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Academic Risk and Protective Factors of Latinos of Undocumented Status: A Narrative Approach

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Academic Risk and Protective Factors of Latinos of Undocumented Status: A Narrative Approach

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Biography

The author was born in Chicago, Illinois on December 30, 1981, and has since resided in the Back of the Yards community on the south side of Chicago. He graduated high school from the Chicago Public Schools in 2000 and received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from DePaul University in 2004, and his Master of Arts Degree from DePaul University in 2012. He is currently completing his Predoctoral Internship in Clinical Psychology at Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois.

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Introduction

Background

There are currently 39 million foreign-born immigrants in the United States, with a large proportion of immigrants coming from countries in Latin America; Mexico is the largest sending country at 30% of new immigrants (APA, 2012). Thus, the Latino population has a large proportion of new immigrants in the United States. The growth and influx of the immigrant Latino population in the United States highlights the importance of lending attention to the undocumented population in the United States, and more specifically young people of undocumented status.

Immigrants of Undocumented Status in the United States

There are currently over 11 million immigrants of undocumented status living in the United States (APA, 2012; Passel & Cohn, 2012). Of these individuals, approximately 80% are Latino origin (Passel, 2009). Over 1 million are youth under the age of 18 (Passel & Cohn, 2012), 3.2 million are under the age of 24 (Passel, 2006) and 4.4 million are age 30 or younger (Passel and Lopez, 2012). Thus, the Latino immigrant population tends to be younger in age, which is consistent with the overall Latino population in the United States. Latinos are overwhelmingly young in age compared to other minority ethnic groups, with Latinos accounting for 26.3% of the country's youngest residents while African-Americans account for 13.7% and Asian-Americans at 4.4% (Passel, Livingston, & Cohn, 2012).

Immigrants of undocumented status are defined as foreign-born non-citizens residing in the United States who do not have legal documentation to reside in the country; this definition reflects the customary use of the term "unauthorized immigrants" by the Department of

Homeland Security and among researchers (Passel & Cohn, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). In the current study, "unauthorized" will be replaced with the more common term "undocumented" when referring to non-citizen foreign-born immigrants in the United States without authorization. Additionally, given previous studies on this population refer to them as "undocumented immigrants" or "unauthorized immigrants", the current study will implement the use of "immigrants of undocumented status". The use of this terminology is intentional so to emphasize the provisional nature of their status and to recognize the possible amenability of this status. Furthermore, it challenges the sole responsibility placed on these individuals for their current status and instead recognizes the limitations and barriers created by the current immigration policy.

This change in terminology has precedence as it is not dissimilar to the people-first language used with people with disabilities (https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/disabilityposter_photos.pdf) and has roots among immigrants of undocumented status with past efforts to move away from the term "illegal" when referring to undocumented status (Jonathan Rosa, 2013). It is important to note that a change in terminology does not necessarily represent a change in the social implications of undocumented status. However, a change in language is being proposed here as an accompaniment to and acknowledgement of the social change that is occurring and necessary to continue in order to provide an inclusive and humane representation of individuals who contribute to and form a part of the United States.

Challenges associated with undocumented status

Being of undocumented status means individuals face institutional barriers and policy that prevents them from accessing economic and educational resources. Institutional barriers include being unable to obtain formal employment, obtain a driver's license, or vote. In the case of undocumented youth in school, barriers include the inability to apply for financial aid and most scholarships. Being of undocumented status also means encountering risks associated with being undocumented in the United States. Risks include deportation and fear of deportation (Dozier, 1993), discrimination and xenophobia (Deaux 2006), and in the case of youth of undocumented status, interruption of formal education during the migration transition. For immigrant youth of undocumented status, these barriers are in addition to the risks and potential stressors normally related to migration, which include loss of close relationships, a sense of isolation, housing problems, the acculturation process, learning English, school adjustment, ethnic identity development, and changing family roles (Garza, Reyes, & Trueba, 2004; Igoa, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Zhou, 1997).

Academic outcomes and risk factors among Latino immigrant students and those of undocumented status

Latinos attain less education than any other ethnic or racial group in the United States (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, KewelRamani, 2011). Unfortunately, Latinos also represent the largest proportion of the nation's drop-out rate (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009). With regards to immigrants, the immigrant paradox posits immigrant students have an initial advantage and better adjustment upon arriving to the United States (Fuligni & Perreira, 2009) when compared to subsequent generations (Fulgni & Perreira, 2009). However, the immigrant paradox is complex and the initial advantage associated with newly arriving immigrants is fleeting, if initially present. Mixed findings have been reported on the benefits of the immigrant paradox.

Some positive outcomes associated with first generation immigrants are higher aspirations (Fuligini, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), more positive attitudes towards school (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995), and higher levels of optimism about the future (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) when compared to peers born in the United States. However, a five-year study with a diverse sample of immigrant students demonstrated that first-generation immigrant students had a decline in academic outcomes over time, as measured by grade point average and academic engagement (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, Milburn, 2009). This indicates that any initial advantage associated with being a newly arrived immigrant dissipates once in the United States and helps to demonstrate that any protective benefits associated with newly arrived immigrants seem to wear off steadily over time.

Possible reasons for academic decline may be that immigrant families tend to settle in low-income communities with few resources, high in violence, and poor quality schools (Waters, 1999). This issue is further complicated for immigrant students. Many immigrant youth struggle to succeed in the American educational system. They face a range of challenges associated with migrating to a new country. These include high poverty rates (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2005), racism and discrimination (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Szalacha et al., 2004), and school and neighborhood violence (M. Collier, 1998; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). These stressors may threaten the academic adjustment and success of immigrant students over time.

Research on Latino students of undocumented status is nascent and a dearth of research in the area is evident, despite the increased attention this segment of the immigrant population receives in the popular media and government. However, research on Latino youth of undocumented status provides preliminary evidence of the negative effect of risk factors on their

academic success. A study on the academic resilience of 104 immigrant Latino students of undocumented status revealed the following risk factors for poor academic outcomes: having parents with low educational attainment, working a high number of hours per week during high school, and feeling a sense of rejection due to their undocumented status (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Latino students of undocumented status feel a sense of rejection and experience discrimination, as further supported in qualitative interviews, in which students disclosed the manner in which individuals around them shared negative views towards immigrants of undocumented status (Perez, 2009). One of the first studies on students of undocumented status found that college students suffer from a fear of deportation, loneliness, and depression as it relates to their undocumented status (Dozier, 1993). The risk of being deported impacted the students in this study in a multitude of ways. They were reluctant to seek medical care, endured poor working conditions, and avoided close personal relationships with others for fear of their undocumented status being discovered, thus having a negative effect on their well-being. Other environmental risks faced by these students are similar to those found in research with low-income, urban Latino youth generally. In an ethnographic study of Latino adolescents of undocumented status, environmental risk factors included exposure to violence near their homes and schools and attending poorly funded schools (Abrego, 2006). Students of undocumented status face many of the academic risk factors associated with low-income Latino adolescents and the migration process, along with the added stressors and risk factors brought about by their unauthorized status.

The imminence of academic risks faced by students of undocumented status becomes apparent for many during high school as this coincides with the legal working age in the United States (United States Department of Labor, 2013) and the legal driving age. For example, high

school aged students with this status become aware that they are not eligible for employment opportunities afforded to their peers due to their documentation status nor can they begin the process to obtain their driver's license. A study revealed it is during high school many students with this status become aware of their undocumented status while seeking employment and/or applying for college (González, 2011). Learning about their immigration status can also serve as an academic risk factor, as it can lead students to lower their aspirations, suffer a decline in academic performance, and demonstrate difficulty remaining motivated (Abrego, 2006). In qualitative interviews with high school students of undocumented status, Perez (2009) encountered students who found out about their status in their final years of high school. Students mentioned the reality of their severely limited educational opportunities due to their status, which left them ineligible to receive any form of federal financial aid and limiting the schools which they could attend (Perez, 2009). However, Perez (2009) found that some Latino students of undocumented status remained motivated and performed exceedingly well academically despite learning about their undocumented status.

Academic barriers faced by students of undocumented status are further magnified upon graduating high school, as this is when the barriers faced and policies in place become apparent and directly relevant. Students with this status cannot fully participate in United States society as they do not have the right to vote, drive, obtain legal employment, or qualify for financial assistance for higher education (Abrego, 2006; Gonzáles, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Yoshikawa, 2011). These barriers likely serve as risk factors that impede academic success among this population. For students of undocumented status who do attend college, few college choices exist and funding sources are scarce for those who remain in college (González, 2009). Further, many have truncated and interrupted college

experiences, as they are unable to complete school and fund their educations (Abrego, 2006; González, 2009). Parental educational attainment and documentation status of parents can serve as an academic risk factor as well. Parents of these students are most often also of undocumented status as well. They also have lower levels of educational attainment and can leverage very few resources or advocate for their children's educational mobility (Terashini, 2010). However, parents of students with undocumented status have high educational aspirations for their children despite the risks present in their lives (Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2000).

The current unstable and wavering immigration reform process may contribute another potential risk factor for education that is yet undetermined due to being understudied. The recent Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy put forth by President Barack Obama's administration in 2012 provides some safeguards for students of undocumented status who meet eligibility and are willing to apply for this opportunity. DACA provides eligible students under the age of 30 with protection from deportation and temporary work permits for two years, with the possibility of renewing the protection for another two-year increment pending a review of their case (Passel & Lopez, 2012). The requirements for eligibility are rigorous, requiring undocumented young people to prove they were living in the United States continuously since June 15, 2007, must have lived here on June 15, 2012, are enrolled in school or have a high school diploma, and they cannot have a felony conviction, serious misdemeanor conviction, or three other misdemeanor convictions, and do not pose a threat to national security or public safety (Passel & Lopez, 2012). The recent DACA policy may seem like a sense of relief to some. However, a level of guarded optimism, reluctance or even fear may be present for students of undocumented status who meet eligibility or are unsure if they meet the requirements. It is unknown if students who meet criteria will automatically be approved for protection once the

two-year period elapses, thus placing them at risk of being identified as an undocumented person living in the United States who can then be deported. Further, those granted protection through the DACA policy are not provided safeguards that their family will not be identified as unauthorized individuals in the United States, as protection is only afforded to those who meet these stringent requirements. DACA will require young individuals to disclose their status to the government. This disclosure combined with uncertainty of future immigration reform in Congress, may leave them and their families at risk for possible future deportation or penalty. Of the 4.4 million undocumented individuals aged 30 and under, 1.7 million are eligible for DACA (Passel & Lopez, 2012). More research is needed to understand the implications of this policy change as well as current potential policy changes pertaining to immigration reform in the United States.

Resiliency Theory

The process of resiliency guides the focus of this study and provides a framework for understanding how young people of undocumented status are able to achieve favorable outcomes. Resiliency is a process by which individuals overcome the negative effects of risks and avoid the negative outcomes associated with those risks (Zimmerman et al., 2002; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). For example, poverty can serve as a risk factor for violent behavior, yet many youth growing up in poverty do not exhibit violent behavior. Resiliency requires both exposure to adversity and achieving the positive adaptation despite exposure to the risks (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). It is a process that indicates both the presence of risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Masten, 2001) and promotive factors (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Resiliency theory is a strengths-based approach that emphasizes protective factors in their relationship to risk factors (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Masten, 2001). Protective factors

contribute to overcoming the adverse effects of risks. These protective factors can be categorized as either assets or resources (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Assets are positive qualities present within the individual, such as self-esteem, coping skills, and competence. Resources are described as positive external factors that are part of an individual's environment that assist in overcoming risks; these include parental support, youth programming that promotes positive youth development, and adult mentors.

Among adolescent resiliency research, resiliency theory provides a framework for understanding normative, healthy development among adolescents who are exposed to risks and adversity. In a longitudinal study, Werner and Smith (1992) found that resilient children exhibit good communication skills, had a positive self-concept, were achievement oriented, held an internal locus of control, a belief in self-help, had caring attitudes, and had a sense of responsibility. These personal protective factors fit the definition of assets in the resiliency framework. In this same study, about one-third of the children classified as vulnerable became competent successful adults despite being exposed to poverty, perinatal stress, chronic familial discord, mental illness, and/or parental illness (Werner & Smith, 1992). Support from non-parental adults was identified as a protective factor that contributed to their resilience. Protective factors helped the individuals in this study adapt to normative lifestyles throughout their adolescence and into adulthood. Similarly, a study of institutionally-reared girls found that external social supports served as a protective factor in their lives (Rutter, 1987). External protective factors such as these fit the definition of resources within the scope of resiliency theory.

The aforementioned studies of resilience illustrate that supportive relationships with non-parental adults can serve as a protective mechanism, or resource, for adolescents exposed to

risks. Best practices for research on immigrant populations should incorporate a strengths-based approach and focus on resilience (APA, 2012). With regards to Latino students of undocumented status, Gonzalez (2012) found that adult mentors were among the protective factors that encompassed a network of support for these young adults. In another study of academic resilience of Latino adolescents with undocumented status (Perez, 2009), protective factors included receiving support from friends and parents. Thus, resiliency of these students may be promoted by the presence of adult mentors who serve as promotive or protective factors.

Assets and Resources as Protective Factors for Education

The examination of assets and resources as protective factors among immigrant Latino youth of undocumented status is quite scarce in the literature, as is the case with research on undocumented immigrant people in general. However, a quantitative study provided support for some assets and resources for undocumented Latino students' academic success (Perez et al., 2009). The study found having school value and being labeled academically gifted were assets, and extracurricular participation and volunteerism/community service served as resources (Perez et al., 2009). Having a positive outlook towards the future can also serve as asset. In a qualitative study of 10 Mexican male immigrant students, participants remained optimistic about the future and were able to successfully navigate postsecondary education, despite facing challenges (DeLeon, 2005).

Other studies on immigrant youth have identified resources, specifically supportive relationships, as protective factors for education (DeLeon, 2005; Gonzales, 2012; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). A study of immigrant youth found that academic engagement and outcomes were mediated by supportive relationships with school-based adults (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009), and another study on undocumented Latino immigrant students

illustrated how caring adult mentors and high-achieving peers served as protective factors for college success (Gonzalez, 2012).A qualitative study of 10 Mexican male college students of undocumented status revealed relationships with school counselors and teachers as being particularly important sources of information and guidance (DeLeon, 2005). Further, DeLeon (2005) found that other adults from the community, more so than school-based adults, helped students obtain information about applying to college. These studies demonstrate how such supportive relationships may serve as resources for Latino students of undocumented status. The importance of the aforementioned supportive relationships warrants understanding the role of natural mentors as a protective factor in the lives of Latino immigrant youth and young adults of undocumented status. Despite the nascent research on risk and protective factors for this population, more is needed to further identify other assets, resources, and risks for educational outcomes.

Natural Mentoring Relationships

The potential benefits of natural mentoring relationships have been validated by the literature. In addition to the many youth who participate in formal mentoring programs, there are many youth who informally receive guidance and support from an older, more experienced adult. These relationships are known as natural mentoring relationships (NMRs). NMRs are classified as relationships between young people and non-parental adults (e.g., extended kin, neighbor, teacher, coach, religious leader) who are already a part of youth's social network and provide support and guidance in their development (e.g., teaches knowledge and skills, motivates, fosters self-esteem, communicates moral values). These relationships between adolescents and non-parental adults are developed without the help of a formal mentoring program and instead

organically develop in the lives of adolescents (Southwick, Morgan, Vythilingam, & Charney, 2005; Zimmerman et al., 2005).

Mentoring and Resiliency

Support for models of resiliency has been demonstrated in the literature. Zimmerman and colleagues' study (2002) supported the protective model in that NMRs moderated the relationship between peer school perceptions and participants' school attitudes. More specifically, participants with natural mentors maintained more positive attitudes towards school despite their friends' poor school attitudes, while participants without mentors had less positive attitudes towards school. This study serves as an example of how NMRs fit the protective model of resiliency to reduce the negative association between risk factors (e.g., friends' negative school attitudes) and outcomes (e.g., school attitudes) among urban, low-income ethnic-minority adolescents. Evidence of the compensatory model of resiliency was also supported by Zimmerman et al. (2002); participants with natural mentors demonstrated fewer problem behaviors, such as smoking marijuana and nonviolent delinquency, in the presence of negative peer influences. Natural mentors were found to support the compensatory model of resiliency in that NMRs compensated for the exposure to risk factors (e.g., friends' problem behaviors) and were associated with fewer problem behaviors among participants with mentors.

More recent examples of NMRs in relation to resiliency theory are highlighted in two studies by Hurd and Zimmerman (2010a; 2010b), which found that natural mentors can buffer the negative effects of stressors on mental health problems. Studying an urban, low-income, African American sample of adolescent mothers, it was found that higher levels of perceived stress predicted more anxiety and depressive symptoms (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010b). Given that natural mentoring serves as a protective factor among a variety of youth populations, it is

possible, yet unknown, whether natural mentors can have a similar effect on Latino youth and young adults of undocumented status.

Positive Role of Natural Mentoring in Adolescents' Academic Outcomes

Research shows that NMRs are associated with positive outcomes in adolescents, including academic outcomes. Using a large, nationally representative sample of adolescents, DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found that having a natural mentor is positively associated with an increased likelihood of completing high school and attending college. This was enhanced through the presence of non-familial NMRs. Similar findings were demonstrated in a study of urban, African-American adolescent mothers. Participants with long-term NMRs were 3.35 times less likely to drop out of high school than those lacking NMRs (Klaw, Rhodes, & Fitzgerald, 2003). In a study of urban Latino high school students, researchers found that the presence of NMRs was related to fewer school absences, higher academic expectations, and a greater sense of school belonging (Sanchez et al., 2008). In a longitudinal study of a large, nationally representative sample of diverse adolescents, Erikson and colleagues (2009) found that youth reporting a natural mentor had significantly higher high school grade point average (GPA) and obtained higher levels of education compared to youth without natural mentors. Another study found that more positive attitudes towards school were demonstrated among 9th grade urban, African-American adolescents who reported a natural mentor compared to their non-mentored counterparts (Zimmerman et al., 2002). Specifically, mentored participants reported higher school attachment, higher sense of school importance, and greater school efficacy (Zimmerman et al., 2002). This research shows the positive role of natural mentoring in academic outcomes.

Mentoring among immigrant youth and youth of undocumented status

The intersection of research on mentoring and students of undocumented status is nearly non-existent, and literature from similar areas must be drawn upon to begin to understand this further. Often, studies do not separate the citizenship status, generational status, or country of origin of the participants, thereby generalizing the experiences of immigrant young people of undocumented status together with other non-immigrants or youth with some legal status. More recently, research on mentoring and supportive relationships of immigrant youth has emerged (Gonzalez, 2012; Roffman, Suárez-Orozco, & Rhodes, 2003; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009; Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007).

Previous research has demonstrated that supportive relationships with school-based adults mediate the academic outcomes of immigrant students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). In this longitudinal study, a diverse group of immigrant students were tracked for five years, including Haitian, Mexican, Chinese, Dominican, and Central American immigrants. Among the entire sample, relational engagement with school-based adults positively predicted academic engagement, which in turn, positively predicted GPA. Another study demonstrated how relationships with school-based adults provided immigrant youth with attachment to non-parental adults, facilitated learning of new cultural norms and practices, and provided information for school success (Roffman et al., 2003). Only one study has investigated the role of mentors in Latino students of undocumented status. A longitudinal qualitative study with Latino young adults of undocumented status transitioning to college found that caring adults and peers played a key role in the academic success for participants throughout their schooling (González, 2012). However, these adult mentors were not distinguished as natural mentors using an operational definition common among the mentoring literature, and, further, these mentors were not identified as protective factors using a resiliency framework. These mentors were part of a

network of support for the Latino young adults of undocumented status that included adults and peers; supportive adults came in the form of teachers, counselors, and principals while supportive peers were high achieving classmates who motivated students to do well in school. This study also found that not all students were able to develop a supportive network of individuals to help them navigate the transition between high school and college. Students also reported relying on multiple mentors at different points in their education, with one stating:

> "At every step of my education, I have had a mentor. There's a chain. They are always looking out for you, looking at scholarships for you. It's a thousand times much harder without someone helping you. Being undocumented, it's not about what you know, it's who you know. You might have all of the will in the world, but if you don't know the right people, then no." (Gonzales, 2012).

Another study on formal mentoring of immigrant students provides evidence for the benefits mentoring can have among immigrant populations. Chinese immigrant adolescents who partook in a formal mentoring program had higher psychosocial outcomes at the conclusion of the mentoring program compared to their baseline (Yeh et al., 2007). For one year, 23 recently immigrated Chinese students participated in a peer mentoring program in which four high school students served as their peer mentors. Students who participated in the program had significantly higher levels of peer attachment and trust, as well as the need for closeness. However, the previous study was a formal mentoring context and lends limited insight to the natural mentoring relationship of Latino students of undocumented status.

Lastly, a summary of the theory, research, and practice of mentoring programs with immigrant and refugee youth was conducted recently (Birman & Morland, 2014). It reiterated the shortage of research that exists with immigrant youth in relation to mentoring programs. This shortage is particularly lacking when considering mentoring of immigrant youth of undocumented status, especially in relation to natural mentoring. There is no research

specifically focused on the role of natural mentoring on the educational experiences of Latinos students of undocumented status, thus further providing support for the current study.

Rationale

Of the 11 million immigrants of undocumented status in the United States, over one million of them are under the age of 18 (Passel & Cohn, 2011) and 80% are Latino (Passel, 2009). The number increases when college age youth are included in the estimates. Latinos attain less education than any other ethnic or racial group in the United States (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, Kewel-Ramani, 2011) and represent the largest proportion of the nation's drop-out rate (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009). Allowing immigrants students of undocumented status access to financial aid and legal employment may yield greater educational and economic benefits and help ameliorate the negative consequences of the nation's high drop-out rate. Given the policy impasse around comprehensive immigration reform, identifying how assets and resources serve to address the risks young people of undocumented status face provides a better understanding of how this population achieves positive outcomes despite policy and institutional barriers.

From a resiliency theory perspective, the presence of risk factors (e.g. perceived discrimination, living in poverty, attending poorly funded schools (Abrego, 2006; Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2005; Orfield, 1998; Perez, 2009) do not completely impede immigrants of undocumented status from achieving positive educational outcomes. Given the lack of research on immigrants of undocumented status and the unstable political landscape around immigration reform, other risk factors have yet to be identified, such as determining whether disclosing citizenship status or applying for DACA are considered risk factors for undocumented status.

Protective factors are less represented in the research than are risk factors on immigrants of undocumented status, thereby justifying a need for strengths-based approaches and a focus on resilience in research. Assets and resources serve as protective factors to facilitate positive academic outcomes among Latinos of undocumented status. Protective factors among immigrants of undocumented status include a high value towards school (Perez et al., 2009), and high optimism about the future (DeLeon, 2005) as well as positive external factors like extracurricular participation and volunteerism (Perez et al., 2009) as well as the presence of supportive adult mentors and peers (Gonzalez, 2012; Roffman et al., 2003; Suárez et al., 2009). Since supportive non-parental adults have been cited as a source of support among students and immigrants of undocumented status, it is imperative to understand further the specific need and role natural mentors play in their academic success. Mentoring programs with immigrant and refugee youth have received some attention in the literature (Birman & Morland, 2014) but none has been focused on natural mentoring of immigrants of undocumented status. Adults and natural mentors have been validated by the literature as important sources of support for education. Natural mentors have been associated with positive academic outcomes among various youth samples. Support for the role of important adults for students of this status is emerging in the literature. Studies on immigrant youth have identified resources, specifically supportive relationships, as protective factors for education (DeLeon, 2005; Gonzales, 2012; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). However, no one has explored the role of natural mentors in the education of Latino immigrants of undocumented status. The current study is the first of its kind that assesses natural mentoring among this population. My study seeks to explore how natural mentors may serve as protective factors.

Research on immigrant populations is scarce and fails to specify factors such as generational status, determine country of origin or age of arrival to the United States, and lump immigrant groups together (e.g. Latinos and Asians) into a monolith across care and ethnicity (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2012). Research on immigrants of undocumented status is further lacking, despite the national attention given to this segment of the population. This study employed best practices for research with immigrant populations (e.g. focus on resilience, specify country of origin, and avoid lumping groups together across generational status, race/ethnicity, and citizenship status) (APA, 2012). My study utilized these approaches to provide proper representation to an underrepresented group and help fill the gap in the research about both immigrant Latinos and immigrant Latinos of undocumented status.

Thus, the current study contributed to multiple areas of research and is viable across disciplines. It filled gaps of knowledge to inform various fields of study about immigrant Latinos. Additionally, the mentoring literature is informed by providing the first study of its kind on the role natural mentoring plays in the academic outcomes of Latinos of undocumented status. The study incorporated best practices around the much neglected research on immigrants by using resiliency theory as a framework and specifying characteristics (e.g., citizenship status, country of origin) of the sample that are often neglected or overlooked in other research with immigrant populations.

Research questions

1. What risk factors do Latino students of undocumented status experience in their education?
2. What assets and resources serve as protective factors in the educational experiences of Latino students of undocumented status?

3. Do Latino students of undocumented status have natural mentors? If so, who are they?
4. What role do natural mentors play in the education of Latinos of undocumented status? How do mentors support them?

Method

This study explored the academic experiences of Latino immigrant adolescents and young adults of undocumented status. Specifically, through these experiences, I sought to identify the risk and protective factors that influence their educational pathways along with the role natural mentors may have played in their academic experiences. Participants' experiences were examined using qualitative methodology, an approach that emphasizes the validity of subjective perspectives in developing an understanding of phenomena (i.e. educational experiences as an undocumented Latino student; Creswell, 2007). A narrative approach was used to interview participants about their subjective experiences (Creswell, 2007).

The narrative approach in qualitative research is designed to gather the participant's personal story through interview. The story relates to the area of interest that provides an account of relevant events that occurred from beginning (e.g. pre migration and migration/arrival to the United States) to the end (e.g. the person's current situation; Czarniawska, 2004). During the development of the narrative, the participant structures the story, not the researcher, thus ensuring the participant will use his/her own form of verbal communication and meaning throughout the interview. This maintains the assumption that the narrative approach provides the participant's perspective in the most genuine way. Though participants may not understand the theoretical underpinnings of their experiences, which are often targeted in more structured interviews, they do have knowledge about their experiences that can be communicated more easily in narrative form.

Qualitative methods also allow the researcher's perspective to be incorporated throughout the research process. Indeed, an underlying principle of qualitative methodology is the

expectation that a researcher's subjective viewpoint is an inevitable component of the research process; guiding development, procedure, analysis, and interpretation. Thus, the interaction between participant and researcher is central in conceptualizing particular phenomena. Given the centrality of the researcher's perspective in qualitative research, I provided a brief description of my background and relevant experience related to my research project.

Researcher's Perspective

I am a Latino man who was born and raised and continues to live on the south side of Chicago, in a community known as the Back of the Yards. My mother was an immigrant from Brasil and arrived in the United States at the age of 18. My father was an immigrant of undocumented status from Mexico and entered the United States without authorization at age 19. Both of my parents were working-class, and had little educational attainment: my mother completed high school in Brasil (10th grade) and my father completed 2nd grade in Mexico. Nonetheless, they both promoted and advocated for my educational well-being. My mother applied for and obtained citizenship by having family in the United States serve as her sponsors. My father eventually obtained his citizenship in 1983 during the amnesty granted by the United States government.

Growing up in a Spanish speaking household within a predominantly Mexican immigrant Spanish speaking community, my first language as a child was Spanish. It was the language spoken in my home and among my community. I attended English-only public schools in Chicago from kindergarten through 12th grade, and English became my dominant written language. I am the first person in my extended family to graduate from college and first to

attend graduate school. I recognize the importance of an education as it has provided me with opportunities for social mobility and privilege.

Growing up in a predominantly low-income Mexican immigrant community in Chicago, the issues of migration and documentation status have always been salient among family, peers, and neighbors in my community, thus making me aware at an early age of the challenges associated with immigrants of undocumented status. Of the various challenges (e.g., discrimination, inability to legally work, etc.), the barriers to an education among this population became important because I feel that education can be and has been for me a tool of social mobility.

Understanding and promoting educational pathways of young people, particularly those underrepresented in higher education, has been a main interest of my research as well as my personal and professional commitments. I completed a master's thesis on the academic outcomes of urban, low-income, Latino adolescents as it relates to how natural mentoring serves a protective role against the risk factors of stressors in their lives. Prior to and continuing through graduate school, I have maintained involvement in community organizing and positive youth development by working at and with various youth serving agencies and hundreds of low-income, ethnic minority youth, in the inner city of Chicago. While in graduate school, my clinical training has provided me with more experiences with youth and families of undocumented status. In my clinical, community, and research-related work, a common challenge I have witnessed in the lives of a large number of Latino youth was their undocumented status.

Through my community involvement, I worked closely with faith-based agency, and a community coalition of schools, social serves agencies, and youth-serving organizations that provided social and academic services such as scholarships to Latino and Latina students who maintained service involvement in their community. As an undergraduate student, I was a recipient of the SHC scholarship. A large portion of the students receiving scholarships were and are immigrant Latino and Latina students of undocumented status. This is where I obtained my initial dissertation idea, as I knew I wanted to further explore and understand the experiences of these young Latinos and Latinas. After discussing dissertation ideas with family, peers, community members, colleagues, and my dissertation chair, I decided to employ a strengths-based approach to further understanding Latino youth and young adults of undocumented status, and decided to examine the risk and protective factors that influence the academic trajectories of these individuals. Thus, I chose to use a narrative interview to allow youth to share their perspectives as well as provide their own structure in sharing their perspectives for the purposes of this study.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were recruited using three sampling techniques. First, a criterion sampling technique was used to ensure all participants meet certain criteria (Patton, 2002): self-identified Latino individuals between the ages of 16 to 30 who arrived in the United States prior to age 16 without legal authorization, remained in the United States since arrival, and have experience in the United States educational system. The next sampling technique was a snowball sampling technique (Patton, 2002), in which participants were identified by sampling people potentially knew people who were eligible to participate in the study, or community members who heard about the study knew of other eligible participants. Snowball sampling was conducted through

the community agencies of SHC and EC. This strategy ensured that interested participants voluntarily disclosed their immigration status, as they contacted me directly via email or phone instead of me identifying an individual's immigration status and approaching them about study participation. Lastly, a stratified purposeful sampling technique was implemented to obtain participants with a diverse range of academic experiences to compare academically successful individuals of undocumented status with those who were not as academically successful. An attempt was made to stratify participants in my study across level of school completion at the time of the interview, including those who did not complete high school, graduated high school, have some college experience, completed college, or have graduate school experience or an advanced degree. The education range of participants was from 8th grade to completion of Master's degree; however, participants skewed towards being more highly educated with at least some college experience. It was expected that there would be variation in the level of school completion based on age and interruptions in schooling along their educational experiences. A stratified purposeful sampling technique is useful to illustrate characteristics of particular subgroups and facilitate comparisons (Patton, 2002).

Participants in the study ae 20 Latino students ages 16 to 30 years, who migrated to the United States without proper authorization prior to age 16. Participants from any Latin American country and who self-identified their country of origin and race/ethnicity were able to participate; 19 participants were from Mexico and 1 was from Brasil. Detailed information about participants is found in Table 1, with participants listed in the order interviews were conducted. Participants attended or were attending school in the United States at the time of the study. The 16 to 30 age range for participants was chosen for a few reasons. One reason is that this is the age range that is being considered in the immigration reform debate as it relates to DACA and the previously

proposed DREAM Act. Thus the findings of this dissertation have implications on policy. Secondly, selecting this age range has practical implications for the study as it increased the likelihood of identifying participants by making more individuals eligible to meet criteria for participation, given that disclosing undocumented immigrant status is a sensitive issue and may be risky. Lastly, by selecting a large age range that spans different developmental and educational milestones, I was potentially able to capture the commonalities and differences as they relates to academic risk and protective factors among individuals of undocumented status.

Table 1

Participants' demographic information (N=20)

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Gender**	**Country of Origin**	**Age of Arrival (years)**	**Immigration Status**	**Education in years (*enrolled)**	**College type**
Carlos	21	M	Mexico	1	DACA	14*	2 CC
Rosa	21	F	Mexico	4; 6	DACA	14*	4 Pub
Cierra	19	F	Mexico	6	DACA	13*	2 CC
Leila	23	F	Brasil	<1	LPR	B.A.	4 Priv
Oscar	22	M	Mexico	3	DACA	15*	4 Priv
Jose	25	M	Mexico	10	DACA	B.A.	4 Priv
Sandra	21	F	Mexico	7; 8	DACA	15*	4 Pub
Tania	23	F	Mexico	4; 9	DACA	B.A.	2 CC; 4 Pub
Frida	27	F	Mexico	3	DACA	M.A.	4 Priv
Santiago	29	M	Mexico	14	DACA	B.A.	4 Pub
Abel	19	M	Mexico	5	DACA	14	4 Priv
Agustin	25	M	Mexico	5	DACA	14	2 CC
Theresa	22	F	Mexico	3	DACA	14	2 CC
Diego	25	M	Mexico	9	DACA	15	4 Pub
Zulmira	20	F	Mexico	8	DACA	14*	2 CC
Claudia	26	F	Mexico	8	DACA	B.A.	2 CC; 4 Priv
Giselle	18	F	Mexico	4	DACA applied	12	None
Cedahlia	23	F	Mexico	6	DACA	15	4 Priv;4 Pub
Antonio	21	M	Mexico	8	DACA	15*	4 Pub
Jesus	18	M	Mexico	3	Undocumented	8	None

Gender: M=Male; =Female. Status: DACA=Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals; LRP = Lawful Permanent Resident. Education: B.A. Bachelor's Degree; M.A Master's degree. College Type: 2 CC=2 year community college; 4 Pub=4 year Public University; 4 Priv= 4 year Private University

Context

My sustained involvement and affiliation with the youth agency and the community coalition, EC and SHC respectively, served as locations for recruitment of participants for the study. Both of these community agencies provided an array of social and academic support services to youth, young adults, and families in the Back of the Yards community. One such service is scholarship support and educational support services for young predominantly Latino college students. The SHC scholarship is provided to college students who provide community service to the Back of the Yards, and the EC scholarship is specifically for immigrant Latino students of undocumented status who provide community service to the Back of the Yards; many of the scholarship recipients also happen to reside in and around the community. These two youth serving institutions have been providing a range of services and support to promote the educational attainment of young ethnic minorities and working to reduce the impact of violence and poverty has on the community for many years; EC has been doing so since 1993 and SHC since its inception in 1998. Conducting research within this context provided a setting in which immigrants of undocumented status, a potentially vulnerable population, may have felt comfortable enough to be forthcoming for participation in research that requires disclosing their undocumented status. It also attempted to assist with connecting with those who are not enrolled in school, given that these agencies provide an array of services beyond the scholarship support. This assisted with the stratified sampling approach.

Further context is required to understand the geographic and sociopolitical realities affecting participants at the time of data collection within the state of Illinois. Despite federal laws that do not grant certain rights to immigrants of undocumented status, some states have

passed legislation to decriminalize and provide immigrants of undocumented status with opportunities to participate in the social and economic fabric of the state. Illinois is among the top ten states with the highest population of immigrants of undocumented status and is considered to be "undocumented friendly." Though further comprehensive immigration reform is required, Illinois along with other states have passed legislation that provides immigrants of undocumented status with opportunities to obtain a temporary visitor driver's licenses (date effective November 2013), receive in-state tuition rates (date effective 2003), does not check immigration status for medical care coverage for children, and has created a private, philanthropic college scholarship fund to provide students with funds for college. To provide comparisons across the country, five states, with California as an example, provide in-state tuition and state financial aid, while six states, including Georgia, have passed legislation to bar immigrants of undocumented status from receiving in-state tuition. Thus, Illinois is moderate in providing immigrants of undocumented status with support for school in comparison with other states in the country, which can fall along the spectrum of providing greater or far less support.

Recruitment

I used my sustained community involvement and youth-related work to help me recruit participants from the Back of the Yards and surrounding community. Initial contact with participants took place in person, via flyers, and email. Recruitment presentations took place at various community gatherings and meetings at SHC and EC. These included but were not limited to college scholarship meetings, SHC Board meetings, and Sunday morning masses at EC Parish. The youth agencies possessed an email list of all individuals who have received educational services and advocacy through the agencies. Using this list, the agencies contacted participants to inform them about the study and emailed information about how they can contact

the Principal Investigator. Flyers were also distributed and posted in and around the community agency and coalition office building (Appendix A). I made recruitment presentations to past and current scholarship recipients to identify potential participants who are interested and eligible for the study. All recruitment presentations and materials were provided in English and Spanish. Further, as participants agreed to participate in the study, I recruited other potential participants through participants who have already consented using snowball sampling.

Through the aforementioned agencies, interested participants contacted me via phone, email, or in person to express interest in the study and determine eligibility. Thus, I did not specifically seek out individuals to determine their immigration status. Upon consent and eligibility confirmation, the interviews took place at either of the agency sites or the participants' homes, at the preference of each participant. Consent was given verbally via a waiver of documentation of consent so the participants' names and identifying information are not connected to any interview data through a written document.

Procedure

In order to understand the participants' academic experiences as it relates to being a Latino immigrant student of undocumented status, narrative interviews were conducted with each participant, for a total of 20 interviews. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, or both languages, and depended on the preference of each participant. Interviews ranged in length with the shortest interview taking 50 minutes and the longest interview being two hours and 8 minutes. Interviews took place at a location convenient to the participants. Data collection began in August 2014 and concluded in February 2015. All interviews were audio recorded. Upon completing the interview, participants were given a $20 gift card to Target. The audio recording

of their interview was securely and confidentially stored in my university-issued password-protected file storage account. The audio recording was transcribed and subsequently coded for analysis by me as the principal investigator.

Narrative Interview Protocol

The narrative interview protocol consists of four phases, which begins first with the introduction to the central topic, is followed up secondly by the narrative provided in the participants own words, thirdly leading to the questioning phase, and concludes with small talk (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The first phase of the interview consisted of informing the participant about the topic of interest (i.e., experiences of undocumented Latino students) and providing an overview of the interview protocol (Appendix B). The introduction to the topic of interest provided little structure so to produce a narrative that communicates the genuine and relevant experiences of the participants rather than the researcher's interest. A visual aid in the form of a timeline (Appendix C) was used during the interview to highlight their educational trajectory and indicate significant events in the story of the participants. Participants were asked to identify significant events and dates that relate to their educational journey as students of undocumented status, beginning with pre-migration and migration history up to the current date. The timeline assisted participants as they narrated their experiences as an immigrant student of undocumented status.

The second phase was the narration. This phase consisted of the participant telling his or her story without any interruption or questions from the researcher. I provided only minimal nonverbal feedback to indicate an interest in the story. Notes were taken so that I could follow up with any details during the questioning phase.

The third phase, the questioning phase, began once the participant completed the narration. In this phase, I asked questions to obtain a better understanding of the story and clarify any parts of the narration. The questions asked by the researcher in a typical narrative interview must relate to events that have been mentioned in the participant's story and should not concern opinions, attitudes, or speculated causes (Kohler-Riessman, 1993). In addition, I asked specific questions as they relate to the research questions I have developed. I asked participants to elaborate on the portions of their narratives that specifically relate to my research questions. Additionally, if participants do not mention issues related to my research questions, I probed for participants' perceptions regarding these issues during this phase of the interview. I prompted participants to discuss topics related to transitions in, out, and between schools, types of support received, supportive adults and peers, and challenges faced in their education.

The last phase of the interview consisted of engaging in small talk with the participant. For this portion, the digital audio recorder was turned off. The participant was provided with their incentive for participation and was reminded that the audio recording of the narration would be transcribed and securely uploaded to my protected account. Additionally, the participant was reminded they would be contacted in the coming months to ensure the interpretation of their interview is accurate (i.e. member checking – see below).

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. Analysis was primarily guided by a general inductive approach, in which study findings are not shaped by an existing framework, but rather emerge from the raw data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). This approach is particularly appropriate in the study, as understanding the students' perspectives

regarding their academic experiences as a student of undocumented status was a primary objective. Data analysis included an examination of the interview data.

As interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. Transcribed interviews were then reviewed for accuracy and transcriptions were imported into a qualitative software program, NVIVO (QSR International Pty Ltd, Version 10.0, 2010), to assist in data analysis. In this study, students' academic narratives were examined in the context of their undocumented immigrant status to identify the general story of students of undocumented status and to locate significant academic experiences specific to undocumented status.

I read the transcripts were read closely to identify segments of text that present central themes related to youth's risk and protective factors during their academic journey in general and specifically as these factors relate to their undocumented status. Text about natural mentors was also examined. I coded the segments of text to depict the basic meaning of these segments and to categorize them with other segments of text that possess similar meanings. Coding of text was conducted to present central themes related to barriers and facilitators of participants' educational experiences, as well as the need for natural mentors and role of natural mentors.

As these descriptive codes developed, a codebook that included a list of codes and their definitions was created (Miles et al., 2013). This descriptive coding method continued throughout data collection and analysis. Through the continual process of coding, existing codes were collapsed with other similar codes, irrelevant codes were eliminated, and new codes continued to emerge. Once descriptive codes became refined, the coded themes as well as the relationships between these themes were examined through the process of pattern coding (Miles

et al., 2013). Additionally, the similarities and differences in themes presented across subgroups were explored (e.g., comparisons of themes presented by youth who were aware of their immigration status since arrival to the United States to themes presented by youth who became aware of their status at a later time). I completed all of the coding.

Evaluating the Quality of Qualitative Findings

Credibility

In qualitative research, it is important that results are credible; that is, that they accurately reflect participants' perspectives (Creswell, 1998). The study used three methods of augmenting study credibility: prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking.

Prolonged engagement refers to the researcher's extended involvement within the setting in which the study took place. Through prolonged engagement, the researcher is able to build rapport with study participants and key stakeholders as well as become familiar with the culture of the setting. Prior to beginning interviews, I was affiliated with the Back of the Yards community in multiple ways: as a long-time and current resident, involvement in multiple youth and community based organizations, including the SHC and EC, as a mentor to high school youth, and as a supporter of the SHC scholarship for college students. I have lived in the Back of the Yards for 34 years, have been involved in youth-related activities and community organizing with EC for 19 years, and have been affiliated with SHC for 14 years, in multiple capacities. This involvement facilitated relationships with individuals who participated in my study.

Peer debriefing, which entails discussing results with professionals who are not involved in the research study to challenge researcher bias, also occurred. I discussed study findings with other researchers (e.g., dissertation advisor) and with other professionals (e.g., psychologists, lawyers, community-based advocacy groups, and youth workers) who have experience working

with students of undocumented status. They provided feedback and input as interviews and data analyses occurred.

Member checking allows the researcher to obtain feedback from participants concerning study results. In this study, results were discussed with five interview participants to determine the degree to which my findings were reflective of their experience as a student of undocumented status. Findings were discussed in person with participants, who were provided with an email summary of the main themes and findings. They were provided with an opportunity to omit, edit, or add to the main findings so to provide an accurate representation of participant narratives. They reported their impressions of the overall findings were generally in agreement with their narratives. Specifically, they emphasized that structural barriers were a key deterrent to higher education. During member checking, one participant provided an example of how he continues to make progress through college but at a slower pace due to a lack of financial resources to pay for tuition. While an effort was made to have all participants equally represented, only five participants were contacted for inquiries for follow up and the others could not be contacted to participate in member checking.

Results

Based on the data analysis of interview transcripts, a general narrative emerged specific to the unique experiences of students of undocumented immigrant status, and themes were associated with the research questions. Thus, the first section provides an overview of the academic risk factors specific to the experiences of Latino students of undocumented status. Then an examination of the academic protective factors follows. Lastly, participants' narratives conclude with an academic protective factor that provides hope for an education despite the challenges they face due to their status. A summary of themes related to academic risk and protective factors can be found in Tables 1 and 2. Each theme's meaning as it relates to the way in which participants described their educational experiences is discussed below. Broad themes found in the transcripts include: immigration status (i.e. being aware, becoming aware of status, & disclosing their status to others), the implications of status on their education, financial demand for school, the benefits and challenges associated with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (i.e. DACA), a social responsibility to others, having hope and determination, receiving scholarships and academic awards, and the role of supportive and natural mentors. The majority of themes include more specific subthemes and they are described in detail below. Whenever a direct quote is used from a participant, pseudonym is attributed to that participant that coincides with their participant identification number. These results are discussed below.

At the time interviews were completed, participants were currently in school, aiming to re-enroll to complete their current level of school, or had completed the previous level of school with aspirations to continue to the next level (i.e. hope to get next degree). A summary of the narratives and detailed account of the academic experience of students of undocumented immigrant status is presented in the following sections.

Academic Risk Factors Specific to Undocumented Status

There were three overarching themes that were identified as academic risk factors specific to experiences of having undocumented status. The first risk factor was merely being of undocumented status, as by its very nature this restricted their academic opportunities and created distress about how to navigate school in the context of having this status. The second overarching risk factor was the challenges associated with DACA. Lastly, the third risk factor was the financial demand for school. Academic risk factors had subthemes within each of the three risk factors (see Table 2).

Table 2

Themes and subthemes pertaining to academic risk factors specific to undocumented status (N=20)

Academic risk factors	**Total** % (n)
Immigrant status	
Status awareness since arrival	30 (6)
Understanding implications	80 (16)
Status limits college choices	55 (11)
Being asked for social security number	65 (13)
Status disclosure	65 (13)
Boldly disclose status	30 (6)
Reluctantly disclose status	35 (7)
Being told yes, then no due to status	35 (7)
Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals	
Applying for DACA	90 (18)
Limitations of DACA	30 (6)
Financial Demand for school	
Balancing work and school	75 (15)
Working to save for school	50 (10)

Immigration Status. All 20 participants mentioned their status played some role in their academic experiences, ranging from no role to a significant role. Immigrant status was identified as an academic risk factor as participants mentioned ways in which their status was a barrier to

their education, because this status restricts individuals from fully participating in their education, and because t put them at risk for deportation. As shown in Table 2, subthemes of immigration status were status awareness, understanding implications of status, status disclosure, status limits college options, being asked for social security number, and academic opportunities being rescinded due to status. Discussions related to status were sometimes described in direct relation to education while other times it was done indirectly. Notably, many participants were included in more than one subtheme.

Status Awareness. Six participants described being aware of their status to some degree since they arrived to the United States. They used words such as "I knew", "I always knew", and "I kind of knew" but they reported not fully understanding the implications of being of undocumented status or even knowing what the word undocumented was until sometime later. Nonetheless, they reported feeling as if they did not belong being in school. Diego, who arrived at age nine, said:

> "I knew that I wasn't supposed to be here. I knew it. From the beginning, the base of my thoughts was "I'm not even supposed to be here now." I'm here without permission. Then everything just tumbles over. It's college, work, everything just goes with it, so when I'm not supposed to be here I'm not supposed to be in school, I'm not supposed to go to college, I'm not supposed to work. That's how my assumptions were. It's not that I knew, that I really, really knew for sure because I didn't ask anybody. My parents never told me that, but it was more of an assumption."

Though participants were aware of their status since arrival, they did not fully understand what that their status meant initially. Cedahlia stated, "I knew that I was undocumented, but it didn't hit me—it didn't hit me until senior year the implications of being undocumented because of the limitations of scholarships, the limitations of college." Tania said, "I always knew that I hadn't come here legally. That's something that I always knew. My parents would always be like *no tienes papeles*. That's all I knew. Again, I just thought, well, I don't have a paper that other people do have. I never actually understood this term undocumented until later on."

Understanding implications of status. Sixteen participants reported learning about the implications of their status in relation to their education. They described learning about the implications as "limitations" that prevented them from taking advantage of opportunities, such as getting a higher education, being eligible for financial aid to pay for school, obtaining employment or a driver's license, and traveling on school trips abroad or via airplane. Many participants began learning about their status during high school and junior high, at a time when many of their peers were participating in developmentally appropriate academic activities in their education, such as traveling for class trips, applying for part-time jobs and driver's licenses, filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and college applications and scholarships. It was during these experiences that many participants found out that being undocumented meant not having the same opportunities as their peers. Abel succinctly described it as "We couldn't apply for FAFSA. We couldn't get certain scholarships, apply to certain schools." When learning about the implications of her status, Cedahlia responded by saying, "Wow, I can't do a lot of stuff that my classmates are doing".

Twelve participants recall discussing their status with their parents to learn about it for the first time, gain clarification about their status, or learn how to navigate their world as a result of their status. Discussions with parents varied from parents informing participants about their status at a momentous occasion to regularly discussing the limitations associated with undocumented status as a need for adapting or remaining discreet about their status. For example, Carlos vividly remembered his parents pulling him aside on the day of his eighth-grade graduation celebration to tell him "You don't have papers. You came with us illegally to the United States." He was reportedly crushed by this news though he did not quite fully understand

what it meant yet. As an example of ongoing conversations about status with parents, Jose and his mother had regular conversations about the implications of his status:

> "I knew I was undocumented. I just didn't know what it meant. Those conversations, basically said, "Boom." My mom would be like, "You're undocumented. We're undocumented. You need to find resources. Your teachers know how to work with undocumented students. Again, make sure that you're making use of an opportunity that comes to you, and also make an effort to look for resources and opportunities, because this is one of the challenges. You're undocumented. Financial aid is one of the biggest ones to be able to afford college."

Other participants like, Frida, learned from their discussion with their parents that they should be cautious about their status.

> "I knew I was here illegally because that's something that my parents always talked about. Like, 'You need to be very careful. You can't share that information. You can't just talk about it casually with people because you never know their intentions, and you just have to take care of yourself when talking about that'" (Frida).

Status limits/affects college choices. Eleven participants described that their college choices were influenced by their undocumented status. Specifically, a college's familiarity with undocumented students, the cost of higher education, and lack of financial resources determined participants' college choices. The high cost of college combined with the lack of federal financial aid and limited private scholarships was a major limitation in participants' college choice. Many participants were accepted to multiple schools based on their academic qualifications but were merely unable to attend due to the financial cost, as they were responsible for tuition and were from low-income and working-class backgrounds. Rosa's example demonstrates how her status led her to choose a less competitive school, a community college, due to the financial costs instead of her top choice, a four-year university, where she had been accepted due to her 5.1 grade point average:

> "I did get some scholarships, and stuff. However, at that point, we didn't really have much money saved. It was gonna be $8,000 per semester [after scholarships]….That's when my brother had came in, and was, "Okay, why don't you try to go to community college like I am? Do two years. You'll be half-way done through college. Then you could apply to [four year school of choice], and try to go. Then I tried to do that way, because there was no way I was gonna able to pay $8,000 per semester."

Similarly, Theresa cited how she received a large amount of scholarship offers from her top school choice but it was insufficient to cover tuition, and she and her family could not afford to pay the difference:

> "When it came down to applying to colleges, I did receive very good feedback from all of them. Unfortunately, it was just not enough scholarships they were providing for me to go. There was one college in particular. I believe their tuition was $46,000, and they offered me $35,000. It still wasn't enough. My parents couldn't afford those $10,000. I actually talked to my parents, and they are, like, 'If you want, we could take out a loan from the house.' They were very supportive. That's one thing. They're my biggest support, my mom especially. She's, like, 'If that's what you wanna do, we can do it." I'm, like, 'But you guys are gonna over-stress yourself.' I'm, like, 'That's not a risk I'm planning to take for you.' I just decided to stay within the community college."

Only four participants reported that their prospective college's familiarity with undocumented students was also an influential factor on school choice. Colleges familiar with students of undocumented status appeared to be a welcoming place for these students, but such colleges appeared to be few for participants. A lack of familiarity with undocumented students was evident during the college application process:

> "I only applied to four universities, which limited my options. I also knew that these universities, were again already familiar with the issues. We have something called [State] Dream Act, which in the [college] application, they ask us certain questions that identify that you qualify for [State] Dream Act. They make you sign an affidavit. I knew the schools also had experiences with working with undocumented students" (Jose).

Being asked for social security number. Thirteen participants were asked for their social security in some manner during the course of their academic experiences and reported these as stressful and terrifying experiences. Some were asked as early as junior high because they were traveling on a school trip, while others were prompted for their social security number in high school when applying for college, scholarships, FAFSA, or for a class trip.

Leila and Rosa recalled similar experiences in which they were considered for scholarships only to have them revoked due to not having a social security number. Leila reported receiving a four-year private scholarship to pay for her private high school: "Once I knew that I had received the scholarship, I got a call back saying I no longer was able to get it.

They called me to a meeting due to the fact of no social security number. That threw me off. I was pretty excited about that, but then that just went down the drain."

Rosa mentioned she was asked about a social security number during a college scholarship interview after applying for it and being selected as a finalist:

> "I went in downtown, got all dressed up. Got ready to get the scholarship. You go in there, you answer some questions. You go into groups. People are walking around. They're writing down names. Then, at the end, they give you this application. It's just more know your personal information. …. I'm filling it out, everything's going great. …Then we get to the social security question. I'm, "Okay, well I don't know." I just started to wait until everybody left. I waited until everybody left, because it's something that I'm not proud of. Not having social security number. Then I go, and then I ask them, "Okay, I don't have a social security. Would it be okay if I put the ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) number?" That person did not know what an ITIN number was, or anything. She's, "Okay, let me call my supervisor." At this time, it's 8:00 already, at night. Then it turns 8:30, and then we're just waiting there.…. My friends are waiting there for me, so I won't go and take the train alone. Then it gets to a point where they're, "What do you mean you don't have a social security?" I'm, "Well, I'm undocumented." Then, again, you had to explain what undocumented means. You're, "Well, I was born in Mexico. My parents came here when I was little. I don't know what happened in the between time. I do know I was four, or six years old." I didn't know. It's having to explain that over and over, and then they tell you, "You can't apply for this scholarship. We don't take people that don't have a social security." I just started crying, because that's telling you, "Hey, you don't have the right to have an education at that point." To me, it was the point—the lowest point at that time. I came out of that building, and I was just crying, and crying, and crying."

Theresa discussed being asked for her social security number in 8th grade for a class trip to Washington D.C. and a visit to the Pentagon:

> "I was confused because they asked me for a Social Security number. When I looked at it, I was, like, 'I have never seen that we have one of those.' They showed me the card, and I was, like, 'No', they started asking me, 'Okay. Were you born here?' I was, like, 'No. I was born in Mexico.' They started informing me about it." They had us write down our name, everyone that was going into the Pentagon. They had us write down our name, our Social Security number. I guess they wanted to do a background check before we entered it."

Cedahlia shared an experience in which her college's financial aid office asked for a social security number, and it was difficult experience for her:

> I remember one specific situation that happened to me at [4 year university] that really hit hard for me. I was just like oh, my god, just realized my whole perspective of being undocumented, was when I had gotten a scholarship. I remember the whole scholarship was able to cover one of my terms, but I had [funds] left over. I had $300.00 left, but I knew I wasn't gonna go back to [this 4 year university], so at the time, I went the finance department, to get my refund. I had asked her for my refund. She gave me a paper, where it asked me for my social security. It asked for all my information. I gave it back to her, and she saw that I had no social security number. She's like, "I need your social security." I answered, "I don't have one." Then, she's like, "Well, I can't give you your refund. We need a social security." I was just like, "Well, I have gotten refunds before

> and it hasn't been a problem." She's like, "No, you need a social security. We cannot give you any money." Then I'm like, "Well, what's gonna happen to the money?" She's like, "We can't give it to you because you need a social." Then, at the time, I was very disappointed because I was like that's $300.00 that I could use for something else, my books or something. I remember I was very, very disappointed. …She was just like—and she asked me, "How you not have a social security? Where were you born?" I felt insulted because I was just like why are you asking me these questions? ... Definitely social security has always been a big thing."

Sandra discussed a mundane experience during her college orientation when she arrived on campus and attempted to login to the school's electronic student portal. She reported the facilitator instructed her to use her social security number to login. She was unable to do so and had the impression the facilitator was unfamiliar with students of undocumented status, and was not intentionally being hurtful. Nonetheless, Sandra reported going home and crying as a result of being publicly asked for a social security number in the school context.

Lacking a social security number is a significant risk factor for these students as they navigate schooling. It is reportedly distressing when promoted to provide a social security number in order to participate in academic experiences and not providing this number can prohibit students from participating in school events or being granted academic opportunities.

Disclosing status. Participants varied on whether they disclosed their status, to whom they disclosed their status, and the impetus to disclose. Status disclosure was also a continuous ongoing process, as participants made decisions about when to disclose at different times. Some participants were proud to boldly disclose, but they were still put at risk by doing so. Diego recalled coming out of the shadows the first time in a very public way:

> "In 2012, already with the movement, the DREAMer's movement was already on its way in the United States. In 2012 I came out of the shadows, which is I participated in this event, which was held at, I think, [downtown of the city]— in front of a lotta people. A few hundred. In front of a lotta people I disclosed myself as being undocumented. From then on I begin to feel more confident, not only because I disclosed, not only because I came out of the shadows, but also because I saw that I was not the only one having these feelings of depression, having these feelings of discouragement. Ever since then I find myself more confident"

This provided Diego with the confidence to be unafraid and engage in civil disobediences related to immigration issues and challenge decisions of the current immigration policy and practices:

> "It was 2013 when I participated in three civil disobediences. That's what I call, what do I call 'em? Hard core activism, and the only reason I said that, though, is because not everyone wants to go civil disobediences because it can be harmful to your—if there was any time where you could apply for your visa or to fix your papers legally, then that could affect you because the civil disobediences, what I did, was I blocked the street together with a few other students and undocumented immigrants to stop deportations, to stop this bus from leaving with people inside to the airport.

Diego described the risks associated with each of his civil disobediences:

> "The first time I did that they arrested us, and luckily they didn't—it wasn't like a big charge or anything. I was good, then. The second time we blocked, it was when Obama was coming to [the city] for the—what was that conference, the big conference they were having at [a hotel]? We blocked off Michigan Avenue, and we blocked traffic. There we got reckless conduct, and we got three other charges I forgot. There, I think, the charges were a little bit more…they were more harsh…. The third time, again we decided to stop a bus from leaving with people inside it that were about to be deported. This time we locked ourselves to the bus. The way we did it is PVC pipes. We put 'em under the bus and we were connected, three people were connected around the tire, around one tire. We did this on two tires. Then, in front of the bus, around seven people, around there, were forming a circle connected with PVC pipes. They were chained together. There we also got some charges. I think out of these three, luckily, I only have one. I will have only had two, plead guilty to one charge, but it is still in my record. Right now that I'm applying for DACA again, it can affect me. Even though they say that when you apply for DACA you have up to—if you have three misdemeanors, you don't qualify."

Other participants also disclosed their status at demonstrations and in public settings in front of others. For example, Santiago participated in a demonstration where he was arrested at the Capitol Building for protesting.

Others were reluctant to disclose entirely at some point in their education. Rosa chose not to disclose with most of her peers in high school because she felt they did not understand what it meant to be of undocumented status:

> "…in high school, I couldn't. Most of my classmates were documented. They all had their licenses, and what not. That's something I never really talked to them about. I only talked to a couple of students that were there. What were they gonna tell you? They couldn't really say anything. They were, "Oh, I just got my financial aid. I'm going to college. You begin to realize, "Hey"—when you're a freshman, "Hi, I'm from Mexico. I was born in Mexico. No big deal." They're, "Okay, that's cool. My parents are from Mexico," or something. Then, at a certain point, you're, "Well, I'm undocumented. This is all new." You begin to realize you're not like everybody else. It's a secret. You can't just tell anybody, because they don't understand either. If you don't understand, they don't understand. Only the ones that came from [a Latino community], or that they had undocumented parents, were the ones who were able to understand."

Jose shared that he was also reluctant to disclose his status but eventually felt the need to do so out of a collective sense of responsibility and out of necessity:

> "I was scared in college of disclosing my status, which up until recently, my senior year, …there has been this movement with the immigrant youth about coming out of the shadows. …Not hiding that you're undocumented, because being undocumented is a result of many factors that don't necessarily have to do with you personally. The reason why I'm here in the US is because I had to come for a better living. Not just in general, like I wanna have the American dream, like house and a car. No. It was more about I need to eat. I need to survive."

Frida reported she did not share her status to anyone at her university. She discussed an experience early in college that influenced her decision not to disclose. She was presented with an opportunity to be a guest of the President of the United States at an event:

> "She asked for my information so that they could do a background check before I entered…the White House or even attend the summit. I mentioned it to my parents, and they said, "No. You're not gonna ago. You can't do that." A part of me just felt like, " Why not?" I know I was very naïve, and I didn't really understand what it meant to even submit my information. I did it anyway, and it got back just fine. …I met President. I know people have their own opinions about him, but my experience just meeting him and talking to him for those brief minutes, I really appreciated that he asked me about my family and commented on his experience going to Mexico. It seemed like he was happy that I was there, and I appreciate that. I'm very grateful for that moment. I get back to my dorm, and I have a bunch of phone calls from my family, friends, and one staff member from [my high school] who was bothered that I had gone to the summit because I had jeopardized the work-study program at [my high school because I was one of the last students to be undocumented. They made it a requirement that everyone had to be a U.S. resident or a citizen because of the work-study program. It was a deflating two hours after getting to my dorm. I just felt so elated and happy. I had lunch at the White House. It was an amazing experience for me. Like, "Wow! I'm in D.C., and I just met the president, and now I'm in the White House." I go to my room, and I have all these phone calls, which made me feel really scared. I spoke to my parents, and they were disappointed and scared, too. That afternoon, I get a phone call from the associate principal…That made me feel comforted, but after that I stopped talking about anything that had to do with my status to anyone. I really closed down, and I did not mention it to anyone. Even my closest friends from college still don't know that I'm undocumented because I don't wanna jeopardize my parents' status in this country. I also feel that I am very connected to my high school, and if anyone would trace it back, I don't want them to feel like, "Frida put us in a situation because she was talking about her experience". I didn't talk about my status until just this year.

For Frida, and others, disclosing their status meant not only putting them at individual risk, but also meant that their family and friends were at risk for being identified as having undocumented status.

Theresa reported being worried about having to unwillingly disclose her status, and as a result, she drove "cautiously so that wouldn't happen." She also mentioned how this worry was

one that was unique to undocumented students: “[Documented students] don't really know the worry—they don't really have the same worries that undocumented students do.”

Being told ‘yes’, then ‘no’ because of status. Seven participants were initially offered educational opportunities and financial support, such as merit scholarships, but were subsequently denied those same opportunities once their status was disclosed to institutions. For example, Jose’s experience accurately captures the theme of being offered financial support for higher education only to have it revoked due to his undocumented status:

> “For senior year, a private university offered me full tuition, because that’s what they were doing for [city public school] students. They offered me around $30,000.00 worth of awards, which is housing, full tuition, a meal plan, and a work study. However, again, this whole thing about being undocumented. I made sure to ask them. I didn’t wanna go to the school, show up, and then they would tell me, “Oh, you can’t.” That will be too late. I asked them via phone. I talked to financial aid. One of the representatives for financial aid. I told them, “Look, I do wanna go to this college. It’s a good college. ... Here’s the issue. I don’t have a social security number. I know at some point, you’re gonna ask me for it. How can we talk about this?” The financial aid counselor wasn’t aware that that was an issue. Apparently, they just didn’t go through my application. They didn’t notice that I left a blank social security box. ... He went through my financial aid packet. He said, “Well, work study. You can’t do work study. This grant that we have for housing, yeah, you’re gonna need a social security number for that. Then all the other documents for your financial aid award were basically loans as well.” …. Then finally they said, “Well, the scholarship that covers most of the tuition, yeah, you can’t have that either.” Basically, that’s how I told the story of how I lost $30,000.00 in 30 minutes, because of my status. I keep sharing that up until today, which should have discouraged me. But just the fact of the issue of being undocumented was there since such an early age, I was used to it. I was desensitized of doors closing on me.”

Rosa received support from her high school cross country coach familiar with her undocumented status and facilitated a connection with a university. She recalled being provided with a message that tuition support would be possible for her to attend college, given that she was academically successful and exceling in cross country:

> “my cross country coach did try to help me. Since I was a good runner at that point, I did decide to visit two schools. One of them was [a 4 year private university]. Me and my dad went and visited. We sat down with a counselor, and he's, "You know, we could help you. Don't worry. The tuition is okay. I talked to [your] cross country coach." It was two hours. An hour or two hours away, I'm not sure. We did have to take a train there. They're, "You know what? We'll make this happen." Again, all being so—‘We're gonna get you there." Being determined to get you there. When it came to talking to the financial aid office, it's "I'm sorry, we can't really help you at all.’”

This experience was in addition to Rosa's aforementioned story in which she was a finalist for a scholarship and was then informed she was not eligible to receive the scholarship until after being unable to provide a social security number. Theresa was also awarded college scholarships only to be told she could not receive them because of her status. She said,

> "I remember—going back to high school, there were some applications that I would finish, and then when I would send them out, they would call back and ask for the Social Security. Then it was, like, "Yeah, I don't have one." They're, like, "Well, you were awarded it, so the next person will have to get it because you didn't [understand you needed a social security number]." I lost a couple of scholarships because of that."

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). A second major academic risk factor among all participants was the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) executive action in their education. All participants spoke about DACA in their narratives. When participants discussed DACA as a risk factor in their education, they specifically talked about a) applying for DACA along with the fear and challenges that accompany it, and b) the risks and limitations associated with DACA. DACA as an executive action grants access to legal employment and defers deportation for a period of two years to individuals between ages 16 and 30 who arrived in the United States before age 16; they have to provide proof they have been in the country every year since arrival. Other eligibility requirements include: individuals cannot have a significant misdemeanor or three minor misdemeanors, and they should have a high school diploma of be enrolled in school. Thus, those who are eligible must go through a rigorous process of gathering documentation as evidence to prove their longstanding presence and academic success of currently be in school or have completed high school.

Applying for DACA. Eighteen participants received or were in the process of receiving DACA, and nine of those participants shared details about their decision to apply and experiences with the application process. These participants highlighted details on how they gathered the necessary information to apply as well as their reluctance to apply.

Some participants had difficulties in the application process. Jose successfully received DACA only after the long ordeal of gathering evidence to ensure his eligibility and dealing with administrative errors that cost him money and time. He said:

> "You had to gather all this evidence. It's just a pain in the ass…My work permit got lost in the mail when I got approved. Nobody, not even the immigration agents and the hotline when you call in, they didn't know what to do about it. The obvious suggestion for them was, "Apply again." Instead of me applying as a new person, applying for that, I just sent—luckily, I had got in the receipts that I had the deferred action. I had the letter that said, "You have the deferred action." I sent out that information. Then I had to pay again. My deferred action ended up costing around $900.00…when I got my replacement work permit, they didn't move the dates to when I got the second replacement. I lost six months of deferred action for a mistake…My deferred action ended up costing $900.00 and being only one year and six months."

Jesus reported not applying for DACA because he faced certain barriers and demands that prevented him from being in position to pay for the application and gather all of the necessary documentation to apply for DACA. He was uncertain if he was eligible for DACA:

> "I've been trying to go get my *matricula*, my identification. But now it's still hard, a bit hard for me because they require papers that I can't get. I know that DACA has come out but I haven't really looked into it. From now on, I mean, I've been going through a lot of problems, situations. That's the reason why I haven't really looked into it. I've been just spending time with the family because they deserve time. I've been just working, keeping myself busy, my kid keeps me busy all the time. And now I got into an accident, things haven't really been going well with me. I'm actually in debt, and it's harder for me. I really don't have time to go to school right now because I have a lot of things to pay off. I've been trying to look for jobs, different jobs. Probably the reason I haven't really looked into my GED or DACA is because I have to be paying stuff- debts, bills- and now I'm kind of alone."

Jesus was understandably discouraged and overwhelmed with the rigorous process that is necessary to obtain DACA. Jesus represents those of undocumented status who are likely not eligible for DACA. In Jesus' case, he only graduated 8th grade and was not currently enrolled in school, thus further highlighting the limitations of DACA to not include individuals like him.

Limitations of DACA. Participants discussed the limitations of DACA in their narratives. Though DACA provides many benefits and is a necessary step in the right direction towards immigration reform, DACA is considered a limitation for education because it does not provide eligibility for federal financial aid, thus still placing the complete cost of higher education on the

recipients of DACA. Further, DACA is temporarily granted for a two-year period. Though it provides opportunities for legal employment, the employment opportunities do not suffice in covering the expenses of a higher education. Six participants were skeptical about initially applying for DACA, as they were uncertain and fearful that it would eventually put them and their loved ones at risk of deportation. Additionally, some participants were also fearful their DACA would be individually revoked, or that DACA as an executive action would be collectively reversed as a policy.

Cierra described her "fear" associated with providing her identifying information as a result of applying for DACA:

> "Because…you never know. They could take it. They could take it whenever they want…because I know they have our information…that's my fear. Like, they can come and take me, and my family won't know, but like, that's the fear that I have. Like, they could just come any day and they're like, "Okay. I'm taking you." Not even just to me, but any other recipients who have the DACA. Because, like, you're just giving all your information just to receive permit, but you needed the permit. I needed to work because, how else? So I did have the fear, that, okay, all my information is—I was scared. I was very scared, but I just did it because I wanted to work"

Rosa reported her skepticism with DACA when it was initially announced:

> "In 2013, that's when all the DACA process began. To me, I was really skeptical about it. Sometimes you don't know if it's gonna be real. The risk of being deported. I think the announcement was around September, or something, of 2013. Around there. Around the summer or fall. I did not apply to it, 'cuz I was—first of all, I was scared."

Participants also worried that DACA would be taken away if they did not take advantage of the opportunities it offered. For instance, Theresa reported:

> "I had DACA for a year, and I hadn't done anything. I was scared they were gonna take it away because I wasn't working. I wasn't going to school. I was just helping my mom out in her business…I started working again just so I had something on paper to prove that I'm wasting my opportunity with DACA."

DACA provided legal employment opportunities for participants but also placed a demand for students to work in order to pay for schooling, and for some, to have to also provide and contribute to their household. DACA meant being employed at entry-level jobs that made it difficult for participants to balance school and work demands, as the jobs did not suffice to cover

expenses. Cierra discussed her family obligations while working multiple jobs soon after receiving DACA:

> "That's when I got an offer and a position at the church, as a receptionist, and being undocumented is hard when you don't have your social because the job. You need a job to provide for yourself and also—like, for instance, I was helping my parents either to buying food or anything, anything my brothers—I love caring about my siblings, so if they want anything, I'll get it for them, when I have the money and when I have the time. That's the kind of sister I am to them, so, that's what I'd do, so I did that, got the DACA, and then work as a receptionist, and basically, I was to save enough money just for myself, and that's when I got another job at McDonald's."

The DACA work permit also allowed Leila to work multiple jobs out of necessity to pay for school. She noted that she had to temporarily stop school due to financial demands:

> "The fall of 2013 I took a semester off because that's when I applied for [my] University. With that said, I realize I had to pay more, so I took three jobs. I'm sorry. Before that, I actually had applied for DACA, and I had received it. That's the only reason why I was able to get two new jobs, because I received my social security number. I worked for three different food restaurants, two fast food and one actual food industry. 2014, I got my driver's license. Yeah, pretty much, I think—until right now, just working to pay off school."

DACA also created a competition for jobs, according to Carlos. He discussed the difficulties in finding employment to help pay for college:

> "I took a year off of school. I'm recently back. It was because of the money thing. Even though I had DACA, one of the problems was it was still hard to find a job, if not harder, because of all the ones that previously got [DACA] first before me, they filled up the jobs. They just turned even more hard to get a job. I just couldn't find one."

Diego similarly experienced that finding employment was difficult, even with the DACA work permit. He stated,

> "When I received DACA I started a plan for jobs, and I realized that it's not that easy to get a job, even with a Social Security Number."

Nonetheless, Diego was able to find multiple jobs, but this created a new challenge, as it was a demand to balance work and school:

> "When I went to school it took me two hours to get from there to my house, and one hour from school to downtown. What I tried doing is go to work first at downtown, then school, and then head back to [my youth worker job], to the neighborhood. Sometimes it would be that I would have to leave one of my jobs early because I had to go to school."

Even though some participants were able to find legal employment, often it did not suffice for covering educational expenses. Ten participants experienced disruptions in college due to lacking adequate financial support to pay for school, even though many worked in some capacity while studying. Diego shared his difficulties with being unable to complete college due to the financial demands and the unrealistic expectation that his current employment could cover the costs. He discussed his college disruption as follows:

> "Until right now I haven't been able to graduate from [my university] because I am not able to pay. It's the cheapest university that I was able to find, and I am still not able to pay it because the job that I have right now is not a very good one. Last year I was forced to stop going to college, to classes, so I didn't go for a year. I took, you could say, a break, and that was because I didn't have the money. It was that and also that and my grandpa from my mom's side had died, and I wasn't able to go see him, so that got me even more depressed. I just stopped going to class, and that's when I decided, "You know what? I'm not gonna go back to school right now." I took a year break, until right now."

Carlos also mentioned a recent school disruption due to financial school demands despite being legally employed through DACA,

> "I had a misfortune this past year. *[Pause]* It's just something that reminds me of, "Man, the many struggles of being undocumented—" I took a year off of school. I'm recently back. It was because of the money thing."

He also spoke of a previous experience prior to obtaining DACA in which he reduced his college enrollment to part-time due to costs:

> "That's when I said, "Okay, I guess I gotta start going part-time." The lowest was like I remember one semester, I just took one class just to save money. I even did a monthly payment of $80.00 a month, and that was still hard to keep up. This was before DACA came out, too. It was just hard, man, up until—yeah, I can't do it anymore. I just have to stop. That was the toughest one."

Agustin mentioned leaving college unexpectedly:

> "Due to financial problems, I had to drop out of college and start working. Like how I said I dropped out, and then—well, I dropped out in spring 2013 right after completing all my architecture courses. That following June after the semester was over, I started working as an office assistant. From there on, I only lasted a couple months."

Claudia discussed her demands balancing work and school, which prompted her to choose between work to provide for her household and school. She stated,

> "I was part-time at [community college]. Pretty much, I was still working full-time. I had to work full-time, and I still had to help the house financially. Then it was like, I sometimes didn't have enough money, even though I was working so much, because I was being paid the minimum wage. I would have class to pay—I would have money to pay for class, but then I wouldn't have enough to pay for books or to—since I was part-time, I wouldn't have enough to pay for transportation because, yeah, they only give the U-Passes to full-time students. There were other things that had to be paid that I just couldn't afford. Pretty much, it was—I think at that moment, I was trying to figure out, how am I going to do this school thing? It was either I work or I go to school. I knew that I couldn't do school full-time and then work full-time because again, the hours just—they didn't work out. It was either I lose my job and try to go full-time, but then what's gonna pay this full-time tuition? It was trying to balance out everything."

Claudia eventually graduated with her bachelor's degree, but reported it took her longer as she had to work to save for school and provide for her family. Claudia also recognized another unique limitation of DACA and DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawfully Permanent Residents) beyond the challenges associated with working. She feared the executive action was a policy that could create long-term social problems despite the benefits it may lend:

> "I do see DACA as a step and DAPA as a step, but I am very scared of where this step is going because even though it is providing us opportunities, it's also creating a permanent underclass. A lot of people are not realizing this, that there is a lot of danger in that, that pretty much, yes, we are given certain opportunities, but is this just a way to keep us lower forever, permanently?"

DACA's provisional nature, failure to make these students eligible for financial aid, and access to legal employment are severe academic limitations for these students. Given DACA is granted for two years, it is not realistic students can complete a degree in this amount of time. Though DACA is renewable, the tentative nature of immigration reform does not guarantee DACA will remain in place and provides the possibility of it being denied or revoked. Though participants can legally work with a DACA permit, it is not realistic to expect the money eared working entry level jobs will adequately cover the cost of tuition, books, fees, and other related academic and living expenses. Opening the door to work for students who are in school or have a high school diploma without financial aid eligibility is essentially placing a ceiling on these students ability to realistically obtain a higher education. This lack of eligibility for financial aid related to the following theme, as it increase the financial burden for school for these students.

Financial demand for school. Given that participants were of undocumented status, all of them were ineligible for federal financial aid to help pay for college and required participants find other sources of income to pay for schooling. Fifteen participants reportedly worked while simultaneously enrolled in school at some point, while ten participants worked while *not* enrolled in school to save money for college in the future. Additionally, eleven participants directly reported their parents lacked the income to finance their college studies as they were also of undocumented status and worked low wage jobs. Due to the financial demand for school, participants' experiences in college included disruptions in school or enrolling in a reduced course load.

Oscar reported a slow start to his higher education, as he began at a community college in fall 2010 by registering for only one class. He reported paying "all out of pocket" with money earned through his employment. Oscar reported it took him longer to complete school as a result, and graduated with his associate's degree in spring 2013.

Rosa shares her experiences of needing to be employed to pay for college and having to juggle work and college responsibilities:

> "I'm not gonna tell you that it's—that I don't feel the financial burden. Because I feel it every day. I mean, I've been working three jobs this summer. I still feel that wasn't enough for me to be able to save up for $21,000 for the first year. Hopefully something's gonna happen, because I really need scholarships. It's not like I haven't applied. I have applied so much, but then you realize how competitive it is to apply for undocumented scholarships. Every year, I applied for all of them. I'm just here struggling to pay my tuition, and stuff."

She further discusses having to balance being a full-time student and full-time employee:

> "Spring semester I did have the Petco job and the tutoring job. I was a full-time student. I was taking all hard core level classes that year, since it was my last year. You had to do what you had to do. I did work full-time at that time."

Abel discussed working during the summers while in college in order to save money for school fees and tuition in case the multiple scholarships he applied for would not cover the expenses. He reported:

> "Then I applied to a summer job last year. Again, I wouldn't be—I wouldn't apply for it otherwise, so I was really happy. Actually, I got to work around 30 hours a week. I haven't spent a dime of that money. I'm gonna use that money to help pay for school in case—as a backup plan in case I'm not able to get enough scholarship money. I'll have that in reserve."

Agustin also shared his experience saving for college: "I'll have to probably pay out of my own pocket, too. I'm saving up money now so whenever I needed to pay my education I'll have it paid for already."

Zulmira discussed how she was able to pay for her college expenses by working and keeping her tuition cost low by attending a community college:

> "I'm still in college, so what I do is I get out of class; I go to work, or if I don't have class, I just go to work. Right now I'm paying for [community college]. I just finished paying off the last semester. For my first semester of college, my parents would give me maybe like $100.00. My tuition wasn't that bad my first semester in college. It was kind of low, and so my payment plans weren't super high. Once I got a job, it was like, okay, I will get paid in time for me to be able to afford to pay the bill when they bill came. My parents will help me pay for maybe half of it, and I will pay the rest of it. Then by the time my second semester came in college—because I paid my first semester—I was able to get tax money because I paid for school, and so my parents gave me the tax money that I got from the school. They put it into my bank account, and so with that tax money, I was able to pay my second semester. Plus I had a job. I stopped working at [a community art program} when I started working at [a community based media program]. With my job, obviously, which paid for my books and stuff, and with the money, I was able to pay for the rest of the semester."

Claudia reported she was unable to attend college after graduating high school due to the financial cost. As a result, she worked full time to save money and pay for community college: "After graduating high school in 2006, I ended up taking a year and a half off to work full-time to be able to then start at the city colleges."

Antonio remembered taking time off from school to work and reported feeling pressure from his employer to continue working instead of returning to school. He discussed taking time off from college his sophomore year to save money for school expenses:

> "I told my supervisor I was going to go back to school like my first day. I remember him bringing me to his office because he wanted to talk. He's like, "I should fire you because you're going back to school. I should fire you." …for some reason I didn't care. It's okay if I lose it. That's why I took a semester off because I had to work for school. I needed financial aid. That's why I took a semester off."

Antonio also discussed his need to continue working to save money to transfer from a community college to a four-year university to obtain a bachelor's degree for his preferred career:

> "That's what I plan to do, be a teacher, but since I'm gonna do that, I know that I have to go to first degree to get my… bachelor's degree in education… I'm aware of what I have to do, but not specific, so I know I have to transfer, and I know that the tuition over there is more expensive than at [community college] so …right now, I'm saving money… saving money for school, when it comes to that one time. And just keep saving, and that's why I'm taking advantage of the DACA, and again, just doing good in school, and then applying for scholarships, which is what I just planned to do. But I know I have to do more than that because it probably will be a lot, but."

The requirement to work, balance college demands, and save money to pay for tuition continued at every level of higher education, as Frida indicated was the case for her while attending graduate school.

Academic Protective Factors

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed multiple protective factors in the educational journey of Latino immigrants of undocumented status. Some protective factors were specific to undocumented status but others were not. Protective factors discussed by participants fell into two types: assets and resources. Assets are described as personal protective factors that are attributed to the individual participants while resources are environmental protective factors that are available in the participants' setting. Assets among study participants fell into two main subcategories: being socially responsible to others and having a sense of hope and determination to succeed in school. Resources include a benefits of DACA, scholarships and academic awards, and natural mentoring relationships. Both assets and resources were further broken down into subcategories (see Table 3).

Table 3

Themes and subthemes pertaining to academic protective factors (N=20)

Academic protective factors	**Total** % (n)
Assets	
Social responsibility	
Responsibility to collective group	55 (11)
Service involvement	55 (11)
Extracurricular involvement	85 (17)
Family responsibility	40 (8)
Hope and determination	50 (10)
Resources	
DACA benefits	45 (9)
Scholarships	65 (13)
Academic Awards	35 (7)
Support from natural mentors	100 (20)
Direct financial support and opportunity	50 (10)
Tuition	20 (4)
Employment	30 (6)
School connections	50 (10)
Encouragement and advice	30 (6)

Benefits of DACA. Nine participants reported DACA provided benefits that directly or indirectly contributed to their academic experience. Specifically, these benefits included gaining access to legal employment, removing fear of deportation, and obtaining driving privileges. Antonio stated simply that DACA allowed him access to opportunities he otherwise wouldn't have had: "I applied for DACA. I was able to get my permit to work and get my license." Cedahlia mentioned she was relieved to get her driver's license, no longer worry about being stopped by police, and having a way of identifying herself:

> "When I was able to apply for Deferred Action, getting my social security was like I was a new person, in a way, because I was able to get my license. I had started driving since I was 15. I had no license. I drove for six years without a license. It was a big thing. It was a big deal, just to have a way to identify myself here, in the United States, and not be scared, for the first time, of being stopped by police and not having a license, or even more, not having a status."

Abel also shared the benefits he received from DACA once he finally applied:

> "There were a lot of benefits to DACA... I got to fill it out after I graduated high school, and the reason is because the work permit really comes in handy. I know a lot of people who would like to work but can't because of the whole undocumented status. I was actually able to apply to places I wouldn't be able to apply otherwise. Without this work permit, I wouldn't be working right now. I wouldn't be able to do something I like and get paid for it. The first job I took was as a busboy at a restaurant when one of my friends got me the job. I felt really glad because I was thinking, "Wow. Last year, I wouldn't even be able to apply for this, but right now, I'm working."

Rosa discussed DACA provided the benefits to obtain employment that provided higher wages, and relevant and meaningful career experiences:

> "I was able to do more of my career stuff. I started working at Petco, and that's a little bit more of the higher wages, instead of working minimum or below minimum. Then I think the grandest opportunities for me for once I got my DACA, is that in 2014, in January, I was able to work at [my college]. I became a tutor the first—the Spring semester I was tutoring basically about anything. English, Anthropology, Math, Physics, English, and other courses, I was able to do that. I was able to help other students."

Claudia similarly discussed DACA provided immediate access to better employment with higher pay while doing something she enjoyed. However, she also mentioned that balancing school and work was difficult, leading her to choose leaving her job in order to finish college:

> "I quit [my previous job] as soon as I got DACA, and I started working for Boys and Girls Club. I was earning, I think, $11.00 an hour. Thanks to DACA, I got a decent job. I was working part-time. I actually liked this job working with youth because that's pretty much what I wanted to do. That's why my work—I had to work the afterschool program, so my last semester at [my university], my classes—the classes that I needed to take were in the evening, so I had to quit my job that I really loved to be able to finish college."

Jesus, the sole participant who did not apply for DACA nor had other legal resident status, recognized DACA could provide him with opportunities, as follows:

> "I know the DACA would help me because at least it would be a permission for me to get a better job. And paying off more things and getting myself in a better status than I'm in right now. And I think it's a lot of help - well the DACA, and I think it would be something important for me, for the same reason that it's getting harder to get a job, a better paying job."

Social responsibility. Narratives communicated a theme of responsibility to help others, to be civically engaged, and extracurricular involvement. An obligation to family was another sense of responsibility shared across narratives. Social responsibility served as an academic protective factor because participants felt rewarded by their contributions to others and spoke positively about these experiences.

Responsibility to collective group. Eleven participants discussed a collective responsibility to others, be it to those of undocumented status or other underserved groups. Abel reported being civically involved in various ways to assist others of undocumented status. He recalled a desire to assist others and explored options to do so:

> "I want to help out the community organizations, help out undocumented students, so I've started going to different meetings. Like one of my classmates put it, it's possible if you put the effort into it."

He volunteered at a citywide DACA workshop attended by thousands soon after DACA was initially announced:

> "In terms of DACA, when it came out, actually, I went with one of my brothers to the announcement—not the announcement, but to a meeting downtown where the programs were—different programs were meeting to discuss what this is about and who will qualify and how to help people and how to send out information. That got me motivated to volunteer, so I volunteered during the—during that day. It was the first day where DACA was going to be accepted, and ICE (i.e. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) held an event at [downtown]... I felt happy because I was actually helping—doing something to help the cause of undocumented students."

Zulmira recalled unexpectedly volunteering to assist people of undocumented status during the same aforementioned citywide DACA event in which Abel volunteered. She discussed her experience helping others and feeling a sense of unity as a result:

> "I had no job, but I had DACA, because I had applied a year a half earlier. I was actually one of the first people that applied for it. I was at [the citywide DACA event]. I got there at 2:00AM. I decided that I wasn't gonna sleep, so I might as well just work. I did an eight hour shift to help people get in line and stuff. It was the most amazing thing because I've never seen so many people that were just like me. The lines were endless. There were so many people, and I was just so excited to see that. People were uniting, and they were talking, and they were singing, and I was just really excited. I started smiling, and I told my mom, and she was just really excited too. We were just all together there for that thing."

Diego was involved in helping immigrants of undocumented status in multiple ways as well. He recalled the first moment he became civically involved:

> "It wasn't until, I don't remember, 2010 I think, when there was this big movement, and there was gonna be this mega march in Washington, D.C., to ask the man for immigration reform. I think that's when I started really getting' involved. Basically, it was letting people know that I was goin' to go down, and also gather 150 people from Chicago to put 'em on a bus to go to Washington, D.C., and gather the money for the busses. I think that was the first time that I had ever felt that sense of bein' involved.

Diego channeled his collective responsibility to others of undocumented status by being the co-founder of a scholarship specifically geared towards college students of undocumented status. As a college student of undocumented status who was well aware of the financial challenges in college, he wanted to help others pay for school even as he struggled to finance his own education:

> "an idea came about, about funding, like fundraising for a scholarship for undocumented students. That's a project that we started three years ago. The way we fund raise is through the Chicago Marathon. We run the Chicago Marathon, and we ask people to sponsor our miles. The first year that we did that, we had a pretty good amount of response from the community. We raised $3,500.00, and we were able to split that into nine scholarships. The second year we were able to fund raise $10,000. This year we were able to fund raise around $20,000. These are scholarships that go to undocumented students only. It's actually a scholarship that I can't apply for because I am one of the organizers and I am one of the runners."

Santiago discussed his involvement in running a marathon and raising funds for the aforementioned scholarship for students of undocumented status. He reported running a marathon was analogous to getting a college education as an undocumented student living in his community in that it is a long, arduous process that takes one step at a time. He also recognized that his individual educational attainment was not enough to create social mobility, and felt that his involvement in raising scholarship funds through the marathon was a way of creating change collectively.

Claudia mentioned feeling a sense of responsibility to help others soon after she disclosed her status to the high school students and their parents during a panel on her college campus:

> "Pretty much, I felt this heavy responsibility of doing something because it was just not just one [person]. It was so many parents and the students coming up to me. It was mostly the parents that were trying to figure out what to do with their kids."

This prompted Claudia to begin a college support group at her college institution to raise awareness and find resources.

> "I decided that maybe we should start an organization for undocumented students. …. I was introduced through [an immigrant advocacy group] to a student, a current student at [my university] who was also undocumented, and I asked him if he wanted to meet. I ended up having a meeting with him, but then with ten other undocumented students at [my university] that

> summer before classes even started. He was surprised to walk into the room and see so many undocumented students at [my university] because the whole time that he had been there, he had not met another undocumented student. That's when I realized that coming out and saying I'm undocumented actually will bring more benefits and will help me and others find each other instead of being isolated by ourselves and thinking that we are the only ones."

Jose shared his sense of responsibility to educate others of undocumented status about the implications of DACA:

> "Then, the deferred action gets announced. I continued to be unemployed during that time, but I figured that I had something to do. I needed to do workshops, because again, being undocumented, there's a lot of people who wanna take advantage of you. The deferred action was announced. Now you have lawyers saying, "Pay us $5,000.00. We're gonna fix your papers." You have people saying, which is my biggest pet peeve, "They passed the Dream Act! We're gonna become citizens!" No. We knew that our community needed to get information. I believed if they get information, they're able to inform other people."

Cedahlia discussed her motives behind feeling responsible to others of undocumented status:

> "I get it. There's different opinions. I respect them. Because of my situation, because of my personal story, is why I fight for a change, not only for me, but for all the other millions of people who are in my same situation. Because we not all come to do bad things, or slack off. In my situation, I strive for better. I strive for making a change. I strive for helping my community and making a change."

Carlos spoke of being of undocumented status in the plural sense, indicating that he felt solidarity with others. He simply stated, "We just wanna feel that we're strong. We're gonna stick together. There'll be better days ahead."

Being socially responsible fits the definition of an asset, as it represents a quality among these participants that provides them with a sense of purpose and allows them to recognize that their individual academic success is tied to the collective well-being or others, specifically others of undocumented status. Participants recognize that their collective voice can serve as an agent of change for all students of undocumented status, and therefore they recognize that being socially responsible will mean improved opportunities for them as well as others.

Involvement in community service and/or extracurricular activities. Involvement in a multitude of activities and service was a common pattern for participants. Eleven participants

were involved in community service while 17 participants participated in extracurricular activities at school or in the community. Of these participants, eight were involved in both community service and extracurricular activities combined. Though there is some overlap between these two types of activities, community service has distinct differences from extracurricular activities. Community service was defined as experiences in which the participant served in a service role to support a cause, organization, or provide others with assistance; examples include volunteering at a school or hospital, and organizing a support group for other students of undocumented status. Extracurricular activities were defined as being more individual-focused and promoted skills or development of the participant. For example, students participated in activities such as a marimba group, track and field, the school volleyball team, and their high school's National Honors Society.

Sandra expressed a sense of enjoyment she obtained from volunteering and community service. Her sustained engagement in these service roles involved helping at multiple community based organizations and a hospital. She described her volunteer experiences in Spanish as follows:

> "Adoró ser voluntaria en las escuelas con los niños, en el programa de English lenguaje learners, y en organizaciones que ofrecen programas después de la escuela para proveer ayuda con tarea, educación en las humanidades, arte y actividad física."

Abel discussed becoming involved in a service activity through his school in which he was the founder of an after school club in high school. He formed the club to engage other high schoolers of undocumented status, and they conducted service projects and raised money for undocumented students. Abel described the motives behind establishing his club as:

> "That included how we couldn't get driver's licenses, how we couldn't work for places that had e-verify. I really wanted to get more information on that, so I joined that club. In that club, we participated in the race for the governor and the local alderman. The activities we did was to try to get people to vote, people in the neighborhood to vote, and that's when I learned that voting is very important to address the issues that concern you. Again, as undocumented, we couldn't vote. I had talked to the—to some of my classmates, and we said, "Yeah, we can't vote, but maybe we could

> convince others to vote and try to get them to better the community." We did a community service project. That was part of a requirement for school. We had to do a project. We had chosen to go try to get people to vote. I got one of my friends to come help me out. Mostly, what we did was do research about the candidates and then try to give them to members of the community, raise awareness of locations you can vote at or pretty much times and dates. It went pretty well. We did a lot of passing out papers, a lot of talks. That's what got me very interested into politics and to informing myself about what's going on, what is being done for undocumented people, what is being done for Latino people."

Jose discussed his motives for becoming involved in service and extracurricular activities since high school. He said:

> "When I was in high school, I always tried to be involved. One, because I liked what I was doing. Second, because I knew that being undocumented, you need to have a lot of skills. You need to be able to be a leader in your community. Not just because you wanna go to college, but in general, if you need to improve your community, you need to be able to identify the issues and do something about it, rather than just wait for someone else to do it. *[Pause]* As undocumented, I recognized that I needed to get involved. Also, it helped that I wanted to get involved. *[Pause]* A lot of issues that I was involved in."

Cierra felt her extracurricular involvement in her high school's National Honor's Society encouraged to engage in community service:

> "I remember we'd have to do like, an application for [National Honor's Society]. Like, "Why do you deserve to be in National Honor Society?" Like, basically, "What have you done to the community?" and stuff. That's when I started volunteering with the community, and I'm like, "Okay. This is—I'm going to give back"

Santiago recalled his longstanding extracurricular involvement with community organizations in his community upon arriving to the United States at age 14. His participation in these organizations during high school and into college was formative to his development, as he felt these community organizations facilitated his development in multiple ways. Specifically, he stated that these organizations provided a supportive environment with a culture of spirituality, service, and the expectation to excel academically. Once in college, he reported that these organizations provided him with tangible financial support for college trough scholarships.

Carlos spoke about his extracurricular involvement in a youth marimba group through his local parish. He described his involvement being pivotal during his academic struggles in high

school, as this provided him with supportive peers and adults who were able to reengage him back into school:

> "The ensemble really, really helped me. I was failing the classes. Yeah, those some band members are the ones that I told, "I'm just gonna quit. There's no point." …They told [my marimba instructor]. He went on, and he told the point guard of the group, the priest. … He said, "Tomorrow, what time do you start school?" "7:00 a.m." "Be here at 6:30 a.m. at the parish with uniform on. I'm gonna take you. Don't make me come after you." "Okay." I guess we're going."

Family responsibility. Eight participants reported an obligation to support their family; this involved providing financial support, and childcare responsibilities. Participants were proud to support their family and emphasized the collective wellbeing of their family over their own academic success when necessary. Though the need to balance school and employment, or choose employment over school, is an academic risk factor, the personal motivations for this are influenced by being socially responsible members of their family who make contributions. Thus, familial responsibility is a protective factor because participants were motivated by their family's wellbeing to succeed in school in the long-term, despite the immediate disruptions in school.

Santiago discussed being the eldest of his siblings meant he welcomed the responsibility to take care of his siblings while his father worked. Throughout his high school education, after arriving in the United States at age 14, he was in charge of childcare for his younger siblings, including preparing meals, daily drop-off and pick-up at their schools, and shuttling them to extracurricular activities after school. He recalls feeling proud of being responsible for his younger siblings.

Similarly, Giselle cared for her younger sister. She states:

> "Well, both of my—well, my mom and my stepdad work. They don't wanna take the baby out [to a daycare], so I take care of her. They're like, "Well, you're—" they pay me, but I don't feel really cool accepting that money, since she's my sister."

Cierra discussed working a part-time job while in college. She enjoyed being able to earn money and contribute to her household when possible:

> "That's when I got an offer and a position at the church, as a receptionist, and being undocumented is hard when you don't have your social because the job. You need a job to provide for yourself and also—like, for instance, I was helping my parents either to buying food or anything, anything my brothers—I love caring about my siblings, so if they want anything, I'll get it for them, when I have the money and when I have the time."

Cedahlia shared her experiences helping her parents pay for their recently purchased home. She reported this was a higher priority than continuing in college, indicating that she stopped her studies with hopes of returning when possible. She stated:

> "Just last year, as well, I purchased a home with my family. Again, that financial of just helping my parents also came in the way. To me, was first my family, support them, and not bring a burden to them of I have to pay for school, but we can't get a home. Then, I had to make a stop in my education. That doesn't mean I'm not going back. I'm thinking of going back in spring semester."

Scholarships and Academic Awards. Given the many financial demands and challenges associated with the academic experiences of students of undocumented status, many were still able to have academic success as indicated by their multiple scholarships and academic accolades. Seven participants received academic awards and recognition while 13 participants received scholarships to pay for school. These served as a protective factor along their educational experiences because they provided positive environmental recognition and reinforcement from their schools and other institutions, and were key indicators of positive academic experiences. Additionally, scholarships were directly helpful in paying tuition while academic awards assisted with making them more competitive for academic opportunities such as schools and future scholarships.

Academic awards. Rosa received multiple awards throughout her academic journey. Her first notable award came upon graduating 8th grade, when she said. "I did graduate from eighth grade as the salutatorian. I was top two in that middle school. I think that was one of the highest class that had the highest scores so far in that school." She also reported receiving multiple awards in high school from for her athletic achievements. She reported "academically I did well

in high school, but also I had a lot of athletes' awards. I did get the most valuable runner. I got my varsity awards." Cedahlia also highlighted receiving multiple awards along her academic journey, also beginning in grade school. She discussed being recognized in grade school for her academic performance:

> "Then, seventh grade, I was getting more involved, academically, making sure that I was in projects such as science fair, which I still have a trophy that I won for—if I remember correctly, it was best project of my science class. That was really when I started getting awards."

In high school, she continued to receive recognition for her performance and involvement in school. She recalled her junior year achievement:

> "I had a AP photography junior year. To me, I love that class. I still remember my teacher. She was so helpful. She taught me so much. To this day, I still stay in contact with her because photography was one of my favorite, I guess, hobbies at the time, and still class. I remember she encouraged me to enter in a all-city competition for photography. I actually won a medal for one of my pieces. It was, I wanna say, bronze medal for one of my pieces. It was presented in [a major museum] downtown. I remember it was a big thing for my family. It was a big thing for my teacher because it also showed her that I was serious, and she knew that I had made her proud, as well. That was a really big accomplishment that year, for me, aside from being so busy with academics and stuff. That was the main highlight of my year."

Upon concluding her senior year, she continued receiving awards for her academic performance and spoke of her academic achievements positively:

> "I graduated with honors. I was top 6 in my class, out of 91, I think, if I remember correctly. I was part of the National Honors Society. I had a quite good academic life in high school."

Carlos, who self-reported as a below average student at the beginning of high school, discussed being recognized for his academic achievements during the second half of high school:

> "The only thing was, yeah, realistically, I couldn't qualify for the honors all four years because of how bad I did my first two years. I was still so satisfied. Hey, for an F student to all of a sudden at the snap of a finger get two honor rolls in the last two years? That's impressive. I don't need that big honor roll. I'm so satisfied with what I have. It's okay if I don't get to have that thing at graduation. That's fine. Because I was the first one in my family to graduate high school, which was something very special for my family to see."

Frida had multiple awards and recognition throughout her academic experiences as well. An award highlight came with the aforementioned experience when she was selected to meet the President of the United States during her freshmen year while attending her four-year university.

Prior to receiving this accolade in college, her high school recognized her senior year for sustained efforts in service to others. She discussed the reason and sequence behind her high school awarding her with the multiple awards award:

> "At the end of graduation, students get awards. I received the Committed to Justice Award when I was a sophomore, and I think the Leadership Award when I was a junior. By senior year, they award the student that embodies work experience, loving, committed to justice, leadership, and service. [The award I got at graduation was] the Women for Others or Men for Others Award."

Scholarships. Oscar spoke about his high school academic success leading to earning three scholarships that helped partially pay for his private high school tuition. He remembered how these scholarships relieved his brother from full responsibility of paying for Oscar's high school:

> "My sophomore year, thanks to my grades, I had 4.0 GPA after my freshman year, I received three scholarships, which were—one was private, from a couple. I had the Daniel Murphy and then I had the Big Shoulders fund. That helped out my brother a lot [since he was paying my tuition]."

Rosa discussed receiving a scholarship through her community college for her involvement in the student support group for Latinos at her school. She said, "I joined the [Latino student support group] at [the community college]. The guy that's in charge of it, he actually became my counsellor for that. I was able to get a scholarship there. They paid for 12 semesters, for two years."

Santiago indicated he received scholarships from a community-based agencies his first year of college at his four-year institution. He reported receiving enough scholarship aid to cover his first whole year of college. In Spanish, he said "Las organizaciones comunitarias dieron el apoyo económico con becas en el primer año de colegio. Recibí suficiente dinero de las organizaciones."

Abel received scholarship offers from different universities upon graduating from high school. He discussed the scholarships awarded to him and his decision process in accepting them:

> "[University A] first sent me the scholarship. They said, "Oh, you qualify for the presidential scholarship," which is—it was about $20,000.00 worth in scholarships, but the thing is that I had to live in there at a dorm, and I think it would be $30,000.00 in total. I would need to find $10,000.00 somewhere. I think I could manage it if I applied to enough scholarships, and I had some of the money from [my high school's undocumented students support] club."
> "Then [University B] also offered me a scholarship. With that scholarship, they covered 60 percent of the tuition fees and the general fees, and I didn't have to live there because it was a commuting school. The overall out-of-pocket cost would end up being around between $7,000.00—yeah. $7,000.00, $8,000.00. [University A], since I had to live in there, it would be $15,000.00 [out of pocket]. I decided, they're both downtown and they're both really great schools, so I think I will just go to [University B]. That's where I started attending fall. I was actually so relieved because all I had going on was school."

Receiving scholarships not only provided students with monetary aid to pay school expenses, it provided them with hope and optimism to continue their studies despite barriers associated with being undocumented.

Abel mentioned the hope provided by receiving scholarships that made college a realistic possibility for him and provided a sense of accomplishment:

> "After I got the scholarships, I felt really great. I felt accomplished. It got me out of my depression because at that point, I was thinking, I'm probably not gonna get anything. I'm not even gonna go to college. At that point, people believe in me. The New York scholarship, even though they knew I was undocumented, they said, "We know you can do this. We believe in you." I think those scholarships came out to be tokens of their belief in you and their belief if you're gonna be successful or you're gonna be able to invest your time effectively or your studies effectively."

Carlos also felt uplifted and energized by receiving college scholarships that made attending college and paying for it a possibility. He said,

> "The scholarship was a great one too. Another boost. *[Pause]* 'Cause at the end, the biggest award was $5,000.00. Then when they were awarding, giving medals, they said, "Just so you know, three very lucky people—" they didn't wanna announce. They said, "Only three people got the $5,000.00." Then they handed me mine. Everyone was opening it. I heard two guys in the back say, "Man, I wonder who got that $5,000.00. They should feel lucky! I only got $1,000.00." They were complaining. I went, "Yeah, I wonder who got $5,000.00." I opened. I saw the print. Five thousand. Whoa! I'm one of the three! I'll never forget, just opening it. Yeah, I wonder who—whoa. Then it just—that day also even started opening my potential. Yeah, it really doesn't matter if I'm undocumented. I still didn't know exactly where I was getting this energy from."

Jose similarly felt propelled by receiving a college scholarship during high school. He recalled receiving a significant scholarship provided him with motivation and desire to do well in high school and into college:

> "Junior year in high school, I competed against my whole class, 30 students submitting an essay about paying it forward and how I was paying it forward. Turned out that I worked so hard on that essay that I was able to get that scholarship. I was the only one. *[Pause]* My peers will tease me, saying, "Hello Mr. $5,000.00," because junior year, I already had $5,000.00 for college. That was a big push. A big motivation. Because there's really not very many scholarships for undocumented juniors. There should be more, because that will motivate you to do well in the rest of junior year and senior year. Senior year knowing that you have a little bit of money already."

Hope and determination for a higher education amidst uncertainty. Participants faced a combination of challenges in their education, but they maintained the hope and determination that they would find a way to continue obtaining a higher education. Narratives concluded with the possibility that a higher education was still a realistic possibility despite the challenges. Specifically, ten participants expressed hope to continue in higher education with the uncertainty of how they would be able to continue. Their determination to find a way appeared to provide them with hope.

Rosa discussed here current standing at her four-year university, which included her aspirations to be an engineer while also facing the realities of figuring out how she would finance school after the current academic year. She said:

> "Right now, I do have the first year covered. I think, almost, hopefully with the tax refunds, I'll be okay. However, I don't know what's gonna happen. I really hope Obama has something. Hopefully he does something in September. Hopefully, now that I'm working, that the University of [ABC], because the Dean of Engineering, he also graduated from [my high school], he really supports Latino students. He's really involved, and he wants to help them continue school. He was able to help me. I was able to find a job. Now I have that job, that I could help him in the office. Hopefully I find out more about scholarships. Both financial aid right now, it's out of the question. I can't really apply for any grants, or any loans yet. Hopefully my husband can, so therefore maybe I could finish the second year. My plan is to do a co-op for a full semester, and then something engineering based. Then save up for a little bit for next year. For the next second half of the semester. I feel that I really don't know what's gonna happen. Hopefully, at that point, some immigration laws are passed, so I could finish college. That's where I am at right now."

Carlos remained hopeful as he cited his past academic experiences of overcoming difficulties and drew parallels to his college experience:

> "Because now the hard stuff begins: college. I'm not talking about studying. I'm talking about money. We'll find a way. We'll find a way. Yeah, I went from an F to an A. If money's my next obstacle, I can overcome that too. And I did, for the most part."

Carlos then shared his current determination to continue his college studies despite not knowing how he would be able to do so. He said,

> "I know that, yeah, after [community college], what are you gonna do then? I don't know right now. I'm taking it one step at a time. Right now, I have to finish the semester, figure out where to transfer, and get my bachelor's degree in creative writing. We'll see from there."

He concluded his story with hope and determination to find a way. Carlos indicated that hope goes beyond him as an individual. He expressed a collective hope and determination for people of undocumented status by speaking in the plural sense, saying "Just the mentality that we have. We're not gonna give up. *[Pause]* They say *"si se puede"*. There's gotta be a way.

Diego also communicated the hope to complete his bachelor's degree but was uncertain about the amount of time it would take him due to his college experience with taking on a reduced course load and needing to take time away from school to save. He shared:

> "Right now I don't know what I'm gonna do with my life, and I feel that I should know already, I'm 25. I'm hoping to graduate and get my bachelor's soon, but I still don't know when. All I can say is I'm gonna work hard for it, and hope that it's sooner than later because I don't wanna be 30 and still be taking one class."

Zulmira expressed uncertainty about paying for her upcoming year of college while describing the ways she was able to piece together tuition payments for her freshmen year of college. She reported her uncertainty for continuing school as such:

> "I had three jobs over the summer of my freshman year in college. My three jobs helped me settle the amount of money I would need to sustain myself, or at least give me stuff to handle, and then keep me afloat even through my one month break. Because I'm waiting for my DACA thing, I can't really work right now, and so it's helping me have money while I'm on break for a month, and so I paid for that with that. Then I got a scholarship my spring semester, and then I have to figure out how to pay for when that comes. I just like live every day. *[Laughter]* For the moment, just try to figure out come May, come April, how am I gonna figure out how to pay for that? Let's look at more jobs."

Cedahlia discussed her uncertainty and hope to get a higher education by referring to her experience transitioning into college after high school up until her current standing in college as a junior. She reported:

> "Then, academically, [senior year of high school] was a hard year for me, too, because that's when I realized, well, I'm graduating, and what are my plans for college? It was a big deal for me, a big

> deal for my parents. I remember that my mission was to just graduate and have a plan, really, of what was coming next. I graduated, and I remember I had not a real clear vision of what was coming. I just knew that [University A] was the start, and eventually I would figure it out along the way. I started [University A] during the summer. I got, if I remember good, I got 12 college credit hours."

She then continued discussing her desire to complete school with her uncertainty of how to do so:

> "Then, I realized that, after the spring semester, I had to pay for some money, but I had gotten another scholarship. It was the—it's something in partnership with ComEd. The Exelon. It was called the Exelon Scholarship. That paid for, I wanna say, 80 percent of my fall semester at [University A]. I was just like, "Okay, this is a start." I could continue at [University A]. Again, I was just like, "I'll figure it along the way. I figure along the way."

Cierra shared her experience with wanting to go to a four-year university but was unsure of what came next for her due to being uncertain of ways to fund her higher education. She said:

> "When I did my paperwork for school, I did the payment plan, so that's what I did for paying for school, even though I had the scholarships because I just wanted that to be there. I just didn't wanna give 'em the whole thing, so that's how I was doing it, and even 'til now, that's what I still think about, like, behind my head. "Okay. What are you gonna do next? What are you gonna do next?" 'Cause two years, I'm still probably gonna be another year at [community college], but when I do go to a university, I think about, "Okay. How are you gonna pay for school? It's gonna be different." That's what I always think of behind my head, so yeah, so that's why my first day of college—it was hard, like I said."

Frida shared her hopes for attending graduate school after graduating with her bachelor's degree but reported uncertainty with funding graduate school as a student of undocumented status. She also discussed the uncertainty faced by students of undocumented status after obtaining a bachelor's degree:

> "I came back to [my hometown], and I was pretty—I felt like I was empty-handed, like my diploma didn't carry too much weight 'cause I wasn't going to grad school. I didn't have a job. I didn't really have a plan, and that is like blasphemy for any [University X] alum. How is that you don't have a plan? Like, even a five-year plan. I wanted to go to grad school, but I didn't know—I knew that funding was gonna be a problem. Everyone kept telling me, "It's really hard to get funding for graduate school for undocumented students." Knowing that I was very blessed at [University X], I don't think I would be able to find an institution that would say, "Here's a full scholarship," especially because it's so competitive as well. It's hard to get funding for any students, and then you're an undocumented student, so it adds a whole lot of challenges."

As participants shared their narratives, many concluded by expressing hope for the future and were determined to be successful in their education and career. Given the wide age range of

participants, a majority of them were still progressing through school or deciding how to reengage into the next level of education, be it an advanced degree, completing their current degree, transferring to a four-year university, or complete schooling at their current institution. They felt optimistic that things would work out for them. This asset is likely to be protective in remaining persistent in completing their education, even when risk factors such as financial burden of school and limitations in policy were present. It is possible this protective factor also provides hope that changes in immigration reform could occur and would provide participants with better educational opportunities and improved longer term job prospects.

Natural mentors in the lives of students of undocumented status. All 20 participants identified at least one natural mentor in their lives who met the definition of a natural mentor in this study. The number of natural mentors in participants' lives ranged from one to seven adults, with an average of nearly four natural mentors per participant (M=3.7). Cumulatively, a total of 73 natural mentors were identified across all 20 participants. Of those adults, 40 were identified as male, 31 as female, and two were unreported. The race/ethnicity of natural mentors as identified by participants was as follows: Latino/a (n=39), includes 28 reported as Mexican/Mexican-American, Puerto Rican (n=1), Hispanic (n=4), Ecuadorian (n=1); White (n=26), including Italian (n=1), and Polish (n=1); Black/African-American (n=3); from India (n=1); and unreported (n=4).

Adults varied in educational attainment but the majority tended to have a college education or higher. Overall, three adults had a high school education or less, five adults had some college experience or were currently enrolled in college, 24 adults had a bachelor's degree, 26 adults were reported to have an advanced degree, 12 adults had a reported career that would

require a college degree (e.g. teacher) but educational attainment was not reported by participant, and three adults' education was unknown or unreported.

The age of natural mentors span across adulthood, with age ranges as follows: 19 adults in the age range of 19 to 30 years old, 25 adults in the age range of 31 to 50 years old, 12 adults in the age range of 51 to 70, 16 adults did not have an age reported or were reported as unknown, and one adult was reported as "old".

The demographic information of natural mentors for each individual participant can be found below (Table 4). It details the number of natural mentors each participant reported, the age, gender, ethnicity/race, and educational attainment/career.

The role of natural mentors. Many participants reported receiving multiple types of support along the way from natural mentors in their lives. These natural mentors served as protective factors in the education of students of undocumented status. Participants mentioned various roles these adults played in their education, including providing direct and tangible resources, facilitating school connections, and providing encouragement and advice. In many cases, natural mentors provided a combination of the aforementioned types of support and their support was timely because they helped participants at a critical transition time in their education.

Antonio discussed how his lone natural mentor, his high school teacher, supported him with financial assistance for college during his senior year of high school by helping him with scholarship applications; after not receiving scholarships, his natural mentor provided him with money for his tuition as he prepared for the transition to college.

> "My teacher, he gave me a scholarship because he helped me apply to—like personally, he personally helped me write my essays and he helped me with a lot of words I couldn't express myself. He helped me, "Oh, you mean this." He would help me after school. I didn't get any scholarships even though he helped me. They were good essays. I think I messed up in the

> interview because I was nervous. I didn't get a scholarship so he gave me one. He helped me out financially. Like a check, written to me. He called it a gift. It was a gift."

Zulmira shared ways in which her natural mentors continuously remained engaged with her and worked together by providing multiple job opportunities along with providing encouragement, emotional support, and money. She reported:

> "[Natural mentor 4]… she became my supervisor because they're like, "We have an open position because we have too many students in the Youth Circus class, and we have the money to pay you, so you have a job now." I started working there as the Youth Circus instructor assistant, and it was just really cool…Most of my support has come from [the community agency] because of the fact that they always hire me. [The media program] also hires me too. They've given me jobs because my teaching artist, who's my supervisor at [the media program], [natural mentor 5], she's always really helpful. She's always like, "Okay, you know what? This is open, and that is open, and you could do this, and you could do that." They both kind of drive together to help me out to pay for stuff, and when I need something, they're always there."

Theresa discussed how a natural mentor provided academic support in a multi-faceted way that captures a combination of themes. She reported that the dentist she worked for provided her with employment, was encouraging and caring about her education, shared his experience as an immigrant in college in the United States, and paid her tuition. She discussed this natural mentor in this manner:

> "He was a student. He was from India, so he went through a similar situation. A positive thing that came from there is the dentist actually—we had a conversation about why wasn't I in school. I told him money was an issue and I just didn't have the motivation. …He's, like, "What if I pay for school?" …He said, "Definitely focus on your school, and then you'll see that you'll be able to do anything you want." He's, like, "Your status won't affect you. If anything, it's gonna end up helping you because if you can show the government that you can make the money, they're gonna see that you're good for them."…He offered to pay for my last two semesters. He encouraged me to go see a counselor and to do two semesters' worth of the schooling. He paid those two semesters."

Jose shared his appreciation for his natural mentors and discussed how he actively sought and identified helpful adults. He spoke about a scholarship manager at the financial aid office of his university who provided workaround solutions to issues of undocumented status. Every time tuition payments were due, his natural mentor helped him navigate the disbursement of his scholarship despite not having a social security number, and helped him avoid being continuously asked about his status during these key moments. He said:

> "I was just actively looking for people who supported [undocumented students], but also being blessed to find people who were supporting about me, and were supporting about the issue of immigration, and trying to find a solution. I take it as if there was no solution legislatively, they were looking at an instantaneous solution. "What can we do now?" That's how I got to [my university]. That's how I was shielded from inquiries about my social security number…Lucky for me, I guess I have just the blessing of finding good people on my way. I found the person, he's the director of financial aid…They ask you for a letter of registration, or proof of enrollment. I couldn't get the proof of enrollment, because they ask you for a social security number through the software that we use in the university. The person who manages understood the issue. Very friendly. An ally. He was even upset. "This doesn't make sense! Why do we have this?" I was very relieved to know that this person wasn't like, "Why don't you have a social—what are you doing here?" …He even himself went out of his way to help me out when I needed that."

Carlos shared a high school experience in which his natural mentor, a priest, helped him reengage back in high school at a time when he considered dropping out. He reported the priest approached him as part of Carlos' involvement in a church music program after finding out he ceased going to high school. The priest drove Carlos back to school the following day, found out that Carlos' status was the motive behind him quitting school, and provided encouragement, as follows:

> The drive to my high school, he was telling me, "Can I ask, why you didn't wanna go to school anymore? What happened?" I told him, "I didn't see the point?"…I told him, "What's the point? I'm a horrible student." "You can ask for help." Then I told him, "But I'm undocumented. What's the point of all this if I can't make it?" He stood quiet for just a bit. Probably from shock at first. "Oh, I didn't know he was undocumented." I could see in his eyes. Then he said that, "That doesn't mean you have to quit." He said, "In a way, you're your own race." That's when I first heard the word Dreamers. Because really, what you are is a Dreamer. You aspire to be something, but yet you have limitations. "Right now, you're trying to fill a book up, that people have filled up, such as the African Americans when Martin Luther King was around. They wanted to fill their book up with success. That's what you guys are right now. The Dreamers wanna have a book one day of, hey, we made it. This is what we went through. If you give up right now, you're giving up a valuable page. You're just as valuable." Words like that. That was the best stuff I can think of to this day. "You're valuable. Don't ever let anyone else or yourself tell you otherwise."

Carlos further summarized the way all five of his natural mentors supported him in the following way: "Just their never say never attitude too. That kinda thing is contagious in a good way."

Frida described one of her natural mentors as a longstanding presence in her academic journey. She said:

> "The associate principal who's been my mentor for now ten years. He's mentored me. Actually, he mentored me through my high school graduation, college graduation, and my master's degree graduation. He was actually at graduation with his children, which was absolutely beautiful to me because I cared for them throughout my program."

Jesus, the lone participant who did not complete high school and go on to college, reported that his older siblings were the natural mentors in his education. He reported still being hopeful of finishing school and relying on their advice to forge ahead. He said:

> "I mean, they didn't always have talked to me, they have always gave me good advice. They didn't go to school here, they came here when they were grown too. They would always tell me the same thing, like "go to school". They would try and help me, they would always support me. They would always be there if I needed something. They were married, so they couldn't really do much. But as my family, they would be there."

Table 4

Demographic information of natural mentors as reported by participants of undocumented status

Participant	**Mentor #**	**Age**	**Gender**	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Education (career)**
Carlos	1	20s	Male	Mexican	Bachelor's
	2	20s	Male	Mexican	In college
	3	-	Female	White	Bachelor's (Teacher)
	4	50s	Female	White	Masters (Nun)
	5	50s	Male	White	Masters (Priest)
Rosa	1	45-50	Male	White	Bachelor's
	2	50s	Male	Hispanic	Master's
Cierra	1	30s	Female	Mexican	Some college
	2	50s	Female	White	Maser's
	3	35	Female	White	Bachelor's
Leila	1	"old"	Male	White	(Social worker)
	2	-	Male	-	(Teacher)
	3	-	-	-	(Teacher)
	4	-	Female	Latina	(Asst. Dean)
Oscar	1	70	Male	Caucasian	(Priest)
	2	60-70	Male	Polish	(Teacher/priest)
	3	30-50	Male	White	(Teacher)
	4	30	Male	Mexican	In college
	5	24	Female	Mexican	High School
Jose	1	20s	Male	Mexican	Bachelor's
	2	60s	Male	Ecuadorian	Master's (teacher)
	3	-	Male	African-American	Master's
Sandra	1	-	Female	Mexican	-
	2	-	Female	Mexican	-
	3	-	Female	-	M.D.
	4	-	-	-	Bachelor's (advisor)
	5	-	Female	Mexican	(Business owner)
Tania	1	45	Female	Mexican	High school
	2	23	Male	Mexican	Bachelor's
	3	23	Male	Mexican	Bachelor's
Frida	1	-	Male	Mexican-American	MBA (Asst. principal)
	2	-	Female	Latina	Bachelor (Chief of staff)
	3	-	Female	White	PhD (University Dean)

	4	-	Female	African-American	PhD (grad school prof)
Santiago	1	30s	Male	Mexican	Bachelor's
	2	50s	Male	White	Masters (Priest)
	3	50s	Female	White	Masters (Nun)
Abel	1	24	Male	Mexican	Bachelor's
	2	36	Female	Mexican-American	Master's (Teacher)
Agustin	1	-	Male	Polish	(Teacher)
	2	40s	Male	Mexican	Masters
	3	40s	Male	White	Bachelor's
	4	60	Female	White	Doctorate (principal)
	5	-	Female	Mexican-American	BA (asst. principal)
Theresa	1	50	Male	White	(Soccer coach)
	2	65	Male	Polish	Bachelor's (Advisor)
	3	50	Female	White	Masters (Director)
	4	40	Female	Hispanic	Masters (Counselor)
	5	40s	Male	Hispanic	(Soccer coach)
	6	50+	Female	Hispanic	Masters (Teacher)
	7	31	Male	Indian	(Dentist)
Diego	1	30s	Female	White	(Teacher)
	2	55-60	Male	White	Master's
	3	33	Female	Mexican	Bachelor's
	4	32	Male	Latino	MA/PhD
	5	33	Male	Latino	Law degree
Zulmira	1	32	Male	White	Masters
	2	28	Female	Italian-American	Bachelors, applying to grad school
	3	20s	Female	Mexican	Bachelors
	4	27	Male	Mexican-American	Masters
Claudia	1	35	Female	Mexican	(Comm. college Prof)
Giselle	1	28	Male	White	College degree (Priest)
	2	25	Male	Mexican	Bachelor's
	3	30s	Male	White	Bachelor's (Teacher)
	4	20s	Female	Puerto Rican	Bachelor's (Teacher)
	5	40s	Male	White	Bachelor's (Teacher)
	6	25	Female	Latina	Bachelor's (Teacher)
Cedahlia	1	27	Female	Mexican-American	Enrolled in Master's
	2	20s	Female	Mexican	Bachelor's (Teacher)
Antonio	1	41	Male	Black	Master's (Teacher)
Jesus	1	19	Male	Mexican	In college
	2	25-26	Male	Mexican	Some High School
	3	30-31	Male	Mexican	Some High School

(-) Indicates unknown or unreported

Discussion

The current study used a resilience framework to understand the educational experiences of Latinos of undocumented immigrant status in the United States. Overall, results of the study provided an investigation of participants' narrative accounts of their educational experiences as Latino students of undocumented status.

An overview of the key findings of the current study is discussed, followed by a discussion of the findings within the context of the existing literature and as they relate to this study's research questions. The discussion continues with limitations and strengths of the current study, and concludes with implications and recommendations for supporting immigrants of undocumented status along with future directions.

Key Findings

The findings of this study reveal that Latinos of undocumented status experience challenges specific to their status, are able to overcome some of those challenges by relying on both assets (i.e. personal protective factors) and resources (i.e. environmental protective factors), and remain hopeful about ways they can continue to advance academically. They also found ways to make societal contributions, despite being denied the opportunity to fully integrate due to policy. Another key outcome of the current study is that Latinos of undocumented status have a high sense of social responsibility to others. Furthermore, an analysis of the narratives demonstrated that participants remain hopeful about their educational attainment and future outlook despite the uncertainty associated with their status. Taken together, these findings are consistent with resiliency theory, as Latinos of undocumented status are able to have varying levels of academic success in the wake of environmental risk factors specific to their status.

A key outcome that resulted from the collective data was that Latino students of undocumented status overall demonstrated resilience in their education in the face of the unique challenges related to their status. These findings are consistent with the work of Perez and colleagues (2009) on academic resilience among Latinos of undocumented status, where students with high levels of parental support, friends, and participation in school activities were found to have academic success. A significant portion of participants in the current study were academically successful, meriting college admission, academic accolades, and scholarships, and were able to benefit from supportive mentors.

Based on the analysis of interviews in this sample, the study also provided further nuance to understanding the benefits and risks associated with DACA as a policy. A central point of the findings revealed DACA, albeit beneficial because it grants access to legal employment and driving privileges that help with education, has severe limitations. A limitation of DACA is related to the employment opportunities granted to DACA recipients, as they are often inadequate to realistically cover the expenses of higher education. Students were often left temporarily stopping school or reducing their coursework due to the high cost of school and their lack of financial resources to pay for school. Another limitation with larger implications is DACA is not a sustainable resolution to immigration reform; one student went as far as to talk about DACA “creating a permanent underclass”. DACA appears to provide false hopes and establish a ceiling on these individuals who tend to be high achieving as evident by their progress through higher education. The students of undocumented status in this study were able to progress in college, and for some, navigate higher education through the use of bottom-up approaches to gather money for school. This finding embodies resilience in the face of a policy like DACA.

In their narratives, participants identified the role of natural mentors in promoting their education, which contributes to both the mentoring literature as well as the research among those of undocumented status. A unique contribution of the study is all students discussed the presence and role of natural mentors in their education, indicating that Latino students of undocumented status rely on this organic protective factors in their environment to navigate the challenges associated with their status. Mentors had a familiarity with their students' experiences as it relates to undocumented status. The majority of participants reported at least one mentor being familiar with issues related to undocumented status. Most mentors were college educated professionals; students likely attracted these supportive adults and gravitated towards adults who are also successful in navigating higher education. For some students, these mentors even provided financial support in the form of tuition assistance and employment.

Academic Rick Factors

The study examined the unique academic risk factors for Latino students of undocumented status. Although participants reported various environmental risk factors and challenges associated with being from urban, poor, immigrant Latino communities, such as exposure to violence near home and school, attending poorly funded schools (Abrego, 2006), being of low-income, and being first-generation college students (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015), for the purposes of the current study, only academic risk factors unique to being of undocumented status were examined.

Participants provided insight into the academic risk factors they experienced in their lives, including their immigrant status affecting their education, the financial demand for school, and the limitations associated with DACA. Within the category of immigrant status, 80% of

participants discussed learning about the limitations associated with understanding the implications of their undocumented status on their education. These findings relate to a study with 150 Mexican-origin students of undocumented status, where Gonzalez (2011) found that a majority of participants reported being unprepared for the limitations in discovering their undocumented status. Another related subtheme from the current study was awareness of status since arrival, where 30% of participants reported being aware of status since arrival to the United States. These findings are consistent with the aforementioned study that demonstrated nearly 20% of participants knew about their status as children (Gonzales, 2011). It may be that Latinos of undocumented status may be discouraged by learning about the implication of their status at a younger age, as students could realize that they are deprived of the same opportunities for higher education when compared to their peers. This was similar to findings in Abrego's study (2006) among Latino adolescents of undocumented status where students lowered their aspirations and reported decline in academic performance upon learning about their status. Another theme that emerged within immigrant status category was limited college choice: 55% of participants reported ways in which they felt their status limited college choices available to them. This theme is similar to studies that found college students of undocumented status are more likely to attend colleges that are closer to home and that are more affordable, such as community colleges (Flores, 2010; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Perez, 2010).

Additional themes related to immigration status emerged from the qualitative data. A subset of participants (65%) reported experiences about disclosing their status to others. Of note over half (seven) of those participants were reluctant to disclose while nearly half (six) disclosed their status boldly in public or through an act of civil disobedience. Participants were reluctant to disclose status due to worries that people around them would not understand or that others would

respond negatively. Those who boldly disclosed their status were purposeful in disclosure and reported feeling empowered soon after; participants still felt at risk by disclosing to strangers and putting themselves at risk for arrest through civil disobedience. Worries and fears about disclosure of status are consistent with a qualitative study of nine college students of undocumented status where participants reported fear and anxiety about "coming out" to individuals within their academic institutions (Stebleton & Alexio, 2015). This captures the process students of undocumented status undergo when deciding to disclose and shows the variation of experiences in which some students reluctantly disclose, and others do not disclose to school agents at all. The disclosure in the current study differs slightly from Steblton and Alexio (2015) in that nearly half of the participants felt embolden by their public disclosure to multiple people, both known and unknown. It is possible that students who boldly disclosed their status felt compelled to do so by the social responsibility they felt to others of undocumented status. Bold disclosure of status could be facilitated through involvement in community agencies and organizations that promote service and social justice. Additionally, knowing that others of undocumented status were among them fostered a collective sense that may help students feel as if they are not alone in their experiences as immigrants of undocumented status.

A subset of participants (35%) reported being offered academic opportunities, such as offers to schools and scholarships, only to have them rescinded upon institutions learning about their status. These individuals also described being dejected after having these previously offered educational opportunity's revoked. Similarly, in a study of 909 college students of undocumented status, Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2015) found that students reported being treated unfairly or negatively due to their status by individuals representing institutions. The current study further details specific ways in which students of undocumented status are

provided with hope and opportunity only to be rejected by institutions solely due to their status. Another study found a similar sense of rejection due to undocumented status was considered an academic risk factor among 104 Latino high school and college students of undocumented status (Perez et al., 2009).

Some participants (*n*=13) directly and indirectly were asked about their status by school officials when inquiries' about their social security numbers were made, much to their distress. Participants reported that their social security number was requested for academic participation and advancement. These results are similar to Perez et al.'s (2009) findings that students of undocumented status were excluded and detained from advancing their education because they lacked social security numbers.

The second category emerging from the data was DACA carried limitations for education. It is important to note that DACA was considered a positive step in the right direction and it afforded benefits that did not previously exist for eligible immigrants of undocumented status. However, it brought with it severe limitations. While the majority of participants (90%) applied for DACA, six participants reported limitations and challenges with DACA. These participants reported the following limitations: job competition, working entry level jobs, permanent second class citizenship. The limitations of DACA are consistent with Suarez-Orozco et al.'s (2015) study in which respondents also reported limitations with DACA, including lack of clarity about college enrollment and in-state tuition policies, uncertainty about the future of DACA and immigration reform, and worries about being detained or deported. One similarity in limitations associated with DACA between the current study and the aforementioned study is the concern about the provisional nature of DACA, which leaves recipients of this executive action wondering about the next steps. The current study also raised an additional point that the

uncertainty of DACA and immigration reform may perpetuate a long-term second class citizenship status. Additionally, though DACA provides permission to obtain legal employment, the availability of jobs and compensation for those jobs likely do not suffice to help students finance their education. Thus, the current study adds a nuanced understanding of how DACA, though viewed as a benefit, can create unforeseen challenges in the immediate and potentially long-term future. It is possible that DACA may be offering false hope for higher education, especially for those of low socioeconomic backgrounds who would be less likely to have the means to pay for school through employment, familial support, and/or scholarship assistance.

The third category of academic risk factors identified in the study was financial demand for school. A theme in this category was balancing school and employment. A majority of participants (15) identified work experiences that coincided with their schooling at different times. Specifically, 75% of participants balanced employment and school simultaneously, be it high school or college. This is similar to the quantitative study by Perez and colleagues (2009), where they found that working more than 20 hours per week during high school was an academic risk factor. Further support for the findings of current study is demonstrated in a Suárez-Orozco et al (2015) study of 909 college-going immigrants of undocumented status, where 72% of participants worked while in college. The demand for working throughout high school and college in the current study further add to the research that balancing this demand can serve as an academic risk factor. This is further highlighted among those of low-income backgrounds, where Suarez-Orozco and colleagues found that 61% of college-going immigrants of undocumented status had a household income below $30,000 while 29% had a household income between $30,000 and $50,000.

Additionally, another theme in the category of financial demand or school was the need to save money for school expenses. Ten (50%) participants had to work jobs in order to save for school expenses and were determined to "pay out of pocket". Participants worked entry level jobs and were not paid enough to cover the high cost of college, leading to school disruptions or enrolling in a reduced course load. Participants' concern with funding tuition through work and encountering school disruptions are similarly demonstrated in a large quantitative study by Suarez et al. (2015) where they found 56% of college students of undocumented status were extremely concerned with financing their college education, with 75% who stopped-out of college due to financial reasons. Participants in the current study had to stop or slow-down college course-load due to financial reasons related to their status. Despite participants were motivated to work to pay for school, working likely served as a risk factor for education because the hours invested combined with the low wage, entry-level pay can set these students up for failure, especially if they are DACA approved.

Academic Protective Factors

Qualitative findings from the current study revealed various academic protective factors among Latinos of undocumented status. Participants revealed experiences that promoted their resilience in obtaining an education despite the risks associated with their status. Specifically, participants reported assets and resources. Assets in the current study included: social responsibility to others and hope and determination. Resources were academic awards, scholarships, benefits of DACA, and natural mentors. Personal and environmental protective factors among Latinos of undocumented status is consistent with previous studies with Latinos and immigrants of undocumented status (Cervantes, Minero, & Brito, 2015; Enriquez 2011; Perez et al., 2009).

Assets

Participants felt a social responsibility to contribute not only to their own individual educational and advancement, but to the collective good of their families, their community, and other groups such as immigrants and others of undocumented status. Specifically, 55% of participants reported a collective responsibility to others, be it to those of undocumented status or other underserved groups. This finding is consistent with a study of 54 high school Latino immigrants of undocumented status in which they provided support and resources for the good of the undocumented immigrant community instead of for their own gain (Enriquez, 2011). In her study, Enriquez (2011) suggested that immigrants of undocumented status "pay it forward" to stand in solidarity in the fight for social justice to collectively empower marginalized communities. Similarly, in a qualitative study with six Latino college students of undocumented status, participants embodied a social justice perspective to align themselves with the advancement of their communities (Cervantes, Minero, & Brito, 2015). The current study, along with the previous research, highlight the collective and social responsibility espoused by Latinos of undocumented status that lends itself well to contributing to the fabric of any community, country, or society. This carries implications for providing these collective-minded individuals with further opportunities to civically engage in the United States. A contributing factor to their social responsibility may be related to their status, as they may recognize that as a whole, this group is being deprived of opportunities to fully participate in economic, academic, and civic life.

Additionally, 55% of participants were involved in direct service to their community in some capacity. Reasons for service involvement varied from wanting to gain individual skills and leadership, help the community, and make themselves a better candidate for school and

scholarships as a result of being of undocumented status. Service involvement is considered an academic protective factor given these reasons for service involvement include individual development and community betterment, both of which are an integral part of academic success. This civic engagement among immigrants of undocumented status is consistent with previous research that shows civic engagement to be an academic protective factor for this segment of the population; in a study of Latino students of undocumented status, involvement in community service was one of the environmental factors that played a protective role among students across varying levels of psychosocial risk (Perez et al 2009). Additionally, another large quantitative study found 92% of 909 participants had civically engage in a social cause they cared about within the past month, and 48% of participants reported being involved several times weekly or even daily (Suarez-Orozco et al, 2015). Students in the current study felt compelled to become involved in service and extracurricular opportunities as a way build their skills for individual development and contribute to society since they are barred from other forms of civic engagement and societal representation, such as voting. Thus, it may be likely that high achieving students of undocumented status are more civically involved than their legal resident and citizen peers, as they may be feel the need to demonstrate their contributions.

The great majority of participants (85%) in the current study also engaged in extracurricular activities through school and/or community agencies. The study found extracurricular involvement came from wanting to build their resumes and to help others. This finding is consistent with Perez and colleagues' (2009) study that demonstrated that extracurricular involvement among high schoolers of undocumented status was part of combination of protective factors. Given that 40% of participants in the current study participated in both extracurricular activities and community service, the findings of the study

align with the emerging research on Latinos of undocumented status that recognize civic and extracurricular engagement as academic protective factors.

Qualitative results from the study further highlighted participants' familial responsibility while in school. Eight participants (40%) discussed an obligation to support their family while also balancing their school responsibilities, including providing financial support, and childcare responsibilities. These findings are consistent with previous research with demonstrating immigrants work to contribute to family income. In their mixed-methods study with college-going Latinos in California, Terriquez and Gurantz (2015) found students reported a financial obligation to their families and this was the most commonly reported reason for stopping out of college. Gonzales (2011) demonstrated similar findings among 150 young adult Latino immigrants of undocumented status; his study found that nearly all participants contributed to family financial between the ages of 18 ad 24. Given immigrants of undocumented status also tend to be from a low-income family, as found in a recent quantitative study by Suarez-Orozco et al. (2015) with over 90% of the 909 immigrant college students of undocumented status reported a family income of $50,000 or less, financial family obligations appear to be a necessity that these students must attend to in order to continue their schooling. While familial obligations can be associated with interfering with school obligations, the current study demonstrates that participants were proud of contributing to their family, and represents a strengths of these participants. This has implications for providing sustainable and more accessible financial aid and employment opportunities for these students to lessen their financial burden, as they are not solely concerned with their own educational advancement but also with the well-being of others. Taking their familial obligations, service and extracurricular involvement into account, this combined social responsibility to others can contribute to the wellbeing of others of

undocumented status, as a collectivistic approach is likely to foster a system of support among members of this community and, in the long-term, likely to initiate social change.

Ten participants in the study (50%) expressed hope and determination about their future education and career despite the uncertainty associated with being of undocumented status. This hope is consistent with two previous qualitative studies with college students of undocumented status (DeLeon, 2005; Perez Huber & Malagon, 2007) found that, participants remained hopeful about the future despite being uncertain about paying tuition for the upcoming semester or job prospects upon graduating college. The current study adds on the growing research that identifies this source of hope as a personal asset, or protective factor, in the education of Latinos of undocumented status. This sense of hope and determination may be contributing to these students continued engagement in higher education. It is also possible that these students' academic success, completing between 2 years of college to having obtained degrees, reinforces their belief that things will work out for them as a result of being educated. Unfortunately, any hope may overshadowed by the limitations of the current legislation that restricts these individuals from fully participating as members of society. It is also possible that the hope demonstrated may also wane over time, given that half of the participants did not express this sense of hope in their narratives.

Resources

Findings from the current study illustrate the benefits of DACA reported by nine participants (45%). They reported specific benefits afforded to them by DACA: access to legal employment, removing fear of deportation, and obtaining driving privileges. This is consistent with a quantitative study of DACA recipients that demonstrated the reported benefits of DACA

(Gonzales & Bautista-Chavez, 2014). In the aforementioned study, 2,381 respondents reported DACA helped a large number of them obtain a new job (59%), obtain a driver's license (57%), and increase job earnings (45%). The current study found indirect benefits of DACA on education to include obtaining employment in areas similar to their academic interests, higher paying jobs, and commuting to and from school without concern about being stopped by police without a driver's license. This is also consistent with the positive benefits of DACA reported in a quantitative study of college-going immigrants of undocumented status, whereby 85% reported DACA had a positive impact on their education (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Specifically, they found benefits for education among DACA recipients when compared to non-DACA recipients to include higher paying and relevant work-experience and internship opportunities and greater stability with transportation. The current study adds to the quantitative research by contributing qualitative support for the resources students of undocumented status receive from DACA. Students in the current study indicated they were able to obtain better employment opportunities as a result of DACA, and these opportunities usually meant moving from underpaying jobs to jobs that provided entry-level pay.

Qualitative findings from the current study indicate that scholarships and academic awards serve as protective factors in the education of Latinos of undocumented status. Many participants (65%) discussed obtaining scholarships for high school or college. This is consistent with a quantitative study that shows a large majority of college students of undocumented status receive scholarships (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Specifically, they found 79% of students attending four-year universities and 53% of students attending community colleges were likely to receive scholarships and grants for college; they also found that DACA recipients had higher rates of receiving scholarships and grants than their non-DACA counterparts. Given the current

study had a majority (90%) who were DACA recipients and 65% who were scholarship recipients, the findings demonstrate ways in which Latinos of undocumented status are accessing financial resources to fund their education. However, it is essential to emphasize that that immigrants of undocumented status are not eligible for any federal funding for school and their ability to obtain scholarships occurs within a context that limits their financial and educational mobility due to federal policy. Consistent with resiliency theory, these students are able to obtain funding for school despite being ineligible for financial aid. However, the funding available for these students combined with the rising cost of higher education make the amount needed to completely fund higher education insurmountable for most students of undocumented status, leaving them to make difficult choices about how to continue in school. This likely means that regardless of how resilient and academically successful these students may be, they are being set up for failure.

Seven (35%) participants received academic awards multiple times along their educational experiences. These academic awards provided external recognition from teachers and peers, and served a promotive role in their education, as participants reported positively about their academic abilities and accomplishments. This is consistent with findings from a quantitative study with Latino high school and college students of undocumented status reported receiving an average of two high school awards; students with higher numbers of protective factors and lower levels of risk factors reported receiving a higher number of academic awards (Perez et al., 2009). The current study identifies academic awards among participants as key moments during their education in which students received external feedback about their academic abilities.

Natural mentors as resources

All participants in the current identified natural mentors in their lives who helped them in multiple ways, as it relates to their education and beyond the academic context. This is the first study to examine natural mentors specifically in the lives of immigrants of undocumented status, but there has been previous research on the social support of students of undocumented status, which help to explain the findings in the current study. In a study of four Mexican college females of undocumented status, supportive relationships with faculty and staff on campus was a key environmental protective factor for school (Munoz, 2008). In another study with ten Mexican male college students of undocumented status, DeLeon (2005) found that relationships with school counselors and teachers on a college campus were important sources of information and guidance. Another study (Enriquez, 2011) of 54 Latino college students of undocumented status revealed that these students receive emotional and financial support from a combination of teachers, peers, and family. A qualitative study among young adult Latinos of undocumented status in Southern California provides evidence that building a network of caring adult mentors combined with high-achieving peers is one way these young people achieve academic success (Gonzales, 2011; 2012). Identifying a network of mentors may be a highly critical academic protective factor that students of undocumented status need to rely on in order to navigate the challenges of higher education related to their status. This is especially important since these students are left with less opportunities for a higher education compared to their peers.

Natural mentors provided support in multiple ways, including tangible resources, encouragement and advice, and school connections. Half of participants discussed natural mentors who provided them with tangible financial resources for tuition and provided employment opportunities. In his qualitative study with Latinos of undocumented status, Gonzales (2011) portrayed participants' experience in receiving financial support from extra-

familial adults, citing examples where caring adults paid for tuition, school fees, and provided money for books. The current study demonstrated ways natural mentors provide financial support for school, and further adds to the research by demonstrating that natural mentors also provide more sustainable forms of financial support through employment opportunities. Natural mentors were mostly aware of challenges of undocumented status and may have recognized the structural limitations these students faced, likely prompting them to contribute financially to their education. Mentor financial support in the current study is a contribution to the natural mentoring literature.

The qualitative findings provide detail about the role natural mentors have in providing encouragement and advice in the education of participants, with 50% receiving this form of support from natural mentors. Participants relied on encouragement from natural mentors to reengage back into school. Similarly, Gonzales (2011) found evidence consistent with the current study, by highlighting the difference between college-going immigrants of undocumented status compared to those who exit school earlier: he found that college-going immigrants of undocumented status utilize relationships with adults more so than those who exit school earlier and do so at critical times that assist them with decisions to remain in school. In the current study, the support provided by natural mentors is not dissimilar to that provided for the success of other student populations. However, the encouragement and advice from these mentors is further emphasized because it may help students of undocumented status navigate barriers and challenges that help them continue their education instead of stopping out of school. Six participants (30%) discussed how natural mentors helped them by facilitating school connections through high school and college, by referring them to certain individuals or institutions that would help them enter or get through college. This is consistent with the aforementioned lone

study identifying extra-familial mentors among students of undocumented status; Gonzales (2011) found these caring adults helped youth successfully transition into postsecondary institutions. The current study looked at the role natural mentoring relationships play in the lives of Latino students of undocumented status. Organic supports such as natural mentors are additionally important for the academic success of students of undocumented status given the structural educational barriers resulting from current immigration and education policy and the longstanding impasse on immigration reform. In the current study, the collective encouragement and advice received from natural mentors helped facilitate the hope that these students could succeed in the face of being barred from financial aid and equal opportunities (e.g. eligible for financial aid and scholarships) for a higher education. It may be possible that receiving encouragement from these mentors made students recognize they had allies who were working alongside with them at finding solutions to help them obtain a higher education. One commonality among the majority of natural mentors was their high educational attainment and/or professional position as well as their familiarity with issues related to undocumented status. Advice, encouragement, and tangible support from these important college educated individuals who were sensitive to issues related to undocumented status may have helped students believe that they could persist in school in the midst of structural barriers.

Limitations and Strengths

The recommendations and implications drawn from the current study must be tempered by the study limitations. These findings do not generalize or capture the experiences of all immigrants of undocumented status. First, most of the participants were academically successful in that they had advanced through sufficient schooling to at least enter college, and for some to have obtained college degrees. Thus, the findings are not reflective of students of undocumented

status who may drop out of high school or forgo college after high school graduation. Further, the study provides an overrepresentation of the DREAMer population and may portray too positively the experiences of immigrants of undocumented status. The DREAMers have been portrayed as immigrants of undocumented status that have been academically successful and appear as favorable and likeable, thus creating an inclination to provide legislative solutions solely to certain individual who merit legal status based on their ability to comply with and obtain arbitrary academic achievements. Therefore, it is imperative that legislation does not perpetuate a hierarchy that separates immigrant of undocumented status by some arbitrary measure of success. Thus, it is likely this study provides a narrow perspective that does not fully capture the difficulties of immigrants of undocumented status. Second, most participants were DACA recipients, and this is not representative of all immigrants of undocumented status, as not all are eligible for DACA. Even among immigrants who are eligible, not all apply for the executive action, as Suarez-Orozco et al. (2015) found differences between DACA recipients and non-DACA college students who are undocumented; specifically, DACA recipients had a higher propensity to work, had higher school aspirations, received more scholarships and grants, and were more engaged in their colleges. Third, the majority of participants in the present study emigrated from Mexico. Thus, the findings may not be reflective of immigrants of undocumented status who are from other countries in the United States. Fourth, participants were all childhood arrivals, and had a higher probability of coinciding with DACA eligibility; the findings may not pertain to those who arrived after age 16 or who are older than 30, which is the age requirement for DACA eligibility. Lastly, the study did not take into account any gender differences that may have emerged from the data and did not examine differences by gender.

Study design provided other limitations. First, it is a cross-sectional study, which does not comply with the recommended research practices outlined with immigrant populations (APA, 2012). However, this study served as a platform of research which will allow the researcher to build upon longitudinal research in the future. Secondly, participants included only Latino-origin immigrants, with the majority from Mexico and do not account for immigrants from non-Latin American countries. Lastly, the sample of participants was drawn from one particular geographic location in the United States (i.e. Chicago), limiting the generalizability of the study to a nationally representative sample. Similar to other studies with immigrants of undocumented status that were geographically limited to areas such as California (Gonzales, 2011) and Wyoming (Munoz, 2008), a strength may be that it provides specific insight to the undocumented immigrant population within Chicago. This is important given that each state has differing policies and private funding sources that make educational opportunities different for immigrants of undocumented status across the country.

A sample of 20 participants was included in the study, thus limiting the ability to generalize the findings to a larger group. However, the current study still yielded a higher number of participants than other qualitative studies with immigrants of undocumented status (Abrego, 2006; DeLeon, 2005; Munoz, 2008, Perez Huber & Malagon, 2007; Stebleton & Alexio, 2015). Additionally, the current study was cross-sectional and only captures the participants' narratives up until the time of when they were interviewed. It is reasonable to expect that participants' narratives about their educational experiences are still developing given their developmental age is typically associated with educational milestones of navigating higher education.

Another limitation of the study related to natural mentors, as all participants identified these important adults in their lives. Future studies should recruit a larger and more diverse sample size to determine if some students of undocumented status do not identify mentors so a comparison can be made between those with and without mentors. Additionally, the current study asked participants to report information about natural mentors instead of directly including mentors in the research. Future studies can integrate both mentors and students to provide a well-rounded account of the ways mentors provide support and benefits to students of undocumented status. Of note, all participants identified natural mentors while 95% of participants had completed high school and were college enrolled or completed college. Given the complexity of factors that promote the education of these participants, a directional relationship cannot be drawn from these findings. It is possible that participants in the study by nature of being willing participants represent a highly engaged and motivated segment of the undocumented population; this may be further supported by the majority who were also DACA-approved and eligible, which a study found DACA-approved college students of undocumented status were more likely to enroll in 4-year schools and obtain scholarships and grants (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Another limitation related to important adults is that the current study purposefully excluded the role of parents. The role of parents can be explored by future studies but was strategically avoided in this study so to place a sole emphasis on the role of non-parental adults.

Strengths of the study are found in the detail and richness of participant stories, as they provided accounts that include data beyond the scope of the research questions. Another strength is that it was not limited to college settings but instead used community settings to recruit participants, thus providing a diverse range of students from different college types and varying levels of educational attainment from 8th grade to Master's level. Another study strength is its

specific focus on immigration status, as many studies with immigrants generalize and do not distinguish status.

Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

Overall, the findings from the current study inform the existing research by supporting past findings and adding new contributions, specifically as it relates to natural mentors. The current study provides further detail to the risks and imitations of DACA. It also further outlines social responsibility as an academic protective factor. The academic protective factors align with the resiliency framework as the collective responsibility and hope and determination of immigrants of undocumented status are evident in the face of environmental risk factors unique to those of undocumented status. Resilience is evident in the sample, as they make individual advancements while also making contributions to those around them. Their resilient approach to combining their assets with environmental protective factors show their ability to be successful in the midst of structural barriers. This study provides contributes to resilience theory by demonstrating that Latino immigrant students of undocumented status are so determined to overcome barriers directly resulting from legislation, in addition to other environmental stressors associated with this and other populations. They take a bottom-up approach by gathering resources and navigating their world with their status. Despite how resourceful they can be, their bottom-up approach to combining environmental supports with their individual skills may likely be limited by current policy and longstanding impasse.

Recommendations for policy

DACA is an important and interesting executive action that has created opportunities for a segment of immigrants of undocumented status. It has provided many benefits, including

access to legal employment and better wages, deferment from deportation, access to driving privileges, and access to healthcare. However, the few benefits are overshadowed by the severe limitations DACA fails to provide. DACA alone has been viewed as a temporary step in the right direction towards comprehensive immigration reform. It is merely a temporary solution that is limited to approximately 4 million of the over 11 million immigrants of undocumented status. Its temporary nature has a two-year limit, with option to renew for two more years. This temporary status also makes it possible for one to fall in and out of DACA status should renewal be delayed or denied. Neither federal financial aid nor a pathway to citizenship are provided by DACA. Even the benefit of legal employment made available by DACA is limited in that it is not likely to provide employment sufficient to promote upward mobility or would suffice to supplement the rising cost of tuition, especially for those from low-income backgrounds. Policy at the federal and state level should consider that though DACA provides some benefits, it does not create a sustainable long-term solution and may possibly create a permanent second-class. Policy should rely on the emerging research on this population to inform decisions about whether to include immigrants of undocumented status among the social and economic contributions of the United States, or structurally limit them to an underclass group that is at risk for further marginalization. Specifically, DACA should also provide a pathway to citizenship given that individuals who receive DACA must be enrolled in school or have a high school diploma for eligibility and cannot have a significant criminal history. Taken together with the research that describes DACA recipients' contributions and resilience, demonstrates that this population merits legislation that will provide them with opportunities to fully participate in civic, economic, and academic life in the United States.

Relating to DACA, the current landscape regarding immigration reform is in a state of flux. The current legal case, *Texas v. United States*, put forth by Texas and 25 other states preliminarily blocked DAPA and extensions of DACA reached the Supreme Court and oral arguments were held on April, 18th, 2016. The Supreme Court with its current roster of eight Justices did not reach a consensus and the blockage of DAPA and extensions of DACA were upheld, thereby denying over four million immigrants of undocumented status to receive the same benefits of current DACA recipients. Overturning the blockage of DAPA would have extended the benefits of DACA to a larger number of immigrants of undocumented status, specifically to the family members of childhood arrivals and would have extended the current DACA renewal period to three years, up from the current two year deferment period. It is possible that unanticipated benefits, such as those that pertain to helping an entire family or household could have also come to bear. Despite the lack of progress on this particular piece of legislation, further comprehensive immigration reform is needed even had DAPA and DACA+ passed. The United States can model immigration policy on its past immigration policy that places emphasis on family values, given that the circumstances of one's birth currently grant birthright citizenship to anyone born in the country. It appears birthright citizenship is in place as way to maintain families intact, such that children born out of the country to an American citizen can be granted United States citizenship. Since keeping families together should be a priority and is rooted in American values, legislation for immigrants of undocumented status should also be patterned using the same principle. Additionally, immigration policy can also be economically-based and rely on models being used globally, such as in Canada where permanent legal status is granted and given priority to those providing a service, talent, or skill. However, family-based and economic-driven policy alone do not suffice to capture the entire value this immigrant

population brings to the United States and it is possible that future policy decisions should include these values along with others, such as multiculturalism and multilingualism, that accurately recognize the benefits immigrants provide to the United States.

Recommendations for schools, community agencies, and adult-serving professionals

Organically identified supportive adults play vital roles in the education of immigrants of undocumented status. Adults interfacing with students of undocumented status should be informed of the realities of the barriers that these students face, including being ineligible for financial aid and employment. Additionally, they should become informed about resources that are valuable to these students, including DACA, if eligible, employment opportunities and internships, scholarships specific to students of undocumented status, or scholarships that are open to other students that also include students of undocumented status. The important adults, specifically those in position of leadership and assistance (e.g. teachers, counselors, and school staff) should provide encouragement and serve as a source of hope for these youth; at the same time, they should be sure to provide realistic options and not promise unattainable options due to limitations of federal policy. Adults should recognize their own limitations and awareness of issues related to undocumented status and be willing to acknowledge those limitations while also seeking to learn and identify resources for immigrants of undocumented status. As for school and community programming, it may be vital to identify and incorporate natural mentors into structured academic programming. This can come through purposeful school- and community-based initiatives or events that openly support immigrant students and students of undocumented status. By providing safe spaces with trustworthy adults, students can choose to utilize those relationships and navigate their education as they learn about the implications of their status.

Future Directions

Research should include diverse and representative sample of immigrants of undocumented status. Specifically, efforts should be made to understand the academic and psychosocial experiences of students who do not pursue a higher education. Additionally, research can also expand by recruiting samples of immigrants of undocumented status who are not students, not DACA-eligible, and arrive here as adults to get a comprehensive understanding of the multiple ways this population navigates social and economic aspects of society living with this status. It is likely that "coming out of the shadows" may be easier for those who are civically engaged, pursuing a higher education, and protected by DACA, thereby making this an even harder-to-reach population.

Another suggestion for future research is related to the terminology used to describe this population. All previous studies on this population refer to them as "undocumented immigrants" or "unauthorized immigrants". I propose the use of "immigrants of undocumented status", as it emphasizes the ability to shift in status and highlights that status does not blame or place sole responsibility on them for their current status but instead recognizes the limitations and barriers created by the deadlocked immigration reform.

Taken together, the multitude of academic risk and protective factors drawn from the existing research and the narratives of the current study, it is evident participants maintain hope for their future and the future of other undocumented immigrants. Their stories are still being told and the future of those stories can be facilitated through providing systemic changes that would continue to propel them toward success and contributions to society. Their success and the

collective success of their surrounding communities will only strengthen their voice and further the contributions they already make to society.

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Appendix A

Are you or have you been an undocumented Latino student?

If so, you are invited to participate in a study *to better understand the educational experiences of undocumented Latino students, including who and what has helped you along in school as well as any challenges you have faced along the way.*

Is it safe and confidential? Yes. *If you decide to participate, your information will remain confidential and your name or identifying information will not be attached to your interview.*

What does it involve?

- *Participate in one interview that will last approximately 2 hours.*
- *Receive a $20 gift card to Target*

Why is this study being done?

I plan to use this information to develop a better understanding of the strengths and needs of Latino students of undocumented status.

Who is conducting the study? *Claudio Rivera, graduate student at DePaul University, is conducting the one-on-one interviews as part of his Ph.D. studies.*

You may be eligible if: *you are age 16 through 30 and have school experiences as an undocumented immigrant Latino student*

To participate: *review the permission form to determine if you want to participate and contact Claudio Rivera to determine eligibility.*

You will receive a $20 gift card to Target upon completing your interview.

Please contact ***Claudio Rivera*** at the information below:

Crivera3@depaul.edu

Appendix B. Interview Protocol

Age:

Gender:

Country of origin:

Age of Arrival:

Current School Status/highest level of education:

Current resident/citizenship status:

Interview Protocol: Narrative Interview (Phase 2)

At this moment, I would like to inform you that this conversation is being recorded for research purposes. Please let me know if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. I would also like to remind you not to use any identifying information such as names. Before we begin recording, do you have any questions? We will begin recording now.

Referring to the timeline, tell me about your educational experiences as an undocumented Latino immigrant, from your arrival to the United States until today.

Interview Protocol: Questioning Phase after the Narrative Interview (Phase 3)

Example Queries

Questions probing about migration and school transition upon arriving to US

(*indicates an event highlighted on the timeline)

1. At what age did you arrive to the United States?*

2. When did you first enroll in school in the United States?*
3. Were you enrolled in bilingual education classes or English-only classes?
    a. Or both? And when did you switch from one to the other?
4. Do you speak English?
    a. If so, when did you learn it and what was it like learning a new language?
    b. If not, what are some things that have prevented you from learning English?
5. Do you speak Spanish?
    a. If so, when did you learn it and what was it like learning a new language?
    b. If not, what are some things that have prevented you from learning Spanish?

Questions probing for risk and protective factors Probe further about particular risks (challenges, barriers, obstacles) or protective factors (support, help, assistance) that arose during the interview, both as assets and resources.

(*indicates an event highlighted on the timeline)

1. What challenges have you encountered in school?
    a. Have you had any transitions in your schooling where you were out of school for a period of time?
        i. If not, what helped you remain in school with little to no interruptions?
        ii. If so, what were some of the challenges that led to an interruption in your school experience?
2. Which of these challenges are a result of being undocumented?
    a. When did you first learn about your undocumented status?*
        i. How did you find out?
    b. What school challenges, if any, have you had due to your language ability?
    c. Have you worked while in school?
    d. Have you disclosed (shared) your undocumented status with anyone?*
        ii. If so, to whom and why them?
            1. Who did you not disclose your status to?
        iii. If not at all, what keeps you from disclosing your status?
    e. What led you to share your status?
        iv. Was it for educational-related purposes, such as seeking assistance or due to academic barriers?
    f. Have you applied for DACA? *
        v. If so, please describe the application process.
            1. What opportunities do you hope to receive by applying for DACA and disclosing your undocumented status?
            2. What are your fears/risks accompany applying and disclosing your undocumented status?
        vi. If you have not applied, what has prevented you from applying?
            1. Ineligible?

2. Other barriers?
3. Worries?

3. What are some of the positive school experiences you have had as an undocumented student?

4. What personal qualities, abilities, or individual characteristics have you relied on to help you be successful or academic barriers of being undocumented?

5. What has been a support for you in your education?
    a. What resources have been particularly helpful along your educational experiences, if any?
        i. If so, what are they?
        ii. If not, why do you think you were unable to find resources?
6. Hopes and fears for immigration reform:
    a. Hopes
    b. Fears

Supportive people

1. Referring to your timeline, which individuals have been supportive for you at different points along your education?
        i. Who are they (demographics)?
        ii. How were they supportive?
        iii. If you do not identify supportive individuals, why do you think it was difficult to find supportive people during your educational experiences?
    b. Are any of the supportive people:
        i. Adults?
            1. Think about any of these adults who are not your parents or someone who raised you nor a boyfriend or girlfriend. Are (were) any of these adults someone who you can count on to be there for you, who believes in you and cares about you deeply, who inspires you to do your best, and who has really influenced what you do and the choices you make?
                a. If so, who is this person (people)? Tell me about him/her.
                    i. How did you meet him/her? How do you know him/her?
                    ii. Age? Race/ethnicity? Educational level?
                    iii. Relationship duration? Frequency of contact?
                b. What makes this person (people) so special or important in your education?

c. How have these important adults supported you in your education? Provide examples or specify.
d. If you didn't have this important adult in your life, how do you think your educational experience would have been different?
e. In what other ways would you have liked for these important adults to support you?
f. If not, do undocumented students need important adults like this to support them with school?
g. What kind of support is needed from these important adults?

ii. Peers?
1. In what way have peers been supportive in your education?

c. Have supportive individuals or important adults helped you navigate the decisions and process of applying for initiatives such as DACA or a temporary drivers' license?
d. Do any of these supportive people know about your undocumented status?
i. If so, did you tell them? How did they respond?
ii. If not, how come? What are the benefits and/or risks to sharing your status with them?

Appendix C. Interview Timeline

Possible Probes for the Timeline

1. How old were you when you arrived?
2. When did you start school in the United States?
3. When did you graduate from grammar school, if at all? High school? College?
4. When did you leave, or complete school, at each level of schooling?
5. If eligible, when did you apply for the DACA?

Arrived to U.S. Present day