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UNDOCUMENTED CHICANX/LATINX GRADUATE STUDENTS: ILLUMINATING HOME-BASED SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Argelia Lara and Pedro E Nava

Santa Clara University

AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Argelia Lara, School of Education & Counseling Psychology, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95050. E-mail: alara@scu.edu.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study explores the experiences of Chicax/Latinx undocumented graduate students in higher education and specifically examines the home-based teachings and learnings employed by their parents to access and navigate higher education institutions. The study is guided by the research question: How do undocumented Latinx graduate students make sense of the forms of support and participation they receive from their families around education? The authors used Bernal's (2001) Pedagogies of the Home as a guiding framework. The findings revealed important learnings from their family's migration, *laboral* experiences and struggles, and strategies to resist marginalization. Through this study, student experiences highlight important considerations for policy and practice that validate the teachings and learnings that occur in their families and homes.

Keywords: undocumented graduate students, pedagogies of the home, family engagement, Chicax/Latinx students

“Now it's my turn”: Education in Action

Each year during graduation season at Mills College,¹ members of the graduating class have the opportunity to inscribe messages on the Senior Paint Wall at the center of campus. This “mural” painted on the Senior Paint Wall is a collective effort of the rich and complex diversity present on this unique campus. These messages often serve as a self-tribute or expressions of deep gratitude and appreciation to family or close friends who have supported the graduating students to “make

it.” Some students write inside jokes or well wishes for themselves or others. In contrast, other students leave messages of the struggles they overcame, sacrifices made, and dreams that graduation from Mills College brings closer to fulfillment. The following message was written by a graduating undergraduate student centering on aspects of their identity, connecting to familial generations of struggle, and affirming a commitment to work to end injustice:

Yo soy primera generación, queer, indígena, Chicanx mujer quien viene de una casa pobre y madre soltera. Mi gente sufrió para asegurar que yo podría salir adelante. Ahora es mi turno de asegurar que mi gente ya no sufra.

I am first generation, queer, indigenous, Chicanx woman who comes from a poor single mother household. My people have suffered to assure that I would prosper. Now it's my turn to make sure my people no longer suffer.

The message—written by a multiply marginalized (Annamma & Handy, 2019) first-generation, queer, *Indígena*, low-income, Chicanx *mujer*—draws attention to the resistance people from her community have endured so students like her can “*salir adelante*,” or get ahead. In that same vein, given the history of Mills College, which is now a Hispanic Serving Institution,² we can infer that this student also experienced marginalization on the pathway toward completing their undergraduate studies. The path toward undergraduate degree completion, along with the familial legacy spanning borders, is fraught with reminders of one's otherness (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). This shows that even higher education institutions with progressive track records still struggle to be responsive to non-white students that are often othered and marginalized. The student's written affirmation serves as an expression of solidarity with those “othered,” as she declares it her “turn” to utilize her formal education to ensure that her people “no longer suffer” by working to stop social injustice.

Across the country, institutions of higher education are facing increasing scrutiny to address hostile campus racial climate issues by creating more inclusive campus environments (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In racially diverse states like California, where three-quarters of the graduating K-12 students are of color, and the state's legislature has high percentages of lawmakers of color, the policy context for Latinx students has seen a shift through an array of legislative changes with a greater focus on educational equity (Ed Data, 2021). Over the last 20 years, California policymakers have passed AB 540,³ the California Dream Act, Proposition 58, and, most recently, an ethnic studies high school graduation requirement. These policy changes are indicative of the growing Latinx political representation in the nation's most racially diverse state.

The experiences of Chicanx/Latinx students across the higher education pipeline reveal that in California, almost 40% are pushed out before graduating high school, and only 11 out of every 100 students who start elementary school eventually complete a 4-year degree (Covarrubias et al., 2018). Other educational pipeline research has highlighted within-group differences across Latinx communities that call attention to other stark inequities. For example, Covarrubias and Lara (2014) found citizenship status plays a significant part in the educational attainment of the Chicanx population. U.S.-born Chicanx were found to show significantly higher high school, college, and graduate school attainment and enrollment rates than foreign-born and noncitizen Chicanx. Their

work revealed that citizenship status is an important privilege that provided tangible material benefits to help access higher education. Other scholarship focusing on how Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals⁴ (DACA) affects the lives of people who are undocumented has similarly shown that DACA recipients have more straightforward transitions into adulthood (Gonzales, Ellis, Rendon-Garcia, & Brant, 2018) compared to their undocumented non-DACA peers.

Despite the challenges faced by undocumented Chicanx and Latinx students across the higher education pipeline, some manage to complete their undergraduate education. Examining their K-12 and postsecondary experiences reveals the critical role of their families in supporting and nurturing their educational and occupational endeavors. A growing body of literature has found that Chicanx and Latinx families play an important, yet under-acknowledged role in educational engagement that includes: home-based communicative practices (Auerbach, 2006; Gaitan, 1994; Valdés, 1996); developing an educational presence (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005); providing myriad forms of support (Nava, 2012); and organizing for political power (Manzo, 2016; Manzo & Deeb-Sossa, 2018; Paredes Scribner & Fernandez, 2017; Vélez, 2016). While most of this research is focused on the K-12 experiences of Chicanx/Latinx families, outside of a few studies focusing on college-going (Alvarez, 2010, 2015), additional research is urgently needed to more closely examine how Latinx families support their undocumented adult children in higher education.

In the opening vignette, the student alludes to the role of her single mother in her higher education experience. Our aim is to illustrate the role of familial home-based pedagogies (Bernal, 2001) in influencing the career and professional aspirations of Latinx undocumented graduate students. Prior research has shown a multitude of ways that families engage and participate in their children's education, in both formal and informal ways. In this paper, we expand on existing research and emphasize how immigrant parents contribute important knowledge and resources rooted in their home-based experiences (Bernal, 2001) to promote the educational success of their undocumented adult children. Therefore, this paper is guided by the research question: How do Latinx undocumented graduate students make sense of their familial histories and the forms of support they receive from their families toward education? The study draws on two years of ethnographic and oral history data through a counterstorytelling method to examine the life journeys and educational experiences of Chicanx/Latinx undocumented graduate students enrolled across both of the 4-year degree-granting public systems of higher education in California: the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC) systems.

Literature Review

Navigating the Legal Context in Higher Education for Undocumented Students

Historically, undocumented students have struggled against discriminatory federal and state policies that impeded their education (Oliveroz, 2006; Perez Huber & Malagon, 2007; Santos, 2006). Since 1974, several critical court cases have provided undocumented students with the opportunity to obtain an education. The Uniform Residency Law, a California law that lasted from 1974 to 1980, allowed long-term California residents to pay in-state tuition at all public colleges

and universities (Madera, 2008). Once the law expired, however, 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 19 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 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 for undocumented students to attend institutions of higher education.

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 (Madera, 2008). In 1990, though, 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 (Madera, 2008).

In 2001, Assemblyman Marco Antonio Firebaugh helped pass the California Legislature Assembly Bill 540 (AB540) which 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, all of whom had been 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 federal law because it could not provide undocumented students with tuition and residency benefits unless a citizen or national of the United States were also eligible for such benefits. In November 2010 the California Supreme Court issued a ruling on the *Martinez v. Regents of the University of California* rejecting the challenge to AB540, allowing in-state tuition benefits to continue for undocumented students.

Recent scholarship on undocumented students both inside and outside of educational contexts has become increasingly critical of the against-all-odds success stories of “DREAMers” (Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020). The term DREAMer highlights and positions the undocumented who attain success through higher education as more deserving of inclusion and legalization, in essence being model minorities (Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020; Buenavista, 2018). Abrego and Negrón-Gonzales (2020) contest the DREAMer narrative that some are more deserving than others, wrestle with the implications of such framing, and instead call for broader human rights framing that suggests all humans are deserving. Their argument challenges the

framing of “deservingness” as a meritocratic ideal because it is fundamentally flawed and based on the extent to which one’s worthiness is determined by one’s use of capitalist notions of productivity. We concur with Negrón-Gonzales, Abrego, and Coll (2015) and believe that “humane immigration policies should recognize all subjects as equally deserving of the right to work, shelter, education, family integrity, and to live without fear of violence” (p. 10).

Latinx Undocumented Students Across the Higher Education Pipeline

Over the last decade, research on Latinx undocumented students has increasingly explored numerous factors impacting their higher education trajectories, including financial challenges (Abrego, 2006; Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011); state and federal policy constraints (Abrego & Gonzalez, 2010; Enriquez, Hernandez, Millán, & Vera, 2019; Negrón-Gonzalez, 2017); social and academic stressors (Suárez-Orozco & Lopez Hernández, 2020; Perez, Cortez, Ramos, & Coronado 2010); racism and micro-aggressions (Muñoz & Vigil 2018; Perez Huber, 2009); and decision-making processes of college graduates (Lara & Nava, 2018), among other factors. Other research has increasingly focused on physical and mental harm (Gonzales, 2015; Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013) that undocumented students experience from dehumanizing immigration policies. Future research is needed to illuminate the experiences of undocumented students after undergraduate degree completion and their experiences in graduate school. In this article, we seek to contribute to the small but growing literature pertaining to familial supports in higher education for Chicanx/Latinx undocumented students. In particular, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the pedagogies learned in the home of Chicanx/Latinx undocumented graduate students around education.

The Role of Latinx Family Support of Undocumented Students

Important research has documented a link between family engagement in education and the educational outcomes for all groups (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), but less is known about the roles that Latinx immigrant parents play in supporting their children, and even less so for those that are undocumented. Guided by normative approaches based on White middle-class values towards family engagement (Auerbach, 2002; Ishimaru 2019), educators in school spaces often overlook the particular ways that Latinx families provide critical support. More specifically, some research has shown how working-class immigrant parents may have a presence (Carreón et al., 2005) in their children’s schooling without being physically present. Scholars in the field of education (Ceja, 2004; Manzo, 2016) have argued that some forms of involvement and encouragement that Chicanx parents provide are different and may be manifested through culturally specific forms such as *consejos* [folk wisdom], family stories (Nava, 2017), *apoyo* as broad-based support (Nava, 2012), or through lessons learned from viewing their parents and the importance and value placed on sacrifices (Rocha, 2020) and working hard (Lopez, 2001). In these ways, parental encouragement (Auerbach, 2006) plays a vital role in mediating the harmful risk factor effects that many of their children face. Ceja (2004) has written about the significance of older siblings in Chicanx families (or community members) who have gone to college and can

serve as protective agents and as a “mobility related resource” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) by sharing important information, knowledge, and opportunities for their younger siblings.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is guided by a theoretical framework that draws on the work of Chicana feminists (Bernal, 1998, 2001) and critical race scholars to help explain Chicax and Latinx familial practices of educational support. We turn to Chicana Feminist theoretical perspectives that consider families of color as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001, 2002). In her ethnographic work with Chicana college students, Bernal (2001) developed a framework to account for the home-based pedagogies to resist different systems of oppression. Grounded in Chicana Feminism (Bernal, 2001), these pedagogies of teaching and learning in the home “allow Chicanas to draw upon their own cultures and sense of self to resist domination along the axes of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation” (p. 624). We draw on Bernal’s pedagogies of the home framework to illustrate how students and their families engage in transformative resistance (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). The components of the framework consist of collective experiences and community memory, teachings and learnings of everyday life, and resistance strategies.

The first component we engage in the pedagogies of the home framework, collective experiences and community memory, situates Chicax/Latinx experiences within the context of the family unit. As such, this creates a rich context for community and family knowledge to be transmitted intergenerationally through a variety of oral traditions, including “legends, *corridos*, storytelling, and behavior” (p. 624). A second component of the framework consists of teachings and learnings of everyday life, which are “key for the emotional and physical survival of Chicana students, yet it is seldom acknowledged in educational research and practice” (Bernal, 2001, p. 625). For Chicanas, whether attending institutions of higher education or in their places of employment, their experiences often include being subjected to racism or other dehumanizing experiences. The third component of the framework consists of subtle resistance strategies. In other work, Solorzano and Bernal (2001) use a framework of transformative resistance to highlight the ways that Chicax students strategically navigate across the educational system. Some forms of transformative resistance are internal and may go unnoticed because an individual's behavior may be subtle or silent.

Methods and Data Collection

A Critical Race Methodology (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) informed the study’s design, which included qualitative data collection methods and focused on experiential and familial knowledge collected through the student counterstories. This method specifically honed in on the home-based parental teachings these students learned throughout their educational journeys. We utilized counter storytelling methods, which aided the participants in retrospectively thinking about teachings and learnings they experienced at home and were key in supporting their educational trajectories. We collected life history interviews focused on their migratory and labor histories,

and in-depth semi-structured interviews focused on educational aspirations and navigational strategies. This article draws from data collected out of a larger study focusing on the decision-making processes and navigational strategies of Latinx undocumented college graduates in the state of California (Lara, 2014; Lara & Nava, 2018).

The participants in the study were Chicana/Latina graduate students enrolled in a California State University or a University of California campus. To facilitate the recruitment process in both institutions, student support services and programs serving migrant and undocumented students were strategically targeted. Student participants were recruited by email, as program directors reached out to students asking for volunteer participants (Babbie, 1998). A total of 20 graduate student participants were in the study; 10 were women, 10 were men, and they were enrolled in diverse fields, spanning STEM fields (7), education (4), humanities (4), the social sciences (3), and law (2). The majority of the research participants were of Mexican origin (18), except for one student born in Peru and another in Brazil. The initial research participants played a critical role in recruitment efforts by making recommendations to friends in similar networks and who shared similar lived experiences, given they maintained a low profile (Babbie, 1998). During data collection, we sought to learn about the participants and their families and their educational, laboral, and migratory histories. We also asked questions about parental hopes and expectations and parental roles played in education, students' formative experiences in school and at home, and obstacles experienced as college students, among other questions. The goal of the data collection was to gain a deeper understanding of students' lived experiences and critical learning moments connected to their education.

Data Analysis

Furthermore, as we listened to interviews prior to transcription, we wrote analytic memos and developed tentative ideas about categories and relationships (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). 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). The authors read each transcription, highlighted and identified important codes, and organized them into different categories. Contextualizing strategies were also used to “understand the data in context” facilitating the identification of “relationship(s) among different elements of the text” (p. 79). These strategies were particularly helpful in analyzing the life history narratives of participants told through the oral history interviews. These narratives provided important analytical insight to understand key life moments around teachings and learnings that were taking place in their “home life,” which invoked Bernal's pedagogies of the home framework. The analytical process required indexing and charting data, highlighting and sorting quotes, and making comparisons both within and between cases (Rabiee, 2004). Together, collective experiences and community memory, teachings and learnings of everyday life, and subtle resistance strategies provide the basis for categories to analyze the data and frame the findings.

Findings

The student narratives revealed important learnings from their family's migration, laboral experiences and struggles, and how they resist marginalization. The teaching and learning in the home played an important role in motivating them towards seeking to fulfill their academic goals. The first set of findings we refer to as *Stories of Migration and Opportunity*. These consisted of learnings based on the collective experiences of migration and a communal memory held within the family, which unlike the limited parental opportunities for education from a generation prior, revealed a greater degree of possibility for the children. The second set of findings we refer to as *Lessons of Struggle and Survival* in the United States consist of the teachings and learnings of everyday life. These learnings were indicative of the family's acclimation to a new life in a new country, exemplified by experiences of subjugation as undocumented working-class immigrants. Lastly, *Subtle Resistance Strategies* can be understood as actions of parental support positioning their children strategically by prioritizing their goals despite not having knowledge of the inner workings of the U.S. educational system.

Stories of Migration & Opportunity

The undocumented Latinx student participants in this study recounted collective experiences and communal memories of their family's migration to the United States. Their communal memories of migration provided a historical context to understand the corresponding actions that led them and their families to leave their home countries. Across the student participants, a common theme present in their interviews was a sense of hope and possibility from a new beginning in a place understood to represent greater mobility and opportunity. Comparatively speaking, the research participants taking part in this study viewed the opportunity to access higher education as an important step towards avoiding and possibly transforming, the hardships they and their parents experienced.

A common reason research participants indicated their parents migrated to the United States was due to the hardships associated with a prolonged economic downturn and no longer being able to provide for their families. Familial migration toward the United States was seen as a logical response toward finding stable and better-paying employment. While migration to the U.S. occurred at distinct ages ranging from 6 months to 16 years of age, those who were under the age of 5 years had less vivid memories of their connection to their country of origin, and most of what they recalled was learned through communal memory informed by familial stories. Those older at the time of U.S. migration had more clear and vivid memories of their family's collective experiences of migration and what was left behind in the country of birth.

An example of this was Lorena, a graduate student enrolled in a teacher preparation program. Lorena migrated with her family to the United States at the age of two due to her family's economic hardship. Lorena's father had previously come to the United States in 1970 and did not like the pace of life, so he returned to Mexico and swore never to return. An economic downturn decades later coupled with a growing family, and the low pay he received working as a miner in the Mexican state of Jalisco forced him to reluctantly migrate once again to the U.S, with his family

following him one month later. Like other immigrants, Lorena recounted, “he heard all these great stories and he wanted something better for us too.” This story of their family facing economic hardship, which served as a form of communal memory, was shared by Lorena’s mother with all of her children. Lorena remembered crossing the border dressed up as a little boy; she now understands that she was “passing” the border impersonating a documented male cousin of a similar age. These stories of migration also highlighted an important element of parental socioeconomic status. In addition to economic hardships, parents’ low educational attainment often served as an example for their children of the limitations that educational access has on parental employment opportunities and how limited access to education resulted in economic hardships. These experiences intensified the drive and interest of research participants to take advantage of the educational possibilities available to them. For several of the students, a collective experience based on a familial history of educational exclusion informed their aspirations to attain a higher education. Lorena, whose childhood dream had been to become a teacher, elaborated upon the influence her mother’s limited access to education had on her desire to continue her educational journey:

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 chef.” And she’s so good at it and I’m like, “That’s the whole reason why they came was because they couldn’t get their education. They wanted for us to get our education.” [tears begin to roll from her eyes and her voice cracked]

Lorena felt a deep sense of gratitude because she recognized that the education she had already completed and was continuing, given her familial history, was a privilege. From a comparative perspective, family members who were her age in Mexico—due to employment or familial obligations—were typically pushed out of school before having the opportunity to fulfill their educational aspirations. Lorena, like many other undocumented students, had to concurrently work multiple low-paying jobs to finance their undergraduate education. While all the students experienced levels of mental and emotional stress, historically speaking, these students understood their educational predicament remained more promising than that of their families.

For example, Lorena elaborated:

I 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’s description highlights how formal education can be understood as a byproduct of migration and of familial sacrifice that leverages a degree of access and opportunity leading to *algo mejor*, something better. Through collective experiences and communal memory, Lorena’s mother made clear that her education was not to be taken for granted. In fact, Lorena also recalled that, when she was in elementary school, her mother would send her to school even amidst

complaints of feeling ill. Her mother was aware that if Lorena was indeed sick, the school nurse would call her to be sent home. Besides not having the flexibility in her employment to stay home with her daughter, this was another way Lorena attributes her parents' strictness about attending school as a positive factor in her education. If her parents would not have been so determined for her to attend school regularly, she believes she would not be where she is right now—enrolled in a graduate program and studying to be a teacher.

Another participant, Gloria was enrolled in a graduate program in architecture, her familial story of migration began with her father first coming to the United States at 17 years old, seeking to escape agricultural work in Mexico. Like other immigrants, Gloria's father heard stories of working in the United States for a short period, earning what they believed to be "easy money" and then returning to Mexico to live an improved life because dollars went a long way in Mexico back then. Along with his older brother, Gloria's father was able to save money to buy a house and eventually returned to Mexico and married Gloria's mother. Upon his return, he purchased a piece of land in Mexico and started his own ranch and began purchasing and investing in livestock. For some time, her family lived a comfortable lifestyle allowing Gloria to attend a private school. Things changed very quickly after her family experienced a financial crisis. When Gloria was eight years old in 1992, her father's business went bankrupt, leading her parents to make the decision for the family to migrate to the United States.

Migration to the United States was the family's way of providing for Gloria and her siblings the educational and career opportunities that they could no longer afford in Mexico. Enrolled in U.S. schools, Gloria quickly learned about negative stereotypes associated with Mexicans and women. She prioritized her academics and excelled in school seeking to combat racist nativist thinking (Perez Huber, Lopez, Malagon, Vélez, & Solorzano, 2008) by proving to people that undocumented or not, one's potential was not limited by race or citizenship status. These first-hand experiences of migration and marginalization were key in her developing her consciousness and taking advantage of the educational opportunities provided to her. Gloria, who was studying to be an architect, describes the influence her parents' struggles had on her:

My parents went through so much that they didn't want to see us go through it. They would tell us, "You guys don't want to go through this, you don't want to be treated like this all your life." My dad was very adamant about us getting an education so that we wouldn't be looked down upon by other people, and that we would be able to decide what we wanted to do with our lives. Both of my parents, since they weren't able to achieve a formal education, it wasn't because they didn't want to, it was just because of life circumstances that didn't allow them. They knew that would be a possibility for us. So they said, "You guys really have to do this." My dad would come home from work and say, "You guys don't want to be working 18 hours a day." That was what really did it for me.

While Gloria and her family could have remained living in Mexico, she knew her family would not have been able to provide the types of educational opportunities she was eventually afforded in the United States. Seeing her parents work hard to create "life circumstances that *did*

allow” for Gloria and her siblings to “achieve a formal education...[is] what really did it for” her, providing needed perspective. Students’ collective experiences of migration and communal memories of education (Bernal, 2001) informed their agency in growing up undocumented at the margins of U.S. society. This led students to remain motivated to make the most of the challenges and opportunities they faced.

Lessons of Struggle and Survival in the United States

Students held a communal memory of the difficulties their families experienced as immigrants in the United States. These experiences of students bearing witness to struggle imparted the teaching and learning of everyday life (Bernal, 2001) necessary for their survival. Parents strategically exposed their children to these hardships through first-hand experience in labor-intensive work environments. Experiencing dehumanizing working conditions alongside their parents helped shape student understandings of the type of work they did not want to do.

David, a second-year law student at the large public university, recalled migrating to the United States at the age of five with his six siblings, all undocumented. David’s parents had initially migrated to work in the U.S. and temporarily left their children behind, seeking to pay off accumulated debts from a failing small business. Their small business in Mexico had experienced inventory theft that ultimately snowballed, and they could not pay their mounting debts. After living in the United States for one year and trying to save, David’s parents realized it would be easier to remain in the United States, save additional money, and instead bring David and his siblings to reunite the whole family. David recalled the type of work he witnessed his parents partaking in, thus shaping his views of the type of work he did not want to do. David described that as a ten-year-old he was not interested in cleaning, gardening, or doing the physical labor and service that his parents undertook. The teaching and learning of everyday life had profoundly shaped him:

I think of my parents’ experience, seeing my mom go to work at two in the morning and she would come back home at eleven. I didn’t really get to see her much. She would come home exhausted, 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 the point that he had to look for and recycle 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 that are working class.

David’s struggles tell of his family’s experience reflecting the precarious nature of working-class immigrant labor (Milkman, 2020). Sadly for him, David did not see his mother much during this time in his life due to the irregular hours of her work schedule. David’s father taught him and his younger brother an important lesson—that recycling is humbling yet dignified

work where all work counts in a context of prolonged unemployment. The teaching and learning of everyday life in the context of unemployment and economic struggle for David and others provided important lessons. His chosen career pathway of a lawyer was personally fulfilling for David because both parents had less than elementary school education. Although his parents were unable to provide guidance about education in the United States, these experiences served as important lessons for David, allowing him to understand the struggles and dehumanizing conditions that working-class people experience due to their citizenship status and low levels of education.

The teaching and learning of everyday life (Bernal, 2001), including exposure to employment with a high degree of exploitation and economic stability, helped shape how students viewed their own education. Adela, a Latin American master's degree student who came to the United States at the age of four, also spoke of her parents' role in her education and the influence they had on her to achieve her academic goals and dreams of attending graduate school. Adela's family struggled early on, having to live with and share a room with other recently arrived immigrants. Adela described in detail:

My parents did all types of jobs. Beginning with my mom when we first arrived, she did babysitting. They packaged book items for places like Costco or big chain stores. Babysitting, she did marketing. Then my dad was employed at this factory as well for the longest time and he disassembled cardboard boxes. He also worked up north in the fields and then he worked at another factory. Then they decided to start their own small business. You know what's very interesting about my parents? What I am very grateful for is that they've been so thrifty all along. It's to the point my mom is so cheap but because of that they were able to save enough money to start a small business. That's why I always think you know they're really representing the American Dream, if other people could just see how hard they work and they pay their taxes. You know all they ever wanted was to provide us with a better future.

Adela's parents were able to eventually establish their own small grocery store and purchase a mobile home. An essential procedure in helping them establish a small grocery store occurred in 1994 when they found an attorney who supported them in obtaining a work permit and a social security number. With the additional benefits and privileges conferred by this change in their immigration status, they could obtain driver's licenses. Now with a store, Adela assisted her parents about 8 hours a week, supporting them with administrative tasks on weekends such as record keeping and necessary paperwork that needed to be submitted online. Adela's support was essential since they had no prior education or preparation in running a business and did not know how to use a computer. Speaking of these experiences, and despite her parents' own limited formal education, Adela indicated feeling supported by her parents:

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 to go talk to your counselor or

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 to be the primary motivation that led her to enroll in a graduate school program. A benefit of the everyday teachings and learnings of working alongside her parents was the appreciation for the value of saving money, even adopting her parents' thrifty spending as a strategy to pay for her education. Her narrative and that of other students centralized the importance that many immigrants place on the family as a system of support and reciprocal expectations. Adela recalls the ways her parents engaged her as she was growing up:

We always ate dinner together when I was young. Up to that point, my parents started doing more of the business thing and it was always like, "Okay, what's up in the world?" They always wanted to hear my opinion, they always talked to us, "And how was your day?" So I always remember that and always telling us that we needed to go to school because we didn't need to come home. You know my dad would always come home kinda stinky. He was always like, "I don't want you to come home like me," and just those conversations. I remember them clearly to this day, you know all of that advice they always gave us has remained with me. So, I think, even to this day I think it's amazing that my parents don't necessarily understand this whole graduate school thing yet they are so supportive.

The open communication that Adela held with her parents facilitated opportunities for her to learn important life lessons. In working alongside her parents in the family business, Adela supported them as they did not possess the skills or technological know-how to operate a computer to run the family business. She developed a deeper appreciation for her parents, who, despite not understanding the context of higher education in the United States completely trusted and supported her educational endeavors and desire to pursue an undergraduate and then a graduate degree. The teachings and learnings of everyday life these students experienced alongside their families as undocumented immigrants played an important role in helping them maximize the opportunities they were afforded for attaining a formal education. These lessons of struggle and survival are important because these parents demonstrate that despite not having high levels for formal education, they reveal a high degree of investment in their children's education.

Familial Subtle Resistance Strategies

The research participants in this study indicated their parents' support was fundamental to their advancement across their higher education journeys. Even in a politically progressive state like California, a system of constrained inclusion (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017) limits higher education pathways for undocumented students. According to Negrón-Gonzales (2017), in a system of constrained inclusion, there is a "disconnect between the promise of inclusion embodied in recent legislation" (p. 105) and the particular ways that citizenship status hinders higher education access and persistence for many undocumented students. In this study, students reported their families employing subtle resistance strategies to support them despite not being familiar with the inner functions of the U.S. educational system. In what follows, we provide two examples that illustrate

how students' families employed subtle resistance strategies to temper the hindrances associated with citizenship status.

Diego, a graduate student in engineering, was the only undocumented person in a mixed-status family. Had it not been for the untimely death of his grandmother before his birth, Diego would have been born in the United States. As his grandmother laid on her deathbed in Mexico, Diego's family rushed to be by her side, she eventually passed away. The family was unable to return to the U.S. before Diego's birth. Consequently, Diego and his younger sister were born in Mexico. However, his sister was able to apply for and eventually obtain her legal permanent residence as a minor. Diego "aged out" before his application of adjustment of status was decided and remained the only undocumented person in his family. As Diego completed high school, he only sought a vocational career given the constraints his citizenship status would place on his higher education opportunities. Diego explained how his father held a deep sense of responsibility to help him, given his citizenship status in comparison to his documented siblings:

My objective was to become a mechanic, take some classes in car mechanics, but then when I graduated high school my dad was very supportive. He said, "You know what, there are no colleges or universities here, but we can move anywhere you want. I'll sell this house and buy a house somewhere else. We'll just move, I am not working right now." So I took his word, I looked for a university and it was Treeland State, the one I liked and that's how we moved to Treeland.

Diego's father decided to move the family to be closer to Treeland so his son could have a greater possibility of fulfilling his educational aspirations. In turn, Diego's plans changed from attending the local community college and completing a vocational career, to instead pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering. One of the most prohibitive costs for undocumented students tends to be living expenses; in moving to a nearby community, his family would be supporting him with one of the most significant costs associated with completing his education. Diego's father also supported his educational journey by serving as his fiscal sponsor and taking out loans to help pay for his educational and living costs. These subtle resistance strategies of mobilizing familial resources enacted by Diego's father made Diego's higher education pathway tangible. As U.S. citizens, the access to resources that Diego's family had at their disposal made a significant difference in being able to support him. For other students whose parents and family members were also undocumented, though, accessing tangible resources in that way was not possible.

In some instances, the wisdom and guidance espoused by parents with their children led students to acquire an interest in specific areas of study. This was the case for Antonio, who was a graduate student working towards a master's in mechanical engineering. His determination was instilled early on by his father, who highlighted the importance of obtaining an education. Antonio's family grew up in Michoacán, a small and impoverished town. His father worked the land of Antonio's grandfather. The time came when the family was no longer able to live off the land, and his father decided to migrate to the United States in 1993, bringing the family along in

1995. During those two years, his mother had to work, and his father would send little money while settling in the United States. Antonio confided:

Well the truth, like I tell you, my parents always have told me to study, they never gave us a limit like go to college and that is it. But they have always instilled in us to continue studying, since I was little they instilled that in my mind, to continue studying. They would be the first ones that influenced me the most since I was small, since I was little they would tell me, tell us to stay in school and get good grades.

Antonio credited his parents for being the biggest influence in his life and for consistently pushing for a formal education for their children. Antonio's father in particular was a notable influence in his decision to pursue a degree in a mathematics-related discipline. Shortly after graduating with his bachelor's degree in engineering, Antonio took an exam that, if he passed, would help bring him a step closer to earning his license. He recounted the experience,

I started the test in the morning, and they took my calculator away and told me I could go during lunchtime and buy [the right] one real quick. I said, "Oh well." I took the test like that, it was engineering math. I started doing like right there multiplication, division on the side of the paper. During lunchtime, I went to Walmart and bought the calculator, now for the second part of the test I had the calculator and passed it like that. I went with two other friends [who also took the test] and they didn't pass it. So everybody asked how did you do it, if I cheated or what? I said, "No, no, it's all here [pointing to his head]." It's because here [U.S.] with the technology, they make you so accustomed to using calculators. But when we were kids my father made us learn our times tables really well. He would get home from work [and ask us], "What's this? 5×6 ," and we would need to answer and sometimes he would even leave us tests to do while he was at work. I guess I learned my math fundamentals pretty well.

Antonio's ability to successfully pass an engineering competency exam despite not having a calculator for part of it is a testament to having a solid mathematical foundation. His father, who was his first teacher, inculcated a love and appreciation for mathematics, helping him develop a strong math identity. During elementary school, his father would have him recite his multiplication tables every day before dinner. In a field where Latinx students are historically underrepresented, the subtle resistance strategies employed by Antonio's father provided Antonio with a level of preparation that led to his success. The use of pedagogies of the home employed by Antonio's father in teaching math skills created a positive association for Antonio with the subject, positioning him on a trajectory to access high-level 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. Educators need to cultivate and nurture the success of Latinx undocumented students drawing from home-based pedagogical and asset-based approaches by building on what these students already bring with them from home into educational spaces.

Discussion and Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

An increasing number of Latinx immigrant students with varying degrees of citizenship status are entering higher education institutions every year in the United States. Educational leaders in colleges and universities across the country must be prepared to understand and respond to the unique social-political context and particular experiences of this population. This paper has examined how undocumented college students draw on the forms of support they receive from their families around education. By focusing specifically on how these families utilize home-based pedagogical approaches (Delgado Bernal, 2002), our findings revealed three ways that parents provide support to their children in higher education contexts.

The first finding highlights the significance of familial histories explored through collective experiences and communal memories of migration and how these shape students' educational aspirations. For Lorena and Gloria, communal memories of their parents being pushed out of the educational system provide a perspective of their own educational experiences. As Bernal (2001) reminds us, communal memories are stories that "provided an understanding of certain situations and explanations about why things happened under certain conditions" (p. 625). The lessons learned from these stories can inform the consciousness (Freire, 2000) and agency development of students. Communal memories can transform feelings of shame from parents being school pushouts into feelings of immense pride, knowing they give their all to provide their children opportunities to access the education they never had. By focusing specifically on migratory processes retrospectively, this work offers a comparative perspective on experiences of marginality. Lorena, for example, while working multiple jobs and struggling to pay for her university education, remained grateful to be able to achieve her education, unlike her cousins in Mexico who could not afford college. These examples contribute to the literature and offer a rich description of ways that immigrant families support the educational advancement of their children through collective experience.

This paper also provides considerations for pedagogical approaches that center the teaching and learning of everyday happenings. Ethnic studies and critical race approaches center the experiences of communities of color and other marginalized groups by including and validating their experiences, their ways of knowing and being, and how they resist. The participants in this study were taught and learned about the challenges their parents experienced in their everyday lives, leading them to "develop the skills to confront oppressive conditions" (Bernal, 2001, p. 625) as they accessed and navigated institutions of higher education. The exposure to these lessons of struggle allowed participants to understand how "individuals negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own interactions" (p. 625). Experiencing these inequitable contexts provides these students with a unique vantage point to be able to understand conditions of struggle and power. In the present political moment, when critical educators are facing a backlash from conservative forces daring to teach about social inequality, racism, and other marginalizing structures, ethnic studies pedagogies are needed now more than ever. Centering the teaching and learning of everyday life of communities of color in leadership preparation programs will go a

long way in the development of culturally responsive educational leaders (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

This study provides important considerations for policymakers interested in creating more equitable contexts for undocumented immigrant students and their families. The students in the study revealed the “subtle resistance strategies” their families used to support navigating higher education institutions. Diego, who grew up in a mixed-status family, was fortunate to have the support of his documented family who were able to relocate and provide him material support. This subtle resistance strategy led to a change of plans for Diego, from a vocational career to pursuing a career in engineering. While Diego’s family was fortunate to have a greater degree of resources at their disposal as U.S. citizens, most undocumented families cannot leverage resources in that manner. These subtle resistance strategies on behalf of these families are admirable, but they are insufficient to address systemic problems. To truly support the access and persistence of undocumented students in higher education, policymakers should create pathways for legalization for undocumented students and their families. While in the present political context, it is unlikely that a deeply divided Congress will pass immigration reform, some analysts⁵ speculate there is a possibility that Democrats can utilize their slim majorities through a process of budget reconciliation to do so. It is not hard to predict that the legalization of millions of undocumented people across the country would have a positive impact on the higher education attendance and completion rates of undocumented students. DACA beneficiaries in one study (Wong et al., 2012), for example, have shown increases in labor force participation, economic earnings, and greater social inclusion. Another study (Patler, Hamilton, Meagher, & Savinar, 2019), found some short-term mental health benefits that accrue to DACA beneficiaries may disappear without long-term certainty of its existence. Should the Biden Administration be able to create a pathway toward legalization for millions of undocumented Americans, these policy changes would be transformative and have a more permanent and profound impact on these students across the educational system.

This work also suggests for scholars and practitioners all along the PreK to PhD pipeline to be attuned to non-normative ways families support their children. The immigrant families in this study navigate the sociopolitical context alongside their children in revealing ways. Most of them were the first in their respective families to access higher education and carried extensive pressures to perform well academically. While the sample of students in the study had already achieved a great deal of success by enrolling in graduate programs, they also experienced high levels of anxiety and often coped in unhealthy ways foregoing rest and sleep and taking on extensive employment and familial responsibilities, among other things. The approaches and strategies parents utilize to meet the needs of their children are potent examples of ways educational leaders in institutions of higher education can rethink how they support students by validating the home-based knowledge students bring with them.

While the legislative context in the nation’s capital is one of continuous gridlock, the federal government’s executive branch can play an essential role in expanding access to federal resources. For example, recent moves by the Biden Administration’s Secretary of Education

Miguel Cardona reversed rules that previously denied the allocation of federal stimulus dollars under COVID relief to undocumented students (*Business Insider*, May 11, 2021). This rule change, according to Secretary Cardona, “will include all students, and we want to make sure that all students have an opportunity to have access to funds to help get them back on track.” Initial stimulus expenditures also supported a small number of undocumented immigrants who are holders of Social Security Numbers, like those who arrived in the U.S. under a visa.

Finally, a limitation of this study is that data collection occurred before the enactment of DACA. Since the enactment of DACA, hundreds of thousands of additional students across the country have experienced more significant degrees of access and institutional support than existed before its implementation. DACA has facilitated students to obtain employment and employment with higher pay, start their own businesses, secure employment with health insurance, travel more, navigate higher education institutions easier, and other tangible benefits (Capps, Fix, & Zong, 2017). Regardless of the occupational benefits associated with DACA beneficiaries, a sizeable undocumented population still does not qualify for DACA. This study is particularly instructive for undocumented students who similarly to the participants in this study may not qualify for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals due to age restrictions. as several of the research participants would not have qualified for DACA.

Conclusion

In this paper, we examine the experiences of undocumented Chicanx/Latinx immigrant graduate students and how they have benefitted from the home-based pedagogies they have learned from their families. In viewing these pedagogies as such, we can distill some of the specific resources that positively impact their aspirations and persistence in higher education. Furthermore, understanding these familial forms of support can be a critical component used to educate educational leaders committed to asset-based approaches to being more culturally responsive.

The results of this study have important implications for educators and educational leaders committed to asset-based approaches as they centers the experiences of undocumented Latinx students and their families, highlighting familial understandings of resistance to marginalization. Research on the aspirations of undocumented graduate Latinx students provides a window into the decisive role that families play in fostering agency and persistence. For Latinx undocumented students, who experience greater degrees of structural vulnerability, it is critically important to create spaces where they feel affirmed and supported. Educational leaders committed to culturally, and community-responsive education must recognize and reinforce the role of the family in university spaces.

End Notes

¹ Mills College, founded in 1852, is a small independent college historically serving women and non-binary students in California’s Bay Area.

² We utilize Cuellar’s (2014) definition of HSI: “Hispanic Serving Institutions or HSI’s, are a federal designation. HSI eligibility criteria includes enrolling 25% or more total undergraduate

full-time equivalent (FTE) Latina/o/x students and at least 50% of all students must be low-income” (p. 500). Once an institution is identified as an HSI, these colleges and universities can apply for competitive funding.

³ Assembly Bill 540 paved the way for undocumented students the opportunity to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities.

⁴ The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is an Obama era policy that grants administrative relief from deportation to those that qualify and apply for it. Eligible immigrants are able to receive protection from deportation and are also provided with a permit.

⁵ While it is uncertain if it is even possible, National Public Radio and the Center for American Progress report in the summer of 2021 that the budget reconciliation process maybe the only way that a process towards legalization of undocumented residents could be put forth. The Democrats could in effect have a Senate majority, by having Vice President Kamala Harris cast a tie breaking vote (Grisales, 2021; Wolgin, 2021).

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