make sure students like me feel a sense of belonging. The others are the student organizations that represent my student leadership, Latina identity, and first-generation student experiences. Especially the organization for first-generation college students. That organization is one that I started and really helped me grow roots at my institution.

So, that's my little art piece.

RESEARCHER: Thank you everyone. I appreciate you all for sharing and your commitment to helping me with this study. I learned so much from you and truly hope others will as well. I will get the check, and we can head back to the conference.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I retold the stories of my participants using composite counter-story telling in the format of a stage play script. Nena's monologue explored how she struggled with belonging in a predominantly white university and experienced various forms of oppression by faculty, staff, and students while serving as an advocate for undocumented and first-generation students. Next, Veronica's monologue focused on how her sense of belonging was in question due to her struggles with finding her place and navigating the reality of not having a work authorization. Afterward, Student X's monologue highlighted the feeling of uncertainty that she experienced as an undocumented student despite feeling a sense of belonging at her institutions. Similarly, Alex's monologue centers his positive experiences and sense of belonging with his institution while he struggles to understand the authenticity of his feelings. Then, Emma's monologue explores her transition to her four-year institution and how she is struggling to find her place and a solid sense of belonging. Lastly, the closing scene highlights all five characters and how each character has shared experiences around their undocumented identity and sense of belonging at their institution.

Each monologue shared stories about the characters' interactions with faculty, staff, and students that influenced their sense of belonging. The first research question for this study was how do interactions with faculty, staff, and peers influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus? When considering the findings, generally, negative interactions reinforced a lack of belonging while positive interactions promoted a stronger sense of belonging. However, each participant emphasized that while they may or may not have a sense of belonging for the whole institution, they were able to identify

groups or spaces on campus that helped them foster a sense of belonging. This finding speaks directly to the second research question, which was what spaces and groups influence undocumented students' sense of belonging on campus? For many of the participants, the spaces and groups were places and student organizations or departments that affirmed their undocumented, racial, or student identities, such as multicultural offices, undocumented student services, international student offices, or student leadership offices and student organizations for marginalized identities.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how my findings confirm, contradicts, and extends the existing literature on undocumented students and belonging; provide implications for this study in relation to practice, policy, future research, and scholarship; as well as articulate my concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Anzaldúa (1987) wrote, “But I exist, we exist... As a people we have resisted and we have taken expedient positions, but we have never been allowed to develop unencumbered – we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves.” (p. 108). This study’s purpose was to explore the lived experiences of undocumented students who were attending U.S. colleges by sharing stories about their interactions with faculty, staff, and students and how those interactions influenced their sense of belonging. Unsurprisingly, the human experience is complex and multifaceted; similarly, so are the experiences of undocumented students’ belongingness. While the participants in this study identified a variety of experiences related to their sense of belonging, they all indicated they felt belonging at least to some degree. However, their sense of belonging was often contextual and situational as they sought places, people, and groups that allowed them to be their full selves unencumbered. Brown (2010) shared that

> Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval, which are not only hollow substitutes for belonging, but often barriers to it. Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance. (p. 26)

Participants in this study shared stories of navigating their undocumented identity in both beautiful and challenging ways. What was consistent across each narrative was a desire to belong regardless if the community did not reciprocate that desire with them. Rather, they demanded space, identified safe havens, or settled with fitting in.

Throughout this chapter, I continue to connect findings identified in the study with existing literature on undocumented students and sense of belonging. Afterward, I discuss the implications of this study in the context of practices for faculty, staff, and students, federal and/or state policy, future research, and theoretical considerations. Last, I provide a concluding reflection on my experience conducting this study and my hopes for our nation as we reimagine a more inclusive future.

Discussion

In the discussion, I will share how my study confirms the current literature on mental health. Then I will discuss how my findings extend the emerging literature on financial support (or lack thereof) for undocumented students. Afterward, I express the importance of using art-based pedagogy when conducting this research and how its usage expands the literature on undocumented students and qualitative, critical research as a whole. Last, I explain how my research expands our knowledge of undocumented students' sense of belonging.

Mental Health

Teranishi et al. (2015) believed that undocumented students experienced high levels of stress, fear, and anxiety. Consistent with these findings, all five participants in the study indicated experiencing anxiety, stress, and fear in relation to their undocumented status. This is significant as undocumented students often hold other

marginalized identities as well as usually identifying as first-generation students (Pérez et a., 2010; Pyne & Means, 2013). As a result, the stress, anxiety, and fear associated with their undocumented status is in addition to the stress, anxiety, and fear navigating the other identities they may hold. This means, like many of our marginalized students, they are experiencing multiple forms of oppression in addition to xenophobia and anti-immigrant policies and climates (Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007). Emma talked about her experiences in her business classes that were often dominated by white, male, affluent professors and students. As a result, she was often the only woman, working-class, Person of Color in her business classes. In addition to navigating racism, sexism, and classism in the classroom, Emma talked about the subtle microaggressions she experienced in relation to her undocumented status that she had to work through on her own, as many would assume but were unsure of her undocumented status. Since individuals' identities intersect, often when undocumented students experience stress, fear, anxiety, guilt, or shame, they are unlikely to talk about their status or share their general challenges with others for fear others may find out about their undocumented status (Alif et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2013).

Unsurprisingly and without a prompting question, all five participants also talked about the impact of President Trump's election, immigration laws, and attempts to dismantle DACA. As we consider the impact of our political climate, it is a clear example of how anti-immigrant rhetoric and shifting political values for policies that impact undocumented peoples' lives influences their mental health. While Student X stayed in bed and cried, Veronica mentioned feeling hopeless as it minimized her chances of receiving a work authorization. Further, each student articulated looking for their

institutions to take a stand and show support, which often positively influenced their sense of belonging and ability to cope with the fear. While universities are often considering the political and bureaucratic backlash from donors or politicians, undocumented students are looking to their university leadership to provide safety and security in the form of words and action. Nena's stories highlighted this as she considered her own success with the lack of action and follow-up from university leadership. This is vital as we as university administrators consider how we are not only providing resources but negatively contributing to undocumented students' mental health, particularly isolation (Contreras, 2009).

Gratefully, three of the five participants (i.e. Nena, Veronica, and Student X) shared that they saw a counselor on campus to assist them with their mental health concerns. Each of them shared they were referred to a counselor from the office that they spent most of their time in and was the place they felt they belonged. For many, that meant the multicultural affairs or undocumented student services office. Otherwise, they may not have thought to consider using a counselor to help them manage their mental wellness.

Financial Burdens

As an extension of previous findings, all five participants in this study received in-state tuition and significant financial support to attend their four-year institution while not having to leave college intermittently to save money for the next term. Teranishi et al. (2015) found that undocumented students were more likely to leave college to raise funds for future enrollment intermittently, and Serna et al. (2017) believed undocumented students experienced more severe financial burdens than students with U.S. citizenship.

Although Emma considered taking a year off when she transferred to her four-year institution, she was able to receive a full-tuition scholarship from the institution unexpectedly. Each participant received a scholarship supported by their institution, non-profit organization, or through state monies. Since all five participants are attending four-year institutions in different states within the U.S., this is significant to note. However, due to financial limitations and restrictive state policies, a number of undocumented students still struggle to enter higher education.

While all participants received financial support for tuition, they were still responsible for other expenses such as housing, food, books, and other financial needs. These needs became particularly cumbersome for Veronica as she did not have a work authorization and therefore struggled to acquire additional financial revenue. Moreover, Terriquez (2015) found that many undocumented students selected community colleges near their homes to remain near to their family members as well as for the cheap tuition cost. Although Student X and Emma began their collegiate journeys at a local community college to save money and stay close to family, Alex, Nena, and Veronica started at a four-year institution. Additionally, Student X, Alex, and Emma learned about their scholarship through university administrators, while Veronica and Nena learned about their scholarships from a high school counselor. These contradictions and findings may mean that although undocumented students have access to limited avenues to financial support in comparison to U.S. citizens, they are receiving information on financial opportunities early on and/or financial opportunities are becoming more accessible altogether.

Art-Based Pedagogy

My research and utilization of art-based pedagogy with composite counter-story telling expands the existing literature on undocumented students and critical studies as a whole. There are minimal critical studies that explore undocumented students' experiences using composite counter-story telling in the format of a stage play script and infuse drawings alike. Each participant appreciated the opportunity to draw and provide drawing as a means of reflection. Also, two of the five participants (i.e. Veronica and Student X) indicated enjoying painting and drawing. By using art-based pedagogy, the participants were able to share their stories in the form of art and, in some ways, were more aligned with their preferred form of expression. While Alex, Emma, and Nena did not indicate a passion for completing art, they all shared appreciation for the technique and learned more about themselves in the process. Moreover, as the researcher, I completed my own drawing and was able to truly reflect on my own citizenship story. My understanding deepened my knowledge of self and increased my empathy for those without U.S. citizenship as well as offered me a chance to be vulnerable with my participants and readers. Using art-based pedagogy not only helps those completing the art piece they also helped those trying to understand the participants. As I listened to the participants explain their drawings, I understood their undocumented journeys even more as well as started to identify similarities and differences between our experiences in a way that verbal storytelling did not provide. For example, the drawings allowed me to easily identify how systems of oppression were impacting their lived experiences. In many of their drawings, they describe how classism, racism, sexism intersect with xenophobia as they are navigating their college experiences. Moreover, as a U.S. citizen

writing about undocumented students' experiences, I wanted to be careful in how I chose to retell the stories and which stories I chose to retell. By using composite counter-story telling, I was truly able to provide readers a clear image into the minds and experiences of the participants with minimal editing or disruption to what was shared.

Further, debates surrounding immigration and undocumented people often do not focus on the lived experiences of undocumented people, especially undocumented youth (Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera, 2015; Pérez Huber, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Instead, conversations about undocumented people tend to focus on economic impact, legality, and/or the political ramifications of immigration policies (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006). As a result, many people are uninformed about the actual experiences of undocumented people. This was demonstrated in many of the stories told by the participants regarding students who suggested they just simply apply for citizenship or find a U.S. citizen to marry in order to secure citizenship. As a result, it was increasingly important that when presenting the findings of this study, readers were encouraged to truly see the humanity each of these participants possesses and continually humanize their experiences. By presenting the findings in the format of a play, the participants' experiences were written holistically and presented as a person speaking directly to the reader. Their descriptions were presented, and the scenes were described in detail to support additional imagery. It is my hope that each reader was able to imagine each participant as they shared their stories and felt the emotions alongside the participant.

Belongingness

Strayhorn (2019) named that belonging shows up differently depending on the students' social identities. This study expands the literature on belonging as studies on

undocumented students' sense of belonging are limited, especially when using Strayhorn's (2019) Sense of Belonging theory. I explained the theory to each participant and asked how salient was this theory when trying to understand their own sense of belonging. All five participants self-identified with at least some parts of the theory and were able to use the theory to understand more about their sense of belonging. Alex seemed to have a strong sense of belonging at his institution even though he questioned its durability or how it was acquired. Emma, Nena, Student X and Veronica expressed that their belonging seemed temperamental and conditional, many citing that it was only in particular spaces on campus or with certain groups of people. Further, while the participants were able to meet their physiological needs, Emma, Nena, Student X, and Veronica indicated that they had a temperamental sense of belonging despite also sharing a lack of safety and security.

Uniquely, many of the participants (i.e. Alex, Nena, Student X, and Emma) shared that although they are unsure if the institution's community members desired them there, they demanded to be present and made themselves belong. Strayhorn (2019) shared that "educators should work to create conditions that foster belongingness among all students" (p. 17). However, in the absence of conditions that foster belongingness, this study illustrated that undocumented students actively sought activities and people who would support their presence on campus and demanded conditions that promoted belonging. Strayhorn (2019) highlighted how mattering to others could serve as a motive to drive behavior. While this was true for Alex's experience, the remaining participants used the lack of mattering as their motive for demanding space and the sense of belonging on their campus.

Lastly, the participants in the study seemed most impacted by faculty and staff member's interactions in comparison to student interactions. Hoffman et al. (2002) asserted that peer interactions, faculty engagement, and the campus climate influence students' belongingness. This study indicated that these interactions and the climate did influence their feelings of belonging, but specifically, faculty and staff interactions seemed to be most memorable and, thus, impactful. Many of the participants took an understanding approach to students' negative engagements and seemed to get over them more quickly, while engagement with faculty and staff seemed to be shared with more enthusiasm and concern. Especially when sharing negative interactions that negated their sense of belonging on campus, there was an undercurrent of anger and hurt. Despite some of those interactions happening many months and in some cases years prior, the experiences communicated that the trauma was still impacting their lived experiences. Unlike students, the participants expected staff and faculty members to be more prepared and open-minded when working with undocumented students. As a result, those negative experiences seemed to have a more lasting impact on their opinion of the institution and their overall sense of belonging.

Implications

In this section, I will review the implications identified after completing this research study. I have organized the implications into four categories: practice, policy, future research, and theory. Practice will highlight suggestions given to staff, faculty, and students in relation to undocumented student experiences on campus and help foster a sense of belonging. The part focused on policy will address how as a country, we need improvements to our current immigration policies. Within future research, I will advocate

for future research to explore the lived experiences of students in mixed-status families and undocumented students who participate in Posse or similar programs. Last, I will provide insight into the usage of Strayhorn's (2019) Sense of Belonging theory and future considerations for educators.

Practice

After conducting this research, one implication of practice is the need for increased awareness and training for faculty, staff, and students regarding undocumented students and their experiences. Further than learning common statistics, university communities should grow their understanding of who these students are, the challenges they could face prior, during, and after their collegiate tenure, and how their undocumented status may influence how they navigate their college campuses. The participants in this study all shared stories about insensitive and/or problematic interactions with students but mostly faculty and staff members. By increasing their knowledge about undocumented students, they can learn the most inclusive language to use and why that is important, recognize the privacy needs of undocumented students, and consider the type of activities used in and out of the classroom that may put undocumented students in uncomfortable situations. Additionally, all the participants mentioned having to have a conversation with their faculty members about their inability to meet study abroad, research, or internship requirements. To assist students and faculty members in this conversation, faculty members should be instructed on alternative ways to assist undocumented students with completing these requirements in advance so that they are prepared if asked for an accommodation.

Also, each participant shared an unpleasant interaction with their financial aid and/or student employment office. Often these interactions happened because the employee they were working with were uninformed of the financial aid restrictions of undocumented students and/or challenges with completing FASFA. In addition to completing general training on understanding the undocumented student experiences, employees in the financial aid and student employment office should complete specialized training regarding their financial challenges and available resources. Additionally, their websites should provide resources and instructions for undocumented students to complete these tasks. It may be particularly beneficial that there are a few staff members who specialize in helping undocumented students in the process so that they have a particular person. This does not negate the need for all employees to learn the information but rather provide specialized knowledge and ongoing training for a person who can build a relationship with the undocumented community on their campus; thus, increasing the comfortability for undocumented students to view their office as an ally and resource.

I consider both of the former recommendations for practice tangible and fairly accessible implications. They are important steps but are temporary treatments to the symptoms and not a solution to the core problem. Using inclusive language and building cultural competency will increase political correctness and even cultivate a perceived sense of inclusion but it will not make an environment truly just, equitable, or safe. In consideration of the stories shared by each participant, it was clear many of our institutions are doing the bare minimum to create a safe and inclusive environment for undocumented students. Trainings, workshops, and spreading awareness may increase

staff member's ability to communicate effectively but ultimately the systems our institutions function in need to be transformed in order to be truly inclusive.

I propose that we need to evaluate all aspects of our universities that influence undocumented students' experience: recruitment and marketing, the application process, advising and supporting initiatives, academic curriculums, co-curriculums and university activities (e.g. athletics, study abroad, internship experiences, on-campus student worker experiences, etc.), graduation, and post-graduate/alumni interactions. One of the participants in this study talked about the significance that being a part of Posse program was on her student success and retention. Posse is a program that recruits high school students with marginalized identities who desire to attend college and creates a supportive cohort that attends the same elite, selective college together (The Posse Program, 2021). Together, these cohorts of underrepresented students will attend pre-collegiate sessions to build skills and community prior to starting college, continue in a college program for continued support, and requires a career program post-graduation to encourage continued success (The Posse Program, 2021). After evaluating each aspect of the of college experience, institutional leadership should consider how developing a similar program, modeled after Posse, may further retain undocumented students and provide holistic support for this special group.

Nonetheless, administration and academic leadership need to ensure each of these aspects of the university experience are truly fair and inclusive for undocumented students. Each of these aspects have barriers to student success for undocumented students and if we are truly committed to transformative change, each aspect needs reformation. Moreover, these changes shouldn't be done in isolation. They require

transparency so that prospective students and their university communities understand that undocumented students are not only valued and welcomed but needed in our collegiate spheres.

Policy

Each participant in this story mentioned the benefits of DACA as well as their anxiety surrounding the possibility of the program being dismantled. Undocumented people are a benefit to our nation, and there should be clear, reasonable pathways towards citizenship. At the very least, the DACA program should be protected. In June, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of DACA recipients and agreed that Trump's Administration unlawfully ended the program. While it is currently safe, there is still a possibility the current program could be challenged, and the students and individuals who are depending on its existence will be left without a pathway.

Additionally, the country's leadership needs to work together to pass an immigration policy that will provide work authorization, opportunities for education, military, or trade advancement, and a path towards citizenship. By accomplishing this goal on a federal level, undocumented people, specifically undocumented students, will not have to navigate the different barriers set by particular states. This will broaden the current program, DACA, and allow room for those who may not qualify for DACA, another means for acquiring citizenship. Also, a reform of our existing immigration process for those wanting to migrate to the U.S. is needed so that they have a reasonable means and may not need to consider alternative options.

Future Research

A number of the participants were a part of mixed-status households, and I was a part of a mixed-status household. A mixed-status household is a family unit that may have different citizenship statuses (e.g. the parents are undocumented, but the children are U.S. citizens or the children are undocumented, and the guardian may be a U.S. citizen). As I was listening to the stories of their experiences as undocumented students, I found myself identifying with a lot of lived experiences, especially in college. Regardless of these potential similarities though, the experiences are unique and should be explored separately. Similar to the literature on the undocumented student experience, existing literature on mixed-status households is limited. Future research should explore how undocumented students living in mixed-status households differ from undocumented students who live in a household with all undocumented people. Moreover, future research should also seek to understand the lived experiences of children with U.S. citizenship whose parents or guardians are undocumented.

Also, as previously mentioned, Nena discussed the impact of being a part of the Posse program, a pre-collegiate and campus program that places students in cohorts and provides support before and throughout their collegiate journey to promote success. Nena accredited her motivation to go to a college out-of-state and remain there despite not feeling a strong sense of belonging to her involvement as a Posse scholar. Further, Posse provided Nena a full-tuition scholarship to a university that otherwise wouldn't support her financially. I think the role Posse played for her as an undocumented student was vital, and I believe future research in understanding the impact is important and needed. While it may not be reasonable for the Posse organization to solely admit undocumented

students, as their mission is to empower all diverse students, by identifying what parts of Nena's and other undocumented students who participate in similar pre-collegiate and campus programs positively impact their experiences and assist in helping them foster a sense of belonging.

Lastly, I am grateful I was able to recruit a diverse group of participants for this study. However, more representation from Black undocumented students is needed in research and I was hoping for a chance to include those voices in this study. Being intimately connected to my mother's undocumented journey allowed me to understand early on that the undocumented narrative was not limited to Brown individuals. However, in the United States, media and most of the mainstream storytelling about the undocumented experience defines Latinx as being synonymous with being undocumented, which is not true. The more we can share the experiences of all undocumented people, specifically people whose stories are less likely told such as Black undocumented people, we will be able to demonstrate the diversity that exists within the undocumented community. Thus, further research about the undocumented experience for Black people is needed and necessary.

Theory

When I reviewed Strayhorn's (2019) Sense of Belonging theory with each participant, the majority of them questioned how the model was organized. Although they identified with what was included, they felt the model's depiction of a triangle that showed building blocks upwards seemed to not allow space for fluidity. Strayhorn (2019) illustrates the model as though it may be acquired step by step. Rather, the participants named experiencing the various parts in the model more fluidly; particularly, Nena

named it more like a circle that was repetitive. I believe future consideration should be given to understand how the model is depicted and if, in fact, a recreation of the model could be considered.

Furthermore, many of the participants, especially the participants who also identified as student leaders on campus, subtlety and not so subtly mentioned the impact of capitalism. Specifically, how their worth as student leaders are measured by how much they are able to produce for their universities and later their universities' ability to showcase their contributions to the world. When viewing the model for Strayhorn's (2019) Sense of Belonging theory, the top of the triangle is self-actualization, which is defined as the student's fullest potential and where the university meets its educational mission. This level is also where we may see innovation and creativity flourish. The participants described it as the space that they feel they are taken advantage of the most. I think educators should reflect on the intersections of capitalism, the university's acknowledgment of student leaders' advocacy, and our goal as educators to ensure we are not abusing the work of our students but also not using the benefits of belonging to our own advantages.

With these considerations for revising theory in mind, a lasting recommendation is needed that is an intersection of future research and theory. During the second interviews, I spent a significant amount of time discussing with the participants their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging (2019) theory. I believe this provided a solid foundation for the need to develop a belonging model that better reflects the undocumented student experience. As a result, I aspire to continue my inquiry with willing participants to engage in an additional interview to begin a grounded

research theory regarding undocumented students' belonging that addresses students' feedback discussed previously and better aligns with their lived experiences.

Conclusion

In the wise advice of Nena's mother, we have to work harder. We need to work harder to ensure undocumented students not only feel safe and secure but that they feel like they matter, are valued, and belong in all parts of our universities, not just the spaces created to tolerate their identities. The conditions needed to foster belonging will not show up by happenstance. Nor should we rely on students' determination and grit to help them persevere towards graduation or student success. It is not enough that we are providing more access. It is our responsibility as educators to create environments that allow for each and every student we admit the best chance at success, and right now, we are not doing so for undocumented students.

My time spent with these five undocumented students was life-altering. In a year of tremendous loss, hurt, disappointment, and challenges, their stories and insight reminded me of the heart of the American dream. They personified America, the land of opportunities, and why dwelling in possibility was both painful and hopeful. Their commitment to success was everlasting, and their strength and resilience were inspiring. I implore us to channel that same commitment, strength, and resilience into our own work towards bettering our institutions and our world. So that they too can belong.

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APPENDIX A

FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interview will begin with demographic questions, including:

1. Could you share with me about yourself?
    a. Prompts:
        i. How old are you?
        ii. What is your academic year?
        iii. What is your major?
        iv. What is your gender?
        v. What is your race and/or ethnicity?
        vi. Are you the first in your family to attend college in the U.S.?

General interview questions will include:

1. Tell me about your journey to attending college.
    a. Prompts
        i. How old were you when you learned about your undocumented status?
        ii. Why did you want to go to college?
        iii. Why did you choose this institution to attend college?
2. Tell me about your experience in college as an undocumented student.
3. What does ‘belonging’ mean to you?
4. Tell me a story about when you felt like you did belong on campus.

a. Prompts

i. What or who has contributed to this feeling?

5. Tell me a story about when you felt like you did not belong on campus.

a. Prompts

i. What or who has contributed to this feeling?

6. Are there any spaces on campus that get support from as an undocumented student?

a. Prompts

i. Student organizations/groups

ii. Offices/Departments

iii. Physical spaces on campus

Interaction interview questions will include:

1. As an undocumented student, could you tell me up to three stories about an interaction with a faculty or staff member that stand out to you.

a. Prompts

i. What happened during the experience?

ii. Why was it significant for you?

iii. How did this experience affect you?

1. How did this interaction make you feel?

2. Did this experience change future interactions?

3. How did this experience influence your sense of belonging, if at all?

iv. Are there any other positive/negative interactions with faculty or staff you want to share?

2. As an undocumented student, could you tell me up to three stories about an interaction with a student that stand out to you.
    a. Prompts
        i. What happened during the experience?
        ii. Why was it significant for you?
        iii. How did this experience affect you?
            1. How did this interaction make you feel?
            2. Did this experience change future interactions?
            3. How did this experience influence your sense of belonging, if at all?
        iv. Are there any other positive/negative interactions with students you want to share?

Closing questions will include:

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a student at this institution and/or as an undocumented student?

At the end, I will explain the participant-driven drawing prompt:

Take some time to reflect on how you feel connected, significant, valued at your university. Please make a drawing that represents how you feel about your sense of belonging to the university community as an undocumented student. Any material of choice can be used for the drawing. We will discuss the drawing during our second interview.

APPENDIX B

SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The second interview will begin with check-in questions, including:

1. How have you been since our last meeting?
2. Have there been any significant changes for you since then?

Drawing questions will include:

1. Tell me about the drawing you brought with you today?
    a. Prompt
        i. How does this drawing reflect how connected you feel to the university community?
        ii. How does this drawing reflect how disconnected you feel to the university community?
        iii. Is there anything else you would like to share about the drawing?
2. Here is a photo of Dr. Terrell Strayhorn's model for the Sense of Belonging Theory. Please review the model and tell me what you think of the theory.
    a. Does the theory make sense to you?
    b. What are some stories that come to mind when looking at the model?

The rest of the interview will be follow-up questions about experiences shared during the first interview.