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Peer reviewed

Dear Amani,

Katie made changes to the paper as requested, and I just looked them over (but didn't accept or alter them). We are hopeful that we can submit this paper for review soon. I know we have gone back and forth several times, with several models, and the writing has gone through some refining and tightening as well, and over a significant amount of time. And there still may be more to do, but I have to say I am feeling a bit like the perfect may be the enemy of the good at this point.

I truly want the paper to be ready to go as far as all of us are concerned, so that is still the goal. I speak for myself that I would like reviewers to have a chance to weigh in before any more substantial revisions are made -- but again, that is my opinion only! Consensus trumps my opinion.

Thanks Amani. I HAVE LEARNED SO MUCH FROM THIS PROCESS AND FROM YOUR LEADERSHIP!

Master Status or Intersectional Identity?
Undocumented Students' Sense of Belonging on a College Campus¹

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Abstract

Research examining the educational experiences of undocumented students in the United States analyses the challenges they face navigating postsecondary education, rooted in exclusionary social and structural constraints associated with their precarious legal status. The negative reception context has been implicated in shaping undocumented students' sense of belonging on college campuses, impeding academic progress. The observed salience of legal status provides compelling evidence that being undocumented functions as a master status – a salient identity and social position that shapes the educational incorporation of undocumented students in the United States. Yet, these studies tend to focus primarily on legal status, while deemphasizing or excluding other identities. Our study takes an intersectional approach to investigate undocumented students' college experiences and sense of belonging. Using focus group data with thirty-five undocumented students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution, this study shows that undocumented students rarely identify their legal status in isolation or implicate it as the sole source of their adversity. Instead, they reveal that a sense of belonging rooted in multiple dimensions of their identity, including legal status, ethnicity, and class. This study reconsiders the utility of the master status concept in favour of one emphasizing an

intersectional social location for a comprehensive picture of undocumented students' educational incorporation.

Keywords: Undocumented; Education; Intersectionality; Mexican Americans; Racial and Ethnic Relations in the United States

Introduction

Legal status, specifically being undocumented, shapes the social and economic life chances of U.S. Latinos in myriad ways, from securing housing (Gonzales 2016), obtaining work (Gleeson 2015), accessing healthcare (Fabi and Saloner 2016), to getting married (Enriquez 2016). Among young adults, being undocumented also conditions their educational trajectories (Abrego 2006; Enriquez 2016; Terriquez 2015). Researchers contend that the effect of undocumented status on the process of educational incorporation is consistent with that of a 'master status,' or a primary identity that shapes affiliated members' social position (Hughes 1954), including their sense of belonging (Enriquez 2016). In keeping with this perspective, Abrego (2006:217) finds that among recent high school graduates, undocumented students are less likely to pursue college than their documented counterparts. Likewise, Terriquez (2015:1319) observes that being undocumented significantly affects postsecondary students' ability to maintain continuous enrolment, concluding that 'illegality functions as a master status' that increases the likelihood of students' stopping out - 'leaving college with the intention to return' (Terriquez and Gurantz 2014:204) - or withdrawing from college altogether.

Roberto Gonzales (2011; 2016) and Laura Enriquez (2016) find common ground with these researchers even as they offer a more nuanced understanding of legal status as a master status. Gonzales (2016) maintains that undocumented status may serve as a master status during certain

stages of the life-course. For example, undocumented immigrant youth are especially likely to experience the negative consequences of being undocumented during their high school years, as many first discover their status when contemplating a first job, securing a driver's license, or thinking about college (2011). For some undocumented young adults, 'learning to be illegal' is synonymous with experiences of exclusion during the transition from high school to college, prompting them to lower their educational aspirations or curb their educational attainment (2011:611). Laura Enriquez (2016) also recognises the contingent character of undocumented status, although she is more circumspect than Gonzales on whether to classify illegality as a master status. She argues instead that other intersecting dimensions of identity and collectivity that often accompany undocumented status take precedence in shaping the educational outcomes of undocumented students in significant ways. Specifically, she shows that being poor and a first-generation college student influences undocumented students' likelihood of stopping out of school both earlier in the life course and to greater effect than legal status does. Consequently, she concludes that undocumented status does not function as a master status, but rather, serves as a 'final straw' that imparts feelings of not belonging rooted in exclusionary experiences, which tip the scale in the direction of stopping out for disadvantaged students. Her research calls into question whether undocumented status acts as a master status at all, choosing instead to

underscore the affective and relational aspects of undocumented status when compared against other master status identities (e.g. social class).

Rather than focusing on the (negative) postsecondary outcomes of undocumented students, i.e., on lowered educational aspirations (Abrego 2006), decisions against applying to college (Gonzales 2016), or once enrolled, whether they are more likely to stop out or withdraw (Enriquez 2016; Terriquez 2015), our study focuses on a unique subgroup of undocumented college students who have successfully transitioned from high school to college and are currently enrolled at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) located in a low-resource, majority-Latino community in Central California. We consider how a variety of salient identities, including undocumented status, being poor or working class, and the first in the family to attend college, shapes students' educational incorporation, as measured by their sense of belonging on a college campus. Moreover, we take seriously the social and structural reception context of the campus in which these undocumented students are embedded, to assess whether an HSI may offer a more or less inclusive or exclusionary environment. This multilevel approach allows us to link student experiences rooted in their intersectional social location within the broader campus community and structural context, to better understand how individual and group identities and social relationships combine with contextual-structural forces.

Building on the insights of Gonzales's (2012; 2016) and Enriquez's (2016) interventions underscoring the temporal, contingent, affective, and

relational aspects of undocumented status, this study considers how multiple, intersectional identities shape undocumented students' sense of belonging on a college campus. Whereas Gonzales (2012; 2016) concludes that undocumented status serves as a master status in transition periods, from high school to college and during the transition from youth to adulthood, Enriquez (2016) is more cautious, reasoning that legal status does not operate as a master status for postsecondary pathways; rather, disparities rooted in race, class, and being a first-generation college student influence undocumented students' decisions to stop out of college well before feelings of not belonging and exclusionary experiences associated with undocumented status do. Our findings reveal that for undocumented college students attending an HSI in California, being undocumented does not rise to the level of a master status in conditioning students' sense of belonging. Yet, neither do the largely uncontested master statuses of ethnicity or class. Although these distinct categories of identity have been examined separately in previous research, and moreover, have been shown to affect students' educational incorporation (Abrego 2006; Enriquez 2016; Gonzales 2016; Terriquez 2015), they also intersect. Our findings reveal that multiple identities combine to shape students' sense of belonging in interdependent ways that students do not easily or necessarily distinguish from each other. Instead, they become fused in undocumented students' discourse and understanding of their sense of belonging as expressed through experiences of inclusion and exclusion. The salience of an

intersectional identity took place on a campus where the majority of students are Latino, working class, and the first in their families to attend college, and where the campus climate is characterised by undocumented students as favourable. In this context of relative advantage, when compared to the experiences of undocumented youth more generally or undocumented students attending colleges with less favourable or inclusive campus climates, undocumented students are empowered and experience a resilience that facilitates an intersectional identity over an undocumented one. Our findings suggest that undocumented students may be more likely to emphasise their intersectional identity and social location over a single master status in the context of an inclusive student body and campus environment.

Master Status or Intersectional Identity?

Individual identity is based on a variety of characteristics and traits, as defined by the self, social roles, and group affiliations, to name a few (Thoits 2013:374). As such, individuals hold multiple identities at once, such as identifying as an undocumented immigrant and a college student. Strong evidence suggests that the salience of a given identity is determined by individual subjectivity, social relationships, and structures (Stryker and Burke 2000). The notion of a single salient identity is consistent with that of a master status identity. In the original use of the concept, Hughes (1954) describes a master status as one that affects interactions between an individual and others to such a degree that it has an 'outsized' impact on the

life chances of that individual. Selecting a master status from the multiple group affiliations that are available to most individuals, however, is not a straightforward process. For example, Hughes (1945:357) contends that race functions as a master status, especially for black Americans, as '[being black] tends to overpower, in most crucial situations, any other characteristics that may run counter to it.' Yet, he also implies that there are times when two or more master statuses may compete for primacy, what he refers to as a 'status dilemma.'²

To illustrate, Hughes (1945) suggests that a black man with a professional occupation, such as a medical doctor, may identify these two identities based on race and occupation, respectively, each as master statuses. Yet, these statuses are also contradictory, in the sense that being a racial minority is associated with a lower position on the racial hierarchy, whereas being a medical doctor is a prestigious position associated with a higher class status. Contradictory master status identities are likely to result in a 'status dilemma' for the doctor and those who interact with him. In such cases, context matters: a black doctor is likely to experience racial discrimination in settings where his professional status is not known, such as a public setting (Feagin 1990); however, he may avoid instances of racial discrimination in hospital, where his profession is known or signalled (see also Wingfield 2013). Hughes (1945) concludes that in particular

² In particular, he suggests that contradictory master statuses may be more likely to cause tension and require adjudication than complementary ones.

environments where 'specific relationships of professional practice' are expected, the status dilemma may be mitigated.

Similarly, college campuses are institutional educational settings that share in common several features, including the built environment (e.g. classrooms), classes of workers (e.g. administrators, educators), and a large student body. Like hospitals and other institutions, there are expected norms, relationships and practices that are specific to the college campus, from faculty teaching classes to groundskeepers managing green spaces. The undergraduate student body is generally made up of young adults who graduated from high school or its equivalent, voluntarily chose to apply, were subsequently selected by admissions committees, and enrolled in college to pursue a postsecondary degree. From the perspective of mainstream America, getting a college degree is indicative of middle class aspirations (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013).

Students who identify with one or more salient identities on a college campus may seek out opportunities and situations to build relationships with others based on one or more identities. The presence on campus of one or multiple salient identities may "reinforce one another," or may engender conflict (Stryker and Burke 2000:290). The organization dynamics of the campus matter here, as they condition in part what identities are represented (Reyes 2017). These include the demographic profile of the campus, policies promoting diversity and inclusion efforts, student organizations, and the actions of individual institutional agents (Reyes 2017;

Golash-Boza and Valdez 2018). Among Latino students, Reyes (2017) found that the college racial climate shaped three possible identity outcomes: an inclusive Latino identity, one that is based on organizational membership, or one that rejects the salience of a Latino identity in favour of an alternative identity (2017).

The demographic profile of the undergraduate student population in California is racially diverse. At the University of California, the majority of students identify as non-Hispanic White (23 percent) or Asian (34 percent), with a significant proportion of Latino students (24 percent) (University of California 2017).³ The HSI where this research took place is located in the low-resource, Latino-majority Central Valley. The general student population is majority working-class/poor (60%), Latino (60%), first-generation college (50%), and has the highest percentage of undocumented students relative to its student body in the UC System, equivalent to that of African Americans on campus (approximately 5% each) (University of California 2017). Moreover, a significant number of U.S.-born students who attend this university come from mixed-status families, whereby one or more family members are undocumented. Like most Latino students, then, the majority of undocumented students are Mexican-origin, poor or working class, and first-generation college students, if not first generation high school students. In this context, undocumented students share multiple, socially-constructed

³ American Indians lag far behind other groups at 1 percent (University of California 2017).

identities with others on the college campus. In other words, they share a similar intersectional social location (Zavella 1997).

This study applies an intersectional approach to the study of undocumented students' sense of belonging on a majority-Latino college campus to reveal whether undocumented status functions as a master status identity or as one aspect of an intersectional social location. An intersectional approach is based on the notion that multiple dimensions of identity are created, maintained and transformed simultaneously and in relation to one another (Collins 1997:18; Weber 2001:104). From this perspective, one social group identity, such as undocumented status, may not explain fully a sense of belonging among students, because distinct yet interdependent identities, such as being poor or a first-generation college student, intersect and fuse with legal status to shape this process. Intersectionality accepts that existing socially constructed categories of difference are imperfect yet capture some aspects and dynamics of inequality that are commonly experienced by those who share a given classification, thereby capturing 'relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions' (McCall 2005:1173). Applying an intersectional approach to students' educational incorporation emphasises how multiple dimensions of identity shape undocumented students' sense of belonging.

Campus Climate and Nested Contexts of Reception

This study took place at an HSI. Many studies have found that this designation can be misleading because it does not mean that the institution necessarily serves Latino students well – it simply means that Latino students make up at least a quarter of the student population (Hurtado and Ruiz 2012). Moreover, the presence of large numbers of Latino students does not guarantee positive outcomes for this group. Zerquera and Gross (2015), for example, found that the percentage of faculty of colour was more important for Latino student success than the percentage of students of colour. HSIs thus vary in the extent to which they actually serve Latino students. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that HSIs can provide a positive climate for Latino students. Cuellar (2014), for example, found that although Latino students enter HSIs with relatively lower perceptions of their academic abilities than their counterparts who attend non-HSIs, their self-perception improves more at HSIs than it does for those enrolled at non-HSIs. Although studies have consistently found that African Americans experience improved educational outcomes at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the experiences of Latinos at HSIs are much less uniform (Nelson Laird et al. 2007), with mixed results, given the limited resources and structural inequality that often characterise such schools (for an expanded discussion, see Golash-Boza and Valdez 2018). In this study we consider the ways in which being in a majority-Latino, working-class, first-generation college student setting shapes undocumented students' sense of belonging.

When this research took place, the campus where we conducted the focus groups had a designated office for undocumented students, a vibrant student organization for undocumented students, and several student clubs specifically for Latino students, such as MECHA and Hermanas Unidas. The study also took place in California, a state with relatively favourable laws towards undocumented students. For example, since 2001, a California law (AB 540) has allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition, and since 2011, AB 130 and 131 have allowed eligible undocumented students to apply for both private and state financial aid. The respondents thus had their tuition partially or fully subsidized by the state of California. At the time of this research, the President of the UC system, Janet Napolitano had recently allocated \$5 million dollars to UC campuses to support undocumented students. This funding supported the undocumented student service centre. At the national level, there was some hope for immigration reform and the federal executive order, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which provides a deferral from deportation and a two-year work permit, did not seem to be imminently under threat. At the same time, the country was in the midst of breaking all-time records for deportations. As Golash-Boza and Valdez (2018:2) explain, undocumented students at an HSI in California thus experience 'nested contexts of reception' insofar as undocumented students 'encounter distinct contexts at the local, state, and federal levels that shape their educational incorporation,' including their sense of belonging.

Building on previous research that finds evidence for and against the classification of undocumented status as a master status identity, this study reconsiders the utility of retaining the master status label in a highly stratified society that is increasingly diverse. Attention to the intersecting dimensions of power and identity decentres undocumented status as the principle determinant in shaping undocumented students' educational incorporation to underscore the interdependent influence of multiple and fused identities on their sense of belonging. Does being undocumented rise to the level of a master status identity? Are social class and ethnicity easily identified as master statuses in addition to or instead of undocumented status? In a different setting (e.g. a predominately white institution) or stage in the life-course (e.g. transitioning from high school to college), being undocumented, or non-white, or working class, might be more likely to function as a master status, in keeping with previous research. At this university, however, such an assumption requires further exploration.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

During the 2014-2015 academic year our research team (two faculty, five undergraduate research assistants) developed a qualitative study of undocumented students at an HSI in Central California. The team conducted five focus groups with a total of 35 undocumented students who constitute roughly 18 percent of the undocumented student population on campus. Each focus group had between five and eight participants. The focus groups lasted between sixty minutes and two hours. We developed the focus group

questionnaire in consultation with a student group that includes and advocates for undocumented students on campus. Questions included students' experiences in applying to college, securing financial aid, experiences with being undocumented, and attitudes regarding campus climate, which included questions of belonging.

The majority of the focus group participants were female students (24 out of 35). 31 of the 35 students were from Mexico. The others were from Brazil (1), Guatemala (1), and the Philippines (2). Our sample of students migrated to the United States at varying ages and years. Some arrived as early as the mid-to-late 90s (8), while the majority came from early-to-mid 2000's (25), and only a couple migrated in the year 2010 (2). Most of our student participants arrived to the U.S. at an early age. Twelve arrived between the ages of two and four. Another eleven came at the ages of five to seven years old. A smaller minority migrated as preteen and early teenagers. Six of them came between the ages eight and ten, and the remaining six came at the ages of eleven to fourteen. Twenty-two of the thirty-five students (63%) reported that their parents' annual household income was less than \$25,000. Eleven (31%) reported that their household income was between \$25,000 and \$50,000. Only one student reported that their household income was over \$75,000, and one student reported that they did not know. Our participants had varying levels of grade point averages (GPA): one student had less than a 2.0, fifteen students had between 2.1 and 2.99, eleven had

between 3.0-3.4, five students had a 3.5 or higher, and three students did not disclose their GPA.

FINDINGS: IDENTITY SALIENCE AND BELONGING

Undocumented Status as a Master Status

Confirming previous research, undocumented students were well aware of their undocumented status and perceived it as a master status identity that conditioned their educational trajectories during the transition from high school to college. As high school students exploring their options, they mentioned great difficulty locating information on how to apply for college or whether the complicated California and federal policies associated with the DREAM Act and DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) applied to them. Institutional actors, such as high school guidance counsellors and university recruiters who were trained in advising undocumented students provided crucial information for undocumented high school students to navigate the application process (Golash-Boza and Valdez 2018).

Some of the students enrolled in college prior to the implementation of AB 130 and 131 and thus experienced significant financial burden, directly due to their undocumented status. These students expressed frustration at the limited financial awards and opportunities for which they qualified and the long hours needed to search for aid. Carlos (FG2) captured the sentiment of many when he stated,

‘In order to apply [for scholarships] you need to be a US citizen or California resident; I was pissed off I needed to do extra

research...that's a real unique struggle [for undocumented students].'

The financial burdens associated with being undocumented were not limited to financial aid. Joaquin (FG1), for example, had trouble finding affordable and adequate housing since neither he nor his parents had social security numbers. The particular constraints that undocumented students face on the college campus shape their college experience in ways that diverge from the mainstream middle class experience. Rather than a time of excitement and discovery, Lisa (FG 4) described her educational pursuit as a "battle" due to her limited options: 'I know that each student has their own battles they have gone through, but I think that undocumented students have gone through a lot more battles than documented students have for me it was like a constant battle.' For many students, being undocumented was a salient identity, synonymous with confronting and overcoming unique obstacles.

Despite the temporary reprieve from deportation that DACA provided for most, the impermanence of its protection and the threat of deportation for family and community were never far from their minds; several respondents mentioned the deportation of family members. Joaquin (FG1)'s cousin (a sophomore in high school) had recently been deported, which served as a reminder of his own vulnerability. Joaquin (FG1) explained:

Is that what happens to me next? He wasn't doing any harm so I guess like when that happened it just made the realization that

you're not even safe if you're a student, even if you're a good civilian, you're still gonna get, you still have that possibility of being taken away.

Although the majority of undocumented students indicated that they felt safe on the college campus itself, they expressed feelings of anxiety and worry about their status or their family members that might occur off-campus.

In addition to shaping their own subjective identities, undocumented status was also a critical part of how undocumented students perceived each other and how they were perceived by others. Ivette (FG2), for example, explained that when people find out she is undocumented, largely through self-disclosure, 'they put you in a category.' She explained further that people make assumptions about who she is and what she is capable of achieving. As these statements illustrate, undocumented students identified their legal status as creating specific circumstances that shaped their subjective identity and social relationships, and which generated anxiety, stress and frustration in pursuit of a postsecondary education in the transition from high school to college and after arrival on campus. Such instances underscore the salience of being undocumented on the everyday lives and sense of belonging of undocumented youth on and off the college campus.

Undocumented Identity as one of Multiple Identities

Although the salience of undocumented status is consistent with a master status identity, when students spoke about the challenges they faced as

undocumented college students on campus, they rarely mentioned experiences that could be traced to their legal status in isolation. Instead, they related experiences that were shared with poor, Latino, and first-generation college students, multiple identities that they shared alongside their undocumented identity, and which combined to make up an intersectional social location. For example, students often conflated being undocumented with being 'low income' or 'first-generation [college student]' or all three at once. Notably, they did not use 'first-generation' to refer to their status as first-generation *immigrants*, but to their status as first-generation *college students*. From their perspective, being undocumented was synonymous with their identity as foreign-born immigrants, whereas identifying as first generation college student was an identity shared with the majority of other students on campus.

Respondents characterised the need for financial aid as an extra burden and source of stress that undocumented students experienced on a daily to semester to annual basis, as they waited for their letters of financial aid to arrive in time to pay for fees, books, and the like. As Joaquin (FG1) illustrates,

I feel like being undocumented and being especially low income, like first generation ... [there's] a lot of budgeting that comes with being undocumented. You just have to watch very carefully what you spend. ... I've been with my computer for like six years now. Why? Because I don't have the money to upgrade. And it's just like it's kind of like

ripping apart. Being undocumented, you have to budget. It's just the biggest thing you have to take into consideration.

Joaquin's recognition that being undocumented goes hand-in-hand with being fiscally responsible and fiscally burdened was one shared by many undocumented students and underscores the fusing of intersectional identities rather than emphasizing one over the other as a master status. Likewise, John (FG1) melds together the distinct identities of social class and legal status, as he explained the reality that his mother's undocumented status means she is also poor when he stated, "being undocumented, my mom doesn't make that much money."

Similarly, Lisa (FG4) indicated that economic concerns were the primary obstacle that undocumented students faced. Lisa (FG4) explained that her mother worked as a fieldworker and earned only the minimum wage, which made it difficult for her to help Lisa out financially. Lisa's mother had also been pressuring Lisa to get a job, which she feared could negatively affect her school performance. This was a pattern in the focus groups -we would ask participants questions about the experiences of being undocumented, and they would describe challenges they shared with documented students, Latino students, students from poor or working-class backgrounds, and first-generation college students.

As described above, undocumented students suggested that their legal status functioned as a master status in the transition from high school to college. They also expressed anxiety and stress associated with their legal

status that included the very real threat of deportation that they and their families faced off campus, even as they acknowledged their more privileged and secure position relative to family members due to being a college student with DACA on a college campus. When asked about the ways in which their legal status mattered as college students, undocumented students more often conflated their legal status with their social class or first-generation college student status, in keeping with an understanding of an intersectional social location rather than one emphasizing a single master status.

When we asked students about their undocumented status prior to coming to campus, we also saw some of this conflation with other aspects of their identities. For example, participants also referenced issues that many immigrants face, such as language barriers. When asked what obstacles she faces as an undocumented student, Sonya (FG1) discussed her arrival into this country and her inability to speak English.

I came to this country when I was four years old ... I had a friend that was also undocumented and she also had the same trouble as me - not understanding the language.

In this quote, Sonya (FG1) suggested her inability to speak English when she arrived was a salient aspect of her undocumented status. She, like many other students, fused her identity as an undocumented student with other aspects of her identity, in this case, being an English language learner. Of

course, many undocumented students are not English language learners and many English language learners have legal status.

We asked students in the second focus group to reflect on what being undocumented meant in their hometowns. Students responded with a variety of different responses. Ivette (FG2) explained that in her hometown, being undocumented meant she was not expected to get very far in life. Several students responded that, in their hometown, everyone works in the fields, and few people dream beyond that. As in the other focus groups, when we asked about hardships associated with their status as undocumented immigrants, the participants pointed to obstacles related to other identities. In some cases, respondents made a clear distinction. For example, Sonya (FG2), highlighted her status as one of many important factors:

When you have a single mother ...and on top of that being undocumented, I also have to work, do good in college, to further to be an example for my siblings - to get my family on a different level.

Sonya (FG2) made a clear distinction between having a single mother and being undocumented, while also noting that both statuses made her more economically precarious. Likewise, Ivette (FG3) related her status as undocumented to economic challenges she faced on the road to college, although she did not make a distinction between being undocumented and being economically disadvantaged. Of course, as other students implied, being undocumented increases labour market vulnerability and uncertainty.

For these students, one of the most salient aspects of being undocumented is the financial implications – for themselves and their family members. This economic precarity shapes their sense of belonging on campus insofar as their limited financial resources often meant that they had to work during the school year and over the summer. They also had to worry about their parents’ ability to make ends meet and pay their college fees on time to ensure they could enrol in the classes they needed. They also sometimes felt guilty about studying instead of working full time. As Don (FG3) explained: ‘we’re always worrying ... taking focus ... that we could be giving to academics instead.’

Undocumented Status and Belonging in the Context of an HSI Campus

Reyes (2017:19) contends that the campus climate, including organizational dynamics, demographic composition, institutional agents, and student interactions, conditions Latino identity formation. We observed a marked shift in the ways in which undocumented students talked about their status when referencing the campus and their perceptions of the campus climate. Specifically, the salience of undocumented status was tempered in student narratives regarding experiences or feelings of inclusion and exclusion within the campus setting. Although they continued to identify as undocumented, students tended to downplay its importance or primacy in shaping their sense of belonging on campus while emphasizing an intersectional social location; it appears this shift was based in part on the perception that the

campus offered a favourable and inclusive nested reception context and climate.

For example, when asked about personal experiences and feelings of belonging on campus, the vast majority of students expressed uniformly affirmative feelings and communicated positive incidents and encounters, which they attributed to a climate of inclusiveness. Many understood the campus reception context as one that embraced all students regardless of their backgrounds. This sentiment was captured by David (FG3), who went so far as to dismiss from consideration his particular social location,

It's not about your background, your ethnicity, or if you have citizenship or not...[this campus] is the most diverse UC campus...I feel like they treat [undocumented students] the same [as everyone else]...they respect them and treat them equally.

For David (FG3), legal status did not function as a master status, but neither did class, ethnicity, or nativity. He emphasised the demographic composition of the student population as a whole in fostering a more inclusive climate (see Sandoval et al. 2016). This sense that he shared an identity with many other students on campus and that no aspect of his identity affected how he was treated on campus enhanced David's sense of belonging on campus. One of the student researchers, who is undocumented, wrote in his notes after this focus group: 'All of [the participants in this focus group] felt [this campus] is a great place to be, its resources are getting better and its staff is really well trained on how to help the undocumented community.'

For many undocumented students, being undocumented is an identity and experience they share with a select subgroup on campus, even as they share a similar social location with most students, with respect to ethnicity and social class background. Nevertheless, their distinctive undocumented identity, in turn, creates the desire for a dedicated space on campus for undocumented students to gather. Students thus were strongly in favour of the creation of a larger resource centre for undocumented students, and greatly benefited from the existence of an active student organization for undocumented students. Undocumented students expressed the importance of having an undocumented community, as it made them feel empowered as well as having a safe zone where they could talk freely.

David (FG3): We do share experiences. Another thing that [the student group] taught me about is unity. They bring empowerment - once you have those people next to you, you can do anything, you can say anything, no one's gonna judge you.

At the same time, however, undocumented students also expressed feelings of solidarity with other students on campus, due to other shared characteristics. For example, when asked what he liked about the campus, Daniel (FG3) pointed to the solidarity he finds on campus: 'I like the solidarity ... and how it's a close community.' He explained further:

I personally felt really ... welcomed overall and I think one of the reasons [is] because we have a large population of first

generation college students so that makes everybody kinda relate like not through the immigration status, but through like the background and the hardships that everybody encounters.

For Daniel, a shared social location associated with hardships experienced by first-generation college students created the basis for group cohesiveness and a climate of inclusiveness that transcended differences between documented and undocumented students. His statements also provide evidence against the notion that undocumented status functions as a master status for undocumented students in this context.

The suggestion that undocumented students face unique disadvantages when compared to other students was also challenged by Frank (FG1) who maintained that college just takes an adjustment, regardless of legal status. He mentioned that the difficulties he experienced settling into to college life had more to do with being homesick and learning a new environment rather than because he was undocumented:

It's not just because [I'm] undocumented or anything...leaving home, not being close to your parents, to your siblings, to go to a campus that you don't really know...coming in as a freshman there's so much that you just don't know...

Homesickness aside, the overwhelming majority of undocumented students expressed a sense of belonging on campus, rooted in a shared intersectional social location. That said, over the course of conducting the five focus groups students reported a handful of negative incidents that made explicit their

undocumented status or other dimensions of their identity. These interactions were almost always between an undocumented student and a non-Hispanic white student, staff member, or faculty member. (Although non-Hispanic white students make up a minority of the undergraduate student body, the racial/ethnic composition of staff and faculty is majority-white.) Such incidents are consistent with descriptions of microaggressions that have been reported between whites and non-whites on predominately white universities and colleges (PWIs) (Moore 2008). Veronica (FG1) described one such example, as she explained that her undocumented status was not typically the source of unequal treatment, but rather, her presumed ethnic-origin:

Anything I said, [my white roommate] would say ‘whatever Mexican.’ I thought it was hilarious because first of all I’m not Mexican you know [laughter]...but to her like anyone who is undocumented is Mexican...even sometimes when I would listen to Spanish music she would call it ‘Mexican music’ and I’m like, it’s not Mexican music.

The students in the focus group nodded their heads and laughed in agreement with Veronica, specifically her claim that many students just assume that all Latino students on campus are Mexican-origin, and that all Mexican-origin students are undocumented. Yet, instead of developing or expressing feelings of concern or anxiety about not fitting in or belonging,

Veronica and the other focus group respondents were quick to dismiss these types of incidents, or express surprise that they happened at all.

In a somewhat similar incident Maria (FG4) mentioned that when she first arrived, she heard students on campus referring to the campus as 'UC Mexican.' She then went on to clarify that the reference to UC Mexican is not just directed to the large number of Mexican-origin students, but specifically to the 'high population of undocumented students.' Maria (FG4) explained that she felt affronted by this designation because she understood it as a critique of the high number of undocumented students on campus. Her analysis also points to the recognition of a widely-held stereotype by both undocumented students and their peers that conflates being undocumented with being Mexican, and which persists even on a campus with a majority-Latino student body and inclusive climate. Nevertheless, Veronica, Maria, and the other focus group participants tended to dismiss such incidents or laugh them off because of a strong conviction that they, too, belonged on campus.

We conducted these focus groups during the first year of funding from the UC President's office to the UC campuses specifically for undocumented students as well as after the creation of an active student group. Thus, some juniors and seniors found the campus had changed during their time there. John (FG5), for example, did not know there were other undocumented students until his junior year, and was pleased to learn that the campus had a relatively high percentage of undocumented students.

One of my friends gave me the information [about the student group] so I showed up to the meetings and there were a lot of people. They started talking about how we have like 200 students who are undocumented here [on campus] and I was amazed cause all this time I've been scared to say I'm undocumented cause I thought I was the only one, but now I see the support.

In contrast, Sara (FG1) - who came later - heard the campus was friendly before she even came to campus, '[my high school] counsellor ... guided me towards [this university]. She was like "the people there are nice, everybody's friendly especially towards undocumented students."' Other students expressed similar sentiments, saying that their high school counsellor or one of the recruitment officers had told them that the university welcomed undocumented students. Upon arriving on campus, students found this to be true - they felt accepted.

Daniel (FG3), for example, explained, 'There's a wide population of undocumented students here on this campus so when you like tell your friends "I'm undocumented" they don't treat you differently.'

In sum, undocumented students were able to experience a sense of belonging on campus in part due to the fact that there are many students like them on campus. Nevertheless, they also have specific needs as undocumented students and recognition of those needs is also critical for them to feel as if they belong on campus. These findings point to the

importance of considering undocumented status as a critical part of their intersectional social location. This understanding does not in any way downplay the importance of being undocumented. Instead, it highlights the importance of how being undocumented intersects in important ways with students' class position, ethnic background, and other social locations.

Discussion and Conclusion

The theoretical assumption that a master status identity, or competing master status identities, conditions the life chances of affiliated members has been demonstrated empirically in a number of studies that examine undocumented students' educational incorporation (Abrego 2006; Enriquez 2016; Terriquez 2015). This research has increased our understanding of the ways in which being undocumented creates and reproduces inequality and shapes students' educational progress. Such analyses have set the stage for the development of policies targeting this population's particular needs. Yet, the assumption that one dimension of identity takes precedence in shaping educational outcomes, followed by empirical analyses investigating how that one dimension operates, masks the force of one's intersectional social location on those results. Our study starts from a different premise; instead of taking as a given that undocumented status functions as a master status, we consider how undocumented students' sense of belonging on a college campus is rooted in multiple dimensions of their identity, which include ethnicity, legal status, class, and being the first in their families to go to college.

This study was conducted at an HSI with a student body that shares much in common with the undocumented population, including a large working-class, non-white, and first-generation student population. Differences in legal status between students that might increase tensions in an alternate setting, such as a predominately-white institution, are less likely to occur at this institution. Moreover, the state of California and the UC system has committed resources to address the recruitment and retention of its diverse student population in an effort to increase student success. Favourable campus policies targeting underrepresented students, including undocumented students specifically, and attempts to create a more inclusive campus have fostered a sense of belonging among students who identify with one or more traditional, underrepresented populations. In this favourable nested reception context (Golash-Boza and Valdez 2018), students were less likely to identify with one master status only and resisted the idea that their undocumented status had an outsized effect on feelings of belonging.

We contend that the undocumented students in our sample made reference to their intersectional social location over one that emphasised their legal status as a master status because of the favourable social and structural context in which the study took place, and which is in keeping with Hughes's (1954) contention that context matters. As an HSI that is majority Latino, working class, and first-generation college student, with the largest proportion of undocumented students who make up the student body in the

UC system, the campus is unique. Moreover, the campus is located in a majority-Latino, rural, and working-class region of California. We suggest that students fused the salience of undocumented status with other group affiliations in part due to this more representative context. We suggest that one added benefit of greater inclusiveness on the college campus may be to bolster undocumented students' sense of belonging.

To facilitate a sense of belonging on college campuses, the creation of an inclusive campus climate is necessary. Organizational dynamics matter here, and include training institutional agents and staff on the specific concerns and needs of the undocumented population, facilitating the development of undocumented student organizations and the creation of an undocumented resources centre (Reyes 2017). By implementing institutional and organizational support, universities can increase the chances of undocumented student success. Lastly, we suggest that programs or policies aimed at undocumented students are helpful; however, there is ample evidence that such efforts targeting legal status only may fail to adequately address concerns raised by undocumented students that are linked to vulnerable family members, social class, or first-generation college student status, and which, if addressed, could help a larger number of students.

Though we question the value of using the master status identity concept over one that emphasises an intersectional social location, we do not imply that disadvantages associated with undocumented status cease to matter in students' perceptions of belonging; on the contrary, we suggest

that multiple identities matter greatly, but their distinct impact is difficult to determine, even by the members themselves, because their effect is often fused together. Nor do we believe that campuses that strive for a more inclusive and welcoming campus climate always succeed in 'solving' the very real problems and disadvantages that underrepresented students face. In fact, and at the time of this writing, undocumented students and their allies are organizing to demand more protections for undocumented students on this campus, including putting pressure on the administration to designate the campus as a 'sanctuary campus' following the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. There is a growing sense of unease on campus and off, as concern grows over what Trump's presidency will mean for undocumented students and their families going forward. Whether the current political climate will begin to alter undocumented students' sense of belonging on this campus has yet to be determined, but there is some evidence that it is having an impact, including ethical questions that are now being raised concerning best practices by faculty who are conducting research on this vulnerable population.

Taken as a whole, our findings suggest a need to reconsider the utility of the master status identity concept in research on the undocumented population. Undocumented status has been embraced as a master status in the literature on educational incorporation; yet, its effects are often examined in isolation or conflated with multiple dimensions of identity. Our study reveals that undocumented status does not function as a master

status in the context of an inclusive HSI campus in the heart of California, but neither does social class or ethnicity; in this context, an intersectional approach that investigates undocumented students' intersectional social location provides a better and more comprehensive explanation for undocumented students' educational incorporation.

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