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Los Angeles

Navigating Critical Terrain:

The Decision Making Process of Undocumented Latina/o Graduate Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

Argelia Lara

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Navigating Critical Terrain:

The Decision Making Process of Undocumented Latina/o Graduate Students

by

Argelia Lara

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Daniel G. Solórzano, Chair

This qualitative research study examines the experiences of undocumented Latina/o graduate students. Specifically, the study explores how undocumented students have navigated entrance into graduate school and how their immigration status has impacted their educational and occupational aspirations. Utilizing a Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) framework this study challenges forms of racism that exist through immigration policies and laws that limit the opportunities for undocumented students. The study draws on a Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model, and argues that undocumented college graduates utilize forms of capital embedded in their culture and communities of support to navigate institutions of education and successfully obtain their degrees. The study employs an oral history methodology with 20 Latina/o students attending the University of California or California State University System at

the time of the study. The study provides insight into the lived experiences of undocumented students and how those experiences inform how they strategize and mobilize key resources in higher education. Additionally, this work has important implications for educational practitioners and policy makers interested in broadening post-baccalaureate access for this student population.

The dissertation of Argelia Lara is approved.

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2014

DEDICATION

Para Analiza y Pedrito.

This degree is for you.

May these stories of hope and sacrifice inspire you

as much as they inspired me.

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- Lara, A., Nava, P.E. (2008). Looking Toward the Future: The Aspirations of Undocumented Migrant Students. Presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, New York, New York.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

As an undergraduate student, I first learned about many of the hardships undocumented students encountered due to their illegal status. In 1998, as a junior in college, I enrolled in a Chicano Studies course where we critically examined the experiences of Chicanas/os¹ and Latinas/os² in the educational system. For the final project, we identified a problem in our community and created a video. As a group, we decided to examine a personal issue experienced by one of our classmates. Ana was a first generation college student who struggled to convince her father to allow her to attend the university and, ultimately, enrolled without his blessing. As we shared her issue with the rest of the class, Ana ran out of the classroom crying. Being at the university without her father's approval and support was one of the most difficult issues with which she had to deal. Several years later at our graduation ceremony, I learned that coupled with her father's disapproval of attending the university, Ana was also an undocumented³ student.

After discovering Ana's story, I learned of other friends and classmates who were undocumented as well. As a teacher assistant working for the California Mini-Corp Program⁴, I met Irene, who was a top student in her graduating class, studying to become a teacher, and undocumented. Due to her undocumented status, Irene did not have a driver's license and struggled with transportation to the elementary school site where she worked. Since we were at the same school site, I helped Irene by giving her a ride every morning. After earning her

¹ I define Chicanas/os as people of Mexican origin living in the United States.

² I define Latinas/os as a people of Latin American origin living in the United States (e.g., Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan)

³ Historically and until recently, the State of California barred undocumented students from enrolling in most forms of postsecondary education because of structural barriers. These barriers included charges for out of state or international tuition fees, and not qualifying for most forms of financial aid.

⁴ A California educational program that recruits college students from a rural migrant background to work as teacher assistants in migrant impacted elementary and high schools.

Bachelor's degree and receiving the Dean's Medalist⁵ for the School of Education, Irene enrolled in the teaching credential program where she excelled. At the end of her credential program, Irene was unsure what to do because her undocumented status would not permit her to work as a teacher. In hopes of gaining legalization before the end of the program, she pursued a Master's degree in Counseling. While Irene decided to remain in the United States and continue her education, other undocumented students pursued other paths, including attending graduate school outside of the United States in countries such as Canada and Spain. Others remained in the United States hopeful that someday legislation would create a pathway toward citizenship that would finally reward them for their hard work.

Most undocumented students fortunate to obtain legalization did so with the assistance of an employer or through marriage. For students like Miguel, his sacrifice merited reward as he adjusted his status and obtained legalization through his employment. Due to the low number of Latino/a bilingual math teachers, Miguel's district petitioned for a visa, which eventually led to his legalization. Though I was aware of the issues of citizenship status, I did not recognize the importance of these students' accomplishments until a few years later when I enrolled in a doctoral program.

Problem Statement

Following the November 2008 election of President Barack Obama, the issue of immigration reform⁶ again rose to the forefront of national discourse. While the nation continues to debate the perceived costs and benefits of extending legal rights to undocumented immigrants,

⁵ Dean's Medalist's awards designate the top graduate in each of the eight undergraduate schools and division of student affairs.

⁶ On Thursday April 9, 2009, a headline from *The New York Times* online read, *Obama to Push Immigration Bill as One Priority*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/09/us/politics/09immig.html?hp>

the benefits for undocumented students would be significant. Often, the framing of immigration reform is one that focuses on the ‘immigrant problem’ or places blame on immigrants for the social and economic problems of society. The principle purpose of these popular myths is to frame the discourse of the immigration debate as one in which immigrants take jobs from U.S. citizens, fail to pay taxes, and drain the economy by dependency on school and hospital services (Chomsky, 2007; Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006). This narrow focus entraps the immigration discourse within a framework of illegality and prevents many other important considerations from entering the debate (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006). For instance, a deeper analysis of the immigration problem could account for the role of international trade agreements, such as North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the reasons why people must leave their home countries (Chomsky, 2007). Thus, the focus of immigration as a problem diverts attention away from social structures, cultural values, and racist beliefs and actions that marginalize and exploit immigrants.

Researchers Huntington (2004) and Hanson (2003) claimed that immigrants were unwilling to assimilate and were over-running the country. Under closer examination, their arguments have little credibility. For example, in 2005, there were approximately 37 million foreign-born residents in the United States. Of those 37 million, 11.5 were naturalized citizens, 10.5 were legal permanent residents, 11.1 were unauthorized immigrants, 2.6 million were refugees, and 1.3 million were temporary legal residents holding a visa (Chomsky, 2007). Of the total number of unauthorized immigrants (11.1), 6.2 million were from Mexico, 2.5 million were from elsewhere in Latin America, 1.5 million were from Asia, 600,000 were from Europe and Canada, and 400,000 were from Africa (Chomsky, 2007). It is important to note that often

persons consider immigration as a ‘Mexican problem’, overlooking the reality that immigrants come from other countries, such as Canada and those in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

While the myths and negative perceptions of immigrants affect the overall immigrant population, they gravely impact the education and lives of undocumented students. In one of the first studies of its kind, Abrego (2006) found Latina/o undocumented students disengaged and discouraged from pursuing higher education because of the perceived barriers they would encounter in college. For these students in particular, legalization would provide a more realistic possibility of attaining a degree and increasing the likelihood of becoming educated members of society.

In 2008, estimates pointed to 1.8 million undocumented immigrant children in the United States (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). The Urban Institute of the National Immigration Law Center estimated that, every year, 65,000 undocumented immigrant students graduated from U.S. high schools (Passel, 2003; Protopsaltis, 2005). Of that number, approximately 7,000 to 13,000 (10-20%) undocumented immigrant students enroll in public colleges and universities annually (Passel, 2003). It is difficult to determine the exact number of undocumented students in higher education because some students feel that revealing their status will put them at risk of deportation (Biswas, 2005). A report by *The Urban Institute* (2007) estimated that 12% of undocumented immigrants in California had at least a bachelor’s degree compared to 28% of legal immigrants and 34% of US citizens with a degree. In Los Angeles County, the numbers were similar, with an estimate of 8% of undocumented immigrants, 25% of legal immigrants, and 36% of US citizens with at least a bachelor’s degree. While these demographics point to overall estimates and general educational attainment trends for

immigrants and citizen groups, no disaggregated data was available about the specific numbers of racial and ethnic groups.

The most pressing issues undocumented students face are federal and state policies that prohibit them from receiving state and federal financial aid (Duron, 1995). Consequently, due to the high and increasing costs for tuition at many four-year universities, most undocumented students must attend community colleges where costs are lower (Abrego, 2006; Oliverez, 2006). Similar to undocumented children, undocumented college students live in fear of deportation and have concerns about their prospects of finding legal employment once they graduate (Drachman, 2006; Oliverez, 2006; Perez-Huber & Malagon, 2007).

In the recent past, the few existing sources examining undocumented students in higher education tended to be either policy briefs or reports (Protopsaltis, 2005; UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008) or articles from popular media sources. These works generally provided student stories focusing on the barriers and struggles that undocumented students encounter in their secondary or post-secondary education. However, more current research examined the experiences of undocumented students at different points in the educational pipeline (Perez Huber, Malagon, & Solórzano, 2009). Several studies focused on legislation that impacted the financial opportunities of undocumented students (Flores, 2010; Guarneros, Bendezu, Perez Huber, Velez, & Solórzano, 2009; Olivas, 2009). At the time of this study, no large scale research existed on the graduation outcomes for undocumented students and few studies explored what happened to them after they graduated from college (Oliverez, 2006; Perez, 2009; UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008). The minimal research available on the experiences of undocumented college graduates reported that, even with baccalaureate and graduate degrees, students were unable to obtain employment and had to

adjust their career plans (Perez, 2009). Although these students excelled in their education and had goals of becoming professional members of society, their legal status was an impediment that kept their goals and dreams from becoming reality.

The current research study examines the experiences of undocumented students with earned baccalaureate degrees from institutions of higher education as they navigate entrance to graduate school. Having a clearer understanding of the experiences of undocumented graduate students may create a counter discourse that can illuminate the talent lost by not creating greater career and academic pathways for these students. The following research questions will guide this study:

Research Questions

RQ1. How do undocumented Latina/o graduate students reach a decision to attend graduate school?

Rationale: In order to understand the post-baccalaureate experiences of undocumented students, it is important to examine the barriers and opportunities these students encounter as undergraduates. Moreover, it is important to learn about the strategies they utilized to overcome those obstacles because the barriers might reappear in graduate school or when they enter the work force.

RQ2. How do undocumented students navigate the post-baccalaureate portion of the educational pipeline?

Rationale: As undocumented students complete their baccalaureate degrees, it is important to understand their goals and plans for their future in the context of limited future opportunities. Furthermore, it is important to learn about their current and prior aspirations and how those aspirations have changed due to the reality of their immigration status. This question addresses the way in which undocumented students fulfill their post-baccalaureate educational aspirations.

Moreover, it identifies the barriers encountered and strategies used by students to enter graduate school and navigate the schooling process.

Summary

The following chapter provides an overview of the current literature explaining the research areas of Decision-Making and College Choice Processes, Post-baccalaureate Experiences of Latinas/os, and Undocumented Students in Higher Education. Chapter 3 discusses the three theoretical frameworks, Critical Race Theory, Latina/o Critical Theory, and Community Cultural Wealth, which inform and explain the experiences of undocumented college graduates. Chapter 4 presents the design of the qualitative dissertation study and a description of the participants. Chapter 5 includes a description of the research participants. Chapter 6 examines the decisions of undocumented Latina/o students to attend graduate school. Chapter 7 investigates the ways in which students navigated their graduate education, summarizes the prior chapters, and offers implications and future research direction for this work.

CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature

In examining the experiences of undocumented Latina/o graduate students, it is important to review previous studies on their undergraduate and graduate educational experiences. This chapter reviews the relevant literature pertaining to the decision-making process of undocumented students to attend graduate school and the sociological research utilized to explain the navigational experiences of immigrant students in U.S. institutions. The literature review will serve as a tool to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do undocumented Latina/o graduate students reach a decision to attend graduate school?

RQ2. How do undocumented students navigate the post-baccalaureate portion of the educational pipeline?

The following areas of research form the literature review: Decision-Making Process, College Choice Processes, Post-baccalaureate Experiences of Latina/o Students, and Undocumented Students in Higher Education.

Decision Making Process

To understand what influences undocumented Latina/o students to pursue graduate education, it is important to examine what influences any student to attend graduate school. Several studies documented the initial decision of students to attend graduate school (Baird, 1976; Ethnington & Smart, 1986; Goldberg & Koenigsknecht, 1985; Malaney & Isaac, 1988). These studies found students with greater academic achievement, higher socioeconomic status, and better academic and social integration at their undergraduate institution were more likely to pursue graduate studies. The researchers also reported that men were more likely than women to continue their studies after completing a baccalaureate degree.

Malaney (1987) investigated the common reasons why students pursued graduate studies and found they desired to learn more about a specialty, sought personal satisfaction, had interest in improving their job prospects, or needed an advanced degree for progression within their chosen field. Overall, these studies suggested that the same factors, such as the academic reputation of the institution, size and quality of program, price and cost, financial aid, geographic location, contact with faculty, and students' individual characteristics, that influenced their selection of an undergraduate college affected graduate student decisions (Kallio, 1995). Most of the research available on the decision-making process of graduate students related to the college choice process. The decision making process best fits the early stage or pre-disposition of the college choice process when a student decides whether to attend graduate school. The current study highlights the factors that influence or impact the decisions to attend graduate school of undocumented Latina/o students. The existing literature focusing on the enrollment decision process of undocumented Latina/o students was very limited, and no studies to date examined the factors shaping Latina/os in general or undocumented students graduate school matriculation decisions. The next section features studies that address the College Choice Process.

College Choice Process

The college choice literature repeatedly forms the study foundation for the way in which high school and college students select an institution to attend. This section introduces the college choice model originating in 1987, followed by a discussion on college choice for Latinos/as. It also addresses research models incorporating the experiences of Latino/a graduate students and undocumented students.

One can examine the college choice process through three analytical categories: social psychological studies, economic studies, and sociological status attainment studies (McDonough,

1997). The college choice process is “a complex multistage process which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training” (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989, p. 234). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) described college choice through three critical phases: a) predisposition, when a student makes the decision to attend a postsecondary institution; b) search, when a student investigates institutions and programs; and c) choice, when the student completes college applications and selects a particular institution.

The literature on college choice focused on high school and undergraduate students and found that institutional characteristics, such as special academic programs, tuition and costs, financial aid availability, academic reputation, location, size, and social atmosphere, influenced student selections of postsecondary institutions (Hossler, Braxton, & Coppersmith, 1989). The model also explored the way in which outside factors, such as parents and socioeconomic status, influenced the individual decisions. However, when taking race and ethnicity into account, the importance of these attributes varied. Therefore, it is important to note that, when selecting an institution, not all individuals have access to the same resources; race, socioeconomic status, and gender tend to influence access to resources and the college choice decisions of students (McDonough, 1997; McDonough, Nunez, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2003, 2004). Thus, it is critical that research includes the experiences of students of color, specifically on the ways in which students chose institutions of higher education. The next section covers research studies that focus on the Latino/a college choice process.

Latino/a College Choice

Research on the college choice process noted that Latina/o students were the least likely to enroll in college immediately after high school (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997). Given this research, it is important to understand what influences Latina/o students to continue their education and what factors inform their college choices and institutions. In their research Perez and McDonough (2008) incorporated the experiences of Latina/o students' deciding to attend and selecting a college. They found first generation Latina/o students relied heavily on support from siblings, peers, and relatives. Parents played a critical role in encouraging their children to pursue a postsecondary education (Gandara, 1995). In her study, Gandara reported that Latina/o parents motivated their children to work hard and do well in school in order to have better lives than their parents.

In addition, research found that, compared to Caucasian students, Latina/o students had stronger inclinations to live close to home (Desmond & Lopez-Turley, 2009). Latinas/os students were more likely to attend community colleges and less likely to attend the postsecondary institution of their first choice (Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008; Kim, 2004). According to Person and Rosenbaum (2006), Latinas/os usually noted their family and friends as the primary reason for enrolling in a particular institution because family and friends served as the primary social connections that provided information about the institution.

Gender also influenced the type of postsecondary institution selected by Latina students. For example, Latina students tended to chose colleges and institutions closer to home to help support their families (Ceja, 2004). Ceja (2001) reported parents inculcated messages to their daughters about valuing education. These messages endorsed the family's social struggles, establishing what Gandara (1995) referred to as a culture of possibility. A qualitative study by Ceja (2006) noted that first generation low-income Chicanas lacked access to college

information, resources, and networks within their home environment. As a result, they felt alone but also exercised agency by soliciting the assistance of older family members.

Overall, the existing literature provided some understanding of the challenges and opportunities available to Latino/a high school and college students as they navigated the college choice process. McDonough, Nunez, Ceja, and Solórzano (2004) suggested a need for more research on the role of social networks of peers and information networks within Latino college choice. Indeed, there remains gap in the literature that addresses the way in which Latino/a undocumented graduate students navigate through the graduate school process. While most studies on college choice focused on high school and community college students, the next section provides an overview of research that underlines the importance of the graduate school choice.

Graduate School Choice

Similar to the college choice process for high school students, the “Graduate School Choice is a complex, multistage process during which an individual decides to continue her or his formal education beyond the baccalaureate degree” (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, pg.234). This process ultimately finalizes with their decision to enroll in a specific graduate institution and graduate program. The graduate school choice process contains five phases (Millet, 2000). Phase One, the disposition phase, takes place during the sophomore and junior year when a student begins to develop aspirations for post-baccalaureate education. During Phase Two, the search phase, a student turns those aspirations into the process of searching for and evaluating graduate schools. This phase usually takes place during the junior year and summer before the senior year. The third phase, choice and application, takes place during the fall of then senior year and entails thinking about the school the student would like to attend. The fourth phase, the

decision phase, is during the spring of senior year when the student needs to select a school. Finally, the fifth phase, moving and enrollment, occurs during the summer and fall after graduation (Millet, 2000). The college choice process is complex procedure and it is important to examine the way in which it applies to diverse populations.

A few studies examined graduate students' college choice (Barr, Wanat, & Gonzalez, 2007; Kallio, 1995; Poock & Love, 2001). The influences in college choice were similar to those for undergraduates and consisted of program reputation, location, financial aid, characteristics of the graduate program, quality of faculty, and input from spouse or partner. However, depending on the student's age, enrollment status, gender, race, and ethnicity, the importance of the variables differed (Poock & Love, 2001). Research compared younger students' decisions to those of older students and found older students placed greater weight on institution that were closer to home and offered part-time programs (Poock & Love, 2001). In addition, race, ethnicity, and gender seemed to mediate graduate student college choice and students were more likely influenced by campus racial climate, financial considerations, and reputation of the graduate program (Poock 1999). Most studies on the undergraduate and graduate school choice tended to be quantitative; however, a few recent studies stressed the importance of qualitative research in understanding this phenomenon. The next section details the few studies incorporating graduate school choice and the experiences of Latino/a graduate students.

College Choice and Latino/a Graduate Students

More recent research emphasized the college choice experiences of Latina/o graduate students. Ramirez (2011) examined the application and college choice process graduate students underwent to attain a graduate education. She highlighted the barriers that Latino/a students

encountered during the application process. The barriers consisted of lack of knowledge about the way in which to apply to graduate school, lack of guidance and support, and institutional abuse. Sources of support consisted of participating in research programs and receiving guidance from institutional agents. In another study, Ramirez (2013) examined the graduate school choice process for Latino/a graduate students. She found five major factors that Latina/o students identified as reasons for enrolling in a doctoral program. The five factors consisted of a desire to stay close to home or to study with certain faculty as well as financial considerations, campus climate concerns, and circumscribed choice. While few studies examined the college choice process for Latino/a graduate students, even fewer studies explored the college choice process for undocumented Latino/a graduate students. However, one study in particular highlighted the college choice process for undocumented Latino/a high school students (Perez, 2008). Perez found that students decided to attend certain institutions due to the location and distance from home, the affordability of the institution, and encouragement from supportive relationships with parents, friends, and school personnel. Due to the monetary barriers undocumented students encountered, students were more likely to enroll in community college as their first postsecondary experience (Gonzalez, 2007).

While some studies looked at race and gender, none focused on the decision making process and navigational experiences of undocumented Latino/a graduate students. In order to fill this gap in the literature, the central focus of the current research is on the decision making process of undocumented Latino/a student in navigating their graduate education. The next section reviews the related literature that addresses the experiences of Latina/o college graduates.

Post-Baccalaureate Experiences of Latina/o Students

Along the educational pipeline, Latina/o students are far less likely than African Americans, Caucasians, or Asians to graduate from high school, go to college, and earn a degree (Contreras & Gandara, 2006). Of one hundred Latina/o elementary students, about half will graduate from high school (54 females/51 males), and only about ten females and eleven males will attain a bachelor's degree. According to Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, and Solórzano (2006), only 2% would receive a graduate degree, and less than 1% would complete a doctoral program.

Data from the 2009 Current Population Survey demonstrated that graduation rates increased minimally for Latinas/os. Although the number of Latinas/os graduating from high school and college minimally increased, graduating with post-baccalaureate degrees remained stagnant. Non-citizen Latinas/os fared even less well in obtaining an education at all points in the educational pipeline. The chart below demonstrates the number of all Latinas/os and non-citizen Latinas/os and their educational outcomes at all levels in the educational system. Of one hundred non-citizen Latinas/os that begin school, only 47 will graduate from high school and only five of those will earn a bachelor's degree. The numbers for post-baccalaureate education are even lower with 0.7 obtaining a graduate or professional degree and none earning a doctorate.

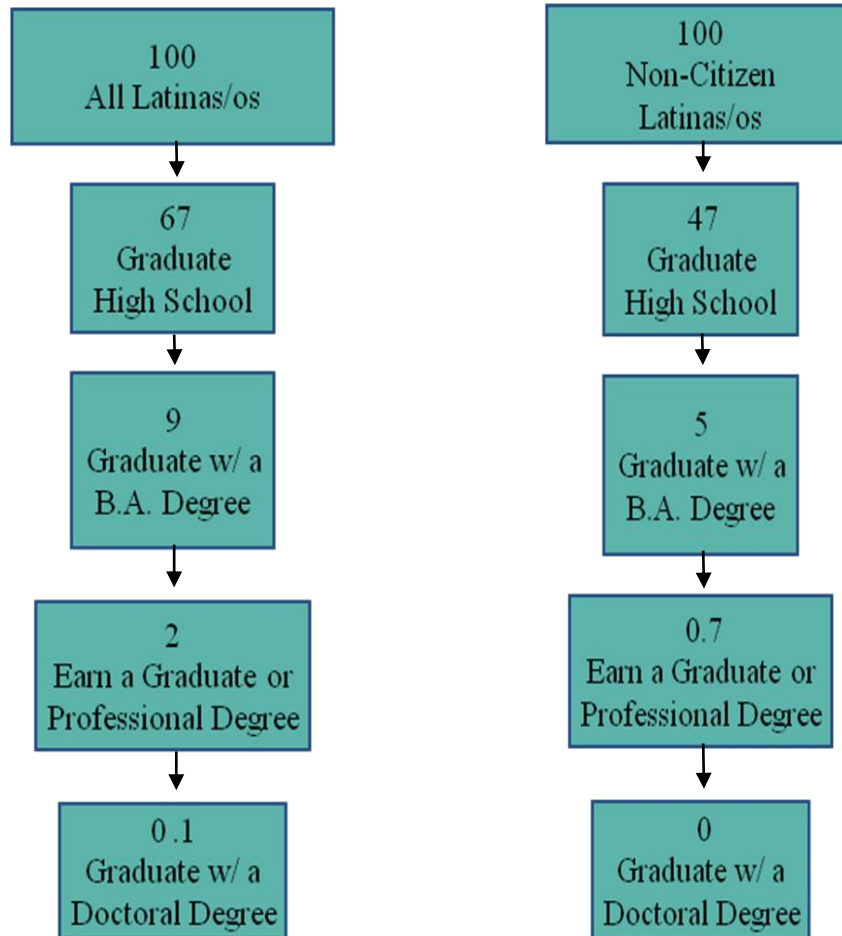


Figure 1. Latina/o immigrant educational pipeline, 2009 (Current Population Survey, 2009, March).

The majority of research available on the post-baccalaureate experiences of Latinas/os consists of Chicanas in doctoral programs (Cuadraz, 1993; Gandara, 1982, 1994, 1995; Morales, 1990; Solórzano, 1993, 1998) and autobiographical accounts of Latinas/os in the professorate (Cantu, 2006; Padilla & Chavez, 1995). Research examining the experiences of Chicana/o students in doctoral programs originated with the work of Gandara (1982, 1994, 1995). Her findings revealed that Chicana/o students found emotional support, particularly from their mothers, along with attending highly integrated schools to be of critical importance. Similarly, Cuadraz (1993) focused on the experiences of Chicana/o students in doctoral programs,

principally concentrating on students who had either graduated or pushed out of doctoral programs. She found Chicanas marginalized because of their race, class, and gender.

Other scholars that investigated the experiences of Latinas/os enrolled in or graduated from doctoral programs included Morales (1988), Achor & Morales (1990), and Solórzano (1993, 1998). In her study, Morales revealed critical strategies of resistance used by students to overcome institutional barriers. Morales found that “students frequently challenged and rejected any underlying message of their unworthiness” (p. 137). Solórzano’s (1993, 1998) works found the devastation that racism and sexism created in the process of obtaining a doctoral degree. Throughout their doctoral programs, Chicana/o students felt isolated in the academy, perceived their professors had lower expectations of them, and experienced marginalizing racial and gender incidents (Solórzano, 1998).

In an earlier study, Solórzano (1993) explored the resources, barriers, and critical events for Chicana/o students in doctoral programs. In comparing females to males, Solórzano found Chicanas encountered greater levels of discrimination at all points in the pipeline. Barriers encountered by Chicana/o students consisted of overcoming a lack of preparation skills, lack of financial support, and lack of information to pursue graduate school. Their reasons to attend graduate school consisted of interest in contributing to the field and toward the advancement of minorities and women. Additionally, desiring occupational mobility and personal intellectual growth were influences on their decisions (Solórzano, 1993).

According to Watford et al. (2006), some of the challenges for Chicana students in pursuit of a doctoral degree consisted of feelings of marginality, lack of mentorship, lack of funding, and familial responsibilities. The study concluded that, despite increases in the number of Chicana/Latinas doctorates, they had underrepresentation in fields like the sciences and

engineering and marginalization in doctoral production. Much of the research conducted on Chicanas/os in post-baccalaureate education described experiences, barriers, or environmental pressures (Torres, 2006).

Another body of literature that aids understanding of the baccalaureate experiences of undocumented college graduates is the personal narratives of Latina/o professors. Latina/os in the professorate continue to experience racism and marginality because they are often the only professors of color in their departments (Padilla & Chavez, 1995). Similarly, Chicanas have very low representation in the fields of science, math, and engineering (Cantu, 2008).

The post-baccalaureate experiences of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os might explain some of the barriers and challenges for Latina/o undocumented college graduates: however, lack of documentation creates even greater difficulties in pursuing a graduate education or obtaining a job. This literature review and the current study may support the need to provide legalization for undocumented college graduates and increase the numbers of persons of color in underrepresented careers. The next section borrows from research on undocumented high school and college students to attempt understanding of undocumented college graduates.

Undocumented Students in Higher Education

Historically, undocumented students struggled against discriminatory federal and state policies that impeded continuing their education (Oliverez, 2006; Perez-Huber & Malagon, 2007; Santos, 2006). Since 1974, several critical court cases provided undocumented students with the opportunity to obtain an education. For example, *The Uniform Residency Law*, a California law that lasted from 1974-1980 allowed long-term California residents to pay in-state tuition at all public colleges and universities (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008). However, once the law expired, undocumented students had to pay out-of-state tuition from 1980 to 1986. One of the most important cases to address the educational rights of undocumented students was *Plyler v. Doe* (457 U.S. 202, 1982), which held that

undocumented students had protection under the fourteenth amendment of the United States Constitution and states could not deny them the opportunity to obtain an education. The court's decision overruled a Texas law that argued the state could withhold funds to educate persons not legally admitted to the United States. *Plyler v. Doe* overturned the Texas law, arguing that the law was discriminatory towards children. In other words, the Texas law punished children for the actions of their parents, something over which the children had no control. Justice William Brennan highlighted the importance of an education for undocumented students. He stated,

[E]ducation provides the basic tools by which individuals might lead economically productive lives to the benefit of us all. In sum, education has a fundamental role in maintaining the fabric of our society. We cannot ignore the significant social costs borne by our Nation when select groups are denied the means to absorb values and skills upon which our societal order rests. (*Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 1982)

In part, lawmakers based the majority decision on the fear that denying the students an opportunity for an education could lead them to form a subclass of undereducated individuals and add to the crime and poverty in the country (Salinas, 2006). The case was key in pushing the right of undocumented students to receive an elementary and high school education. However, the *Plyler* decision did not include opportunities to attend institutions of higher education for undocumented students.

In 1985, the case of *Leticia A. v. UC Regents and CSU Board of Trustees* supported the rights of undocumented college students to pay in-state tuition. In this case, the court ruled that the university should treat undocumented students as California residents and that students meeting the residency requirements of one year and one day qualified to pay in state-tuition and were eligible for state financial aid, such as Cal Grants (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008). However, in 1990 the case of *Bradford v. UC Regents* overturned the previous ruling and undocumented students were again charged out-of-state tuition and lost all eligibility to receive financial aid (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008). It

would be another decade before an additional attempt would create college affordability for undocumented students in California.

In 2001, Assemblyman Marco Antonio Firebaugh helped pass the California Legislature Assembly Bill 540⁷ (AB540) that granted undocumented students the opportunity to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities. For eligibility purposes, AB540 required students to be graduates of a California high school, to have attended a California high school for at least three years, and to secure current enrollment in a California Community College, California State University, or a University of California (Santos, 2006). While AB540 was beneficial for undocumented students, the cost of tuition and room and board impeded many students from attending state universities and led many of those that did enroll to leave the university (Santos, 2006). In 2005, the court case *Martinez v. Regents of the University of California* challenged AB540. A group of forty-two U.S. citizen students, declared ineligible for AB540, filed a class-action lawsuit against the University of California, California State University, and the Community College systems. The plaintiffs argued that AB540 violated the federal law because it could not provide undocumented students with tuition and residency benefits unless a citizen or national of the United States was also eligible for such benefits. AB540 continued to be active until the hearing for *Martinez v. Regents of the University of California* finalized.

According to the 2006 *University of California Office of the President Annual Report*, most AB540 students were U.S. citizens, permanent residents, or held visas. Among potentially undocumented undergraduate students, Latinas/os represented the largest group (45-52%), followed by Asians (40-44%) (UCOP, 2006). Among AB540 graduate students, half or more were Caucasian. Unfortunately, many undocumented students were unaware of the existence of

⁷ The first in-state tuition bill passed in Texas, and became the model for the California bill. AB540 granted undocumented students the opportunity to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities.

AB540 and uninformed about the necessary steps required to apply. Additionally, students that applied for admission under the bill were often unsure of when to identify themselves as AB540 because some who disclosed their identity experienced discrimination. For example, at times, employers exploited AB540 students because of their status as undocumented students. Oliverez (2005) added that in-state tuition policies such as AB540 did not go far enough to make college financially accessible for undocumented immigrant students, and attending community college was the most realistic opportunity.

On the other hand, legislation, such as the federal and state Dream (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, had the potential of making a university education affordable for undocumented students. If passed, the California Dream Act⁸ (Senate Bill 160) would allow undocumented students to apply for financial aid, and the federal Dream Act⁹, reintroduced in March 2009, could provide a path to legalization for undocumented students brought to the United States as children or those that graduated from a university (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008). The bills would require undocumented students to be U.S. high school graduates with good moral character, to have arrived in the US as children, and to be in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill's enactment. The bills would afford students temporary residency for a period of six years, wherein they must attend college, earn a two year degree, or serve in the military.

Few studies examined the experiences of undocumented students in high school and their transitions into higher education. One of the greatest obstacles in continuing education for undocumented Latina/os was their ineligibility for financial aid due to their legal status (Oliverez, 2006; Perez-Huber,

⁸ The first California Dream Act was in 2005 but vetoed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger with two subsequent versions of the bill also vetoed (SB1 & SB1301). In March 2009, legislators introduced the latest version (SB160).

⁹ The federal Dream Act is a federal version of the Dream Act. If enacted, it would provide a path to legalization for undocumented students.

Malagon, & Solórzano, 2009; Rangel, 2001). Several studies focused on the importance of not only providing undocumented college students with information and guidance about the college process but also explaining the way in which their legal status could present specific barriers in their pursuit of a higher education (Perez-Huber & Malagon, 2007; Rangel, 2001). Receiving guidance from social support groups, such as organizations, peers, and family members, has been critical in the higher education experiences of undocumented students (Perez-Huber & Malagon, 2007). Other obstacles included being the first in their families to attend college (Oliverrez, 2006) and experiencing forms of discrimination and racism through feelings of fear, criminality, and invisibility (Perez-Huber & Malagon, 2007). In addition, ineligibility for financial aid led to financial concerns and impacted their decision on which universities to attend (Oliverrez, 2006).

UCLA's Center for Labor Research and Education along with several undocumented undergraduate students published an edited book entitled *Underground Undergrads* (2008). In the book, undergraduate and graduate students wrote about their struggles as undocumented students and about the hardships they underwent to obtain a college education. As college students at UCLA, several students indicated they had long hours of commuting and worked multiple jobs in order to attend the university (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008). Added to that, one of the biggest concerns for undocumented college students was the uncertainty of the opportunities available to them after they graduated. As undergraduates, students noted severe limitations in the jobs available to them and many endured low wage employment, i.e., baby sitting, washing dogs, transcribing, because those jobs required no identification (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008).

For undocumented students that graduate, their legal status continues to be a major obstacle in finding employment or attending graduate school (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008). Undocumented college graduates accepted into some of the most

prestigious graduate schools often decline offers because of insufficient fellowships to cover the cost of tuition and living expenses (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008).

Perez (2009) investigated the experiences of undocumented students in the pursuit of an education. His study demonstrated the critical need for this country to create an avenue for highly talented students to gain legalization. By utilizing the stories of undocumented students and comparing them to those students with legalization, Perez shed light on the way in which the nation lost economically by keeping some of its best and brightest members on the margin. This study was of great importance because it specifically focused on different points through the educational pipeline (elementary, high school, community college, university, and college graduates) in the lives of undocumented students. Furthermore, his focus on the experiences of college graduates added to an area of literature about which little was previously available. Despite the study participants' feelings of hopelessness due to the uncertainty of their immigrant status, they persevered and continued with their educational dreams and goals. However, they faced continuous obstacles, such as not qualifying for most forms of financial assistance, encountering difficulties in obtaining employment, and continuously dealing with feelings of isolation. Tragically, even with bachelor's and graduate degrees from some of the most prestigious universities in the country, they were unable to use their degrees to obtain employment. Thus, in some cases, college graduates considered changing careers and pursuing technical and vocational programs to gain more opportunities for employment.

In addition, Perez's study challenged many of the prevalent misconceptions about undocumented immigrants (i.e., that they are criminals or a burden on public services) by closely examining the many unnoticed ways in which students contributed to the betterment of the country (i.e., civic engagement, community service, extra-curricular activities). Despite the

discrimination many of these students encountered from society, they remained committed and dedicated to community service and to helping others. The personal stories highlighted in the study served as a testament to their hard work and dedication towards making the country a better place.

The literature review speaks to the experiences of Latina/o undocumented college graduates. The decision making and college choice literature explains the educational choices of high school and college students. Due to limited research on the experiences of undocumented college graduates, the review borrows from what is available on the post-baccalaureate experiences of Latina/o college graduates and the experiences of undergraduate undocumented students. The current study will address the gap in the literature pertaining to the experiences of Latina/o undocumented college graduates, in particular the way in which they navigate through institutions of higher education to meet their educational goals. The next chapter details the theoretical frameworks utilized to explain the experiences of undocumented college graduates.

CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter covers the theoretical frameworks, Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), Critical Race Theory (CRT), and a Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) Model, utilized to answer the research questions for this study, and to aid understanding of the experiences of Latina/o undocumented graduate students. A Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework unmasks the advantages that Caucasians and documented students largely experience within the educational system and in society. A LatCrit framework sheds light on the experiences of Latina/o undocumented college graduates and provides an analytical lens to challenge forms of racism that exist through immigration policies and laws that restrict their opportunities. Ultimately, this study utilizes a developing conceptual model focused on non-dominant forms of capital that undocumented graduate students utilize to navigate through institutions of higher education.

Romero (2008) addressed the importance of utilizing a CRT approach in immigration studies. According to Romero, much of the previous research conducted on immigration excluded race and featured studies in sociology dominated by theories that perpetuated meritocracy (i.e., assimilation, social mobility). Thus, a CRT and LatCrit framework challenges dominant ideologies of colorblindness and meritocracy and demonstrates the way in which they operate to disadvantage people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Theories like CRT and LatCrit account for race and racism in institutions of education and work towards the elimination of inequality.

A critical understanding of race is necessary if one is to comprehend the way in which racism serves as a form of oppression in the lives of undocumented immigrants and people of color. Most consider race a socially constructed category (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) that also

“signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). Haney Lopez (2000) reminded. “Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions (p. 165). Despite the uncertainties and contradictions, the notion of race continues to play a critical role in “structuring and representing the social world” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 56).

Haney Lopez (2000) noted, “Race dominates our personal lives [to the extent that] contested systems of meaning serve as the connections between physical features, faces, and personal characteristics” (p. 165). Historically then, race emerged as a social structure that provided systemic privileges to those of European origin (those who would become white) over those from non-European (non-white people) origins (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). These racialized social systems” spread around the world, affected all nations that fell under European colonization, and perpetuated white supremacy¹⁰.

Racist ideologies justified and legitimized this social structure or hierarchy of white privilege (Solórzano, 1998). The consequences of racist ideologies is racism, which manifested in African Americans and Latinas/os making up a large percentage of the prison population and the poor, leading shorter lives, receiving worse medical care, completing fewer years of school, and occupying more menial jobs than whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Racism then is “a system of oppression of African Americans and other People of Color by White Europeans and White Americans (Feagin, 2001, p. 3). Building on well established definitions by Lorde (1992),

¹⁰ Definition by Ansley (1997), cited in Leonardo (2004), was “a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of White dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social setting” (p. 595).

Pierce (1975), and Marable (1992), Yosso (2006) defined racism as “(1) a false belief in White supremacy that handicaps society, (2) a system that upholds Whites as superior to all other groups, and (3) the structural subordination of multiple racial and ethnic groups” (p. 5).

People of color were always aware of embedded racism in educational institutions, such as public schools and universities, where dominant groups set certain criteria to limit the entrance of ‘the other’ into the institutions. These acts of white supremacy afforded whites the opportunities to attend the best schools and gain the highest quality education under the guise of meritocracy and fairness (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In the past, white supremacy was overt and explicit through Jim Crow laws and strict racial covenants in the form of legal racial segregation. Today, these racial covenants are covert but still exist in cities and towns where whites and people of color separate by physical markers, such as railroad tracks and highways (Avila, 1998). The landmark case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* exemplified the difficulties in attempting to eradicate racial segregation without first addressing the root causes of race and racism through white supremacy, as highlighted by Judge Robert Carter¹¹ (Brown, Currie, Duster, & Oppenheimer, 2003).

The challenge for today’s critical race scholars is to counter the dominant racial frames of color blind racism effectively (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) and racist nativism¹² (Johnson, 2002; Perez, Huber et al., 2008;). By definition, critical race theorists in education need to challenge the ‘dominant’ ideology of these forms of racism if they are to have a serious commitment to social justice in the work.

¹¹ Judge Robert L. Carter argued the *Brown v. Board* case along with Thurgood Marshall. He stated, “It was not until Brown I was decided that blacks were able to understand that the fundamental vice was not legally enforced racial segregation itself; that this was a mere by-product, a symptom of the greater and more pernicious disease—White supremacy (cited in Brown et al., 2003).

¹² See Perez, Huber et al., 2008. Racist nativism is the assigning of values to real or imagined differences to justify the superiority of the native, perceived white, over that of the non-native, perceived to be a person or and immigrant of color, and thereby defend the right of whites or natives to dominance.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory dates back to the early 1970s and emerged from dissatisfaction with the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement because of its failure to address race and racism, and because of restrictive strategies for social transformation (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). In particular, scholars posited that CLS did not address the lived experiences and histories of people of color (Yosso, 2006). As a result, a number of activists and scholars, such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, developed an interest in “studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2) and were determined to explore such dynamics in other disciplines outside of law. Over the years, CRT was also expanded to incorporate the racialized experiences of Latinas/os, women, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, and ultimately leading to branches such as Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), Feminist Critical Theory (FemCrit), Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit), Tribal Critical Theory (TribalCrit), to address each groups’ unique differences and experiences (Yosso, 2005). CRT is interdisciplinary and draws from a variety of fields, such as sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women studies.

In 1995, Tate and Ladson-Billings applied CRT to the field of education. Critical race theorists in education have studied issues such as campus racial climate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), access to higher education (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), and resistance and education (Delgado Bernal & Solórzano, 2002). Solórzano (2002) defined CRT as “an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation” (pg. 595). His work in the field of education has been particularly powerful through developing new frameworks to capture the ways students of color experience racism in education (Solórzano 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Solórzano (1998) asserts that CRT “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 122). For instance, CRT in education could reveal the racial aspects of educational policies, such as academic tracking, No Child Left Behind, and high stakes testing masked as color-blind ideology. Critical Race Theory Framework in education consists of five tenets that include: a) The Centrality of Race and Racism and their Intersectionality with other forms of Subordination; b) The Challenge to Dominant Ideology; c) The Commitment to Social Justice; d) The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge; and e) An Interdisciplinary Perspective. In the section that follows, a discussion is presented that applies the five tenets that encompass CRT to the unique experiences of undocumented college graduates.

The centrality of race and racism. CRT in education holds that race and racism are endemic, permanent, and central in explaining characteristics of American society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). There is also recognition that “race and racism are imbedded in the structures, practices, and discourses that guide the daily practices of universities” (Solórzano et al., 2005, p. 274). A central feature of this discussion examines the “intersection of race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, and sexuality” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 472) in order to illuminate the theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical questions related to the educational experiences of Latina/o undocumented college graduates. Furthermore, CRT sheds light on the adverse conditions that undocumented college graduates encounter due to their race and immigration status.

The challenge to dominant ideology. A CRT framework challenges the dominant ideologies of meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Yosso, 2006).

Thus, a CRT framework can uncover the inequalities that undocumented Latina/o students experience due to their immigration status. More specifically, CRT challenges forms of racism, such as racist nativism, and many of the pervasive misconceptions about immigrants that blame them for the social and economic problems of society. Undocumented immigrants are often portrayed as being on welfare and a burden on the economy, when, in reality, undocumented immigrants are more likely to participate in the labor force (93%) when compared to legal immigrants (82%) and U.S. born people (82%) (Passel, 2006).

The commitment to social justice. CRT commits to social justice by working towards the elimination of racial, gender, linguistic, and class subordination (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). By utilizing CRT as a theoretical framework, the current study highlights the importance of access to higher education and, more importantly, obtaining legalization for undocumented college graduates. It is an expectation that institutions and individuals strive to achieve educational equality for all students (Villalpando, 2004).

The centrality of experiential knowledge. The stories and narratives of people of color have often been non-dominant ways of conducting research. However, the experiences of people of color are legitimate and appropriate when learning about their subordination and marginalized experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). For Latinas/os, the application of a CRT framework centralizes student experiences and views them as assets. Thus, the educational experiences of undocumented college students are a valid form of learning about their encounters with racist nativism, forms of colorblind racism, and feelings of isolation due to their immigration status.

The transdisciplinary perspective. This tenet “challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses, and insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both a historical and contemporary context” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 473).

CRT in education draws from a knowledge base in sociology, history, ethnic studies, law, and women's studies. Situating the experiences of undocumented college graduates in a historical perspective reveals the privilege of European and lighter skinned people. In addition, a transdisciplinary perspective reveals a richer and more complex portrait of the ways in which undocumented students navigate institutions of higher education. The five tenets of CRT are also consistent with Latina/o Critical Theory because both frameworks strive towards equality and transformation for people of color.

Latina/o Critical Theory

Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) can address the specific dilemmas concerning the education of Latina/o undocumented students. LatCrit evolved as a branch of Critical Race Theory (CRT) due to critiques by Latino scholars that CRT did not fully address issues in the Latina/o community. LatCrit posits the same tenets and underpinnings of CRT but focuses more specifically on the experiences and realities of Latinas/os. By moving away from a black/white binary often present in CRT, a LatCrit framework can analyze issues more pertinent to the Latina/o population, such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Villalpando, 2004). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2001), a LatCrit framework more appropriately addressed the intersecting issues of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other forms of oppression in the Latina/o community.

Recognizing some of the challenges and limitation in the field, Johnson (2002) called for his CRT colleagues to “come to grips with the challenges posed by the international complexities of racial subordination” (p. 187). He drew attention to the xenophobia of many Americans that resulted in the racializing of foreign peoples. Members of the host society often legitimize anti-immigrant sentiment manifested through ‘racist nativism’ or ‘nativist racism’ through

attacks on “non citizens of color as the ‘aliens lack rights under the law’” (p. 188). Furthermore, Johnson argued that “racially exclusionary immigration laws reinforce the subordination of domestic minority groups [and] helps maintain white privilege in the United States” (p. 192). Similarly, Perez Huber, Benavidez Lopes, Malagon, Velez, and Solórzano (2008) argued for the need to advance Critical Race Theory beyond a race-class-gender paradigm to address the experiences of Latina/o undocumented communities. In effect, they utilized a LatCrit framework to challenge the dominant paradigms of immigration discourse rooted in white supremacy.

Moreover, Romero (2008) addressed the importance of utilizing a Critical Race lens when examining immigration issues and urged scholars to move away from using theories of assimilation. She explained, “A focus on assimilation conceals White Privilege and frames research questions away from examining racial, economic, and political privilege among Whites, ethnic Americans, and native and foreign groups of color” (p. 25). The challenge for a LatCrit theory of immigration then is to see how contesting racially unjust laws for undocumented communities of color can result in fairer and more racially just treatment for both undocumented and documented persons of color.

Figure 2 illustrates the overarching lens of CRT and LatCrit that will aid this study in examining models of decision making and college choice traditionally used to examine students’ preferences in prior studies. Cultural and social capital have been popular explanatory lenses to examine the decisions and college choices of students.

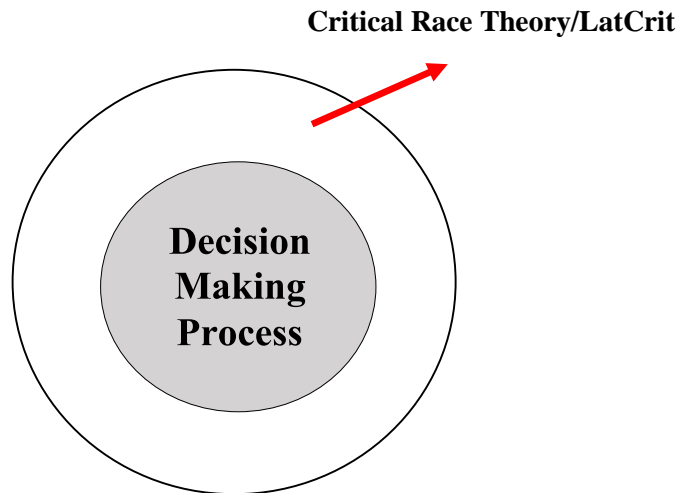


Figure 2. Visual of decision making process within Critical Race Theory/LatCrit.

Community Cultural Wealth Model

An emerging theoretical framework illuminating the forms of capital from which undocumented students draw is the Community Cultural Wealth Model. Yosso (2005) defined Community Cultural Wealth as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). Past theories served to explain the subordinate position of communities of color. She argued that scholars using Bourdieu’s (1977) social and cultural reproduction theories in particular often overlooked the capital that communities of color bring with them, as follows:

A traditional view of cultural capital is narrowly defined by White, middle class values, and is more limited than wealth—one’s accumulated assets and resources. Centering the research lens on the experiences of People of Color in a critical historical context reveals accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of Communities of Color. (p. 77)

Yosso (2005) expanded these definitions and utilized CRT to center them on the experiences of people of color. Yosso, in effect, called on social scientists to develop and utilize critical

methodologies based on theoretical orientations that could capture the complexities existing within subordinated communities of color. When examining the higher education experiences of undocumented students, researchers may need to interrogate conventional methodologies and theoretical frameworks. If undocumented students of color are to succeed academically and make it through the educational system, then educators and researchers must have proper training in methods to create policies that will support their success.

In order to understand the different forms of cultural capital that undocumented students possess and utilize in their undergraduate and post-baccalaureate education, the current study draws on a Community Cultural Wealth framework. According to Yosso (2005), Community Cultural Wealth comprised six forms of cultural capital: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital. Traditionally, some researchers and educators have not recognized these forms of cultural capital as assets in the educational attainment of students of color. A Community Cultural Wealth model acknowledges the importance that these forms of capital play in the lives of people of color. The next section defines each type of capital and provides examples of the way in which they apply to undocumented college graduates.

Aspirational capital. Aspirational capital “refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). For undocumented college graduates, this type of capital can explain their determination to pursue higher education despite the challenges and obstacles they encounter because of their undocumented status. Some of the challenges and obstacles undocumented students experience include not having money to pay tuition, holding multiple jobs, not having enough time to study, not having transportation to get to and from school and work, and not being able to obtain a well paying job. Despite these obstacles, students remain resilient and persistent in achieving their dreams (Lara & Nava, 2008).

Linguistic capital. This capital “includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). This type of capital might benefit undocumented students with bilingual skills, providing them with more opportunities to network with different communities and leading them to gain assets such as employment. This form of capital is especially significant for bilingual Latina/o undocumented students living in California where a large percentage of the population speaks Spanish.

Familial capital. The support students receive from family refers to “those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). The emotional and financial support from family members may be significant to undocumented students because many of them may depend on their parents and other family members financially. Due to fear of deportation, undocumented students are not open about their undocumented status and may only be able to speak about it with family and friends. According to Lara and Nava (2008), family was also a form of support and motivation for students to continue with their studies because many of them wanted to make their parents proud and to take advantage of the educational opportunities their parents never had. The continuation or completion of their studies serves as a reward for the sacrifices of their parents and family. In addition the lessons of *consejos* taught by their parents might serve as guidance as they navigate institutions of higher education (Ceja, 2004; Lopez, 2001).

Social capital. Social capital includes “networks of people and community resources” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) that undocumented students utilize for support. Some of these forms of social capital may be campus student groups or programs that assist them in the pursuit of their education. Moreover, individuals who advocate and support legislative acts such as the Dream

Act and AB540 work to provide community resources for undocumented students. Through these networks, undocumented students may learn how to navigate the institution and become members of a community that shares similar experiences. These support groups are critical sources of information and navigational capital.

Navigational capital. Navigational capital “refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). This type of capital can explain the way in which undocumented students find the way to attaining their undergraduate degrees. Furthermore, navigational capital assists in providing a clearer understanding of the post-baccalaureate experiences of undocumented students and how they are able to enter graduate school or find employment despite their continued undocumented status. Some of the ways undocumented students learned to navigate the system were by working hard, holding multiple jobs, applying for scholarships and stipends, managing their heavy employment schedule with school, and connecting with individuals and groups that support them (Lara & Nava, 2008).

Resistance capital. This form of capital “refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). This form of capital may explain the ways in which students resist institutional structures. Likewise, it may aid in informing how resistance leads to degree completion despite the limited access to resources in higher education. It is important to understand that there are various forms of resistance and undocumented students may react in different ways. For example, some undocumented students might utilize forms of resistance by being involved in their communities and forming organizations that challenge laws and policies that limited their rights to access higher education.

These six forms of capital identify accumulated assets and resources that undocumented students bring into institutions of higher education. With the help of a Community Cultural Wealth Model, the current study identifies assets and resources that undocumented college graduates utilize in entering graduate school or finding employment.

Figure 3 demonstrates how a CRT/LatCrit Framework and a Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) Model intersect to challenge social mobility and status attainment theories. The circle on the left (Social Mobility/Status Attainment) represents the traditional model that relies on the use of dominant forms of cultural and social capital. A CCW recognizes that these forms of social and cultural capital have narrow definition and accounts for additional resources and assets that the traditional status attainment framework omits. Their experiences of being undocumented deeply affects undocumented students and they want to succeed educationally to improve the situation for other students in similar circumstances.

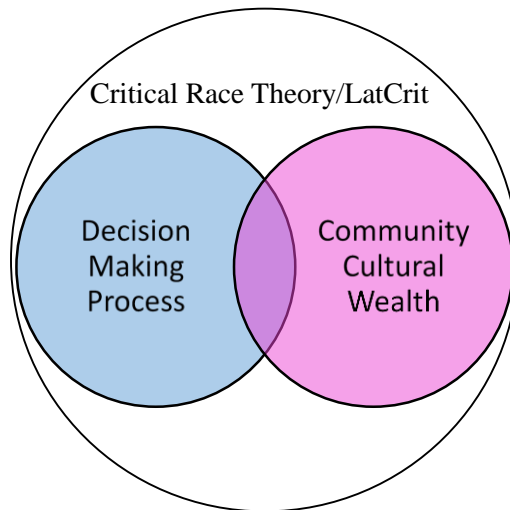


Figure 3. Visual of decision making process and Community Cultural Wealth with Critical Race Theory/Latcrit.

Figure 4 shows where undocumented students would exist between the intersections of social mobility/status attainment and Community Cultural Wealth. CCW demonstrates how undocumented college graduates navigate institutions of higher education and the world of employment through an asset based perspective.

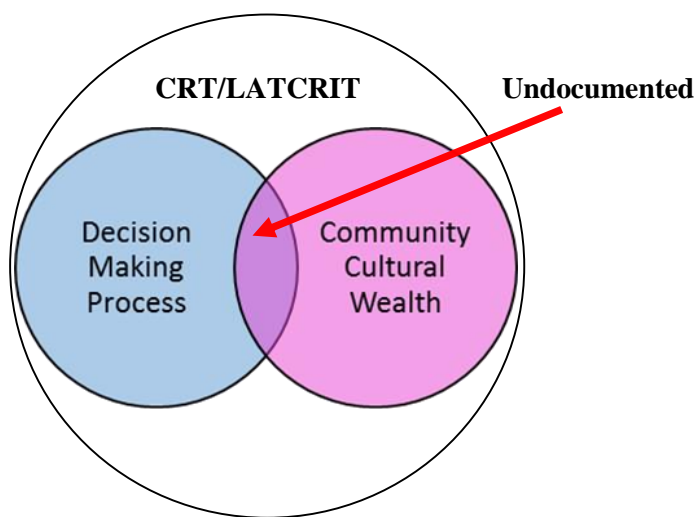


Figure 4. Visual of intersectionality between Community Cultural Wealth, undocumented, and decision making process.

This conceptual model utilizes a CRT, LatCrit, and CCW framework to elucidate the intersectionality between Community Cultural Wealth, lack of documentation, and social mobility measures. Thus, this conceptual model will help explain the way in which undocumented college graduates navigate systems of work and college. Moreover, it will aid in identifying resources and assets utilized by undocumented students in hopes of attaining social mobility. Last, it will contribute to the limited research on Latinas/os and status attainment models, filling a much needed gap that explains the status attainment process for undocumented college graduates.

The conceptual model highlighted above will illustrate the interaction between the three frameworks and answer the proposed research questions pertaining to the educational and occupational aspirations of undocumented college graduates and the role institutions play. The next chapter explains the methodological design of the current qualitative study.

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

This study seeks to add to the limited research available on Latina/o undocumented college students by focusing on their post-baccalaureate experiences. The experiences of undocumented college graduates will provide a more complete picture of the opportunities and barriers that undocumented students encounter in navigating their post-baccalaureate education. Through a qualitative research methodology, the study addresses the following questions:

RQ1. How do undocumented Latina/o graduate students reach a decision to attend graduate school?

RQ2. How do undocumented students navigate the post-baccalaureate portion of the educational pipeline?

This chapter provides a description of the criteria for the study participants and describes the research sites comprised of two higher education institutions. The chapter offers a rationale for the use of oral histories as the preferred method of data collection, discusses the data analysis process, and concludes with a description of each participant.

Selection of Participants

Two principal criteria qualified participants for inclusion: a) they were undocumented at the time of the study, and b) they were Latina/o college graduates having earned a bachelor's degree from a California State University or a school in the University of California system.

The study featured twenty participants organized by gender, school affiliation, current enrollment in graduate school, or recent graduate. Table 1 is a 2x2 model that shows the particular characteristics of the participants. The school affiliation variables included the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU). Despite attempts to find an equal number of students from both university systems, students attending the CSU institutions outnumbered the UC institutions. There were four undocumented males and four

undocumented females currently enrolled in graduate school or recently graduated from the UC system. . There were six undocumented males and six undocumented females recruited from the CSU system with the same criteria utilized for recruitment.

	UC	CSU
Undocumented Graduate Students	4 Females	4 Females
	6 Males	6 Males

Table 1: Selection of Participants

Research Sites and Recruitment of Participants

The research sites consisted of two institutions of higher education, a California State University¹³ (CSU) campus and a University of California¹⁴ (UC) institution. In California, CSU and UC are the two public systems of higher education that grant baccalaureate degrees. Therefore, recruiting participants from both systems enabled examination of a variety of experiences within public institutions where undocumented students most likely attended in greater numbers.

Recruitment of participants for the study began by soliciting help from two organizations that worked most exclusively with the target population: the Immigrant Services Program¹⁵ (IMS) at the CSU and DREAMS Program¹⁶. As a way to identify students who showed interest in participating in the research, I contacted the program directors and conducted information session about the study. When students agreed to participate, I personally contacted each one

¹³ The California State University system is comprised of 23 campuses.

¹⁴ The University of California system constitutes 10 campuses throughout California.

¹⁵ IMS is a program that provides assistance and retention services to immigrant students.

¹⁶ The DREAMS program is a support network for undocumented and AB-540 students.

and provided them with a detailed overview of the study and what their participation in the study entailed.

Snowball sampling methodology also aided in locating participants for the study. Snowball sampling is a research sampling technique utilized when members of a special population are difficult to locate, such as homeless individuals, migrant workers, and undocumented immigrants (Babbie, 1998). Through a snowball sampling methodology, participants assisted in recruitment of other individuals by recommending their friends and colleagues who shared similar criteria.

Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of a series of interviews. The first interview included oral histories of participants that examined their educational and migratory histories. The second set of interviews focused on the students' post-baccalaureate aspirations, barriers faced, challenges encountered, and forms of support used by the participants. The third set of interviews consisted of two separate focus groups wherein participants had the opportunity to discuss collectively some of the preliminary findings from the individual interviews. The next section details the way in which I conducted the different sets of interview with the study participants.

Student interviews. The data collection consisted of two in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 Latina/o undocumented college graduates. The first set of interviews were in an oral history format (Yow, 2005). Yow (2005) described oral history as an,

in-depth interview that can reveal the psychological reality that is the basis of ideals the individuals holds and for the things he or she does. How the subject sees and interprets her experience given her view of herself and of the world, can be gleamed in no better way than to ask in the context of the life reviewed. (p. 15).

In this manner, through life history interviews, participants had an opportunity to interpret their undocumented student experiences and to make meaning of the way in which their histories affected their present and led them to their educational aspirations. According to Portelli (1981), the benefit of oral histories was that they “not only provide what someone did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (p. 97). An oral history methodology created a structure that aided the participants in retrospectively thinking about their educational and occupational aspirations prior to their entrance into college and the completion of their degrees. Moreover, the histories of undocumented college graduates are important because there is limited research on their post-baccalaureate experiences. Through their oral histories, the students had the opportunity to share their own lived experiences by adding to a research literature about which little is available. Portelli (1981) explained that,

oral sources are necessary for a history of the non-hegemonic classes, while they are less necessary for the history of the ruling class who have had control over writing and therefore entrusted most of their collective memory to written records. (pg. 97).

In order to collect the stories of the participants and centralize their voices and lived experiences, the process took various stages of interviews.

Once I secured student participants, I scheduled the first interviews. The interview participants signed a consent form to volunteer in the study. I assured them that their names and personal information would be confidential. The interviews took place at the universities they attended or in a convenient location for the participants, such as their place of employment. In the first interview, participants revealed their and their parents’ educational and migratory histories. I specifically inquired about when they came to the country and the reasons why they came. I was also interested in determining when they first became aware they were undocumented, and their parents’ aspirations for them as they were growing up. I then asked

them to reflect retrospectively about their undergraduate experiences as being undocumented students. How did they navigate through their undergraduate education, what were the obstacles they encountered, and what strategies they utilized to complete their undergraduate degrees? The oral history interviews were critical in presenting a baseline to understand the experiences of undocumented students and the reasons for their aspirations. As I conducted each of these interviews, I informed each participant that I would record the interviews with a digital recorder and transcribe them into an electronic document for data analysis. Before conducting the second interview, I reviewed the first and revised the interview protocol accordingly.

In a follow up interview, students were asked specifically about their post-baccalaureate educational aspirations and how they navigated the educational pipeline. These interviews were also audiotaped and transcribed. I provided a hard copy transcription to the individual students and asked each to participate in the data analysis. I made every attempt to ensure the analytical process accurately represented their views on the transcript.

Focus group interviews. After completing the individual interviews, UC and CSU participants took part in a separate focus group interview to discuss the emergent themes in the prior two interviews. According to Bogdan and Bilken (2003), “Focus groups are group interviews that are structured to foster talk among the participants about particular issues” (p. 101). In this case, undocumented college graduates had an opportunity to meet one another, share their experiences, and discuss their views about the data analysis. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to listen and learn from the participants concerning their range of views (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). The focus group interviews augmented understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, practices, and values of undocumented college graduates and their educational and occupational aspirations (Bertrand, Brown, & Ward; 1992).

Some of the main advantages of conducting focus group interviews from the literature paralleled this experience. The population under study was able to express their ideas based on interactions among participants rather than between participants and the researcher. Furthermore, focus group interviews revealed unanticipated topics that did not emerge from individual interviews (Babbie, 1998). Participants provided more in-depth insight into how they felt about being undocumented and the reasons why they felt so (Bertrand, Brown, & Ward, 1992).

There were two focus group interviews, one on each university campus. The focus groups ranged from one to two hours and included 8-10 participants. This fit within the recommended guidelines suggested by Rabiee (2004), that a manageable focus group consisting of 6-10 individuals was large enough to gain a variety of perspectives and small enough not to be out of control.

Prior to the focus group interview, each participant received a copy of the key themes that arose from the individual interview transcriptions and commented on their thoughts about the key themes. During the focus group interviews, I shared the preliminary analysis with the participants and asked for their reaction and input. The participants had the opportunity to discuss the thematic results of their personal interview.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began immediately after the first interview. According to Maxwell (1996), engaging in the data analysis process immediately would help the researcher avoid piled up transcripts and unanalyzed field notes. Therefore, some analysis took place during data collection and prior to all transcription. At the end of each of the individual interviews and both of the focus groups, I wrote analytical memos. According to Bodgan and

Biklen (2003), analytical memos were long reflections that focused on analysis. These analytical memos were critical in aiding my ideas, facilitating reflections, and deriving analytical insights from the data during collection. In addition, the memos served as data to make sense of the study (Maxwell, 1996). Furthermore, as I listened to interview tapes prior to transcription, I wrote memos and developed tentative ideas about categories and relationships. According to Maxwell (1996), a memo is a “versatile tool that refers to any writing that the researcher does in relationship to the research other than the actual field notes, transcriptions, and coding” (p. 11). Moreover, a memo “not only captures your analytic thinking about your data, they facilitate such thinking, as stimulating analytic insights” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 78). The memos aided reflection on the methods, theory, and purposes of the study (Maxwell 1996).

To continue with the data analysis process, I began to read, code, and organize the data into themes. I used categorizing strategies, such as coding, to assist in analyzing the data. According to Maxwell (1996), the goal of coding is to “‘fracture’ the data and rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (p. 79). As I read each transcription, I highlighted important codes and begin to organize theme into different categories. Additionally, contextualizing strategies assisted data analysis. Contextualizing strategies are different from coding because the “analysis attempts to understand the data in context, using methods to identify the relationship among different elements of the text” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 79). This type of strategy served as a critical tool in analyzing the powerful narratives of participants told through the oral history interviews.

Similar to individual interviews, the analysis of the focus group interviews also happened concurrently with the data collection (Krueger, 1994). According to Rabiee (2004), the

analytical process involved interconnected stages that included familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and framework analysis and interpretation. To become familiar with the data, I listened to the focus group audio and video recordings, read transcripts, and read any memos I might have written throughout the process. Then, I re-read transcripts and looked for possible ideas and concepts that would help develop categories. As the themes and categories crystallized, I organized and reorganized the data according to the thematic categories. Eventually reconsidered for new emergent themes, different color codes identified data belonging to more than one category. .

The analytical process required indexing and charting data, highlighting and sorting quotes and making comparisons both within and between cases (Rabiee, 2004). The final stage of data analysis consisted of making sense of individual quotes by mapping and interpreting them. Krueger (1994) suggested seven criteria for interpreting coded data that consisted of “words; context; internal consistency; frequency and extensiveness of comments; specificity of comments; intensity of comments; and big ideas” (p. 658). To interpret the coded data, I searched for frequency and repetition in the participant responses. The individual interviews coupled with the focus group interviews provided an engaging co-analysis. The following section provides a description of the twenty undocumented graduate students that participated in the study.

Description of the Students

This section describes the twenty Latina/o undocumented graduate students that participated in the study. Twelve of the participants were graduates of a California State University campus, while the other eight were graduate students at one of the University of California campuses. The following tables describe the students’ gender, age of arrival in the

U.S., and degree pursued. The narrative descriptions reveal how and why they came to the United States, their educational aspirations, and plans for the future.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age of Arrival	Education
Diego	Male	14	M.S. in Mechanical Engineering
Alma	Female	8	M.S. in Counseling
Antonio	Male	8	M.S. in Mechanical Engineering
Lorena	Female	2	M.S. Education
Javier	Male	16	M.S. in Civil Engineering
Esperanza	Female	7	M.S. in Biology
Gabriel	Male	15	Ph.D. in Language, Literatures & Cultures
Consuelo	Female	13	M.S. in Linguistics
Joaquin	Male	14	Ph.D. in Physics
Carmen	Female	15	M.A. in Art
Andres	Male	13	M.S. in Kinesiology
Aurora	Female	8	M.S. Economics

Table 2: CSU Research Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age of Arrival	Education
David	Male	5	J.D.
Soledad	Female	6 months	M.A. in Education
Pablo	Male	8	J.D
Karina	Female	8	M.A. Education
Eduardo	Male	11	Ph.D. in Psychology
Gloria	Female	5	M.A. in Architecture
Felipe	Male	14	M.S. in Social Welfare
Adela	Female	5	M.A. in Latin American Studies

Table 3: UC Research Participants

CSU Research Participants

Diego migrated to the United States at the age of 14. Along with his father, he flew from Michoacán, Mexico to the U.S. Had it not been for the untimely death of his grandmother before his birth, *Diego* would have been born on the U.S. side of the border and would be a United States citizen like his two older brothers. As his grandmother lay on her death bed, *Diego*'s family rushed to be by her side and was unable to return to the United States before his birth. As a result, *Diego* and his younger sister were born in Mexico. Although his parents and siblings are U.S. citizens and residents, he continued to be the only undocumented person in his family. *Diego* attended a community college before transferring to a four-year institution. As an undergraduate student, he majored in mechanical engineering and pursued a Master's degree in the same area at the time of the study.

Alma was born on August 22, 1985 in Guanajuato, Mexico and came to the United States at the age of eight. After the death of her father who was a farmworker in California for many years, her family migrated to the United States in hopes of receiving his social security benefits. Although their intentions were to return to Mexico quickly due to the long process of accessing her father's benefits, they overstayed their visas. Throughout her childhood, she participated in a local migrant education program where she received many resources and forms of support. Alma obtained a bachelor's degree in liberal studies and pursued a Master's in counseling with an option in marriage and family therapy at the time of the study.

Antonio arrived in the United States in 1995 when he was eight years old. Because of an economic downturn, his family came to the U.S. in search of opportunities for a better life. As a freshman in high school at the young age of 14, he worked in a packing house to help provide for the family. He enjoyed working and helping his family so much that he began assisting his uncle in construction on the weekends. After attending community college, he transferred to a four-year university where he earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. At the time of the study, Alfonso was in the last semester of his Master's program in mechanical engineering.

Lorena came to the United States at the age of two. Because she was so young, her stories of migration were those her father and mother shared with her. Due to her father's low paying position working the mines in Jalisco, Mexico and his growing family, he decided to migrate to the United States. Lorena recalled her parents dressing her as a little boy in order to use her cousin's birth certificate to cross the border. She attended community college before transferring to a four-year university, where she pursued teaching credentials in hopes of one day becoming a teacher.

Javier came to the United States at the age of 16 because his father wanted him to learn English. When he first arrived, he lived with his aunt and attended the local high school. As a high school student, he began playing basketball and was offered a basketball scholarship at the nearby community college. Javier decided to stay in the United States and take advantage of the opportunity to receive a higher education. After completing his A.A. degree he quickly transferred to a four-year university and earned his undergraduate degree in civil engineering. At the time of the study, he was working on his Master's degree in civil engineering.

Esperanza came to the United States at the age of seven. Because her mother suffered from domestic violence and her family experienced terrible health conditions, they migrated to the United States in hopes of escaping an atrocious lifestyle putting their health at risk. Esperanza recalled her family testing positive for tuberculosis and anemia when they first arrived. Their daily meals in Mexico consisted of cactus and cactus fruit. Despite the severe poverty in which she lived, Esperanza excelled in her education and as a undergraduate student, she received acceptance from many prestigious universities. Due to the cost of tuition and living expenses, however, she decided to pursue the state university closest to home. Esperanza continued her graduate studies at the same university and pursued a Master's degree in biology at the time of the study.

Gabriel came to the U.S. when he was 15 years old. Growing up in Michoacán, Mexico, Gabriel suffered discrimination because of his sexuality and decided to migrate to the U.S. as a way of escaping the sexual harassment he experienced daily. He attended community college and then transferred to a four-year state university. He earned a Master's degree and, at the time of the study, recently graduated with a doctoral degree in Language, Literatures, and Cultures. In the future, he considered pursuing a second doctoral degree in Canada.

Consuelo was 13 years old when she first arrived in the United States. She migrated from Mexicali, Mexico and although she was very resistant to come to the United States, her mother's need for a better job left her no other option. She recalled having to memorize another person's name, age, and birthday and to pretend she was asleep as she crossed the frontier in a car with the help of a 'coyote', slang for smuggler. *Consuelo* attended community college and then transferred to a four-year university. At the time of the study, she was finishing her Master's degree in Linguistics.

Joaquin came to the United States at the age of 14. Initially he intended to work on a farm to help his family financially but the employer rejected his application, leaving him with no other choice but to enroll in school. He finished high school and attended a four-year institution where he earned his Bachelor's and Master's degree in Physics. At the time of the study, he pursued a doctoral degree in Canada with full financial assistance.

Carmen first came to the United States when she was 15 years old. She flew from Brazil to the United States to visit her mother who had migrated to the U.S. three years earlier. *Carmen* described herself as spoiled because coming to the U.S. was not as difficult for her as it was for many of her undocumented friends. She explained that, in Brazil, it was not difficult to get a visa and she was able to get one right away. However, once she was in the U.S., life was difficult because she had to work to help her family financially. With the help of her counselor, she was able to attend the nearby university, earn her degree, and pursuing a Master's degree in art at the time of the study.

Andres migrated to the United States from a small town in Oaxaca, Mexico. When he was very young, his parents departed to the United States, leaving him to live with his grandparents. *Andres* recalls going to school in Oaxaca until the 8th grade and being unable to

continue his studies because of the cost of tuition to earn a high school degree. Consequently, he migrated to the United States to live with relatives in California. In the beginning, his intention was to work; however, after the first week in California, his uncle registered him at the nearest high school. While in school, he worked in menial labor positions, washing dishes, doing yard work, and various other jobs. He excelled in high school and received an academic award. After high school, he attended a four-year university and graduated with a degree in Kinesiology. At the time of the study, he pursued a Master's degree in Kinesiology.

Aurora arrived in the United States at the age of eight. Due to her father's loss of employment, her family decided to migrate to the United States and relocate the family. *Aurora* recalled her parents tricking the children by pretending to go on a vacation to Disneyland. While she and her brother were extremely excited to go to Disneyland, they wondered why their parents had packed so many suitcases. *Aurora* and her family were able to obtain visas and fly from Pachuca, Hidalgo, Mexico to the United States. The initial plan was to learn English and return to Mexico; however, fifteen years later, they were still in the U.S. *Aurora* excelled in high school and obtained a full scholarship at a four-year university. After receiving her degree in mathematics, she attended graduate school on the east coast where she studied economics but, due to financial circumstances she was unable to complete her degree there. At the time of the study, she had applied for several doctoral programs.

UC Research Participants

David came to the United States at the age of five. His parents had migrated from Michoacan, Mexico to the United States earlier with a plan to work, save enough money to pay their debt in Mexico, and return to Mexico to be with family. However, after working for two years, his parents decided it would be easier to bring their children to the U.S. *David*

remembered getting into a car, transferring to a bus, and arriving in Long Beach, California where his parents lived. At age five, what he most remembered about his trip to the United States were the freeways he saw in Southern California. David described arriving in the United States as a very different experience, like a different world that didn't feel like home.

Soledad was born in Puebla, Mexico and came to the United States when she was six months old. As a single parent, her mother decided to migrate to the United States and join her sister who was already established in the country. Although Soledad was too young to recall how she physically migrated to the U.S., her mother told her that because Soledad was a newborn, her mother had to give her to a family to bring her across the border. Her mother worried she would never see her again. Soledad grew up in the U.S. and never questioned where she came from until she entered high school, decide to apply for college, and discovered she did not have a social security number.

Pablo grew up in Guadalajara, Mexico and at eight years old in 1990, he migrated with his mother and siblings to the United States to reunite with his father. After two attempts to cross the border, they were able to pass and arrived in San Isidro. For years, his father migrated back and forth from Mexico to the U.S., sending the family money at Christmas but rarely during the year. Due to his father's migration, Pablo expressed growing up without a father. He recalled his father's absence and his family struggling, starving, and having a hard time surviving. To try to make ends meet, his mother worked long hours in a factory and the children had no other choice but to take care of themselves. Pablo was the first undocumented student in law school at the UC institution.

Karina migrated to United States at the age of eight. In the early 1990s when the economy worsened, her father lost his job and migrated to the U.S. At first, it was only her

father and brother that migrated, leaving her, her mother, and sister in Peru. Later, they all flew to Tijuana. Karina did not remember her trip from Tijuana to the U.S. because she was young and fell asleep during the drive. However, she remembered having their passports stamped and arriving at a Burger King restaurant late at night.

Eduardo recalled coming to the United States at the age of five but only staying for a year because his older siblings remained in Mexico and his mother missed them. He returned at eleven with all his siblings to reunite with his father. Eduardo, his mother, and siblings took an airplane from Guadalajara to Tijuana where they met a woman who prepared them to cross the border.

Gloria was a Master's student attending the University of California at the time of the study. Along with her family, she came to the United States in 1992 when she was five years old. In search of economic opportunities, they migrated to California where they lived with her aunt who was the key in helping her parents find employment. As a child, Gloria remembers constantly praying for papers because she was uncertain of her future. Gloria earned a Bachelor's degree in sociology and pursued a Master's degree in architecture. In the future, she hoped to work with a non-profit organization supporting the undocumented community.

Felipe came to the United States along with his siblings and parents in 1999. They were able to enter the country legally with a tourist visa and flew in a plane to Tijuana, Mexico. They attained a tourist visa because previously his father had a professional job that provided them with a decent living and allowed them to vacation in the United States. Felipe considered his family privileged as they did not have to struggle. They came to the United States due to economic hardships. During the late 1990s, a variety of foreign banks moving to Mexico, which jeopardized his father's employment.

Adela was a Master's student majoring in Latin American Studies at the time of the research. She received her baccalaureate degree in Political Science at a CSU university. She came to the United States in 1992 at the age of five. Due to economic issues her family experienced in the state of Jalisco, Mexico her family migrated to the U.S. Unlike many families, *Adela's* was fortunate to be able to enter the U.S. with tourist visas. In addition to her graduate work, *Adela* assisted her parents every weekend by managing their small business in Southern California. She aspired to become a teacher and planned to apply to a Ph.D. program.

Summary

In summary, the methodology of this research study encompassed one-on-one interviews with undocumented graduate students and two focus groups interviews. The data derived from oral histories through the participants' experiential knowledge. Analysis of the individual and focus group interviews was through memos, coding, categorizing strategies, and contextualizing strategies. This section included a brief description of each participant in the study. Ultimately, this qualitative research brought greater understanding of the experiences of Latina/o undocumented graduate students and the adverse conditions they encountered as they pursued their goals and dreams.

CHAPTER 5: Moving Beyond the Baccalaureate

Introduction

The undocumented students in this research study, unlike few of their peers, overcame adversities, earned their high school and baccalaureate degrees, and pursued graduate degrees. As more undocumented students graduate from universities around the nation with undergraduate degrees, it is of critical importance to examine the multiple occupational, educational, and career trajectories that await this population. Overall, Latina/o students continue to have lower educational attainment numbers compared to all other racial groups (Contreras 2009; Covarrubias, 2011). Research suggested that of 100 Latina/o students at the elementary level, less than one would earn a doctoral degree (Covarrubias, 2011; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Undocumented Latino/a students tended to have even fewer opportunities to attain graduate degrees. For undocumented students of Mexican descent, only one would earn a graduate degree in comparison to four U.S. born Mexican students (Covarrubias 2011; Covarrubias & Lara, 2014). Hence, research informed that undocumented status could impact a student's educational attainment (Covarrubias & Lara, 2014). This chapter explores the post-baccalaureate context for Latina/o undocumented students from California and how they came to decisions to attend graduate school.

Findings from the current study and others revealed that Latina/o undocumented graduate students continued to experience similar forms of discrimination and institutional racism that they experienced as undergraduates (Oliverrez, 2006; Perez & Malagon, 2007; Santos, 2006). Undocumented graduate students were able to attend school but barriers, such as not being able to work or receive financial aid, continued to hinder their upwardly mobility (Abrego & Gonzalez 2010). Through their life narratives, undocumented students described how they came

to their decisions to pursue graduate degree programs. In searching for and recruiting candidates for this study, it quickly became evident that there were a scarce number of students attending the University of California. Through the interviews, I learned that there were only a handful¹⁷ of Latina/o undocumented graduate students on campus.

The objective of this chapter is to provide a discussion and explore answers to the following research question:

RQ1. How do undocumented Latina/o graduate students reach a decision to attend graduate school?

The next section offers six central themes that reveal how undocumented students came to their decision to continue with their graduate education. Key factors that led them to their post-baccalaureate decisions, included: a) Remaining Undocumented, b) Developing a Commitment Social Justice), c) Experiencing a Critical Life Moment, d) Parental Influence/Support, e) Mentorship, and f) Attaining a Globally Competitive Degree Specialization.

Remaining Undocumented

For the participants in this research study, one of the key factors that shaped their post-baccalaureate decisions was the continuity of their undocumented status. As college graduates with earned baccalaureate degrees, many were unable to find employment in their baccalaureate field of study. Even after earning a Bachelor's degree, most students continued in the same positions they had as undergraduates, usually service sector jobs. These jobs generally consisted of working in construction, cleaning tables, bartending in restaurants, cleaning offices, data entry, manual labor in agriculture, and teaching or tutoring through non-profit organizations. As

¹⁷ At the University of California campus, students noted that undocumented students on campus could literally be counted with one hand.

expected by not having authorization to work, seeking employment in their given area of preparation and expertise was a frustrating and challenging endeavor; thus, they had no realistic alternative but to further their studies by entering graduate school programs. The following model demonstrates the first central theme that arose in the data. Continuing to be undocumented greatly impacted the lives and opportunities of students.

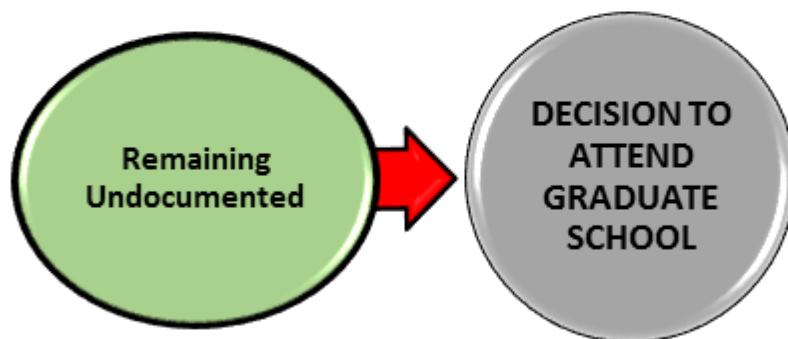


Figure 5. The impact of remaining undocumented on the decision to attend graduate school.

The next section provides several examples of how this concept emerged in the data.

At the time of the study, Diego recently earned a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and searched for employment after graduation. He quickly discovered that, regardless of his prior academic success and preparation in a specialized field in high demand, his immigration status served as the main obstacle against securing employment. Instead, Diego continued his job as a waiter at a local Mexican restaurant where he had worked for the prior five years to fund his undergraduate education. He shared:

See I never thought I was going to do a Master's, actually I never intended to do a Master's degree. The reason I got into the Master's degree was because I didn't have a way to work and at the time when I got my Bachelor's, my daughter had barely been born.

The pursuit of a Master's degree in engineering for Diego was something spontaneous because he had no plans to pursue a graduate degree. The only alternative he saw at the time was to continue working 'under the table' as a waiter to support his family and to further his education with an advanced degree in case some form of immigration reform occurred in the long term. In the end, he hoped that his enrollment in graduate school would be a good long-term investment for him and his family.

Similarly, Esperanza described feeling overwhelmed and depressed about not being able to utilize her degree. She explained,

Well, the one reason in the first place why I took that little break was because I was just overwhelmed. I was emotionally overwhelmed and I didn't want to do anything with school anymore. I was sick and tired and it would have been nice to say, 'I got my bachelor's and it's worth something'. 'I'm gonna go and look for a job as a teacher, I'm gonna go look for a job in a lab', and there was nothing for me. I became really depressed and I took some time off. I was not gonna come back to school.

The quote exemplified her frustration in dealing with having a degree but no opportunities to utilize her skills. As a recent graduate with an undergraduate degree in Physics, Esperanza decided to work for a while before continuing graduate studies. She was comfortable with a small job that did not even require a high school diploma. She did not have the drive to return to school because being in school and in that situation was grueling and hard. She worked at a cattle ranch as a secretary inputting data; her duties included making sure the new calves were properly inputted into their system. Although this job did not allow her to utilize her degree, she was comfortable because it offered a break from the heavy emotional and physical toll of being an undocumented university student.

Other students were adamant about testing their employment prospects in the labor market in their field of study. They intended to see what their employment chances would be like as undocumented college graduates. For example, students like Eduardo, after having graduated with a Bachelor's degree in psychology, applied to several employment opportunities in his profession. He elaborated,

The first summer after graduating, I applied to a lot of jobs. I don't know what I was thinking? I was really hoping that they would say, 'oh it's okay that you don't have documentation'. I was applying to jobs related to my field and I would get interviews and they were like great, great, great, and they would call me back. Then when they would ask me, 'oh bring your id or your social security'. That's when I would be 'okay I'll call you back' and after a couple of times I was like 'what are you waiting for'? 'What are you expecting'? 'They're just gonna be like it's okay'? So that's when I stopped applying to those type of jobs, it's kind of pointless.

After numerous attempts, firsthand experience, and verifying his employment opportunities were indeed limited, Eduardo became disillusioned and disappointed that he could not obtain a job in his field of study. Consequently, he worked as a bartender at night and at a furniture store during the day. These negative experiences led Eduardo to recognize that a better alternative was to return to something familiar by pursuing a graduate education. Besides working two jobs that year, he also began preparing for graduate school by focusing on graduate school applications and preparing for the Graduate Research Exam (GRE).

Other students like Alma, a liberal studies graduate, continued to graduate school out of employment necessity. In Alma's case, her continued enrollment in a degree granting program was necessary to maintain employment as a teacher's assistant for a non-profit educational agency. As an undergraduate student, Alma initially believed that obtaining a Bachelor's degree and teaching credentials would be sufficient to assist her in securing employment as an educator.

Unfortunately, her thinking changed once she faced the dilemma of not being able to work as a teacher. She shared how her interest in furthering her education came about.

When I was in undergrad, I thought with my Bachelor's and my teaching credential I should be set and then nothing happened with my paperwork. I thought 'what the hell, I could either stop my education or go on to a Master's program'. I knew I could do the work. I'm very capable of doing the work that it requires, but I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to do it on my own cause all this time they're paying for my education. So I decided to go ahead and try it [grad school] and if anything, I would go part-time, take six units and just pay for that in installments and if I had to I would ask my mom for a loan. I decided to go ahead and try it because, otherwise, I would still be with the Bachelor's and the teaching credential and not be able to teach or do anything with it. I would still be at the same job that I have.

For Alma, her current employment prepared her to become an educator eventually and something she did not want to give up. Being able to find employment outside of cleaning tables or picking fruit was difficult but, without documentation, finding employment with an educational organization that allowed her to work with students was rare. Like Diego, Alma was also pursuing graduate studies as a way to buy time, hoping in the meantime that some form of legalization would occur. Alma applied to and accepted in a Master's program in educational counseling to become a marriage and family therapist. She hoped for immigration reform before the completion of her Master's degree but was also engaged to be married and would apply for naturalization through her marriage if necessary. Alma continued to work as a teaching assistant and aspired to a doctorate in the future.

Other students like Carmen, Gabriel, and Andres continued because they did not know what else to do. Carmen understood that more education made great sense because the reality was that "Everybody has a B.A. now, a B.A. is not worth what it was so might as well get a Master's degree." For Gabriel, picking tomatoes or washing dishes would make him unhappy; he knew "there was something better and it was probably school."

For these undocumented students earning a baccalaureate degree was a great accomplishment, especially in the context of the numerous struggles they endured. However, this dehumanizing process also served as a reminder of the severe restrictions their immigration status placed on them as they continued to live in this country. Overall, not being able to find employment in their chosen professions due to remaining undocumented served as extra motivation to continue with their studies and hope for change and immigration reform.

Analytical Summary

The emerging literature on undocumented undergraduate students revealed factors like the anxiety (Perez, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2006) and uncertainty (Contreras, 2009; Perez, 2010) that students experienced as they reach milestones, such as graduating from high school, community college, or the university. As they came closer to completing their high school and baccalaureate degrees, they often began to worry about the uncertainty that awaited them in not being able to obtain employment or utilize their degrees in their areas of study (Contreras, 2009; Perez, 2010). Perhaps, this uncertainty and lack of clarity regarding available opportunities after high school graduation might contribute to the low enrollment of undocumented students in higher education. As undocumented students in graduate school, they continued to encounter similar problems to the ones experienced as new undergraduates, such as: financing their studies, transportation issues such as driving to school and work, and remaining ineligible for most forms of financial assistance, including scholarships and fellowships. At the graduate level, these challenges become more pronounced as the financial, research, and study requirements typically were greater for these students.

Even after the completion of rigorous academic courses of study, these college undocumented graduates often felt racialized into low status jobs or ‘Mexican Jobs’ (Lopez,

2012). The interviews with Diego, Esperanza, and Eduardo revealed their experience with this form of racialization, subjected to low status employment as waiters, bartenders, working at a cattle ranch, or a customer assistant at a furniture store. Alma, Andres, Gabriel, and Carmen benefited from existing relationships with a mentor who provided well-paid internship opportunities as tutors throughout various schools in the city. While there were no impediments to pursuing graduate degrees for these students, the chilling reality is that the majority of undocumented students do not go beyond the high school, and only a small percentage graduate from a university.

Undocumented students experience a wide array of obstacles that complicate their matriculation into higher education. However, many of these students remain optimistic, and are hopeful that, sooner or later, legislative changes will take effect and ensure their sacrifices are not in vain. Although few undocumented students pursue graduate studies, those that do are highly influenced by their own personal experiences of marginalization. The obstacles students encountered throughout their educational trajectories influenced their determination to give back to their communities, to challenge systems of oppression, and to change laws and systems that impacted the lives of undocumented people. Their personal experiences shaped their worldview and were critical in helping them develop a commitment to social justice.

Commitment to Social Justice

The unequal and differential treatment that students experienced because of their undocumented status placed a great burden on their lives and shaped continuation of their education and the type of careers they decided to pursue. A byproduct of the marginalization these students experienced in accessing higher education was a commitment to social justice. In this process, through their own lived experience, students become critical of the differential

treatment and living conditions of undocumented and immigrant communities, moving them to work to create change and to improve the lives of undocumented immigrants. They became interested in careers and areas of study that directly or indirectly gave back to the undocumented community and secured involvement with advocacy organizations or other entities that challenged laws, policies, and dominant ideologies that impacted the daily lives of undocumented people. The model below demonstrates the second central theme, a Commitment to Social Justice. Students' personal experiences of discrimination and marginalization influenced their interest and commitment to social justice leading them to pursue a graduate education.

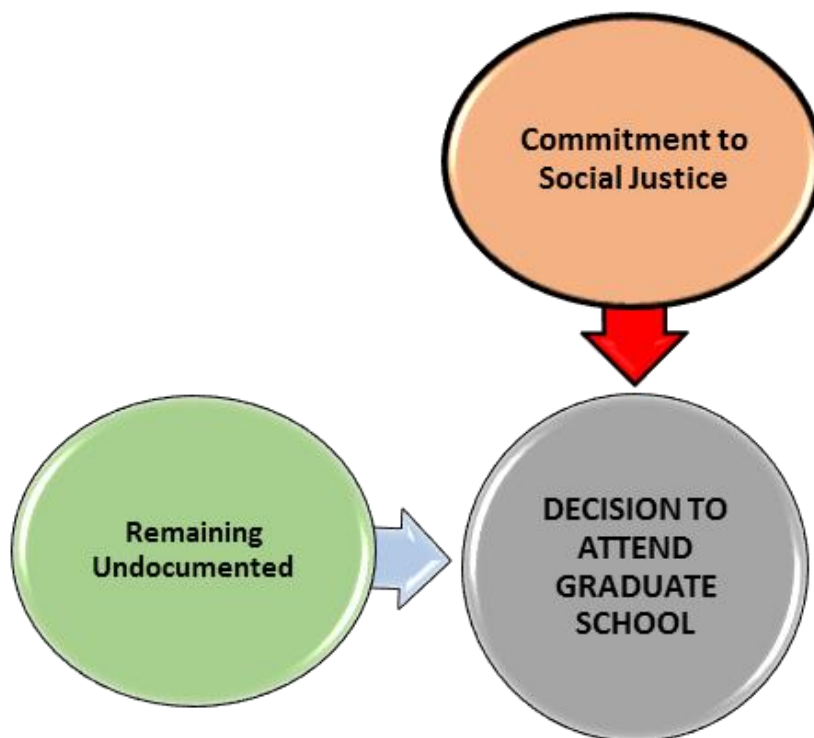


Figure 6. **The impact of a commitment to social justice on the decision to attend graduate school.**

The following section elaborates on the students' experiences and the way in which social justice provided motivation to continue their education. For example, Pablo highlighted a particular experience that motivated his interest in becoming a lawyer and assisting undocumented immigrants.

I got involved in political campaigns. I knew that politics was something I liked and so being involved in politics and understanding that my whole life was dictated by immigration laws. Then, when I started doing my whole workshops about AB540, people would tell me, 'You can't give legal advice because you're not an attorney.' That's really when I said, 'well I'm gonna become an attorney so that people can't tell me that I can't give [legal] advice.'

Pablo's own educational experience assisting the undocumented community led him from politics to the field of law. Consequently, he became one of the first undocumented students in law school on his campus and instrumental as a founding member of the AB540 student group there. The leadership experience he gained through the student group coupled with his experience working in political campaigns gave him hope to continue with his studies and to advocate for immigrant communities.

Students' educational trajectories were also shaped by the economic hardships they experienced in their country of birth and fueled a desire to create change and improve the living conditions of immigrants. These experiences allowed them to develop a critical social analysis, which led them to focus on careers paths that placed a great emphasis on the rights of undocumented immigrants and other marginalized communities.

For Aurora, her social justice orientation began developing at the early age of eight when she first came to the United States with her family. Through her experience, she gained a critical perspective of the interconnectedness of economic structures between the United States and Mexico and how a recession severely impacted her small town in Mexico, leaving her family

with no choice but to migrate north to the United States. Aurora alluded to her family's lived experience and economic imbalances between the U.S. and Mexico as shaping her plan and desire to give back by reducing the disparities between them. She explained,

I decided that I wanted to go into economics because I want to eventually, in the future, I want to be able to go back to Mexico and help with economic development. That was my idea after I'm done. I've always wanted to go back, and ever since I was younger I always questioned why did my parents have to come? Why is there illegal immigration? In my idea it's Mexico's fault too, that it's so bad that people have to leave. So then I thought I'm going to study economics and then go back to Mexico and hope to do something there.

Aurora's experiences living in Mexico and in the United States allowed her to understand many of the shortcomings of both economies. Her willingness to question the current and historical social and economic relations between the two countries resulted in wanting to develop an academic specialization geared towards improving lived conditions of Mexicans, hoping to reduce the need for outward migration. Her interest in this area led her to enrollment in a Master's program in Economic Development at a progressive and liberal university on the east coast. Unfortunately, due to the high cost of tuition and being unable to secure a loan after her first year, she had to withdraw and explore other educational alternatives.

These students were not only highly motivated to continue due to their own personal experience but also, at times, put themselves at risk of deportation by fighting for the rights of undocumented immigrants and students. Many of the students saw engaging in activism as a critical tool towards generating social change, often borrowing from the techniques and tactics of the 1960s civil rights movements. One particular student, Felipe, who recently graduated with a Master's degree in Social Welfare, participated in a 15 day hunger strike while the DREAM act awaited approval from the Senate. For over a week, Felipe camped outside the offices of U.S.

Senator Diane Feinstein, drawing media attention and fighting for the passage of the federal DREAM act to legalize immigrant undocumented students. He shared,

We were continuing in the tradition of Cesar Chavez for a nonviolent struggle: this time for the rights of undocumented immigrants across the country . . . The cold nights, the hard floor we slept on, the loud noise of traffic, and the long days without food, they all reminded me of how much we desire to belong to a country we see as ours too.

Unfortunately, for the DREAMers and their allies, the Senate failed to pass the DREAM act, leaving the bill to die on the senate floor and dashing their dreams. However, the experience proved motivating for DREAMers because the act fell only a few votes short of what would have been a tremendous victory.

After earning his graduate degree, Felipe grew less afraid to take risks and very committed to the undocumented student movement. As a result, he often participated in many DREAMer events and shared his experiences. Like Felipe, other students showed interest in working towards social change, especially for future undocumented students. As the first undocumented students on their campuses and in their departments, they felt a responsibility to assist and inform the next generation of undocumented students interested in pursuing graduate school. For example, students like Soledad, Adela, and Felipe founded an undocumented graduate student organization dedicated to serving the needs of new students by holding workshops and making information available on how to apply to graduate school and navigate the process. The creation of this organization led to greater numbers of undocumented students entering graduate school programs.

Student inspiration to pursue social action varied. Gabriel who earned a doctoral degree in Spanish and Portuguese shared his views. He stated,

One of the inspirations that motivated me to go to school and to do what I'm doing . . . because I am reading and I am very interested in reading about feminist

theory, queer theory and a lot of these people have had the same experiences. I relate to them and it makes me feel good to know that, okay we're people trying to get ahead in society and we're getting ahead.

The exposure to different theoretical traditions provided Gabriel with a nuanced understanding of the manifold ways that produce and reproduce oppression. In pursuing and earning his doctoral degree, Gabriel hoped to teach and conduct research on the intersecting experiences of undocumented students, especially queer undocumented students. In interviews, he shared how he conceptualized being both undocumented and gay. Being undocumented meant “he was not welcomed by the United States or did not have a permit to live here.” But speaking in terms of sexuality was “another type of permit that you have to ask from society to be accepted, the citizenship to live, to be welcomed in the world.” His undocumented status and his sexuality provided two critical factors that greatly influenced his educational trajectory, which carried over to his dissertation study wherein he investigated the lived experiences of dislocated individuals.

In the case of Carmen, a master's student pursuing a degree in art, she utilized her artwork to demonstrate the hard work and exploitative lives that farm workers endured. Some of her paintings illustrated the depicted everyday harsh reality of immigrant farm workers picking strawberries, apples, oranges, and lettuce, climbing ladders, working bent over and on their knees in order to pick the fruit. Through this medium, she was able to portray these workers in humanizing ways that served to highlight the contributions and struggles of a much maligned population in a socially conservative part of the country.

This section highlighted the commitment to social justice of most of the students in this study. Existing research on the activism of undocumented undergraduate students derived from undocumented students (Underground Undergrads, 2008; Undocumented and Unafraid, 2011), scholars (Gonzalez, 2008, Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009), and community

groups and organizations. Particularly at the high school and undergraduate level, research found that student leadership and civic engagement influenced their participation in school and their relationships with teachers, counselors, and peers (Gonzalez, 2008). In addition, students joined clubs and created organizations where they began to partake in community service and developed their leadership skills and advocacy for the rights of undocumented students. The experience of marginalization affected all students and created the desire to give back to the community and develop broader pathways for future students. Students like Felipe that completed graduate degrees had few avenues left but to advocate for their rights to be citizens forcefully and actively (Gonzales, 2008). Previous research (Abrego, 2006, 2011; Abrego & Gonzalez 2010; Gonzales, 2008; Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013) highlighted the way in which undocumented youth and adults utilized civic engagement and advocacy to challenge and fight for change in the laws that defined them as outsiders of society. Similarly, for the students in this research study, their experiences with discrimination contributed to their need to make a difference in the lives of immigrants and people of color.

At the graduate level, their enrollment could, by itself, be an act of social justice because many of them were the first on their campuses to pursue graduate school and demand that departmental offices learn how to serve the needs of undocumented graduate students. Their commitment to social justice derived from their personal and lived experiences as undocumented immigrants in this country. Pablo and Aurora, for example, indicated a desire to obtain and utilize their graduate degrees for the explicit purpose of helping others. Pablo saw himself as an attorney for the immigrant rights community, while Aurora wanted to play a vital role in the economic development of Mexico. Gabriel and Carmen saw they could have influence through art work and use of theories to help explicate forms of violence directed at queer and immigrant

communities. Finally, Adela, Soledad, and Felipe created an organization called GRADD (Graduates Reaching a Dream Deferred) to meet the needs of undocumented graduate students on campus and beyond.

Undocumented students actively contributed to improving the plight of their community. For many of them, their aspirations based on working towards creating change in policies, challenging dominant ideologies, and teaching students about the unequal conditions in underserved communities. As students, they were devoted to assisting other undergraduate students by mentoring them and paving a pathway for their success. The students participated in protests, walk-outs, and sit-ins, mentored and guided other students, and shared stories about their undocumented experiences with others. Regardless of the multiple adversities they faced in their educational trajectory, their persistence at the university was a form of activism in working towards changing the educational opportunities for undocumented students at the graduate level. The next section highlights how Critical Life Moments also played a role in these students' ability to persist.

Critical Life Moments

Another emerging theme that influenced the post-baccalaureate decisions of students were 'critical life moments'. These negative or positive events influenced student desires to advance in the pursuit of their educational aspirations. The following model explains that, in addition to continuing to be undocumented and having a commitment to social justice, personal moments were also important in student decision to continue with their education.

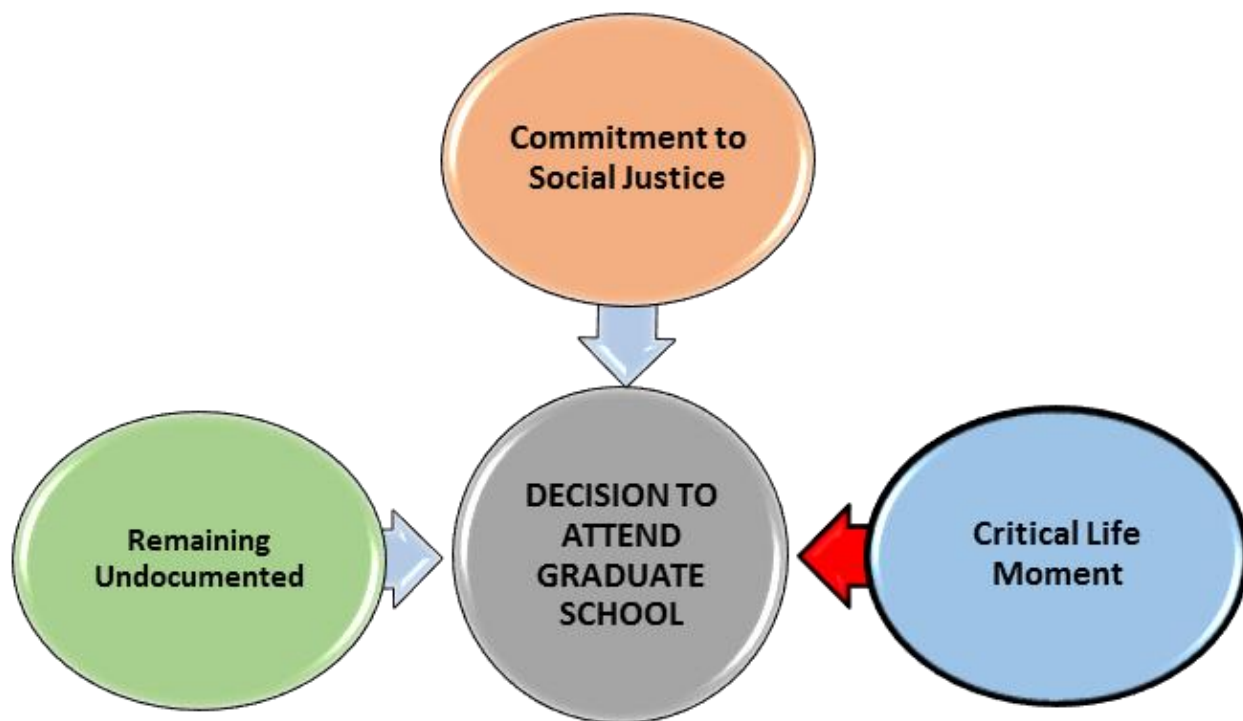


Figure 7. The impact of a critical life moment on the decision to attend graduate school.

For example, Esperanza shared that her younger sister’s near-death experience influenced her decision to return to school and obtain a Master’s degree. She explained her desire to return to school was because of an emotional and unfortunate event:

When the kidney doctor told me what was going on and I was the only one that understood the science behind it, I didn’t want to tell my whole family about it. That day my brother and I were gonna drive back home with my sister. And my brother said ‘you want to drive’ and I didn’t say anything. I didn’t have the words, I just sat down in the car and I was just shocked. I was shocked to have heard that my little sister needed a kidney transplant (cries) and I still remember the whole way. It’s an hour and thirty minute drive from Fresno to Lindsay and I don’t remember the whole way. I was awake but I don’t remember it and I said, ‘you know what God if you can just please be kind to my sister and have her not require a kidney transplant I will go back to school’, so I think that was my main motivation [continues to cry].

The turmoil caused by the illness of Esperanza's younger sister was trying for her family, leading her to make a *manda*¹⁸, or a special plea to God in for the wellbeing of her sister. As she alluded above, Esperanza's decision to return to school and enroll in graduate school was, in part, a result of this *manda*. Fortunately, her sister's health improved significantly and Esperanza entered a very competitive Master's program in Biology. Critical life moments led some of these students to pursue graduate studies even though they had conflicted and uncertain reservations, .

These critical life moments happened in different ways for students. For Diego, it was not a near-death experience, but the birth of his daughter that motivated him to continue. The birth of his daughter resulted in the postponement of filing an ongoing immigration application he had on record. He instead decided to enroll in graduate school, hoping that the election of President Obama in 2008 would provide a form of comprehensive immigration reform and a pathway toward legalization by the time he completed his Master's degree. He shared,

When I got my Bachelor's, my daughter had barely been born and that's why I didn't file in the paperwork. My daughter was barely born and I wanted to be here and now that I'm gonna graduate I'm seeing that I will, but on the other hand I'm hoping for Obama to do something about the situation because I don't want to leave my daughter now. She's older and I don't think I'm ever gonna be ready for that. But you know it comes to a time that you either have to do it or you have to plan for something else.

Unfortunately, at the time of this study, Diego would soon graduate and continued waiting in uncertainty like many other undocumented immigrants and undocumented students in hopes for a pathway towards legalization. Diego remained steadfast in his resistance to filing his immigration paper work for fear of penalization from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), forced to return to Mexico, and separated¹⁹ from his young daughter. Diego's case

¹⁸ A *manda* is promise made to a religious entity usually for the health and wellbeing of a loved one.

¹⁹ Punishment for family separation, often up to or in excess of 10 years.

showed how far he came because he would rather continue living and struggling by his daughter's side undocumented in the U.S., than risk being forced to leave the country and separation from his family. Critical family moments for other students has meant painful separations from loved ones for extended periods of time.

Joaquin who reflected on his graduate school experience explained that it took him four years to complete his Master's degree in physics because during the period, his mother contracted an advanced form of cancer and he had fallen in love and married. At the same time, he had no rush in graduating because he was uncertain of what he would do next; even if he graduated, he could not work in his field of expertise. For Joaquin, the decision to pursue a doctoral degree and continue his studies was easier when he encountered marital problems in his young marriage. He explained,

At the end when I divorced her, I decided, when I realized that we weren't going to be able to be together I made the decision of applying. I did what I should have done four years earlier, when I was in undergrad.

Joaquin regretted not having applied to doctoral programs directly out of undergraduate program where his stellar academic accomplishments garnered him the outstanding graduating senior award from the Dean of his school. While he did apply at that time and accepted to several prestigious graduate programs, he was in a difficult situation when he was unable to secure funding from any of the U.S. institutions to which he applied. Instead, he endured difficult times in the loss of his mother who ultimately died of cancer and ended his short marriage. It was only after the two difficult life incidents that he applied to doctoral programs, knowing that likely meant he would leave the United States to study abroad where there would be a greater degree of financial support.

Gloria, a second year Master's student in the school of architecture, had her mother's influence to pursue graduate studies. As an undergraduate student, Gloria recently lost her mother and was unmotivated to deal with the application process of graduate school. She shared a critical life moment that led to pursuing a Master's degree.

One day I just woke up and I felt like she was telling me . . . this sounds really superstitious but I woke up and all I could think about was am I going to miss the entire year? Do I really want to do that? I woke up thinking, Grad School, today was the deadline for grad school and I called the school and they were like, "actually we extended the deadline two weeks" and I was like "no way, this can't be happening". My professor told me, Gloria ask for an extension. I told him "you know I don't even have the strength to do that, I don't even care right now". He had told me that and I knew that it was possible but I just disregarded it because I didn't have the energy but then that morning it was like my mom was telling me Gloria don't do that, don't waste your time, just go ahead and when I called the school they said we extended the deadline to two weeks, I was like oh my gosh, It was meant for me to do it.

These cases provided opportunities for a glimpse into some of the struggles the students endured to enroll in various graduate degree programs.

From drawing on spiritual and religious beliefs in times of crises, to valuing family unity, to losing family members, the various key family moments these students experienced set plans in motion to pursue graduate studies. Esperanza for example, had a prayer answered for the wellbeing of her sister diagnosed with a serious kidney disease. In exchange for that deed, she vowed to return to school and enroll in a graduate degree program. Diego, on the other hand, was in a situation where he preferred delaying submission of his application for residency rather than running the risk of separation from his family, especially his young daughter. Instead, Diego enrolled in a Master's degree program and continued to live happily, knowing that his family would remain intact and together. Joaquin initially hesitated leaving the country to study because of familial difficulties, but eventually he came to understand that his greatest prospects

remained in Canada where he could pursue his doctoral degree in physics. As Espinoza (2010) noted, researchers effectively examined the way in which families and home life experiences played a role in the academic achievement of Latino students. In addition, some work illuminated the role of *familismo* which emphasized loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity. In the current study, participants all exhibited forms of familismo and maintained solid relations and ties with their loved ones. This sense of familismo gave them a sense of belonging from which they drew to do well academically. It was these reciprocal bonds and strong ties that students utilized and tapped in their most difficult times. These familial experiences allowed students to reflect on their situation and led them to make critical decisions in their life. While some students' decisions were influenced by a critical familial event like in Diego, Esperanza, and Joaquin's case, other students were greatly influenced by parental sacrifices and lived struggles.

Parental Sacrifice/Influence

Their parents' guidance, familial sacrifices, and lack of opportunity for an education influenced the educational and occupational aspirations of the students in the study. In some instances, the advice and guidance of parents led students to acquire an interest in specific areas of study. While, for others, working side by side with their parents and exposure to their daily lives made them aware of the difficult type of work they did not want. The motivation for many of the students was their parents' low educational attainment and they aspired to maximize the educational opportunities their parents never had. The figure below illustrates parental influence and support as experiences that influenced students to continue with their education. The narratives of Antonio, Lorena, David, and Adela provided examples of parental influence and support.

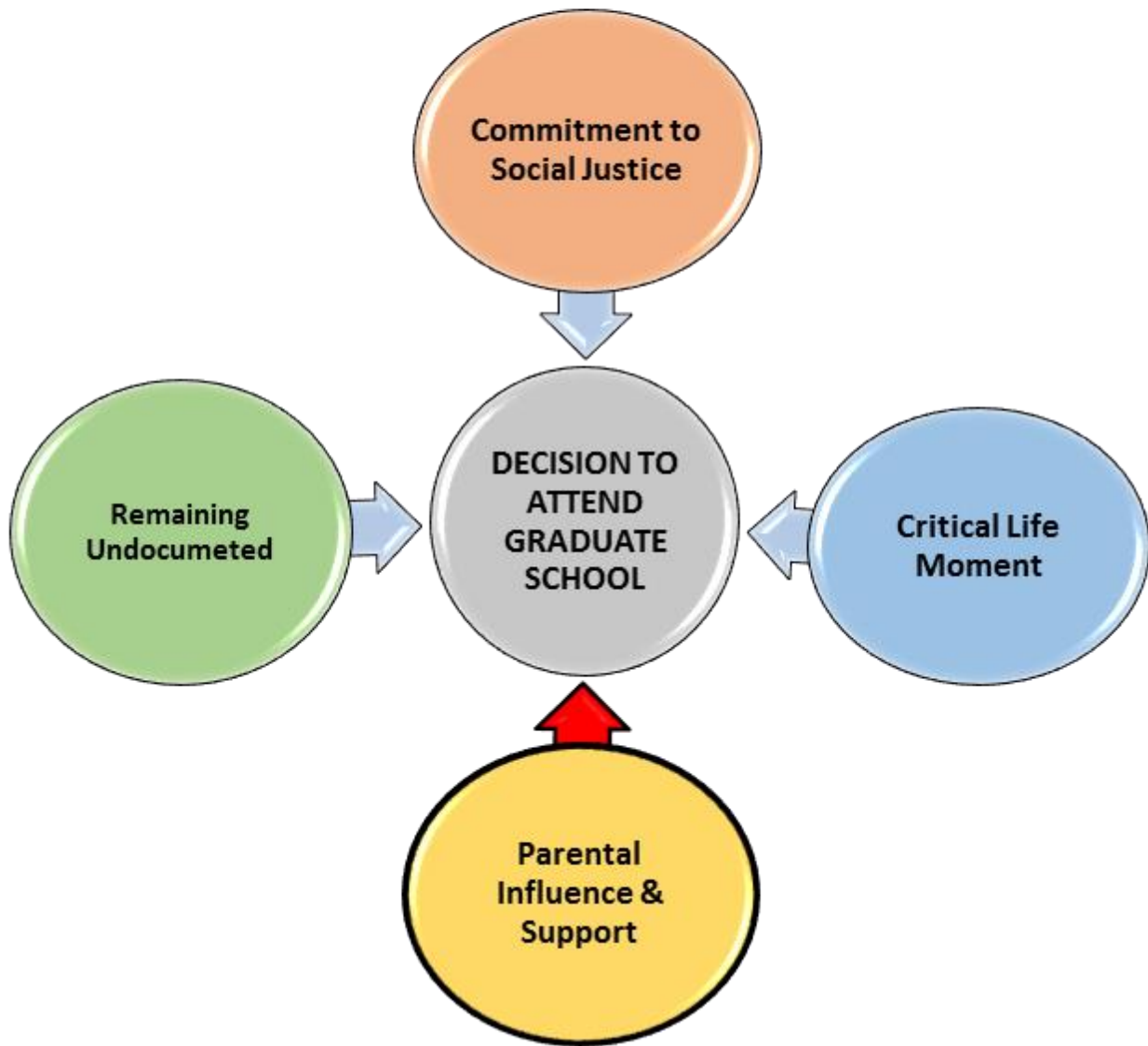


Figure 8. The impact of parental influence and support on the decision to attend graduate school.

Antonio's father was a notable influence in his decision to pursue a degree in the field of engineering. His father, his first teacher, taught him the importance of mastering mathematics. AS an elementary school student, his father would have him recite his multiplication tables every day before dinner. Antonio expanded,

I have always liked math since the beginning. Well, my dad had always implied to me that math is the universal language of the world. And well for that reason he's right, we all know it right, and with that he always involved himself and I always loved it, I always loved to go to school and get good grades.

In Antonio's case, his father first inculcated a love and appreciation for mathematics in his son. The lessons consisted of recognizing the universal applicability of the subject matter, which Antonio credited in becoming a strong student in math. Furthermore, the familial encouragement to 'go as far as you can' paved a solid foundation that led to a high academic output in school for Antonio and propelled him, in part, to pursue an undergraduate major and graduate degree in engineering.

Other students had parents with limited educational attainment and understood from personal lived experiences the negative implications for upward mobility. Not only did the parents instill the value of a formal education but the students understood the sacrifices their parents made in coming to the U.S. and leveraging an opportunity that would create greater access to higher education. For instance, Lorena, whose dream had been to become a teacher since she was a little girl, stated:

I see [my mother], she's so smart and it's just so frustrating that because of her situation she was so poor and she couldn't go to school . . . just the other day I was talking to her. I was like 'mom what would you have studied if you could have gone to school?' and she said 'I would have wanted to be a nurse, even a teacher or a chef' and she's so good at it and I'm like that's the whole reason why they came because they couldn't get their education. They wanted for us to get our education [cries] . . . see some of my cousins in Mexico and I know that they still can't afford college and I'm here. I struggle, I do, I have to have jobs everywhere. I clean, I work at a restaurant, all the stuff that I do, but I can still do

it. I can still get my education even with all these struggles, so I'm just really grateful.

Lorena felt gratitude because she recognized education as a privilege. From a comparative perspective, unlike many family members her age forced by poverty to abandon their educational aspirations, she was on a pathway to meet her aspirations. Lorena and others in this predicament must work multiple jobs to pay for their education, but they understood their situation remained more promising than if they stayed in their home country. They recognized their parents' sacrifices in coming to the U.S. leveraged a degree of access and opportunity that could potentially lead to upward social mobility. Her parents cherished the educational opportunity afforded to Lorena and the importance of learning. She said her parents sent her to school even if she was sick, and explained that if she indeed were ill, the school nurse would send her home. This high value for and deep appreciation of educational opportunities was something for which Lorena was grateful even it meant working multiple jobs with harsh manual labor demands.

Students shared that experiencing the type of daily work their parents carried out alongside them also influenced their educational decisions. In these cases, parents took the students work with them to assist the family with extra income and to expose them to the back breaking labor their parents endured. David, enrolled in a law school program, described his childhood experiences when his parents struggled to find employment and came home exhausted from working long hours. He shared,

I also think that my parent's experience, seeing like my mom go to work at two and she would come in at eleven. I didn't really get to see her. She would come home exhausted, I could see her in the morning, it was hard work. I just saw that and I was like 'that's not the life that I want'. Even with my dad too, the unemployment that he went through, it got to a point that he had to look for cans to make ends meet and he would take me with him. He showed me what it means

to struggle. I had to help him and he also took my little brother too. My dad took us and I got to see that and I was like, 'this is not what I want'. This is not life and they made it clear to us, that's the life that you have to live through if you don't take advantage of educational opportunities. That's the struggle that people have to go through who are working class.

Personal exposure to hard and difficult work in the context of unemployment and economic struggle influenced David and others to take advantage of educational opportunities. Their parents' struggles as well as their own experiences taught them at an early age the value of an education. Even when situations were difficult, school was an outlet to assist them in remaining focused and hopeful that everything would get better. His chosen career pathway of a lawyer was personally fulfilling for David because both his parents had less than an elementary school education

Adela, a Latin American master's student, also spoke throughout her interviews of the role her parents played in her education and the influence they had on her to achieve her academic goals and dreams. She spoke of her family's early struggles living in a mobile home when they first arrived in the United States until they finally were able to purchase their first home. Her parents ran a small store and Adela assisted them with administrative tasks on weekends with record keeping and necessary paperwork since they had no prior education or preparation in running a business. Speaking of these experiences and in spite of her parents' limited formal education, Adela indicated feeling supported by her parents. She shared:

It was my parents, I feel if I could attribute my education to anything or anyone, it was them. I mean even though they couldn't tell me go talk to your counselor or like explain specific things about the degree. They always had my back. So I felt like I could really do whatever I needed to do. It was them.

Adela considered her parents the main factor that led her to enroll in her graduate school program. A consequence of being with and working alongside her parents was that she learned

to value the hard work that went into earning money. Adela even adopted her parents thrifty spending as a strategy to pay for her education. Her narrative and that of other undocumented students centralized the importance that many immigrants place on the family as a system of support and reciprocal expectations.

Researchers often frame and make normative the traditional forms of parental support, which results in the positioning of immigrants and parents of color in a culturally deficit perspective, insinuating that Latino parents did not value the education of their children (Nava, 2012; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). This mindset is ahistorical and inaccurate and wrongfully places the blames on Latino parents for the supposed low academic achievement of their children. Prior research examining the mobility aspirations of Latina/o and African American parents convincingly showed that parents of color held even higher aspirations for their children than did Caucasian parents (Solórzano, 1992). Similarly, for undocumented families, media portrayals unfairly attack and criticize parents for bringing their children to ‘suffer in this country’ and to ‘freeload off the system’. On the contrary, the sacrifices and forms of support that parents explicitly leveraged for their children’s education influenced many of the undocumented students’ motivation and high aspirations. Undocumented students attributed their motivation to the sacrifices of their parents in coming to this country (Olivarez, 2006; Perez 2006). For most of the students in this study, their parents played an instrumental role of support in assisting them both emotionally and financially. In a study of Latina/o immigrant parents, Nava (2012) found parents provided unconditional amounts of *apoyo*, forms of broad based support, as they helped their children navigate the U.S. educational system. *Apoyo* consists of sacrifice, financial support, mentoring, and motivation, which are all key in ensuring the persistence of students through the educational pipeline. In this study for example, Antonio

attributed his becoming a strong academic student to his father's *apoyo* in helping build discipline and appreciation, skills that served him well in his career choice of an engineer. For David and Lorena, the forms of support they received from their parents consisted of hard work and sacrifice that fueled their desire to continue into graduate school. Finally, Adela's biggest influences were her parents, their hard work, and encouragement in modeling how to get by with less. Parents significantly influence undocumented graduate students in countless ways. Their educational aspirations as well as their motivation to continue with their studies manifested in their parents' struggles and sacrifices in bringing them to this country.

Similarly, another theme that arose throughout the study was that of obtaining a globally competitive specialization. By becoming global citizens, students obtained universal skills or majored in a certain subject to be globally prepared to move to another country and obtain employment in their field of study.

Obtaining a Globally Competitive Specialization

Students' aspirations for graduate education and their career trajectory were also influenced by their strong skills in specific academic subjects. For example, many of the students majoring in the sciences noted their strength in mathematics or another subject led them to academic fields like engineering, biology, chemistry, and math. For some, the strong foundational education in the natural sciences and mathematics they received in Mexico or other parts of Latin America prepared them to do well in those subjects, often considered gatekeepers into the majors.

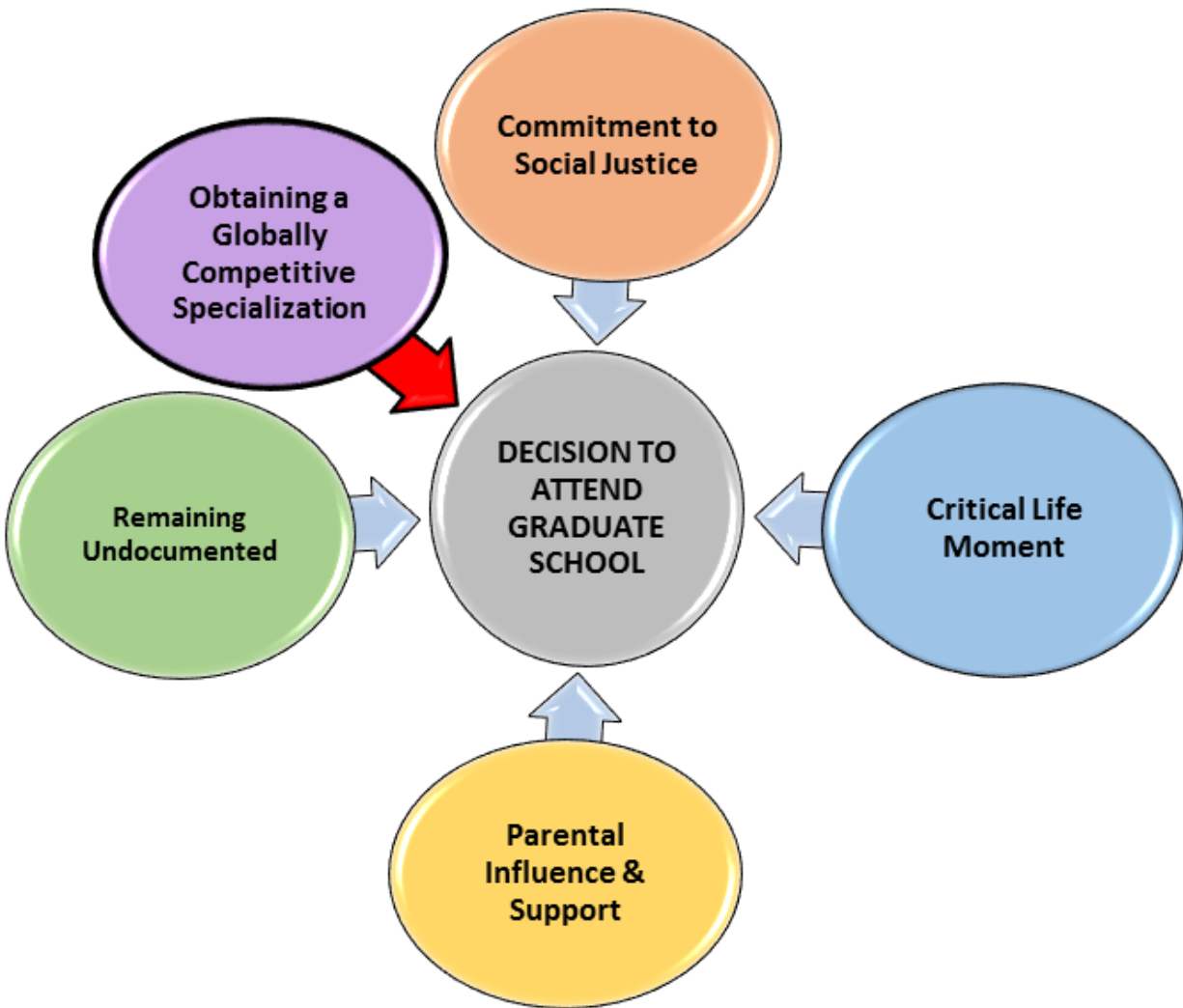


Figure 9. The impact of obtaining a globally competitive specialization on the decision to attend graduate school.

Numerous students mentioned that when they first arrived in the U.S., they struggled initially to learn the English language, but were far ahead in subjects like math or science, subject matter that they had covered prior to migration. Javier described,

Well I entered high school here, and I started seeing that they are very behind here in math. Over there in Mexico, I had already taken calculus, three semesters of calculus, differential calculus, and I came here and they placed me in algebra.

What the hell algebra! And that's how I started liking math and helping others. I already knew from Mexico, so I would try to explain it to others. That's when I said, 'well a career that's gonna be good, and that pays well, well engineering, and engineering it was.'

As Javier described above, his prior education and far superior preparation in Mexico influenced his decision to major in Civil Engineering. When he enrolled in school in the United States, he quickly discovered he was very strong in mathematics and even tutored many of his classmates. Majoring in engineering made sense to Javier because he considered engineering a universal major and believed that career preparation as a civil engineer would allow him to find employment anywhere in the world. Upon graduating with his Master's degree and unsure if he would stay in the U.S., he was open to moving to other countries like Canada or Australia, or even returning to Mexico in search of employment.

When considering possible subject areas as majors, students also were mindful of migrating, of leaving the U.S. to find employment. Following the footsteps of their parents in the prior generation, they too could find themselves in a situation where they would have to go to another country to find more lucrative employment. Karina, a mathematics major as an undergraduate, was well aware of this. She explained with her major she would likely have more opportunities elsewhere. While Karina's parents were college educated, they had to migrate to the U.S. during an economic downturn in their home country of Peru. She shared,

I think something that also affected me a lot was the move, the fact that my parents came here and they weren't able to get a job. They had to do lower skill labor. So I was like if something happens, World War III or something, I have to go to another country, I can teach math [laughs]. Well, that's what I thought when I was in college, that's why I did math.

Karina described above how, despite her parents' college level education in Peru, their degrees and training did not cross-articulate in the U.S. Learning from their experience, Karina

decided to major in mathematics and pursue a Master's degree in education with the foresight that her academic preparation would provide her with avenues beyond the U.S. borders.

Karina's experience, along with other students, highlighted that, even when deciding what to study, undocumented students had to keep their immigration status in mind. A key difference separating undocumented students from documented students was their need to ensure that their career choices would provide maximum opportunities to utilize their degrees globally if necessary.

Consuelo, another undocumented student majoring in linguistics, had grown tired of waiting and struggling to get by and lost faith that anything positive would change in the system. She lamented that, with no signs of amnesty or a pathway to legalization in the near future, she developed plans to leave the U.S. and move to another country. She was ready for a new beginning, planning to pursue a doctoral degree, and looking for universities outside of the U.S. She explained,

I have to start already applying looking for a university and I want to apply out of the country. Simply because I have lost faith in the system here in the U.S. and I don't want to stay here. I just don't feel free. I mean first of all I didn't want to come here. I mean I am not saying I want to stay in Mexico either. It's more part frustration and part wanting more. I think I can get a better university than this one, I can get only so much here. I mean I haven't seen the other universities; I want to get the same opportunities that other people have. That's part of the reason why and being in the U.S., there's not a lot of choice for me. My mom says well if they give an amnesty, they're probably going to give it to the students. They're talking about it, but frankly I was telling her I don't want to stay even if they gave one. I don't want to stay here. I don't feel free, and there are many factors. I don't feel free, I want to travel, I want to get more education, and I don't see that happening here for some reason.

Because of her status as an undocumented student and the many restrictions, Consuelo confessed to feeling confined and no longer free. She was frustrated and wanted the opportunity to fulfill her desire of earning a doctorate in linguistics. She was determined to leave the country and find

new avenues to utilize her degree and accomplish her goals. At the time of this study, Consuelo was by far the most disillusioned student in the group. She had had enough!

Like Consuelo, several other students indicated that, if their immigration status did not change, they were open to migrating to another country where they could live more freely and happy. As students decided on their post-baccalaureate studies, they understood the critical nature of obtaining advanced degrees in a field or area of study that would have high demand and afford them opportunity in a global context. For many of them, especially those waiting their entire lives to gain legalization, finding other avenues to utilize their degrees became a strategic way of coping with living in limbo. Out of the twenty participants in the study, fifteen spoke of their plans and willingness to relocate to another country if necessary.

One particular student, Joaquin, a graduate student in physics, served as an example to many of the other interviewees of a possible solution and pathway to pursue if legalization did not occur. For Joaquin, leaving became a more attractive solution than living in limbo, and not being able to work in his field of study or continuing to doctoral studies. Eventually, Joaquin pursued his dream of obtaining a doctoral degree program in physics at a highly selective research intensive institution in Canada. While the move to Canada as a Mexican national afforded him a degree of freedom and rights that he did not experience in the U.S., there was an impact in different and unanticipated ways. When he left California in search of his academic dreams, he encountered difficult transition experiences that put his new reality into perspective. For the first time in his life, he understood explicitly the important role and support his family and university community provided him. Although in Canada, he no longer worried about deportation and was able to study and work without struggling to pay tuition and living expenses, his new documented status continued to impact a major part of his life because he was unable to

see his family in the U.S. In that manner, he continued to be undocumented, and had not seen his father and younger siblings for ten years.

Gabriel also contemplated his future because he was close to finishing his doctoral degree in Spanish literature at a liberal arts university on the east coast. When asked about his plans if no immigration reform occurred, Gabriel noted he did not like to think about the future, but understood he would likely have to make difficult decisions. He explained,

I'll probably need to make changes and I don't know, I'm not going to return to Mexico. No, I really feel that I belong here in this country and I appreciate so much the opportunity to stay here and work properly, and to help this country, to be a good contributor. If not, I will probably go somewhere else, to another country, I don't know where . . . maybe Canada.

For Gabriel, going to another country was a move of last resort. He was hopeful that immigration reform would occur but, in case it did not, he was open to applying to a second Ph.D. program in the U.S. or abroad. Gabriel understood that, with diminished options in the U.S., he would likely have to go somewhere else in the world. Unfortunately for students like Gabriel, the recent DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals²⁰) relief would not have applied because he was over the age requirement to be eligible. Outside of providing a pathway towards citizenship through comprehensive immigration reform for students over 30 years of age like Gabriel, there are not many other options to become a part of society. These students, then, had no other option but to pursue other opportunities available to them in other countries.

Looking for opportunities to utilize their degrees outside of the country was often an option for the students in the CSU system. They were familiar with the story of Joaquin the

²⁰ On June 15, 2012, President Obama signed a memo calling for deferred action for certain undocumented young people who came to the United States as children and pursued education or military service. (<http://immigrationequality.org/issues/immigration-basics/daca/#sthash.cis2bwLz.dpuf>)

undocumented student who left the country to obtain a doctoral degree in Canada. This example allowed them to see that following in his footsteps was indeed an option and possibility for them despite how painful and difficult. The students spoke of leaving to other countries, such as Australia, Canada, Russia, or returning to Mexico where they could live and have the liberty to work.

The experiences of these students revealed the frustration and disillusion of some undocumented students while waiting for politicians to act. They would rather move elsewhere even at the expense of being with loved ones. Further research is necessary to examine the human talent that the United States loses because of narrow-minded and counterintuitive immigration laws that hurt and separate families. Ortiz and Hinojosa (2010) found that the same legal restraints that impede students from continuing in higher education continue to limit their opportunities at the end of their academic careers. The limited choices available to them involved either enrolling in graduate studies or looking for employment. Graduate school can be a safe haven for undocumented students, while finding employment in their field is the most difficult barrier because they must produce documentation that employers request (Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010).

After gaining Bachelor's degrees, many students in this study sought alternative opportunities where their hard work would pay off. They considered employment opportunities in other countries. Finding employment after graduation was the biggest barrier encountered by students because it was difficult finding an employer willing to give them a chance to practice their skills (Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010). As result, students often return to work in their countries of origin or accept low-wage jobs in the U.S. No available research highlights the educational trajectories of undocumented students that left the United States in search of other opportunities.

Research, however, does note the role of globalization and the interconnectedness of the United States with others nations, especially around the prominence of US institutions around the world (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). For undocumented students, open borders' may provide an outlet to fulfill their career objectives.

Few studies explain the career selection process for undocumented students. Ortiz and Hinojosa (2010) found that undocumented students initially chose careers that required documents but when they realized the barriers, they deferred or changed their career path. As a result, many students redirected their careers by considering graduate education. Similar to other research, the current study discovered that students like Gabriel, Javier, Karina, and Diego furthered their education in hopes of buying time for some type of educational reform or becoming experts in their fields to gain access to sponsorship by employers (Ortiz, Hinojosa, 2010).

Another critical strategy for students to continue in graduate programs was the mentoring they received from peers, family members, teachers, and counselors. Students also came to their post-baccalaureate aspirations through the mentoring relationships they established.

Mentorship

Mentorship was a critical element in the lives and educational trajectories of these students. As high school students, they indicated having a teacher, a counselor, or a relative who motivated and supported them to persist in their education. Without the assistance of these individuals, some students likely would not have attended institutions of higher education because they believed it outside the realm of possibility for undocumented students. Even at the university level after earning a baccalaureate degree, supportive relationships were critical in shaping undocumented students' educational aspirations and trajectories. For instance, in these

cases, students had the guidance of supportive relationships consisting of peers, graduate students, professors, counselors, and staff on campus that familiarized them with how to apply and navigate the graduate school process.

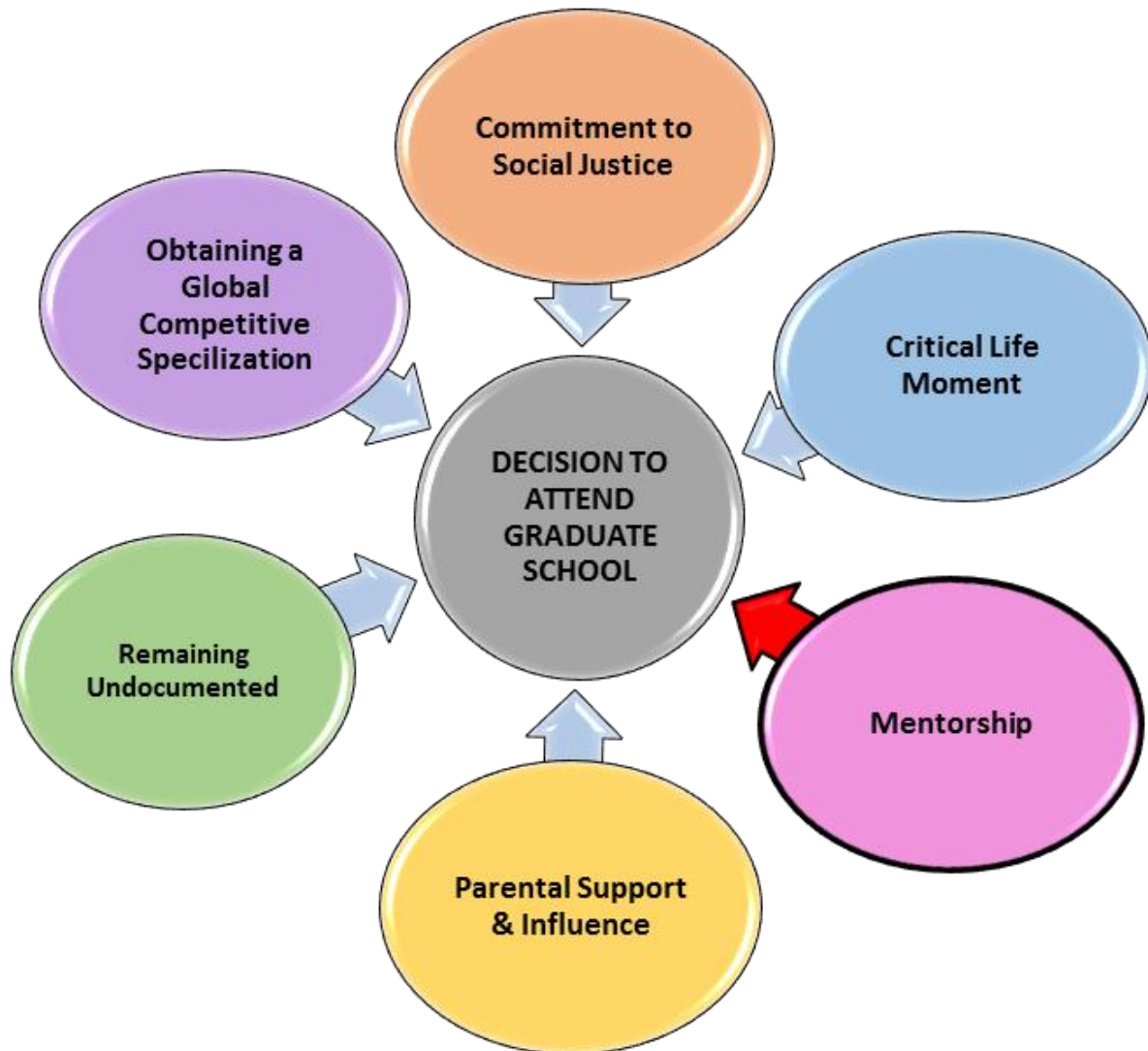


Figure 10. The impact of mentorship on the decision to attend graduate school.

For Soledad, an undocumented student who studied education, navigating the graduate school application process was especially difficult because she was a transfer student and needed

extra preparation in a limited window of time to familiarize herself with the graduate school application process. Soledad shared how one of her peers was critical in her decision to continue graduate studies. She stated,

I didn't really know about what I was going to do after. I was focused on graduating and I was a sociology major here and I really didn't really like it here. So I guess my thinking changed when I found out that people [other undocumented students] were going into grad school and Gloriana . . . really I have to thank her. She's the one who told me about it, because that's the year that I came in, she was leaving to Harvard and so before she left, we did like a one-on-one grad school super marathon. This is what is, this is what you have to do, this is what you have to think and because she was a transfer student she knew the limited time I had. She helped me come up with a deadline, this is when you have to turn everything in by, take the GRE and do all this stuff. I knew that my situation wasn't getting any better and I felt like it was such little time to be here as an undergrad. Two years, that's not that much as an undergrad. So I thought maybe I should just do a Master's. That's how I got into thinking about grad school. She told me when to take the GRE, what to do, what letters, what research I needed to get into and that's how I decided to do more school after I graduated because I didn't know what else to do.

For Soledad, a peer mentor offered to help by providing the opportunity to gain research experience and become well prepared to apply to graduate school. This example was critical and was the extra information and motivation that Soledad needed as reassurance to pursue graduate studies. Similar to other students, Soledad had been assisted by mentors and friends throughout each segment of the educational pipeline. After she decided to attend community college, Soledad participated in an AB540 student conference where she met other undocumented students currently enrolled at the university. This experience allowed her to envision a four-year university as a possibility. Mentors and role models opened alternative pathways for undocumented students to succeed and surpass the many obstacles they encountered in deciding whether to continue with their education.

Receiving peer mentoring was also a common experience shared by other participants. Adela, a Master's student attending the University of California, listened to one of her friends who was enrolled in graduate school at the time Adela was completing her undergraduate degree. The information she received from her friend one day at a bus stop was essential in her future decision to apply to a Master's program. She shared,

If it wasn't for like one friend who got me really thinking about it [graduate school]. He was in McNair and started sharing resources with me, he told me about the GRE, he had books and tons of information. We would get together and just break it down, everything he was doing. If it wasn't for him, I would have never known.

These experiences are critical for students of color. The advice and mentorship they receive from peers and mentors is crucial, exposing them to information and providing tools to navigate the educational pipeline. These relationships and connections are similar to what Yosso (2005) referred to as social capital. The influence these mentoring relationships have on students of color can make a huge impact on their educational career paths. This was the case for David.

For David, the seed to become a lawyer sprouted when he was a student in high school. Similar to Soledad, having someone set an example of what was achievable really opened his eyes and allowed him to envision that, even though he was undocumented, he had the capacity, to become a lawyer. He shared,

I think law became sort of the path that I wanted to take and that was up in high school I think that's when I got to see it. I think it came from an experience from this T.A. who was a student at Cal State Long Beach. She would T.A. on the side at my school and she would talk about her schooling and she was applying to law school. She was talking to me about that experience, and she got into Bolt and she went off to Bolt. So I was really impressed by her. She had a big impression on me and so I was like into the idea of law at that point.

The relationship he built with the teacher assistant in his high school classroom greatly impacted David. Experiences such as these are extremely critical in the lives of students of color,

especially undocumented populations. Many of the students in this research study experienced the assistance of someone at one point in the educational pipeline that helped them graduate from high school, continue to community college, or enroll in a four-year university.

Students were mentored by teachers and counselors that provided them with information on how to apply to the university. This was precisely the case for Gabriel who, after completing his bachelor's degree on the west coast, decided to pursue a Master's degree in the Midwest because he would be able to apply for a driver's license in that state. Gabriel was completely alone in the United States; without immediate family members, mentors and role models formed his entire educational trajectory. He attributed the success of his accomplishments to a French professor he met at community college who offered him a room in her home after witnessing his distress because he was homeless and had nowhere to live. With her assistance, Gabriel was able to graduate from the community college and enroll in a four-year university. The teacher took him to the nearest four-year university where she knew the director of a program that assisted undocumented students. Gabriel shared the importance that personal connections and mentorship made in his life. He said,

The personal connection of life, yes. For me in my life experience, I don't know how to tell you this but, I've always met the right people at the right time. Even when I haven't had anything, like when I'm like brrr, nothing, where I didn't know what to do, where to go. [Acts like he is praying and asking for something] Look if, yes, I have to, please help me and send me a sign, tell me something, what am I going to do? And then . . . it happens.

Gabriel acknowledged the importance and difference that having connections made in his life. Even when conditions were the worst for him, he found someone willing to offer support.

Similar to Gabriel, many of the other students encountered generous individuals who were willing to help them. In some cases, people went as far as to supporting students with

transportation. For example, Gloria was extremely grateful that she had found the support of a family willing to assist them with child care and purchase a car for her and her sister so that they would be able to commute to campus. These rarely discussed situations, such as those of Gabriel and Gloria, make such a difference in a student's life.

Student participants were also supported by institutional mentors. At the CSU institution under study, Ricardo, the director of a student service program on campus, guided and mentored many of the students. Of the twelve participants from that campus, Ricardo had assisted all at some point in their educational trajectories, including their transferring from their community college to the four-year university. He assisted students like Antonio, Javier, and Carmen by providing them information about the services available to them. Other students had counselors or staff members at their universities who connected the students with Ricardo. Alma specifically shared how her first encounter with Ricardo and his program was in high school when the school counselor brought her to visit the university. The most important part of her trip was meeting an undocumented university student from her hometown. She visited the campus and even had the opportunity to see where the student lived. This experience really concretized for Alma the possibility that undocumented students could attend and graduate from the university. Andres and Carmen had similar stories of obtaining support from Ricardo and his organization. Other students met Ricardo once enrolled at the university through participation in his programs. The most common reference to Ricardo included students commenting on his encouragement and advice to continue with their studies because they were now experts in navigating institutions of higher education as undocumented students.

Analytical Summary

Previous research mentioned sources of support consisting of undergraduate research programs and support from institutional agents. Ramirez (2011, 2013) particularly emphasized the obstacles and barriers that Latinas/os students experienced in the graduate school choice process. Some of the barriers encountered by students included a lack to information in how to apply to graduate school, lack of guidance and support, institutional abuse, and limitations posed by the GRE. For Latina/o students, the resources available through mentoring programs were critical. Programs, such as the Ronald E. McNair Educational Opportunity Program among others, assisted students in setting a pathway towards enrolling in graduate school. Unfortunately, for undocumented students, these programs are not an option because they are ineligible to receive federal funds because of their legal status. Due to the lack of resources available to them, mentoring relationships and programs are essential in enabling these students to obtain a baccalaureate degree and continue to graduate school. For undocumented students who have successfully graduated from high school and enrolled in college, individuals in their lives have served as their advocates in providing them with social support in forms of information, counseling, and connections to other services or individuals (Gonzalez, 2011; Perez, 2010). In addition, mentorship has been a critical component in their matriculation in college (Gonzalez, 2011).

As graduate school becomes more isolating and rigorous, the need deepens for social support and mentoring from peers and school-based relationships who understand the legal and financial hurdles of being an undocumented student. Programs established to support students interested in graduate school have been critical. Several undocumented students established a program [GRADD] in 2010 designed to provide support for other undocumented graduate

students. Support systems are essential to broaden the available pathways for the recruitment and persistence of other undocumented students navigating the rigors of graduate education.

Similar to students of color in general in graduate degree programs, mentoring for undocumented students is critical. In many cases if it were not for the example others provided, students would not have the courage or motivation to continue. As more undocumented students graduate from high school and obtain college degrees, it is important to provide them with the necessary tools and adequate information about graduate school.

In spite of their parents' limited education and lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system, undocumented college students often reported that their parents' hard work and sacrifices motivated them to pursue higher education. While students experienced frustration with the numerous restrictions they encountered due to their undocumented status, several studies noted that many dedicated their efforts to mentor or help other undocumented students or become involved in activism and develop a sense of empowerment (Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013). A growing number of colleges have supportive student groups for undocumented students that provide in-depth information about how to navigate college, how to fundraise, and raise awareness for other students on campus.

The findings of the current study noted that the factors influencing undocumented Latina/o students' decisions to attend graduate school were often products of their undocumented status. Research on the experiences of graduate students found several influential factors in their graduate school application and matriculation decisions, including program reputation, location, financial aid, characteristics of the graduate program, quality of the faculty, and input from spouse/partner (Kallio, 1995, Poock & Love, 2001). However, similar to the undocumented students in this research study, significance of the factors varied according to graduate students'

age, enrollment status, gender, race, ethnicity (Kallio, 1995; Poock & Love, 2001) and, in the current study, immigration status. The findings in this study also demonstrate a need to examine or add undocumented status to the variables that researchers utilize to examine the college choice process for students of color. As in the college choice for Latina/o students, parental encouragement was critical in serving as motivation. Similar to what Gandara (1995) coined as a “culture of possibility” (p. 112), parents modeling a strong work ethic and an intense motivation for their children to achieve academically and to have better lives served as support. Other factors influencing students’ decision were their individual characteristics composed of remaining undocumented, having a commitment to social justice, experiencing a critical life moment, and attaining a global specialization. These characteristics related to their undocumented status and served as a great influence in motivating them to go beyond their baccalaureate degrees.

This chapter provided central themes that revealed the way in which Latina/o undocumented students came to their decisions to apply to graduate school programs. The decision to continue with their Master’s or doctoral studies was a critical one because students continued to face similar and more difficult adversities. Each of the following were key factors that contributed to a student decision pursue graduate studies: a) Remaining undocumented, b) A commitment to social justice, c) A critical life moment, d) Familial influence and support, e) Mentorship, and f) Attaining a globally competitive specialization. Despite all the adversities encountered as undergraduate students, these key factors influenced and shaped their decisions to continue their studies. The next chapter emphasizes the navigational strategies undocumented Latina/o graduate students utilize in accessing institutions of higher education. They consist of strategies of self-advocacy, strategies of resistance, and strategies of funding.

CHAPTER 6: Navigating Graduate School

Introduction

Chapter 5 described the different ways undocumented Latina/o students came to their decisions to enter graduate school. Factors, such as remaining undocumented, developing a commitment to social justice, experiencing a critical life moment, parental influence and support, mentorship, and attaining a globally competitive degree specialization, were instrumental in their pursuit of a graduate education. This chapter focuses specifically on undocumented students and their experiences in graduate school and the ways they navigate their Master's and doctoral programs by overcoming challenges associated with their undocumented status. The following research question helped guide the analysis of this chapter:

RQ2. How do undocumented students navigate the post-baccalaureate portion of the educational pipeline?

The next section describes three emergent themes that undocumented students utilize to navigate the challenges they encounter along their graduate educational trajectory. Their personal narratives provide relevant examples of strategies employed by students to navigate the pipeline successfully. The model in Figure 11 illustrates the three emergent themes that explain how undocumented Latina/o graduate students navigate their graduate education, including: Strategies of Self-Advocacy, Strategies of Resistance, and Strategies of Funding.

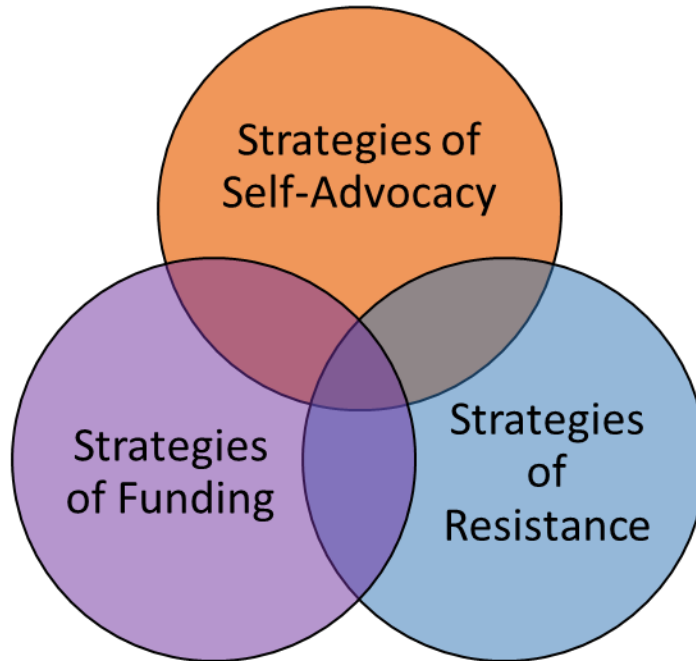


Figure 11. Model of navigational strategies.

Strategies of self-advocacy involved undocumented students advocating on their own behalf to gain access to resources, financial support, and career experiences that ultimately allowed them to continue towards degree completion. Strategies of resistance included students challenging stereotypes, institutional policies, and persisting as a way to resist the various obstacles they encountered in their educational pathway. Finally, students demonstrated various strategies to fund their own education. These strategies were though a process whereby they benefitted from the assistance of parents and family, the student's own individual agency, and the support of social networks and programs.

Strategies of Self-Advocacy

As students pursued Master's and doctoral degrees, they suffered high levels of stress within the university coupled with demanding lives outside that took a toll on their physical and mental health. At both the CSU and the UC institutional systems, students employed what one could broadly call strategies of self-advocacy. These strategies included methods of proactively seeking essential support and practicing self-care for their body and mind. The practices incorporate acts of self-love, self-health, and care, and acts of voluntarism. Research continuously showed that, when students felt welcome and support at institutions of higher education, they tended to perform better and feel better about themselves (Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013). When higher education environments were unwelcoming, students relied on campus organizations, student groups, other campus communities, supportive peers, and faculty for much needed support. But what happens when students face multiple forms of marginalization like Latino/a undocumented students do? The diagram below (Figure 12) shows the three particular ways that students in this study enacted self-advocacy.

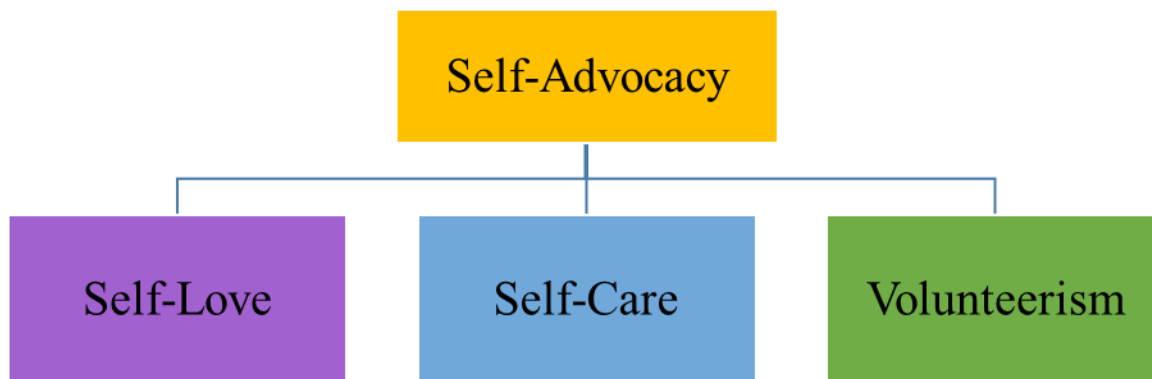


Figure 12. Models of strategy of self-advocacy.

The importance of caring for one's self was especially evident at the University of California where Latina/o undocumented graduate students were more difficult to locate because they were often the only undocumented students in their programs and, at times, the only students of color. At the time of the interviews, only a handful of Latina/o undocumented graduate students attended the U.C. institution. The demands of their graduate programs coupled with working long hours and a long commute took a toll on students' personal and social lives. As a result, some of the students suffered from numerous mental health issues and sought medical advice to cope with the daily stress and anxiety. Having previously been undocumented undergraduate students, they understood that, in order for them to survive through the rigors of their graduate programs physically and mentally, they needed a connection with their undocumented community. Many students sought psychological services, such as meeting with a counselor, that allowed them to share their experiences as a way to deal with the isolation and alienation. In addition, they quickly learned the need to become good self-advocates because faculty and administration were often clueless on how to work with and support undocumented students.

Self-Advocacy

Gloria, a second year Master's student in the school of architecture at the University of California, shared the difficult transition she experienced when she began her graduate program. As an undergraduate, Gloria was very involved in activism and part of a campus support group where she regularly met other undocumented students. With this group, she became involved in immigration protests and other forms of activism, and they cultivated a space to share their experiences with other undocumented students. Engaging in these type of school spaces and in social activism kept her motivated and refueled to fight defeat in the face of continual adversity. Once in graduate school, the demands of Gloria's program limited her participation in social spaces and activism. Gloria found her graduate program to be so demanding that she often would not even take time to go home and she slept on campus. In addition, her graduate program lacked racial and cultural diversity and she struggled to find other students with whom to connect. In describing barriers she had encountered and how she arrived at her decision to attend a graduate program, she explained,

I had decided that I had to come . . . there was nobody, there's like no other Spanish speaking people. I'm the only Latina in the department. There's a couple of, two other students with Latino backgrounds but they don't identify themselves as Latinos.

Despite being the only Latina in her program, Gloria decided to continue her Master's at the same institution as her undergraduate degree because her already established social networks and systems of support made finding resources and support less difficult. Through her activism and on campus presence, she built a well-established community that could support her like they had as an undergraduate. However, in graduate school, she had no financial assistance and soon learned that if she was to be successful at this level she would need to be her own best advocate. She shared,

It was very difficult. Once I was in the graduate school process, I would go to the departments and ask them for money. I was looking for resources, help, for guidance and see how the department might help, not that I deserve special attention or anything. I really felt like I was intruding.

Gloria's only alternative at the time was self-advocacy, personally inquiring about resources and funding. Despite her enthusiasm and eagerness to find resources, the department was unaware of how they could help a student in her situation. With the rapidly increasing costs of tuition, Gloria desperately needed support. At that time not only was graduate school more expensive but tuition continued to increase each quarter. For example, in her last year of graduate school, her fees drastically increased. Rather than paying the reasonable \$12,000 for tuition, she was surprised and angered when she had to pay \$20,000 instead. She learned that, in order to survive the graduate program, she needed to re-connect with the undocumented community and especially with the few undocumented students pursuing graduate school. As a result, Gloria along with a few other undocumented students established a graduate student group where they could support each other and alleviate some of the isolation and loneliness they felt as the only undocumented students in their departments. Another student who was also the only Latina student in her department was Esperanza.

Esperanza, a first year Master's student in the department of physics at the CSU institution, was the only Latina and only undocumented student in the department. In my interviews with her, she was so excited to meet me that she gave me a tour of the lab where she worked. During the tour, she wore her long white coat, and introduced me to her colleagues and to her thesis advisor. She explained her current research and provided an overview of her lab experiments where she was examining samples of cancerous breast tissue in farm working women. One of the biggest challenges she encountered in graduate school was the ignorance of professors and administrators about AB 540 students and issues affecting them. She explained,

My chair he didn't know what it [AB540] was. My professor, research professor didn't know what it was. The previous chair, I'm not really sure how many years he was chair and now we have a new chair but the old chair didn't know what AB540 was. I think that's the hardest thing trying to have them help you when they don't really know what it is and they don't really want to go into a gray area where they think they might get in trouble. So I think that's the hardest thing because if there was some system or if they at least knew what it was, if they were aware of what AB540 students are, then they would help you out. You know, at this time, at this point in time, I would have a position in assistantship, teaching a lab in biology here at the university. So I would have that and I would also have, there's a grant that my research professor gives his grad students to help them out with their expenses, he gives them \$500 a month, I would have that but I don't.

A key strategy employed by Esperanza was meeting with the chair and educating him and other faculty and staff about AB540 issues. Even after learning of her situation, the department chair was hesitant to do anything for fear of potential consequences from his actions. Esperanza decided to self-advocate and speak with other faculty, including her advisor, about the possibility of volunteering to teach a lab course for one of the core classes in physics even if she could not be paid. While this arrangement allowed Esperanza to acquire experience working in her advisor's lab, it also allowed the university to exploit her labor by denying her pay. Similar to Esperanza, another strategy utilized by undocumented graduate students was to serve as a volunteer to obtain the necessary professional experience and preparation in their field. Although Esperanza found her financial situation unjust, she remained hopeful, knowing she had no choice but to continue working hard to acquire the relevant experience in her graduate program. Despite her enthusiasm and eagerness to find resources, her department personnel remained unaware of what to do to assist her. Another student who found herself in a similar situation was Soledad.

Soledad was a Master's student at the University of California majoring in education. Like Esperanza, one of Soledad's strategies was to self-advocate and seek paid employment. When paid employment was unavailable, she volunteered in order to acquire research

preparation to pursue her doctoral degree, something she would have received if she had documentation. The most difficult challenge for Soledad was being unable to obtain research experience because many of the programs traditionally serving low-income, first-generation, or students of color requested documentation. As a strategy, Soledad sought the assistance of graduate students with whom she worked at the time. By disclosing her status and respective problems to a few supportive graduate students, she gained valuable mentorship and unfunded research experience that were critical in her acceptance to several competitive doctoral programs. She shared her navigational strategy.

One I didn't know, TSP stressed like McNair and everybody stresses to get research experience as an undergrad. I honestly felt I wasn't going to get into anywhere because I didn't do any of those programs. So I talked to Gabriela [graduate student] and I cried because I was like "it's unfair to have this program and students aren't able to take advantage. It's supposed to prepare you and I need all that preparation too." So she's like "you know what? I'm gonna help you," and she's the one that introduced me to a professor. We did an independent study every quarter. She's all "you can get research experience doing other things, you can help me analyze my data, we're gonna get you research experience so you can prepare for your application." So that and Veronica [graduate student], she also helped me cause I talked to her, she's like "so what are you gonna do?" And I was like "well I need research experience." She's all "that I have plenty of that and you can help me with this." I felt good even though I didn't join a program, I still was very involved and gathering data I helped with Justice for Janitors data collection and analyzing and I put it in Stata [Data Analysis and Statistical Software], so I was getting a lot of experience.

By seeking the assistance of other graduate students, Soledad prepared herself academically to remain competitive and accomplish her goal of pursuing a doctoral degree. She described the challenges in graduate school as being similar to those in undergrad but "more intensified." She explained the differences and similarities:

So it was like another set of issues that started again, kind of some of the same ones as undergrad but they're more intensified. I always tell students, you all are gonna have to explain what AB 540 is, you do that in undergrad. The same problems [are there in graduate school], but a little bit tougher and because not a lot of us have gone there, there's not a lot of people to ask about this, you know.

When you're applying for undergrad like there's at least different organization you can talk to. There are a lot of students at the Cal State, at the UC system, but when it comes to grad school it's like who do you ask? You can't ask anyone unless they've actually been there.

Several of the students in this study have been the first undocumented graduate students in their departments. As these students navigated their graduate education, they highlighted the importance of being able to connect with and mentored by other undocumented graduate students and to obtain the support of documented allies in order to navigate their institutions. As a result, they also understood the importance of paying it forward by being mentors and frequently meeting with other undocumented students to guide them in their educational pathways. Just like Soledad, Alma also mentioned the importance of seeking the help of others.

Alma, a student pursuing her Master's in marriage and family therapy at the CSU institution, also shared her experience of being the only undocumented student in her program. Alma's advice to other undocumented graduate students was to "be self-determined, to plan ahead, and to seek the help of advisors" because undocumented students in graduate school were scarce. Alma found that seeking the assistance of professors and counselors was critical to success and advancement. By seeking the assistance of professors and guidance counselors, she received a job tutoring children and continued doing the same as a graduate student. By being her own advocate, she received several stipends that allowed her to work and continue with her graduate education. Alma shared her experience in her graduate program.

There's not a lot of us, there were some in undergrad but there's really none as a graduate student that you can relate to. They don't know your experience, you just kind of have to go with the flow and just feel like you're part of them but deep inside knowing that you have a totally different experience.

Because of not having other undocumented graduate students enrolled in her courses, Alma had a strong networking relationship with friends from her undergraduate program on

whom she relied. As a graduate student, Alma sought the help of a key mentor who helped in her undergraduate work and would help her now, especially with tuition increases. She shared that, although paying for tuition and school expenses was a huge barrier, not knowing if she could ever use her degree was also frustrating and challenging. Her plans were to continue her education and earn a doctoral degree.

Diego was the only parent-student in the study and working toward a Master's degree in engineering at the CSU. He frequently spoke of his three year old daughter as his greatest motivation to finish his studies. Diego credited his own initiative in allowing him to overcome the challenges he encountered. He remained at his undergraduate institution for his Master's degree because his partner had recently started a nursing program and he did not want to relocate the family. During the interview, he advised future undocumented graduate students to be active.

He shared,

Be active, be active, the only way I was able to do what I'm doing is because I actually looked into it. It wasn't that I found the right person and that's the case for most people, most people don't find the right person but the right person should be you. You should be the right person and you should be the one searching and it isn't really that difficult. I mean back then it was a little more difficult but now with Google and everything and more undocumented students more people in here and more people trying to go to college, you will have more options than what I had back two years ago You do your research and go look because there is a lot of help out there. Finding the right person is good but you don't always find somebody else or support.

Diego highlighted the importance of taking initiative and being his own advocate. From his experience, he advised others that it was incumbent upon them to search for resources on ways to attend graduate school. Due to his parental responsibilities Diego was cognizant that he had to be his own advocate and if he wanted access to resources and support, he would have to search for them. As a parent, he knew he had little time to waste between his academics and full time job and he remained focused and on a very tight schedule. Another common feeling among

participants was that of being unaccepted or unwanted. A preferred strategy utilized by students to tackle these feelings and emotions was self-love.

Self-Love

Gabriel was one of three males in this study pursuing a doctoral degree. Having gone through community college, obtaining a bachelor's and a master's degree, and, at the time of the study, finishing his Ph.D., he learned the important role caring for one's self played in helping him navigate the process. Gabriel recalled that, throughout his entire higher education experience, he was always nervous about the uncertainty of how would he would be able to afford the following semester.

I remember being depressed, being anxious, nervous about not knowing what was going to happen next semester. So I knew that "okay I'm in school right now I've paid this semester, how I'm I going to pay the next one? And how am I going to buy my books? How am I going to pay rent? How am I going to live?" So it was constantly on my mind, going on and on and on, but there was always something.

Gabriel repeatedly mentioned one of his strategies was remaining positive and hopeful, regardless of any difficulties he might experience at the time. Whenever a pressing challenge arose, he had faith that something would happen to help him persevere. He had a jovial personality, a strong sense of humor, and frequently laughed throughout the interview. For Gabriel, his humor and jokes were a way of dealing with the stressors of his situation. Most importantly, he advised future undocumented students to know that "they have to love themselves because no one else is going to do it."

For Gabriel, self-advocacy and self-love were strategies he used since he was a community college student. He learned to ask for help. He described that, as an undergraduate, he visited all the offices in his department and asked if they had any jobs available. He was

persistent; he did this daily until one day someone told him “yes.” He shared an incident that occurred as an undergraduate:

One day I was walking, I was going to cross the street, and with that [my scholarship money had ended] in my mind, what’s going to happen? What’s going to happen? Oh God, help me what’s going to happen? When all of the sudden I see my friend Gloria, she was crossing the street in her car and all of the sudden she comes back and asks me how I’m doing, “I haven’t seen you in such a long time” and she tells me “well I just came from there because I applied to a scholarship.” Don’t tell me, you see I had one but they eliminated it and they don’t have the money now and I don’t know what to do. “Well go and apply” and there I go and I got into the scholarship program and they paid for the rest of my B.A.

It was through these examples of self-advocacy and self-love that he was able to get through the Master’s and doctoral degree program. When his department became aware that he was undocumented, they dismissed him from the doctoral program. Gabriel remained hopeful and, in the face of such hostility, he sought the assistance of key professors inside and outside of his department. After a tense meeting, faculty and administration readmitted him and developed an administrative procedure to ensure that he would not have to pay for prior or future course work. They let him retroactively enroll in courses so that all his courses would fall under his first two years of the program when his funding covered all his educational expenses. Seeking and having the support of faculty and administrators was a great strategy for Gabriel. Another way students demonstrated self-advocacy was by caring for themselves physically and mentally. This was extremely important when they suffered from high stress and anxiety levels.

Self-Care

David, an undocumented graduate student pursuing a law degree, mentioned dealing with health issues, especially during his first year at the University of California. For David, the rigorous demands of his coursework coupled with a highly competitive environment and his personal and academic insecurities compounded by his undocumented status made graduate

school extremely challenging. He described law school as “sailing in the dark” and a “mental screwing” that impacted him so much he started believing that he did not belong “there.” He shared the issues he experienced his first year.

Trying to find the support that I needed and that was hard to develop because in law school, it was like coming out. The first person and only person I told, having me explain to him that these were my challenges. That was a strategy for me to have someone who could understand me and support me. It was just incredibly challenging, I’m gonna be honest I fell into a very deep depression when I was in law school and I had to go get mental counseling and some medication because it was just incredibly demanding, like I said academically, emotionally. I was like breaking down and this was my first year and I couldn’t drop out— my parents had invested in this, like I’m not gonna quit but I used whatever I could, the school services, my friendships, tried to talk with the other AB540 student there, advocating for myself with the administration, getting them to understand that it’s been very challenging for me. It got bad, even like anxiety, I had to get anxiety medication cause I got to the point where I was like a ball of stress of just thinking about everything that I had to deal with.

As David reflected on his experience and decision to pursue a law degree, he wondered at times whether he should have waited until he adjusted his immigration status. Without a guarantee and having to wait an indefinite amount of time, he would likely still be waiting. Being undocumented made graduate school even more difficult, but David knew he made the right choice in not delaying his enrollment. He knew what he wanted and that he belonged in law school. David learned to cope with his social circumstances, and developed improved study habits that allowed him eventually to excel in his classes, manage the financial aspect of his education, and the stressors that came with it. Becoming a self-advocate and practicing self-care by using the psychological services at the university’s health center were key strategies David relied on to overcome his depression and see improved health outcomes.

In a highly demanding program such as law school, finding the necessary support and maintaining focus in times of adversity is critical to one’s wellbeing. The transition into law school is so rigorous that it is important that students not fall behind if they want to complete the

first year of the program. Maintaining focus under a context of high stress and high pressure was a key strategy for David. He shared,

You gotta know that this isn't gonna be an easy path. That unless you're rich, you're gonna be in debt. You gotta be prepared for that, to see that kind of money being charged to your account and to be able to separate all that from your academic focus. Don't lose the focus, don't let that overwhelm you and look for support structures cause that's the only way you can make it through stuff like that, there's no other way. You gotta find it, find it somehow and find it fast and soon because if you wait it's gonna weigh you down and you're not gonna get the most out of the education that you're paying for. If you're gonna be so distracted from all these different problems and things, you gotta learn to focus and do what you came here to do. I would never say to any student that "you shouldn't go because it's expensive," "you should go, you should be prepared that maybe you won't get your degree when you graduate, maybe you'll be in debt." That's the reality if you want to do this, you can't expect that kind of outcome, don't expect everything to be perfect.

David advised other students to remain focused and to avoid falling behind in academic work. In law school, if one fell behind, it would be nearly impossible to catch up. Much of his anxiety stemmed from not knowing how he to pay the following semester's tuition and associated costs. Fortunately, in his program, he was allowed to enroll and take classes without having to first pay tuition. However, once he fell into debt, he would not be able to obtain his degree until he paid the remaining balance in full. Students also demonstrated self-advocacy by volunteering their time to acquire the necessary skills and training to be well-prepared professionals in their fields of study. If it were not for their undocumented status, these same students would have compensation for their time, training, and expertise.

Volunteerism

Students advocated for themselves by volunteering their time to gain experience in their fields of study. As undocumented students, obtaining training or experience in their field could sometimes be a great challenge. In order to get adequate preparation, students decided that

volunteering their time was crucial and the only way to receive the necessary experience to obtain employment or enter graduate school. Several students, like Aurora, Esperanza, and Soledad, worked for free to gain the necessary resume building to find employment or remain competitive for graduate school.

Because Aurora majored in economics, she relocated to New York to enroll in a prestigious Master's degree program. One of the influences on her decision was a desire to work with the United Nations, located in New York. However, gaining enough experience to qualify was a great challenge. Volunteering for non-profit organizations offered the same experiences as those gained by her documented colleagues. For Esperanza, volunteering to teach a physics course became an option when the department told her she could not be a teaching assistant because of her undocumented status. Esperanza was the perfect candidate to teach the lab course because she mastered the material as an undergraduate. Due to their lack of citizenship, these students missed multiple opportunities to better themselves professionally. When Soledad expressed interest in attending graduate school, a mentor advised her to volunteer to do research for an advanced graduate student as a means of obtaining the research experience to enter a doctoral program.

Analytical Summary

All the students in this study were proponents of self-advocacy. They employed specific strategies as they navigated through the educational pipeline. They sought support from individuals and campus programs to provide them with access to information and opportunities that they otherwise would not have. Students relied on these strategies and demanded the services that typically came to students by virtue of paying registration fees and tuition. These students actively resisted discriminatory policies that sought to deny them resources and services due to their circumstances as undocumented. The additional challenges complicated their

educational trajectory, often leading to longer periods to degree completion. At the same time, the battles won influenced them to pursue more education.

The emergent theme of self-advocacy captured some of the more common ways undocumented students strategically navigated through the educational pipeline. Within the broader category of self-advocacy strategies, students also demonstrated acts of self-love, self-care, and voluntarism to navigate the graduate school process. The students in this study sought acceptance in institutional spaces and demanded equal resources and services that would provide them with the necessary emotional and academic support to navigate effectively through their graduate programs. In many cases, being the only undocumented students in their departments triggered feelings of isolation and emotional distress, mirroring findings in the literature (Abrego, 2011; Gonzales, 2011, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013). Unlike their undergraduate experience, due to the more rigorous demands of graduate education and the few undocumented students in their programs, they experienced seclusion from the undocumented community.

Previous studies on undocumented students chronicled the high levels of stress students endured because of stressors associated with their status (Abrego, 2006, 2008, 2011; Gonzales, 2008, 2010, 2011). According to Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti (2013), undocumented immigrant youth experienced a sense of dislocation that affected their self-esteem, motivation, and self-advocacy. As adolescents, being unable to participate in certain life events led them to social isolation, spending less time in public spaces, and not venturing outside of their own communities (Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013). Additionally, immigrant youth experienced chronic stress due to feelings of uncertainty, being unwanted, fears of deportation, and meeting academic and family needs.

Little information is available on how students negotiated the stress and anxiety they experienced and how that impacted their mental and emotional health. The current study contributes to the literature by revealing the ways in which students respond to the anxiety and stress they endure as undocumented graduate students. Their responses consisted of strategies they employed in response to the inequities they experienced in obtaining access to a graduate education. In the cases of Soledad, Alma, Gloria, Gabriel, and Esperanza, they relied on strategies of self-advocacy by seeking assistance and support. Unfortunately for Esperanza and Gloria, seeking support was not enough, especially when faculty and university personnel were unfamiliar with the context of AB540 student. Although they sought support from faculty and administrators regarding the particular needs of AB540 students—especially in areas of funding—professors and university personnel offered little support and were hesitant and afraid to advocate on their behalf to modify university or departmental policies with disparate impact on undocumented students. For Soledad, Gabriel, and Alma, seeking the support of professors and mentors made a great difference because their mentors pushed boundaries at the departmental and university level and, in the process, created greater access to resources for undocumented students.

Some research highlighted the health consequences that students and faculty of color experience in institutions of higher education due to institutional discrimination, racism, and other stressors (Cueva, 2012; Solórzano, 1998). Solórzano's (1998) research on micro aggressions²¹ captured the feelings of isolation and unwantedness for Chicano/as in graduate studies. Participants in Solorzano's study highlighted feelings of seclusion and lack of acceptance in graduate school. Similarly, in a study examining the experiences of Chicanas and

²¹ Microaggressions are subtle insults (verbal, non-verbal, visual/non-visual) directed toward people often automatically or unconsciously (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

native women of color in doctoral programs at predominantly white institutions, Cueva (2012) reported the particular navigational strategies the women employed to resist multiple forms of oppression. Some of the women in Cueva's study suffered serious health outcomes due to studying in hostile learning environments. The students in the current study had similar incidents regarding racism as the students of color in Solorzano's and Cueva's studies, but their undocumented standing compounded their experience. Participants in the current study also indicated suffering from health issues due to the high demands of balancing their academics and the pressure of having to find the resources to pay for their education. This not only took a toll on their bodies but also on their mental and emotional well-being. Feelings of isolation, seclusion, and unwantedness were common among all participants.

Despite the hardships and struggles these students experienced, they remained hopeful and determined to reach their goals. In their experiences of self-advocacy, some participants exhibited what Anzaldúa (2002) referred to as their path to *conocimiento*²². Anzaldúa reported that the path to *conocimiento* involved a seven stage process one traveled in times of self-discovery and change. Through this process, students learned from the painful and lived experiences of being undocumented to navigate various types of oppression, such as school and departmental policies that often deemed undocumented student issues invisible and thus, did not have an appropriate plan of response for their needs in pursuit of an education (Anzaldúa, 2002; Cueva, 2012). For example, when treated differently because of their undocumented status, they found the motivation to prove others wrong and to continue despite feeling unwanted and rejected. These experiences, while painful, also deepened their consciousness regarding

²² See Anzaldúa (2002) "Now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts" in *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation*. Anzaldúa describes the seven stages of the path of *conocimiento* that one undergoes in times of self-discovery and change.

undocumented immigrant student oppression and motivated them to work to transform the sources of injustice as a step in the healing process.

These strategies of self-advocacy reflected what Yosso (2005) referred to as community cultural wealth²³. For the students to reach their educational goals, they looked for support within themselves, took care of their physical and emotional selves, and grew and healed from the trauma they experienced to overcome obstacles that not only made them stronger but provided them with the navigational capital to accomplish their goals.

Another way students enacted self-advocacy was to take time for themselves to self-care as they challenged systems of oppression that sought to marginalize them. Students learned the importance of self-care as they experienced physical, mental, and emotional stressors that took a toll on their minds and bodies. As gleaned from their experiences, the types of financial and emotional hardships experienced drove them to seek support from close friends and community groups on campus as well as from the campus counseling and psychological centers. In order to combat the university's institutional discriminatory policies, students carried out other forms of navigational strategies that led them to demand equal treatment. These skills consisted of strategies of resistance.

Strategies of Resistance

Participants in this study navigated through the graduate school segment of the educational pipeline by using strategies of resistance²⁴. Due to their undocumented status, several students lost prestigious scholarship and fellowship awards, opportunities to gain paid

²³ Community Cultural Wealth: is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppression.

²⁴ See Solorzano & Bernal (2001), political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible.

teaching experience in their departments, and other forms of extramural funding and internship opportunities. Students did not react passively and responded in numerous ways to these forms of institutional discrimination. Common responses of student resistance included challenging stereotypes, and challenging university policies and personnel that prohibited AB 540 students from receiving financial awards in the form of scholarship and fellowships they had earned. Students finding themselves in these situations had no choice but to remain persistent or risk not having sufficient resources to advance through their respective programs when fees for undergraduate and graduate students disproportionately increased, while campus resources were simultaneously fewer in number. Students learned the importance of challenging policies, not only for themselves at the time, but also for future undocumented undergraduate and graduate students. The model below illustrates the particular strategies of resistance that emerged from the data.

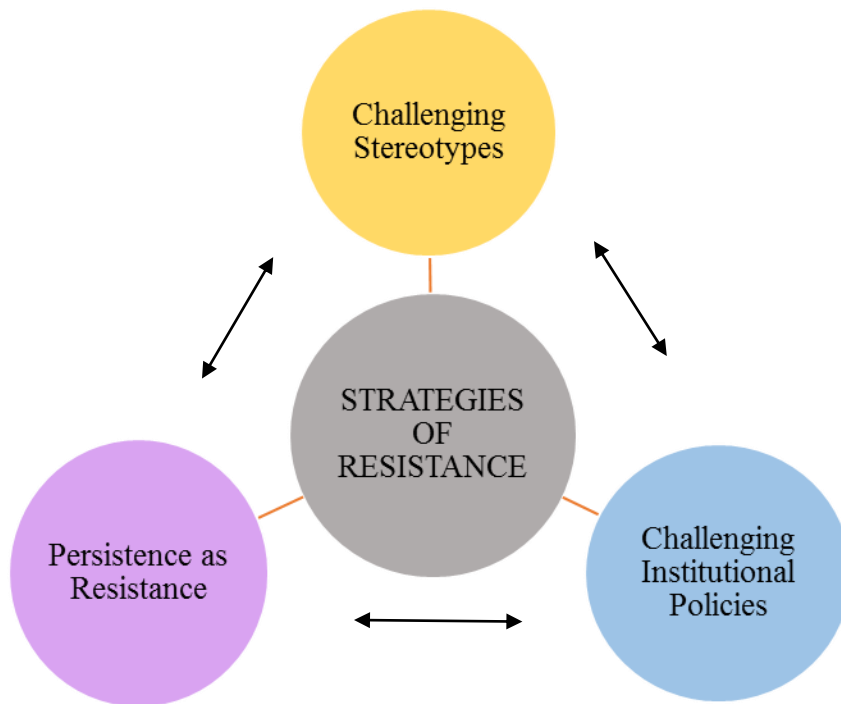


Figure 13. Strategies of resistance.

In this model, students contested institutional discrimination by challenging stereotypes and institutional policies, and demonstrating persistence as resistance. The next section provides numerous examples from the data that demonstrate this emergent theme of student resistance.

Challenging Stereotypes

Javier came to the United States at the age of 17 from the state of Aguascalientes in Mexico to live with his aunt in a small farming community in California. Due to his age, he enrolled as a junior in high school, completed only two of the three requisite years of high school, and lost eligibility for AB540 when he became a college student. In his two years of secondary schooling in the U.S., Javier resisted the language based tracking he endured due to school officials' low expectations of him. He was unafraid to challenge the teachers and administrators and he refused placement in ESL (English as a Second Language) courses because he considered the program dehumanizing. He petitioned to switch from the ESL classes and to the mainstream English classes. He shared his feelings about incorrect placement in lower level courses because he was learning English.

In high school I tell you, they discriminate against you because you don't know English. In the ESL classes, they have you there like a dummy, repeating the ABC's, learning the color yellow, what the hell. Why is that? It's good that I want to learn but teach me, don't treat me like a dummy like if we would be in kindergarten. I don't know but it's like I have a brain to learn more things, teach me more. I was really bothered by that and there were a lot of circumstances, well when I came to this country, I don't understand, like they want us to respect this country, but people here don't respect what you are.

Javier felt disrespect when school officials assumed he was not intelligent because he did not yet speak English but he viewed the lower level courses as a waste of his time. As a result of voicing his displeasure with school staff, he was purposely placed in a history class where they required him to do excessive amounts of reading. Javier viewed it as a challenge and was so

determined to pass the course that even though it would take him “eight hours to translate three pages word for word with a dictionary” he was willing to do the work and prove his teachers wrong. At the end of the course, he received a “C” and was very proud of this accomplishment. Due to his persistence, he became an exemplar student and spoke to other ESL students to motivate them not to give up.

Like many undocumented students, Javier’s pathway to a graduate degree began at a community college. Javier was recruited by a community college coach and awarded a full scholarship to play basketball. As a basketball player, Javier met other international students from Brazil and Germany and students from other states in the U.S. They became friends and a support system based on the common experience of being away from their family. While playing on the school basketball team, he experienced racial slurs from opposing players calling him “a dirty Mexican” and other derogatory terms. Even though the insults bothered him, he focused on excelling on the basketball court and realized that he could exact a sweeter revenge by responding through his play than by screaming or hitting his opponents.

Every semester in community college and as undergraduate, Javier took as many units as possible, allowing him to graduate in two years. After earning his Associates degree, he had no doubt that he wanted to continue for a bachelor’s degree in engineering. As a graduate student, he continued to challenge professors and administrators on certain policies that impacted him and his fellow undocumented students. He recalled how unfair it was that the university instituted furlough days that closed campus facilities. For example, one semester during finals week, the library closed at 5 p.m., leaving little time for students that worked during the day to access the library to study for their final exams. He suggested that universities that practice such

policies should refund part of a student's tuition especially with many classes cancelled and the library unavailable for students to study. He shared,

Look, we are paying [more] and they still take days away. It's like me, this semester I am taking two classes. I paid 2500 dollars. For example, last week and this week I had no classes because they were furlough days. Well then, give me some of the money back, come on don't screw with me, give me back something, I am paying. And yes it angers you, in that aspect that the system . . . I don't know if it sees it or it doesn't see it or they don't care but it's not fair that you pay more and they give you less.

Due to these institutional constraints, Javier and other student leaders on campus organized and collectively decided to stage a protest at the main campus library. They held a sit-in there and refused to leave until the university president or the provost listened to their demands. The group of student leaders strategically called on the media, including the local news station and newspaper, to amplify their message to a wider audience. He shared the reasons why he and other students became so active and civically engaged off and on campus.

I have been trying to be more involved in the protests and everything that has been happening here to change all that. For example, right now we are trying to write a new constitution because this university doesn't have a student constitution. In a few words in the association of students, there is no diversity, only white people. Well, then they are not going to speak for our needs. Well then, they are building a movement where they want to write a new student constitution where students have a say in administrative decision making. Because the administration is trying to use the university like if it's a business, instead of what it is, a school.

Javier and other student protestors were tired of the university no longer having an interest in responding to the needs of students and faculty on campus, while they focused on operating like a business with a strict profit motive. The desire to create a student constitution was, in part, a result of the growing perception that the mostly Caucasian student government did not represent the interest of the majority of the student population who were students of color. The particular ways that Javier resisted motivated him to excel in his studies as a graduate

student in engineering and to hold the university accountable for providing students with high quality education. The next section addresses the ways in which students resisted and challenged discriminatory institutional policies.

Challenging Institutional Policies

Another way students demonstrated strategies of resistance was by challenging institutional policies. The following section offers examples of how students challenged policies that impacted their lives as undocumented students. Esperanza, a first year Master's student in the department of physics, decided to attend graduate school after taking a small break from the rigorous and emotional burden of her undergraduate education. She was excited to be in a graduate program, loved conducting research, and was grateful to have a supportive faculty advisor. Although her advisor could not provide financial support, he provided academic support. Regardless of having to work two jobs to pay for her tuition and living expenses, Esperanza struggled to make ends meet. During her first year as a graduate student, she received a university grant for her graduate expenses but the university had difficulty disbursing the funds to her. She shared the emotional toll she experienced when the university initially failed to give her the grant.

I applied to the grant and then they said, well we can't give it to you and I said well "why not", because you don't have a social, "well why not I deserve it?." It was just really tough and I went through a couple of people before I guess they kind of got tired of me. They just didn't want to give me the money until the end. I said you know I do have an ITN (Identification Tax Number) number. I just wrote it into it and it went through, luckily it went through and they were ready to give me my scholarship.

Unfortunately, as she would soon find out, that was only the beginning of trying to access her grant. At the financial aid office, Esperanza ran into issues with the disbursement of her award. The staff did not want to give her the scholarship unless they deleted taxes. The university had a

policy that all student scholarships fell into a 30% tax bracket. Esperanza shared her encounter with a financial aid officer in trying to avoid paying taxes on her two thousand dollar award.

I said well “how much of that are you going to tax?” and they said “30%” “oh so you’re gonna tax my scholarship 600 dollars?” I said “wow”, and then I had to explain my situation. They didn’t know what an AB540 was over at financial office. I said this is what AB540 is “I went to high school here in the U.S. and I, this is my home.” They wanted an address from, like an international address, like an address from Mexico and I said “I don’t have anybody living in Mexico. I live here, this is my home, my family is here, what would you like me to do”, and then they said ‘just create a dummy address, just any address will do.’ I said “I’m not gonna do that, I’m not, if you don’t want to give me my scholarship then that’s fine with me” and then after some minutes of waiting time they said “okay we’ll go ahead and give you your scholarship and not tax it.”

Sadly, Esperanza’s experience of dealing with institutional ignorance of undocumented student issues was far too common. There are countless example of undocumented students earning prestigious fellowships, scholarships and grants and subsequently losing them when institutions pressed for further documentation. For Esperanza, on top of not being able to access her grant because she did not have a social security number, the university had a policy that every incoming student scholarship would be taxed 30%. For Esperanza and other AB540 students, these policies were unjust and did not account for the student’s special circumstances. In the end, after much resistance, she was able to persuade the staff at the financial aid office not to tax her award, which would pay for her research kits and supplies. Approximately 75% of her award went towards her research to purchase DNA kits and lab materials. Without the scholarship support, she could not afford to conduct the research. Even though the process of obtaining the grant was long and tedious, persistence for Esperanza proved vital.

For university personnel, it is of critical importance to learn ways to aid undocumented students in all segments of the educational pipeline. Their decisions and actions can make an

enormous difference in the type of opportunities students have. Similar to Esperanza, Soledad struggled to obtain the necessary funding to pay for her graduate studies.

Soledad began her educational trajectory at the community college where she was fortunate to meet a mentor who unconditionally supported her. From the beginning, her mentor guided her and invited her to a conference for undocumented students where they could obtain information about advancing through the educational pipeline. Consequently, Soledad met a variety of undocumented students who became her close friends that guided her undergraduate experience.

As an undergraduate undocumented student, Soledad applied to several graduate programs and gained acceptance to many prestigious universities, including Harvard; however, most of the schools failed to offer her funding. Funding became a critical factor in her decision to attend graduate school. If she remained at her undergraduate institution, she had family and a strong network of support on which to rely. On the contrary, if she decided to pursue graduate studies away from home, she needed a full scholarship that would allow her to devote most of her time to her studies. The decision was difficult, but she decided to remain at her undergraduate institution where she received a fellowship for her first year of graduate school that covered all of her expenses. Unfortunately, when the department became aware of her status as an undocumented student, the disbursement of her award hit a roadblock. Soledad shared,

The UC had given me a scholarship for \$15,000 for my first year and that would have paid for the whole Master's and then I got a letter from someone in the office saying, "oh, we didn't know you were an AB540 student, sorry we can't give it to you." I was so mad and then I found out that it was through a private family who had seen the CNN thing that I came out on and so they wanted to give it to me.

In response to the department's decision, Soledad called on her professors and mentors and shared her situation and the struggle with financial aid. One particular mentor helped her

challenge the university's decision to rescind her fellowship award. What complicated the situation was that half of the fellowship money was from the university but the other half was from a private party who wanted to assist Soledad specifically after viewing a CNN TV special that highlighted her plight. Luckily for Soledad, her professors, mentors, and allies were willing to support her by helping her challenge the university and the unjust treatment. After making "a big ruckus," Soledad received less than half of the award because the university was unwilling to provide the public university funds.

While Soledad was fortunate to receive a fraction of the original award, the process drained her energy and resolution took the entire first quarter of the program. These issues arise when undocumented students are the first in their departments and administrators and staff do not have knowledge of AB540 students. For Soledad, the biggest challenge for the administrators that prevented them from assisting her was not having a precedent and not knowing what to do with students in her case. She found this disturbing and repeatedly informed them, "even if they don't know what to do with me, you better learn how to deal with it because I'm not gonna be the only one, someone next year is going to be applying and you're gonna be in the same situation." In this circumstance, Soledad not only demonstrated resistance by challenging institutional policies, but also persistently demanded that personnel on campus learn to work with students in her situation. The following section emphasizes the strategy of persistence as resistance.

Persistence as Resistance

For the participants in this study, remaining persistent was a key characteristic in their successful navigation of graduate programs. This section describes the ways students demonstrated persistence as resistance in their continuation of their studies. This particular

strategy was useful for David, a student enrolled in law school at the UC and in his third and last year of studies. His interest in law first began as a high school student when one of his teacher assistants pursued a law degree. After graduating from high school and attending community college, he transferred to the UC, a four-year university where he received his undergraduate degree. As an undergraduate, he was part of a fellowship program for prospective law students—a program that exposed nontraditional students to essential information and mentorship opportunities necessary for being accepted to and excelling in law school. In addition, he felt comfortable knowing the outreach officers from the law school and felt it was the right place for him. An added benefit was the establishment of a fund to assist undocumented law students, which David hoped to access.

Similar to the case of Esperanza and Soledad, David's lost the funding once the administration discovered he was an undocumented student. Despite the financial difficulties of paying for law school and having feelings of not belonging, David was determined to continue with his studies. He shared the frustration that came with being undocumented, "I refuse to be told that I don't belong here. I got in, I worked hard, damn it, I deserve to be here." His persistence was, in part, due to actively resisting a system that did not accept him in a space he worked hard to earn—a prove-them-wrong attitude (Yosso, 2005, 2006). His struggle was not his alone, but also his parents' and family's that sacrificed to reach his dream of becoming an attorney.

Esperanza experienced a similar situation with her funding and felt she deserved equal access to the monetary resources she had earned for her education. As previously stated, she challenged the departmental policies around AB 540 and funding and took on the university financial aid office not only to provide her with her award but also to spare her scholarship the

30% tax before disbursement to students. Her persistence was a key strategy that literally paid off. Esperanza shared how she felt about her experience in that situation. “I’m very persistent, I deserve this I’m gonna be persistent as much as I can because I know I deserve it.” Most of the participants demonstrated persistence as a way of challenging financial aid policies rooted in a form of racist nativist²⁵ acts. The participants pursued degrees beyond their Bachelor’s as a way of claiming a space, demanding acceptance, and requesting the same educational opportunities as citizens.

Most of the students enrolled in the UC system expressed a deep interest in opening more avenues for undocumented students to pursue graduate studies. As a result, students like Gloria, Soledad, Felipe, and Pablo served as visible examples to other undocumented students interested in pursuing graduate degrees. Soledad and Adela became founding members of programs like GRADD and conducted monthly meetings to provide information about graduate school to undocumented undergraduate and graduate students.

Analytical Summary

Most of the undocumented students in this study enacted forms of resistance to discriminatory institutional policies and spaces in one way or another. Among the participants, there was a sense of unwantedness and feelings of not belonging echoed throughout the interviews. Becoming the “first and only one” or one of a few and persisting in these institutional spaces was a way of not only resisting and challenging university and workplace systems, but also creating pathways for future undocumented graduate students to traverse.

²⁵ See Huber, L. P., Lopez, C. B., Malagon, M. C., Velez, V., & Solorzano, D. G. (2008). Getting beyond the ‘symptom, ‘acknowledging the ‘disease’: Theorizing racist nativism. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 11(1), 39-51, and Perez Huber, L. (2010). Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Racist Nativism to explore intersectionality in the educational experiences of undocumented Chicana college students. *Educational Foundations*, 24(1), 77-96.

Studying the experiences of undocumented graduate students in higher education through CRT and LatCrit frameworks “allows one to look at resistance [among undocumented students and students of color] that is political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible” (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; p. 320). The students in this study articulated critiques of institutional structures and the ways that faculty and university personnel responded or lacked response to the needs of undocumented and AB 540 students. For example, Esperanza and Soledad could have simply accepted that they were ineligible to receive any form of funding when initially denied by school officials. However, undocumented student resistance to forms of institutional discrimination had a ‘multiple effect,’ resulting in their respective departments and graduate degree programs providing them access to some or all of the funding they earned. This action forced those same officials to create pockets of access and create agendas to serve undocumented students in the future. These experiences proved teachable moments for university staff to consider undocumented students’ specific circumstances and needs.

Javier’s involvement in student protests at the university and in the community had basis in his critique of the system, born from earlier experiences of the low expectations his teachers had when he first enrolled as a student in the U.S. These expectations underscored the negative perceptions and deficit portrayals that students like him were incapable of learning beyond singing their ABC’s and colors. His determination to prove others wrong (Yosso, 2000) demonstrated that not only could he pass his high school course, he could create an organization of undocumented and documented student leaders to challenge authority figures at the university. In addition, his excelling in a demanding major and graduate program like engineering served as forms of transformational resistance (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

The simple act of enrolling in these institutional spaces where ‘othering’ (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012) occurred and students felt unwanted provided forms of resisting hostile campus and university places. David and Esperanza both encountered othering when threatened with having financial awards taken away. They both established a physical presence in graduate school, persisted, and embodied resistance to the lack of culture inclusivity despite the isolation and loneliness that contributed to mental anguish. By unapologetically making claims on these spaces, they opened the door for future undocumented students with the hope they would not face the same dehumanizing experiences. These forms of transformational resistance (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) were necessary for undocumented students to navigate graduate degree programs and to illuminate the way in which universities, their policies, and academic personnel can hinder or enhance educational access.

This section provided examples of undocumented students navigating and resisting institutional policies that impacted their enrollment in graduate school. The following section reviews the ways undocumented students strategize and mobilize resources to afford attending the university and obtain funding for their own education. The section specifically shows the complex ways students secured funding and remained steadfast in the pursuit of advanced degrees.

Strategies of Funding

One of the major challenges encountered by undocumented graduate students remained raising funds for their education. As stated earlier, at the time of this study, federal and state policies prohibited undocumented students from eligibility for most forms of financial aid (Flores, 2010). Such discriminatory policies complicated and overburdened the students, most disproportionately from lower income and first generation households, with the task of finding

other means to fund their education. Specifically, the rising costs of tuition in both the CSU and UC system complicated the attendance and enrollment of undocumented students at the undergraduate level and even more so at the graduate level. For most of the study participants, having the opportunity to attend graduate school was due to the extensive amount of support their parents and extended support systems provided, particularly when it came to funding their education. Parents and family members mobilized resources and resorted to a variety of strategies to support their children's education. The students credited their parents for assisting them financially to meet the rising costs of tuition. Parents took multiple jobs, obtained loans, and became sponsors in order for their children to be eligible to obtain student loans. In addition, many of the students also held their own jobs, working at restaurants 'under the table' or through non-profit organizations sympathetic to their immigration status. In some circumstances, when students found no other avenue to raise the necessary funding to pay for their educational expenses, they took time away from school and worked full time to save enough money to enroll the following semester or quarter.

The following section utilizes the model below to depict the three broad categories that students in this study employed to fund their education. Those three ways consisted of parental and familial support, institutional support, and obtaining financial resources from organizations, programs, and networks.

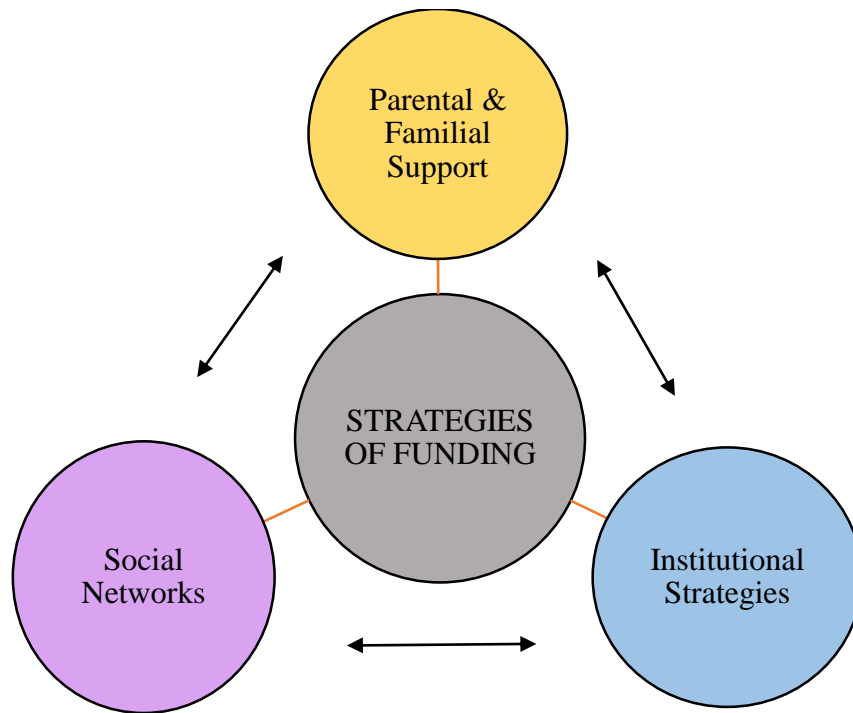


Figure 14. Models of strategies of funding.

Parental/Familial Support

Without the support of parents and extended family members, students could not likely meet the high cost of attending graduate school. For example, Gloria, who was unsuccessful in obtaining any type of funding, mentioned her father had financially supported her throughout her first year of graduate school. To pay for her schooling expenses, Gloria’s father refinanced their home and used the money for educational expenses. If it were not for her father’s assistance, Gloria would have had to abandon her studies.

When it comes to immigrants and their opportunities for an education in the United States, the public perception is that immigrant students and their parents ‘live off the system’ (Chomsky, 2007). The reality, however, for many of these undocumented immigrant students and their parents is that they paid for their education through the unconditional financial support of their families and caring community supporters. Their continuing to graduate school is a

byproduct of their hard work, created opportunity structures, and determination to achieve their goals. Undocumented Latina/o immigrant students found alternative pathways to raise funds to pay for tuition and living expenses and in the process gain access to some of the most prestigious universities in the nation.

One of the strategies used by these students to raise funds was through loans from family members to pay for their studies. Without this familial support, their aspirations to continue with their graduate education would not be possible. For example, Aurora, a student who left California for the east coast to pursue a Master's degree in economics at a small private university, learned the existing challenges of obtaining an educational loan while undocumented. While the university initially informed her that she would be able to obtain funding, administrators offered only 45% of her tuition when the time arrived to distribute her financial aid. Without the means to pay out of pocket, she used her grandmother's social security number to secure a loan to pay for the remaining balance. She explained the process she undertook,

I applied with my tax ID number but to get the loan, it wouldn't accept it. There was like no way I could get a loan to help me pay for the rest of tuition. So then I applied with my grandmother's [social security number] because my grandma is a U.S. Citizen. I talked to the directors of admission and he's the one that said, 'just reapply to the school with a new social security number and with that, you'll be able to get the loan', but I had to wait a whole semester.

Having to rely on her grandmother's social security number inevitably meant that Aurora had to postpone enrollment in graduate school. Instead of commencing the semester with her cohort in September, she reapplied to the university and began her studies in January of the following year to divert attention from modifying the social security number. During the time of the interview, Aurora's plans were to return to the east coast and complete her master's degree. Unfortunately, due to an unforeseen incident with her grandmother's credit, she was unable apply for a loan to return the following year.

Due to their ineligibility for most forms of financial assistance including grants or federal loans, undocumented students have limited options and must be creative with the help available to them. As Covarrubias and Lara (2013) found, being undocumented was much more complex than merely not having documents. Every student's circumstances are different with their access to privilege affected by numerous factors. Their experiences fall on a continuum of being undocumented or an umbrella wherein students not only feel the impact of the status but also other factors (Covarrubias & Lara, 2013).

One case that demonstrated this phenomena was the narrative of Diego, who came from mixed status families and accrued some privilege by having parents and other relatives who were United States citizens and willing and able to provide financial support. Diego's fulfillment of his educational aspirations could only be possible with the help of his father who financially supported him throughout his undergraduate education and continued to help his pursuit of a Master's degree in engineering. At the time of the interview, Diego was in the process of completing his Master's and shared that his father sponsored his securing loans to pay for living expenses. Diego was the only undocumented person in his family, and his father felt an extra responsibility to help him in any way possible. Diego noted he was able to finance his education with the help of his father, attend school, and take care of his wife and daughter. He shared,

I have loans that I have gotten through my dad, my dad has to sponsor me because he is a U.S. citizen. I have probably \$35,000 in loans. The loans I get are mainly for rent, because the money I get from my work is just good for living, for paying bills, buying food. Right now, I asked for a loan and that loan is going to be used for the rent for the whole semester and then I don't have to worry about rent until next semester.

For Aurora and Diego, their opportunities to pursue an advanced degree were due to the financial support their parents and relatives provided for them in the form of loans. However, this support

had repercussions because they constantly worried about loan repayment and the uncertainty and associated risks that came with repayment when they might not be eligible to work in their chosen careers. Particularly for Diego, one of his main fears was being unable to find work to pay the loans sponsored by his father, complicating his father's social security benefits at a time when his father would be nearing retirement age.

Another student, Lorena noted that sometimes coming up with the money to pay tuition became nearly impossible. Although she worked two jobs, she fell short and would ask her father's boss who was also her supervisor for a small loan in order to pay tuition. She explained how she went about asking for his financial assistance.

I did have to get a loan twice, so that was kind of stressful because I didn't do it through a bank but I did it through my dad's boss. The first time was just for tuition. I would work there, so like in a month he would pay me around \$500 for cleaning. Tuition was \$1,500. He would dock me from what he was supposed to pay me.

Students like Lorena were lucky to have support networks they could rely on for funding. Lorena was able to work two days a week at a dairy farm, cleaning, dusting, sweeping, and tidying up the place. This side job allowed her to rely on her father's boss on two separate occasions and avoid asking her father to borrow from a bank that would likely charge him a high interest rate.

Other students were fortunate to find employment with relatives who were willing to help them. Antonio, for example, had worked in construction with his uncle since high school. Employment with his uncle allowed him the flexibility to have steady employment and a revenue stream to pay for schooling while attending community college and transferring to a four-year university. Antonio clarified that working with his uncle allowed him to pay his educational

expenses without having to rely on his parents who could not afford to help him financially. He shared the process he undertook to ask his uncle for a loan to pay his educational expenses.

Well, when the time came to pay I would borrow from my uncle that I worked for. In the summer I would try to save as much money as possible. Perhaps more than half. It was about \$1,500, then I would ask him to lend me the other \$1,000 to compile enough money to pay for my tuition and books. During the semester, I would be paying him back all the money that he lent me. In the winter time was when I did ask him to lend me almost the majority of the money because in the winter I could not work, only what was winter break—which is like four weeks and then he would relend me the money and I would repay him during the following semester.

During the summers, Antonio worked and was able to save money for the upcoming academic year. Without the opportunity to work for his uncle, he did not know if he could raise sufficient funds for his education. In comparing himself to other undocumented students, Antonio had no idea how they managed to afford tuition, books, and the cost of living without the financial assistance of family, friends, or support networks.

These stories all have in common the unconditional support that Latino families provide for their children. Despite persistent cultural deficit ideologies about Latino families in the mainstream media and in the academy, these stories of undocumented students in this study provide counter narratives that challenge those ideologies. The next section emphasizes the institutional strategies utilized by undocumented students as they navigate their graduate education in order to pay for their studies.

Institutional Strategies

In navigating their graduate education, the students resorted to a variety of strategies to remain enrolled and focused on their studies. Due to the increasing costs of tuition due to lowered state support, some undocumented students were unable realistically to enroll for the entire academic year. As a way of circumventing institutional policies around financial aid that

disregarded their struggles, students developed strategies that allowed them to continue without having funds to pay tuition in full. These strategies consisted of taking semesters or quarters off, enrolling part-time, or enrolling through extension²⁶ to save sufficient money to continue taking courses the following quarters and semesters. By resorting to these strategies to pay for their education, they saved money and remained enrolled in school while working towards their degrees. The charts below reveal the increase in tuition for the California State University System and the University of California since the 2006-2007 school year. For example, the CSU increases in tuition more than doubled for graduate students between 2006 and 2014.

²⁶ University extension programs are an educational opportunity provided by colleges and universities to people who are not enrolled as regular students.

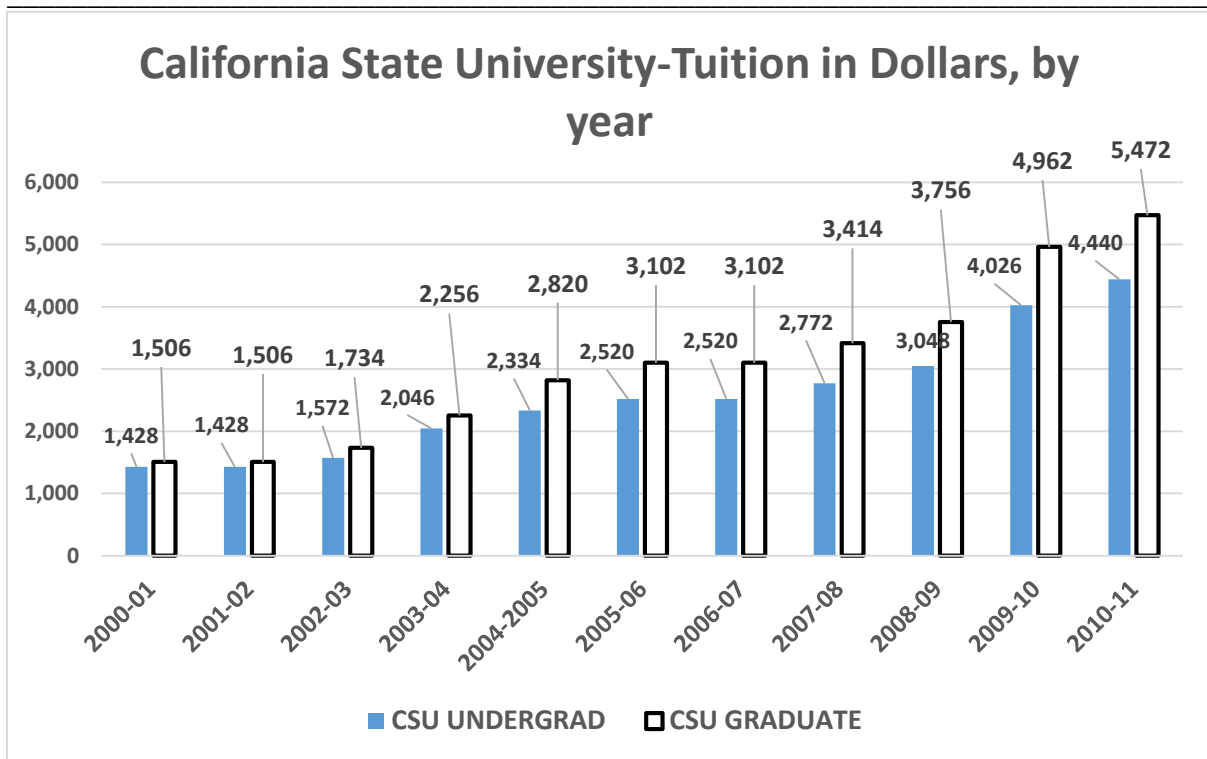


Figure 15. California State University tuition costs.

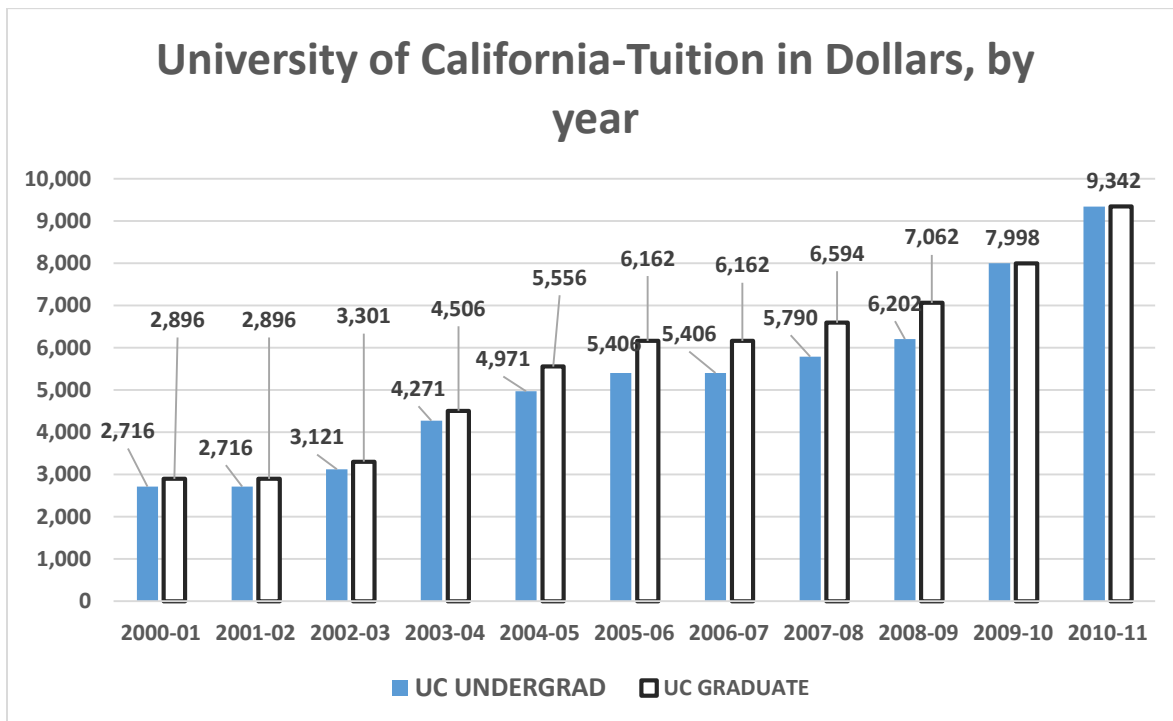


Figure 16. University of California tuition costs.

At the UC, not only did tuition increase for student in general but graduate students enrolled in professional schools experienced additional unexpected increases in tuition and fees, which made securing access to graduate school for undocumented students even more difficult. For example, students, like Gloria in a Master's program in architecture, paid almost double for their studies, \$20,000 instead of \$12,000. Due to the drastic increases in tuition at the time of the study at both the CSU and UC, students developed strategies to navigate the institution and raise even more funds to pay for their education. These increases in tuition had a more drastic impact and were more detrimental to those students attending the University of California.

Adela utilized institutional strategies as a way to circumvent challenges she faced in pursuit of a Master's degree in Latin American Studies. One of the strategies she employed was to take the winter quarter off from her studies to work and save enough money to continue her studies the following quarter. Fortunately, because she was not enrolled in a professional school, her program allowed her to take quarters off, an option other students did not have because their programs required continuous enrollment. She shared her experience:

I am currently not taking full courses. Winter is always tough to get scholarships so I am taking classes through extension. I am just paying for classes and nothing else, for a library card you pay 20 dollars. That's how I've learned to deal with winter quarter.

Adela registered through the university's extension program where she could enroll in courses that would count towards her degree in Latin American Studies. When her funding became tighter, Adela considered these options that allowed her to maintain momentum and continue to progress towards earning her degree. Adela's strategy to enroll through extension cost \$700 instead of \$4,000 if she enrolled through the regular university process. Although this strategy led to her taking longer to complete her degree, she was able to save the necessary money to enroll full-time the following quarter. Enrolling through extension, however, meant

she lost access to various services such as computer labs and the gym, and, most unfortunate of all, no access to health care. Securing and remaining eligible for health insurance was a difficult challenge for undocumented students enrolled in the University of California. Students in the CSU systems strategized in similar ways.

At the CSU institution, Andres was in the last year of his Master's degree in exercise science. Fortunately, when he was working on his thesis, he found ways to circumvent campus policies allowing him to continue working on his Master's degree without having to pay for full-time enrollment. He explained how he coped with his financial struggles.

AL: What do you think is so difficult about graduate school that they [students] don't continue on?

GM: Getting the money to pay for it is the most difficult part, at least for me. The academic aspect of it, I think you can do it, just requires more time. The money, how to pay for it [graduate school].

AL: So next quarter? You'll be done next Fall or next Spring?

GM: Next Fall. I do not have any classes left. I took all my classes this semester, so I am just trying to finish my thesis and wrap it up and I'm done.

AL: How much will your tuition be next semester?

GM: I am going to take zero units, but I can do it through the Global and Continuing Education Program, which is about \$300.

AL: So, that's tuition through them?

GM: Yeah, but if it was regular it would be almost \$2,000. I think if you register for six units or less, yeah close to \$3,000.

Registering for the Global and Continuing Education program made a huge difference in tuition especially for students like Andres. Although he was employed as a tutor, his monthly salary of \$800 would not have been enough to cover tuition and rent. Andres benefited because he was in his last year of graduate school and did not need full-time enrollment. His strategy was to enroll

part-time through the open-university program where students could take individual courses without fully enrolling for the semester. As a result, Andres only paid about \$300 instead of \$2,360 for his last semester of graduate studies.

Though Andres's fees were more affordable, his part-time enrollment came with some limitations. Similar to Adela's case, he was not allowed to utilize some of the university's resources. For example, during our interviews, we were unable to reserve a study room in the university's library because his fees did not cover that service. In many cases like his, undocumented students must choose between the limited resources provided to them, while other students never need to consider securing access to resources.

Other students were not as lucky to find funding support. For example Javier who was pursuing a degree in civil engineering did not feel there was enough support for undocumented students in other majors such as the sciences. He shared his financial struggle,

Since I've been here, I have always paid. I have to work for what I have. Here at the university, every semester I have to pay. They charge you the same if you are taking 12 units or 20. So I have told myself they are not going to take advantage of me, I will take 20 [units] . . . and that's how I do it. Every semester I take like 20, 22 units . . . because in one way or another that is the way that I save money.

For Javier, meeting the financial demands of graduate school was more challenging because his status made him ineligible for AB540. Due to having to pay higher tuition rates, his Bachelor's and Master's degree only took him three years to attain. Javier's experience highlighted the limitations that even majoring in a certain area might bring to undocumented students. Much of the research on minorities in the sciences addressed the low educational attainment of Latino students in the sciences (Cantu, 2008). It suggested a need to increase the numbers of students of color in the sciences and other critical areas. Providing a pathway for the legalization of these students would alleviate some of the shortages and underrepresentation of Latino students in the

academy. Instead of developing ways for student to contribute to society and utilize their expertise in their majors, we are losing some of them to other countries that value their talents and the work ethic that they bring. A student who was considering leaving the country at the time of the study was Gabriel.

Gabriel was a student working on his doctorate in Spanish Literature who resorted to alternative funding strategies to meet the tuition and living expenses. A strategy that greatly impacted Gabriel's economic situation was to teach Spanish at a nearby private college. His employment at the private college that was part of a consortium of his home institution allowed him tuition remission. Gabriel was fortunate to have a friend who opened his home and provided him with a place to live in exchange for watching over and keeping the home clean.

The institutional strategies discovered and developed by these students were key in successfully navigating their graduate programs and the university bureaucracy. Without implementing these strategies that allowed them to gain some form of access to spaces and acceptance into institutional programs, their pursuit of an education would have taken much longer and resulted in higher financial and physical burdens. Other alternative ways students found to pursue their degrees was through the assistance and help of their social networks, organizations, and programs on campus.

Social Networks/Organizations/Programs

Some students were able to pay for their studies by working in non-profit organizations. Many of these organizations did not require students to present a social security number or proof of citizenship and often paid students in forms of stipends. Especially at the CSU institution, many students worked for the school district in elementary and high schools as tutors or teacher assistants. After completing a set amount of volunteer hours, students received a stipend at the

end of the semester. The campus also had educational programs wherein students could volunteer their time tutoring and receive a stipend in return for their service hours completed. This was a key strategy developed by community organizations as a way to provide monetary resources to the students because it circumvented the social security requirement by awarding stipends. Carmen, Consuelo, and Andres all worked at an adult school where they tutored students in math, science, and English. A community organization dedicated to serving immigrant students in these types of situations funded the programs.

At the UC campus, a well-established student group of undocumented students fundraised every year to provide scholarship for its group members. At the time of the study, the group began providing scholarships for undocumented graduate students because more of them were beginning to pursue graduate studies. In some cases, from these scholarships, students would receive funding to pay for part of or all of their tuition. This was critical, especially for graduate students who had increasing tuition costs in their programs of study. Of the study participants, David, Soledad, Adela, and Gloria indicated benefitting from a scholarship from this organization at some point in their graduate studies that helped them pay their tuition.

The students benefited from social networks whether it was through introducing them to programs or connecting them with other individuals. Joaquin was a student at the CSU institution who, after earning a B.A. and Master's degree in Physics, decided to leave California and pursue a doctoral degree in Canada. Joaquin shared the ways he was able to fund his undergraduate and graduate education:

I worked with Ricardo. My first year in the Master's program I didn't return to work in agriculture. Then I stayed and worked with Ricardo during the summers. I had a job with an old friend from high school, he was the manager of a green house. I worked part-time, some days, and I was in charge of the plants doing the same type work. I was also a private tutor, I posted an announcement in the department of physics, for anyone completed with high school or from any part of

the community who needed a math or physics tutor to call me. I did that a lot, tutoring, I worked in the green house, and then summers with Ricardo. All that combined together is how I survived and in that time I was only going part-time to the university. I wasn't taking classes anymore.

Without the support and mentorship he received from Ricardo, his department, and friends, the completion of his Master's degree would not have been possible. Even though Joaquin thought it took him too long to obtain his Master's degree, in the end he felt more prepared and confident about pursuing a doctoral degree outside the country. As a graduate student at CSU, he recalled feeling desperate and disillusioned with the academic process. He shared,

I was there way more over three years because there was nothing more for me to fulfill. They had already offered me everything that they could offer. That is why I was a bit desperate . . . I couldn't do anything. For example, as a post-graduate student, it is very important to go to conferences and to participate in scientific investigations. In the Master's I already felt indigent, I felt like I deserved a better job, that I could be something more, that I was in a certain manner going to waste. And all that because I was undocumented. I felt that I could work in another place, do more interesting things for me.

The mentorship he received from the professors in the Physics department also influenced Joaquin's decision to leave the country. Although he longed to continue his studies at the University of California in a highly ranked physics doctoral program, the universities to which he gained acceptance were unaware of the funding necessary for students in his circumstances. After waiting in the U.S. to hear from the universities to which he applied, he decided to return to Mexico, apply for a visa, and pursue his graduate studies in Canada.

A student who pursued her studies at the University of California, Soledad enrolled in a one year Master's program and funded partially through a scholarship established for undocumented students on her campus. She raised the through the support of advisors and mentors. She shared,

I paid with a scholarship and was a T.A. for Manuel and Michael. I was paid 3,000 with them and I did not get paid through the university, I got a stipend.

Similar to Soledad, many students in this research study received funds for their studies by working or volunteering their time and receiving stipends in return. The strategy of supporting students through stipends provides students with the double benefit of financing their education and giving back to their communities by mentoring other youth in underserved communities.

After volunteering her time and mentoring other undocumented students, Soledad pursued her doctorate in education and received a full scholarship at a very well established graduate school. She understood that, in order to devote herself to her studies, she needed the financial support. Fortunately, as she was debating which university to attend, one private university offered her the financial support she needed to dedicate to her research. She said, “This was critical in my decision, you spend a lot of time applying to scholarships and that’s what the Ph.D. requires. Money makes a difference.” Students like Joaquin, Gloria, and Gabriel came across individuals that, out of kindness, offered support such as a place to stay and a way of transport to and from school. Having a place to stay was especially important for Joaquin when he decided to leave the country and return to Mexico to apply for a visa. Although he was born in Mexico, he no longer had family there or knew anyone that lived in Mexico City where he would have to reside for a few weeks while he submitted the paperwork for a student visa to be approved to study in Canada.

Summary

As undocumented students pursue graduate degrees in increasing numbers, raising the necessary funding in the context of escalating tuition costs continues to be one of their most difficult challenges. In this particular study, students’ strengths in pursuing a graduate education

relied on the support of their families, their social relationships, and navigational strategies. The main source of support came from what familial capital (Yosso, 2005), which consisted of multiple forms of support from their parents and family members. Other sources of support included social capital (Perez & McDonough, 2008) attributed to individuals with whom participants maintained critical relationships, such as teachers, mentors, organizations, and programs. These social networks provided the necessary assistance that included emotional support, financial support, and navigational guidance for the students to continue with their studies. Finally, the navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) enacted through the institutional strategies employed by students was key for them to remain on a trajectory to complete their degree goals. This was particularly important because there was a high increase in tuition for both the University of California and the California State University systems during the time of this study.

Utilizing Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model to analyze the navigational experiences of undocumented graduate students revealed the different cultural, familial, and communal assets and resources that immigrant students mobilized to assist them in surviving, resisting, and navigating institutions of higher education. For immigrants and, in this case, undocumented students, a large part of their surviving and thriving in the academy was through the support they receive from families. Through the strategic activation of their familial, social, and navigational capital, the students in this research study actively countered institutional policies of exclusion that targeted and discriminated against undocumented students by virtue of denying them financial aid as they pursued a graduate education.

Previous research highlighted the myriad ways that families provided support for the education of their children (Lopez, 2001; Nava, 2012). Nava (2012) found that parents provided

broad based support, or *apoyo*, by providing for their children's economic needs, sacrificing, modeling academic excellence, and helping their children build agency as forms of educational engagement. Thus, undocumented students in this study attributed their success in part to their parent's sacrifices by bringing them to the U.S. (Cortes, 2008) and forsaking their own aspirations and happiness to provide their children with an opportunity to access higher education (Nava, 2012). In order for these parents to support their children's educational goals, many worked a second job, applied for a second mortgage on their property, sold food, and organized car washes. Family members, such as grandparents, uncles, and cousins, also helped raise the necessary funds to pay for their educational expenses. For example, the support through loans that Diego, Gloria, Antonio, and Aurora received from their parents and family members created opportunities to pay for their tuition and enrollment in courses within their graduate studies program. Yosso (2005) defined familial capital as "cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* [kin] that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (p. 79). The support students received from their familial capital served as forms of communal support wherein the raising of educational funds was often a family endeavor with everyone pitching in. Many of these students felt isolated, yet their family's support helped in alleviating some of their feelings of isolation and reassured them that they were not alone in dealing with their circumstances (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001).

The strategies students employed to advance through the educational network were similar to what Yosso (2005) referred to as navigational capital²⁷. These strategies were key ways that students utilized to navigate and maneuver through the unfamiliar institutions. A key

²⁷ Yosso (2005) referred to navigational capital as those skills students employ to maneuver through social institutions.

navigational strategy was persistence and the need to remain steadfast in pursuit of their educational goals as they became self-advocates.

Other strategies employed by students to maximize their tuition dollars consisted of enrolling strategically, either part-time or through the university's extension programs. Adela, Andres, and Antonio utilized these strategies to advance through the educational pipeline. Gabriel obtained a teaching position at a private university that qualified him for tuition remission at his own institution. These students exemplified what Williams (1997), similar to Yosso's (2005) description of navigational capital, or "the acknowledging individual agency within institutional constraints, but also connecting to social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces including schools, the job market and the health care and judicial systems" (p. 80).

A prior report on the opportunities available to undocumented graduate students encouraged them to network in order to increase their opportunities for employment and financial support (Olivares, 2006). Latino students overall face challenges in financing their education and are in need of support to continue with their studies (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006). The students in this study were able to persist due to the community cultural wealth they possessed in the form of support networks and access to student support programs. These social networks were critical in providing them with employment and key information, as well as the necessary resources to cover their living and educational expenses. For example, at the UC campus, an AB540 ally committee developed to allow key program administrators, staff, and graduate students to focus on the needs of undocumented students. Several personnel from campus programs and departments discussed the programming and support the university had in place and information needed to support undocumented students. The campus provided a food

closet where students could obtain snacks food items along with vouchers to pay for meals on campus as a way of subsidizing some expenses. The campus was involved in improving services for undocumented students. A support group on campus fundraised to provide scholarships to undocumented undergraduate and graduate students, and the university provided counseling and psychological services to undocumented students.

At the CSU institution, services for students had less overt advertisement, but students had support from key institutional personnel who were aware of the AB540 students and assisted them by providing financial support through stipends. Several undocumented-friendly programs on campus provided students with opportunities to obtain internships that paid through stipends after the completion of community service hours. These programs helped first generation immigrant students navigate the university. For example, Joaquin a student pursuing a degree in physics mentioned that the director of one of the program assisted him throughout his undergraduate education and became his main supporter as he worked on his Master's degree. Andres, Carmen, Alma, Consuelo, and Esperanza raised funds for education expenses with the support of employment through a non-profit organization where they volunteered as tutors and earned stipends for their service to the community. The director of the non-profit organization was also a great support as he mentored them in a variety of ways through their educational trajectory. Likewise, research demonstrated that, when undocumented students had mentors (Gonzales, 2010) and financial assistance, they developed academic resilience and performed as well as their documented peers (Flores, 2010).

The following section illustrates how the three types of navigational strategies use a Critical Race Theory lens and a Community Cultural Wealth Framework to understand the experiences of undocumented students in graduate school.

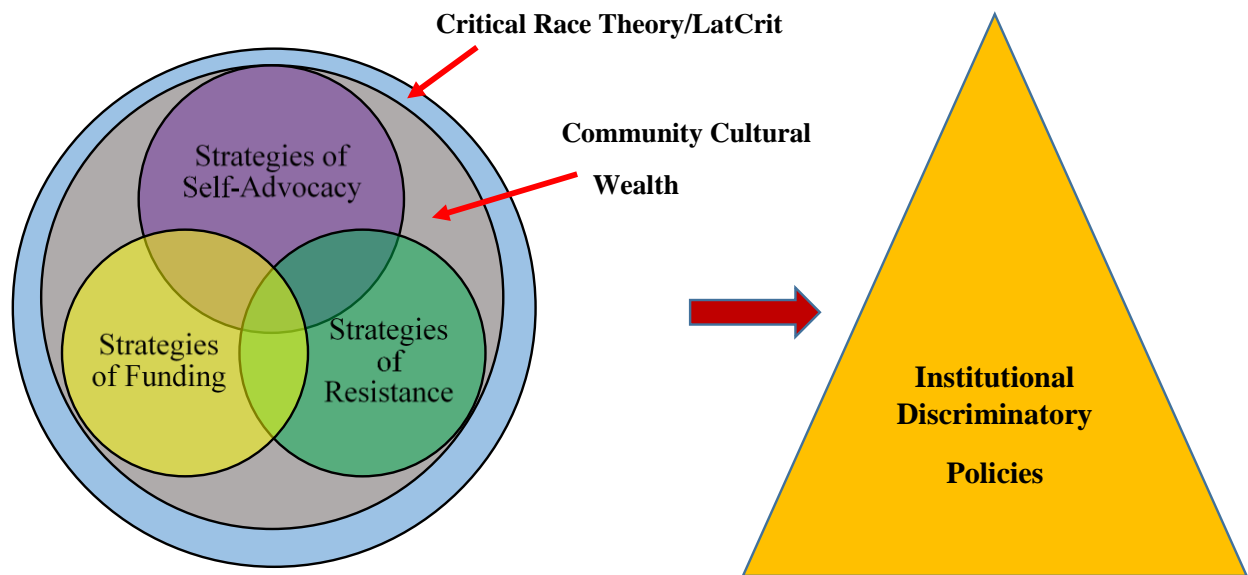


Figure 17. Model of navigation challenging institutional discriminatory policies.

This model of navigational strategies for undocumented immigrant students illustrates how they utilized strategies of self-advocacy, strategies of resistance, and strategies of funding to navigate through their graduate education programs. From the beginning, the students realized the need for self-advocacy by searching for resources to assist them in navigating lonely and, at times, hostile spaces. Some students resisted discriminatory institutional policies that sought to rescind financial awards they had earned by demanding university personnel learn of and be responsive to their needs and work with them in the process. Hence, these students became examples and opened pathways for other undocumented students to follow. Finally, students

overcame the financial barriers encountered through the assistance of extended familial and social capital, finding alternative ways to fund their education, and obtaining the assistance of campus programs and networks. Overall, the model above illustrates student success through these three overlapping strategies that students utilized in challenging and resisting discriminatory institutional policies while allowing them to navigate the educational pipeline and earn their Master's and doctoral degrees. From the examples of these students, it is clear that institutions of higher education can and should do more to create greater access and support structures for undocumented students interested in going beyond the baccalaureate.

This chapter discussed the three different types of strategies that students utilized to move along the post-baccalaureate section of the educational pipeline. The next chapter summarizes the findings of this study, includes the theoretical and methodological contributions of this research to the field, and discusses the implications for policy and practice. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

This study documents the educational experiences of twenty Latina/o undocumented students pursuing graduate studies in the University of California and the California State University System. The following research questions guided the study.

RQ1. How do undocumented Latina/o graduate students reach a decision to attend graduate school?

RQ2. How do undocumented students navigate the post-baccalaureate portion of the educational pipeline?

The study employed a qualitative analysis of life histories and ethnographic interviews to illuminate the particular struggles of undocumented Latina/o graduate students as they sought to obtain a graduate education. These narratives revealed powerful testimonies of hope, resistance, and perseverance in demanding acceptance as citizens of society and equal treatment as they pursued their right to an education. The lessons learned from these students hold powerful implications for policy makers, educators, and institutional agents concerned with creating socially just institutions of higher education that are immigrant friendly.

What follows is an overview of the main findings of this study that demonstrate how undocumented Latina/o students arrived at their decisions to pursue graduate school and explore how they navigated their graduate programs to fulfill their educational goals leading to Master's or doctoral degree completion. The chapter includes a summary and overview of the key findings, highlights the theoretical and methodological contributions emerging from this study, and addresses the limitations of the study. Finally, the conclusion incorporates key points of implications for practice, policy, and future research.

Summary of Key Findings

Prior chapters examined the ways undocumented Latina/o graduate students arrived at a decision to matriculate into graduate school. This process revealed numerous factors that informed and influenced their choice, including their immigration status, parental and family support, commitment to social justice, and mentorship. A particular contribution informed by the findings from this study is a conceptual model demonstrating how students navigated their graduate education despite facing numerous institutional discriminatory policies. For example, Chapter 5 detailed the six different themes that arose from the data that influenced students' decisions to pursue graduate studies. These themes consisted of remaining undocumented, a commitment to social justice, experiencing a critical life moment, parental influence and support, mentorship, and attaining a globally competitive degree specialization. The next section revisits the model and provides a brief overview of its key tenets.

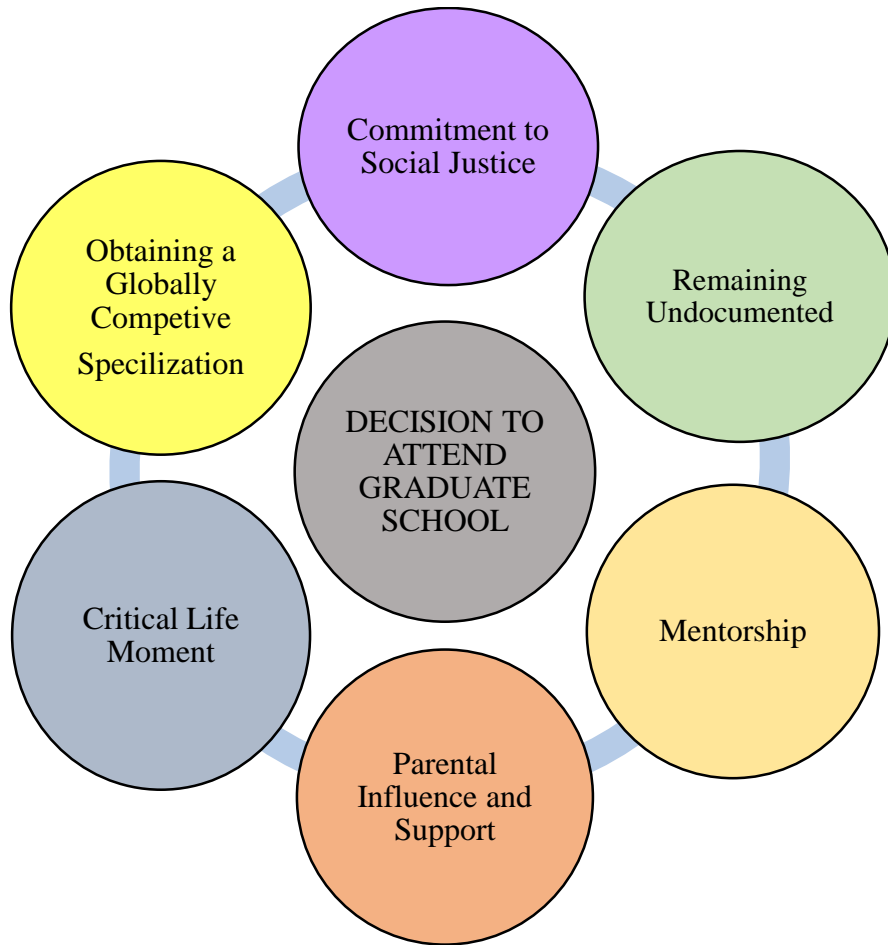


Figure 18. A model of influential factors in the decision of undocumented students to attend graduate school.

The model provides a visual illustration of the six interconnected factors that informed the decisions of undocumented Latina/o students to attend graduate school. As discussed in Chapter 5, their lived experiences as undocumented students impacted their available choices and simultaneously fueled their determination to pursue their degrees. After completing their undergraduate education, most of the research participants indicated having limited employment or career options and “had no choice” but to pursue graduate studies as their undocumented status impeded them from attaining professional employment. Everyday life experiences influenced student decisions to continue with their graduate education. For example, students in this study were specifically influenced by their own lived experience of being undocumented

immigrants. As a result, they had interest in careers that would allow them to address social inequalities and impact the lives of immigrants and people of color. The findings in this study also revealed the importance of having supportive networks such as family and friends, and the significance of mentorship.

Barriers that these students encountered consisted of institutional discrimination, health related issues (such as stress, anxiety, depression, feelings of isolation), and raising funds for their education. As a response to the barriers, study findings revealed three key interconnected strategies that allowed them to counteract the institutional discrimination they experienced. The following model illustrates the ways student participants combated discriminatory institutional policies.

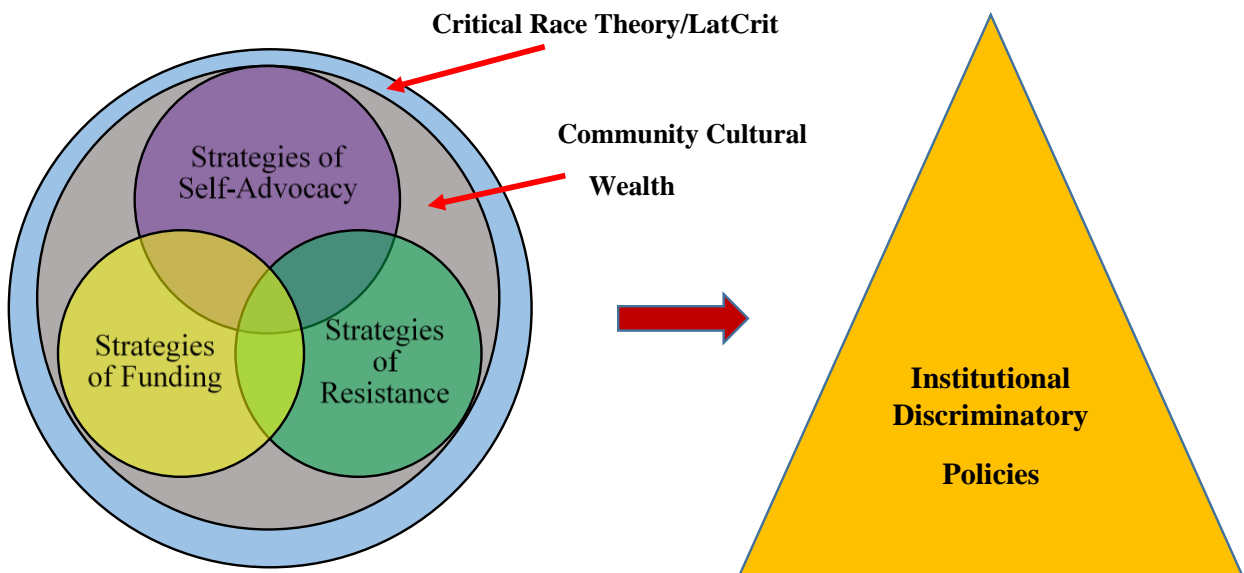


Figure 19. Model of navigation challenging institutional discriminatory policies.

The first set of strategies employed by students consisted of Strategies of Self-Advocacy or methods of seeking the necessary support and care for their body and mind. These acts

consisted of students advocating for their academic and personal needs and volunteering their time to obtain training in their field of study. Due to the already high rigors of graduate school coupled with the additional stress of having to deal with institutional discrimination and racism, the participants in this study found ways to take care of themselves physically and emotionally. As undocumented graduate students, they experienced multiple forms of health related stressors, such as anxiety and depression, due to the isolation and rigorous schedules they encountered in their graduate programs (Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013). For example, David, a law student, fell into a very deep depression during his first year of law school due to the high academic demands and the emotional and financial stress of how to pay for his studies. To overcome the anxiety and health issues he experienced, he sought mental health counseling, relied on close friends and other AB540 students, and became a strong self-advocate. Other students adopted strategies of balancing their school and work life by seeking mental health, psychological, and counseling services where they could receive support to work through some of the difficult experiences. The way that the student participants responded to dealing with institutional racism and nativism demonstrated the ways racism can take an immense toll on immigrant lives.

Another strategy utilized by the student participants to navigate their graduate education was strategies of resistance. On several occasions students reported challenging existing campus policies that were discriminatory in nature to gain equal treatment. For example, both Soledad and Esperanza received fellowships to pay for their first year of their Master's degrees. Unfortunately, after the administration and financial aid office became aware of their status as AB540 students, they rescinded the awards. Both Soledad and Esperanza resisted this discriminatory treatment by administrators at their respective institutions by challenging policies

that were punitive for students in their situation. They resisted by seeking assistance from professors and mentors and persisted to obtain the awards for which they had worked so hard. In the end, both Soledad and Esperanza kept all or some of the monetary support the institution initially granted them. Undocumented students are a group that can least afford to have financial awards rescinded because the extra funds equal less time dedicated to earning money to finance their education and more time devoted to their academics. For these students, it was clear that they had no choice but to resist and fight for their rightfully earned money if they hoped to persist through their graduate programs.

A third strategy that students demonstrated was strategies of funding. This strategy was of critical importance for undocumented students and even more so for undocumented graduate students because finding reliable sources of funding for their studies continued to be a major challenge. The participants in this study found alternative ways to pay for their studies, which included obtaining unconditional support from their parents, utilizing their own institutional strategies, and receiving financial resources from organizations, programs, and networks. One way that participants paid for their studies was through the financial support of parents and extended family members. On several occasions, parents and family members took out loans, acquired a second job, or became sponsors in order to assist their children financially. Other students had the opportunity to rely on family members that could provide them with personal loans. Students also learned about institutional strategies that allowed them to take alternative paths to pay for their education. For example, some students could not afford the high increase in tuition and took semesters or quarters off, enrolled part-time, or enrolled in courses through the university's extended educational programs that allowed them to pay less for their studies. Students also received financial assistance from university organizations and programs. Non-

profit organizations were safe places for undocumented students to receive employment. At both the CSU and UC institutions, educational programs assisted undocumented students. At the CSU school, many students worked as elementary and high school tutors or teacher assistants and received stipends in return for volunteering their time. The UC institution had a well established group of undocumented students that would fundraise annually and provide undergraduate and graduate students with financial assistance to pay for their studies. The following section explores the implications for theory in the work.

Implications for Theory

The study used Critical Race/Lat Crit Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002) in conjunction with a Community Cultural Wealth framework (Yosso 2005, 2006) to analyze the particular experiences of the study participants. The study focused on the ways in which undocumented students came to their decisions to attend graduate school. The work highlights the strategies utilized by students to overcome the differential treatment they experienced because of their undocumented status. In deciding to pursue a graduate degree, students revealed the influential factors that shaped their desire to continue regardless of adversities. Analyzing their life narratives through a LatCrit Framework illuminated the ways undocumented Latina/o students continue to be racialized as they attempted to earn graduate degrees. For example, even after earning baccalaureate degrees in engineering, education, physics, linguistics, and other fields, participants had limited employment opportunities or entry level jobs not requiring college degrees. Participants often accepted low status employment alongside family members with no college education as waiters, bartenders, farm workers, and customer service representatives. For example, Diego and Javier continued working at restaurants as waiters for minimum wage despite both having Bachelor's degrees in engineering. These experiences of

marginalization influenced the type of work they would eventually pursue. As a result of the differential and discriminatory treatment experiences, students showed interest in post-graduate careers with a strong inclination to social justice, assisting undocumented immigrants and other marginalized communities. Their aspirations included becoming lawyers, engineers, counselors, and professors with the intention of giving back and challenging institutional policies and systems of oppression that were not inclusive of immigrant experiences.

In investigating the navigational strategies utilized by students in their graduate programs, CRT/LatCrit and Community Cultural Wealth were crucial in centering their educational experiences as immigrant students. As a result, students utilized a variety of strategies to assist them in surviving the rigors of graduate school and challenging institutional policies. They consisted of strategies of self-advocacy, strategies of resistance, and strategies of funding. The aim of this study is to bring together research and the experiential knowledge utilized by undocumented immigrant students in accessing post-baccalaureate degrees.

This study adds to the growing literature on undocumented immigrant students, and makes a key contribution to the understudied component of the graduate school experiences of Latina/o students. The study focuses on the decision making process that undocumented immigrant students undertake in the context of limited options to further their education or, in most cases, remain marginally unemployed.

Many of the models utilized to explain the decision-making/graduate school choice process failed to account for how this non-traditional population decides to attend graduate school programs. For example, unlike most of the studies on college choice process, this study addresses undocumented Latino/a student's decisions at the post-baccalaureate segment of the educational pipeline, an area of little research. Perez (2010) investigated the college choice

process for Latino undocumented community college and undergraduate students and found that students decided to attend certain institutions due to the location and distance from home, the affordability of the institution, and encouragement of supportive relationships from parents, friends, and school personnel. Due to the monetary barriers undocumented students encountered, students were more likely to enroll in community college as their first postsecondary experience (Gonzalez, 2007). While this information is of critical importance in understanding the opportunities after high school for undocumented students, the current study emphasizes the critical decisions they encountered as they completed baccalaureate degrees and continue to graduate school. Other studies focused on the graduate school choices of Latina/o students (Ramirez, 2011, 2013). Factors that influenced the reasons for Latina/o to enroll in doctoral programs were staying close to home, faculty, financial considerations, campus climate, and circumscribed choices that consisted of acceptance to only one graduate program.

This study also emphasizes the different type of experiences students had when they attended a California State University versus a University of California campus. As mentioned in Chapter 6, students attending the UC campus dealt with stronger feelings of unacceptance and isolation because they were the only undocumented students in their departments. At the CSU university, students formed a community through a course early in their undergraduate experience. Students at both institutions were more likely to remain at their undergraduate campus because they established networks willing to support them through their graduate studies. Men were more likely to go away to graduate school than were women students. In some cases, women decided to stay close to home and attend the community college nearby because parents felt insecure and were not willing to allow them to venture out of their comfort zone to attend a four-year university.

Limitations of the Study

The research emphasized the ways in which undocumented Latina/o students came to the decision to attend graduate school. It also revealed the strategies students utilized in navigating their graduate education. This section outlines the limitations associated with the findings of the study. This study focuses on the experiences of students enrolled in only two campuses of California public universities. Sample size limits the study because the University of California had only a few undocumented Latina/o graduate students. Since the time of the interviews, many laws and policies have taken effect. Although there continues to be a need for the federal DREAM Act, more states provide in-state tuition for undocumented students. In California, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has also been a great form of support, providing opportunities for students to continue their education and find employment. Obtaining the perspectives of others, such as undocumented allies like administrators and staff, would add depth to the study.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings and conclusions from this study provide instructive guidance for educational policy makers. Several students in this study had plans to continue their education, hoping that by the completion of their degree programs, federal and state policy would provide mechanisms to work legally in the United States and possibly offer a pathway to legalization. In 2010, when the majority of the interviews took place, most of the study participants were in Master's and doctoral programs. Since then, some of them earned graduate degrees, while others continue in wait, hoping for the federal government to pass some form of comprehensive immigration reform and Federal Dream Act. During this time, policies, such as DACA, impacted participants and important life events shaped their educational opportunities and choices. Although most of

the participants completed their graduate degrees, some continue working towards fulfilling their life goals of obtaining a graduate degree or of finding employment in their field of study. Others graduated and left the country in pursuit of other opportunities to utilize their degrees and career professions—most of them either left before DACA or would not qualify under its limiting age provisions. Still, a few others secured temporary employment possibilities by obtaining work authorization through DACA.

Regarding policy, as educators, practitioners, and policy makers, it is important to understand the limitations and complexity of programs like DACA. Granted some students applied and benefited from the resources DACA had to offer, but several research participants were ineligible to participate in the program because they exceeded the age requirement. Some of these students had no choice but to leave the country, hoping for improved educational and employment prospects. For students eligible for DACA, it was a life changing experience, providing an avenue to receive an identification card, a driver's license, and, more importantly, employment in their field of study. Unfortunately, the resources provided by DACA are only temporary and expire within a two-year period bringing with it a great deal of uncertainty.

This study addresses the great need for teachers, counselors, and practitioners to be familiarized and knowledgeable about the adversities and constraints undocumented immigrant students experience throughout the educational pipeline. With increasing numbers of undocumented Latina/o students graduating from high school and earning baccalaureate degrees, there is great urgency for educators to assist this underserved population. A key finding from this study highlighted the high levels of isolation and mental health issues in the form of depression and anxiety these students experienced in the graduate programs they attended. Thus, greater awareness of the prevalence of mental health illness with this population is necessary to

make resources available in the form of counseling and providing social and emotional support for students who may be the first and only undocumented students in their programs.

Furthermore, this reality calls into question the commitments of graduate school programs to ensure that they have diverse student populations and the necessary support structures in place to ensure all students are able to complete their degree programs in a timely manner. Ideally, educators and practitioners need to be informed about intramural and extramural support for undocumented Latina/o graduate students to finance their education. There is no reason, as in the case of some of the participants in graduate schools or financial aid offices to deny students disbursements of scholarships, fellowships, and TA opportunities that they have earned. Having trained staff knowledgeable about the particular needs of this population would increase the likelihood that a more welcoming and friendly institutional culture could exist. For undocumented students, this could potentially alleviate some of the undue stress and anxiety students experience every term due to the uncertainty of paying for their educational expenses.

Other important implications involve institutions making a commitment to and providing students with paid opportunities to gain experience in their fields of study. This could include developing programs that offer internships, fellowships, or stipends that would help redress the scant opportunities available for professional development in their majors and courses of study. Ultimately, practitioners must be informed about funding opportunities for undocumented students. These skills are essential in mentoring and advising students in how to go about funding their graduate programs.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study reveals the challenges that undocumented Latina/o graduate students encounter in their pursuit of a graduate education. There is a need for research that addresses the

physical and emotional barriers that undocumented student encounter. Another extremely important area of research that needs further investigation includes learning from undocumented students who have left the country in search of better opportunities. Future research should also address the experiences of college graduates who enter the work force. An expansion of this research would continue to emphasize the different challenges and navigational skills that men and women utilize. Undertaking a similar approach to a research study that investigates the opportunities and resources available for undocumented students that attend private universities would yield valuable findings in terms of understanding how private universities might be able to circumvent federal and state policy limitations of public universities. Ultimately, research also needs to highlight the educational trajectories of students that benefited from DACA versus those that have not qualified for services.

Conclusion

This study reveals the personal and academic challenges of twenty undocumented Latina/o graduate students. Through their personal stories of perseverance, hope, and resistance, students overcame challenges and moved beyond the baccalaureate into educational spaces where they were often times “trailblazers²⁸” in their journey toward obtaining a Master’s or doctoral degree. Most importantly, it highlights the complexities of being an undocumented Latino/a immigrant student in the United States. It suggests that this particular student population is capable of fulfilling their goals and dreams but at the cost of immense sacrifice and hardship. In the end, their success was the result of their determination along with the wealth of

²⁸ I utilize the term “trailblazer” to describe students who paved a graduate school pathway for future undocumented students. Those who were the first undocumented graduate students in their departments and programs.

resources obtained from community and family members who truly believed and supported them. Below I provide an update of what has become of the students in this study.

Epilogue: Where are the students now?

Over the last few years, there have been several attempts to provide federal and state immigration reform to undocumented immigrants in the United States. While many of the attempts did not succeed, particular laws and policies (DACA) provided some type of avenue for students to contribute to society. In some cases, these amendments provided students with opportunities, while for others doors remained closed. The following section offers an update on some of the twenty students that participated in this research study.

Esperanza

Esperanza, who at the time of the interviews was pursuing a Master's degree in Biology continued to live in the same town and commute an hour away to work. Her plans are to finish her graduate studies. Unfortunately, not much has changed for her, although she received her DACA permit and got her driver's license. Her professor continues to promise he will support her with financial assistance, but has not. In 2013, she married through the court and hired an attorney to work on her case. A little later, Esperanza and her husband married through the church and had the fairytale wedding they had always wanted. They both are students pursuing their Master's degrees and hope to complete their studies and move to San Diego where she has secured a doctoral offer with Sandford-Bunham Cancer Research Institute. Esperanza was honest and shared her sentiments of being tired of struggling as an undocumented student. As a result, her interests were to work, buy a house, and start a family. She did not have the same energy and ambitions as she did during the interviews. She had more interest in investing in her

family's future. She was in the process of applying for employment in San Diego, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Esperanza and her husband have plans to enter the job market and take the best offer available to them. The position in San Diego is secure but going for the Ph.D. invested in a route for which she no longer had the energy.

Alma

Alma graduated with her Master's degree in counseling with a marriage and family therapy (MFT) option and a pupil personnel credential (PPS). She became a math teacher at a middle school teaching 7th grade. Her future plans consist of going back to school and obtaining a single subject credential in Spanish. In 2010, she married and her husband was able to petition for her citizenship. She was relieved she did not have to leave the country and obtained her green card within three months after her marriage. She believes that because her whole family came on a visa and passport, it was a little easier for her to change her status.

Antonio

Antonio graduated with a Master's in mechanical engineering. He is very well and credits President Obama for establishing DACA. Due to the implementation of the bill, he was able to obtain a work permit and working in his field of study as an engineer investigating car accidents. The process to receive a work permit was about four months from the time he applied to DACA.

Consuelo

Consuelo graduated with a Master's in linguistics. Through a message, she shared her journey after the degree.

I am very excited to tell you about my journey after you interviewed me. I still remember that I felt very strongly about my situation, about getting ahead in life through education. I remember that I cried and your questions made me realize how strongly I felt towards overcoming poverty and towards breaking with that bad cycle that my past generations had followed. I really wanted to have the

things that I had never had. In December 2010 I finished my Master of Arts in Linguistics with emphasis in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) along with a B.A. in Spanish Literature. The last year was the toughest with me going through personal and economic problems. Even though I worked a lot in the summer and winter and often up to twelve hours per day, it still wasn't enough to pay for my bills, school tuition, and books. School tuition kept and keeps increasing let alone the graduate program which was around \$2700 dollars per semester at the time. I worked Monday through Sundays and studied all of these days as well. I also had some good times and went out whenever I could but I almost didn't have a life. I didn't feel enough support from family, had few or no friends at some point and no boyfriend. I had a really tough and lonely time getting there and even went through a nervous breakdown the last semester of my Master's but fortunately a friend helped me and told me that she believed in me. Then, two weeks after final exams, I found out that I passed all my classes. I don't know how to describe how unbelievably fast my life changed. I met my still boyfriend in January 2011 a week after I received news that I had passed my exams. I looked for jobs online after my official graduation in May 2011 and found a job in Russia. That was in August 2011. Now, I'm about to finish my second and last year in Russia with lots of experiences to tell. It's been a tough road but altogether rewarding. I was finally able to travel, one of my dreams for some years. I can see all my years of hard work are paying off. Education is the best investment I could have ever done. I am happy now. I continue to learn and I'm doing what I want.

Take much care,
Consuelo

Through a follow up message, I learned that Consuelo applied for employment in Russia and many other countries. She was offered the job in Russia, which entailed a ten-month contract with 24 days of paid holiday and decent pay, free accommodations, a work visa, and flight reimbursement. However, she cannot return to the U.S. She knew she would not be able to return but still decided to leave. After her experience, she does not regret it. At the time, she really thought there would not be immigration reform anytime soon and she was not willing to wait for it. She had earned a degree and the way things were, she had the choice of going back to her hometown, living with her mom and working in the fields or staying in the city and working an underpaid job. Consuelo wanted to work legally in a job for which she had studied and prepared herself. While DACA implemented shortly after she left the country, she would not

have benefited from it because at the time it came into effect she was thirty years old and already out of the country. Currently, she resides in Munich, Germany, living with her boyfriend and searching for a job.

Carmen

Carmen was a student pursuing a Master's degree in art. After completing her degree, she worked as a home tutor for a while and sought more stable employment. She worked at the local community college for a year but could not be rehired due to funding issues. While she was able to apply for citizenship, she needed money to pay for her application. Because she was pregnant, she could not afford the citizenship application. She continued to paint but not as much due to her pregnancy.

Andres

Andres earned his Master's degree in exercise science and involved with clinical hours at the local medical center in the cardiac rehabilitation center. He planned to test for the Registered Clinical Exercise Physiologist, which required clinical experience. He gained acceptance to the Ph.D. program at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Vancouver, Canada, but, unfortunately, there was miscommunication with the secretary of the department that resulted in the inability to assign a supervisor. He planned to apply again for the Fall 2015. He got a work permit via the Deferred Action Procedure and received a California driver's license and a social security number. However, he still plans to continue with school because life to him is terribly boring without learning new things. He is interested in applying what he has learned to the knowledge within his field of study.

Gabriel

Gabriel finished his PhD in Linguistics in 2011 from a university on the east coast. After the completion of his doctoral degree, he spent 2011-2012 in a post-doctoral fellowship at a

private university and published a few articles. At the time, many things intersected: his mother in Mexico became seriously sick and he had to see her. He did not qualify to apply for DACA because he was already 31 years old. He also wanted to be with his partner who was in a Master's program in French in Canada. Thus Gabriel went to Mexico to see his mother, and get the papers to go to Canada. He traveled to Morelia, Michoacan where his mother resides and then went to Guadalajara, Jalisco, where he applied for his visa to go to Canada. He described the process of obtaining his visa as very short, very comfortable, and easy on the bureaucratic level. He had previously researched requirements and documentation needed for Canadian papers and that made things easier. The visa arrived at his home by DHL and he did not have to go anywhere.

He currently lives in Montreal and describes it as a great city with awesome people. Now that he is documented and able to travel around. Living in Montreal allows him to visit his mother in Mexico regularly. During the time of the update, he was in Morelia, drinking coffee, and enjoying the beauty of the city. He continues to do research in his field and writing on the experiences of Latino communities that live in the cultural and linguistic contact zones of French, Spanish, and English. He specifically studies the Latino-Quebecois community that lives in the borderlands of French and Spanish and is writing his thesis on Franol radio. He received a great scholarship to study and has taken classes with very well recognized scholars. His partner and he are very happy together living in Quebec and hope to return to the US. They are starting the immigration process to go back to the US now that gay marriage is official. They are very excited about returning since both have family in the US. His plan is to apply for employment in the US and Canada and explore where that might take them.

Eduardo

Eduardo started a doctoral program in clinical psychology at a university on the east coast in 2010. His life changed 360 degrees since then. He no longer worries about the future, he is fully funded, and doing well in his doctoral program. With the help of some people, he was able to hire a prominent lawyer that took care of his situation. He was saddened by the idea that money could be so influential in fixing his legal status. He finished the fourth year of his doctoral program and will begin work on his dissertation. He loves what he does and feels so blessed to have the opportunity to continue his studies. He is living his life the way he always wanted.

It is my personal goal that the sacrifices that these students and their families have undergone serve as examples to elementary, high school, and undergraduate students who may feel they have no options. I hope that this work contributes to the field of higher education and serves to understand the complexities of remaining undocumented.

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