EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN SOUTHWEST MISSOURI SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN SOUTHWEST MISSOURI SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN SOUTHWEST MISSOURI SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Presented to
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By

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When you recognize the impact of causality on your life, it is difficult to sit down and type out a list of people who have helped make an achievement of this type possible. One thing leads to another, leads to another, and leads to another. All of sudden, you look up to find that thousands of micro-actions along with unintentionally impactful conversations and encouragements from unsuspecting people in your life have led you to the place where your current reality exists. All of that is just my way of saying thank-you to the countless "positive human agents" who have played a role in my life and my education. Teachers, coaches, bosses, mentors, and friends along the way—you all matter greatly to me and I probably think about you and your roles in my life more than you would ever imagine.

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who unwittingly led me down this path, your struggles have never left my mind, nor have they left my heart. Hearing participants of this study tell their deeply personal stories of defiant resilience and refusal to NOT find success, makes me hopeful that you, too, have found success in the United States despite the barriers that have been set out before you. *Dios le bendiga a todos.*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. The central research question was: What are the experiences of Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri? Much research has been conducted on undocumented students attending post-secondary schools, but more study was needed concerning experiences and barriers to undocumented student success at the secondary level. The need for study particularly holds true in rural areas outside the Southwest United States and major cities. This study attempted to add to the literature in both areas, focusing on the secondary schools in the geographical location of Southwest Missouri. Themes developed were that students believed an undocumented status did not hinder their academic achievements despite barriers present; activities as a creation of community; and the importance of the positive human agent on the lives of undocumented students in schools.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

More than 40,000,000 immigrants—more immigrants than in any other country on the planet—live within the borders of the United States. Of the 40,000,000, the United States is considered home to nearly 11 million immigrants who are undocumented and living beneath the surface of American life (Budiman, 2020; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2020). Nearly 5 million of the 11 million undocumented are children or young adults under the age of 30 (Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Shelton, 2018). In 2015, 1 of every 4 public school students in the United States came from an immigrant household; 750,000 were undocumented and attending U.S. public schools. Many persist through trials and tribulation towards the achievement of a high school diploma; nearly 100,000 undocumented students, high school seniors, graduate from American secondary schools every year (Camarota et al., 2017; Castrellón, 2021; Crawford et al., 2018; Zong & Batalova, 2019); 40% of the undocumented high school population will not reach the finish line (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Undocumented students have a constitutional right to a free and appropriate public education through high school (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). Undocumented youth often, though, come to realize their immigration status as adolescence settles in (Gonzales et al., 2018; Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Coming of age can be a complicated experience for any adolescent, but is particularly so for undocumented youth for whom the period is wrought with the discovery of shrinking access to rites of American adulthood. Laws prohibit meaningful employment and limit access to higher education. The pressures of poverty require youth to participate in family earnings by whatever means possible. With limited access to school or legal permission to work, undocumented youth are left with poor

options (Gonzales et al., 2018) all stemming from the one master status that supercedes all others: “illegal” (Castrellón, 2021; Enriquez, 2017a, 2017b; Gonzales & Burciaga, 2018).

This study considered the deferred dreams of undocumented youth who begin to navigate liminal legality—a no-man’s-land of immigration status—during high school years, a space in time where undocumented students are neither here, nor there, neither foreign, nor native-American born (Connery, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2019). It was conducted to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States, and to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives. In addition to barriers, research also focused on positive school practices that assisted students in persistence and resilience, all remembered by former students who lived through the discovery stage of liminal legality.

In Chapter One, the researcher introduced a theoretical framework from which the research operated while stating the problem and purpose of the study. Furthermore, the chapter addressed the research questions and the significance of the study. The researcher concluded the chapter by defining terms, limitations and delimitations, assumptions, and design controls of the study.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative narrative inquiry was grounded in Latinx critical theory (LatCrit). Qualitative researchers often use LatCrit and find it beneficial in studies of the Latinx population (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). LatCrit has evolved from other critical theories whose purpose is to impart emancipation, liberation, and transformation of

humans from current states of enslavement (Bohman et al., 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). In general, critical theories attempt to determine why negative outcomes are more consistently found within certain groups of people in certain times and certain localities, understanding that determining the root causes of negative outcomes can lead to eventual action and emancipation (Mussell, 2017; Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

At a seminar of critical theorists in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1995, conversations began to take shape surrounding the ways in which theory could specifically be used for the benefit of the Latinx community (Valdes, 2005). Since 1995, LatCrit has become a widely accepted framework for research (Guajardo et al., 2020) of ethnic studies, sociology, history, law, and education (Guajardo et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 1997). Generally, LatCrit allows for discourse on educational theory and practice as they relate to race and racism (Arreguín-Anderson et al., 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), while also recognizing racism exists inside other labels, such as immigration status, culture, and language (Guajardo et al., 2020; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Valdes, 1997). Through the LatCrit lens, emphasis is placed upon aspects of Latinx identity, culture, and social justice, all of which are relevant to the improvement of the education of Latinx students (Guajardo et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

A key component of LatCrit, critical theorists believe that few in the dominant culture are able to understand the realities experienced by people of color and that writers should use counterstories to challenge beliefs and narratives of the dominant status quo (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Counternarratives and counterstorytelling are essential pieces of LatCrit qualitative theoretical studies, particularly in terms of education as it relates to race, ethnicity, and marginalized

populations (Lundholt et al., 2018). Pankey (2018) stated that critical theories value the voices of the unheard, and through the use of counternarratives provide understanding to the dominant ideologies of the status quo. Latinx counterstories should be fostered by educators who are willing to challenge the structures and beliefs of the educational institution (Cooper Stein et al., 2018). Through employment of counternarratives and stories, researchers seek to listen to the voices of participants, demanding marginalized groups be heard as a way of challenging dominant thought (Diaz, 2018; Shelton, 2018).

Problem Statement

The problem studied was the experiences of undocumented immigrant students in secondary public schools. Undocumented students are one of the most vulnerable groups attending American public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Sibley and Brabeck (2017) claimed an undocumented immigration status has a negative impact on the educational environment of children. Nearly 40% of undocumented students nationwide never reach the threshold of graduation. Among the lowest of collegiate graduation rates, only 17% of Hispanic enrollees ever attain college degrees (Hussar et al., 2020; Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2020). Undocumented children are raised on American ideals of upward mobility, dreams of college, careers, scholarships, and certifications. But the better life they seek and believe in - even for students who perform well academically and accomplish the feats and rites of American school passage – may be hindered, deterred, or deferred due to an undocumented status in the United States (Gonzales et al., 2018; Passel & Cohn, 2009; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Immigrant parents bring their children to the United States for a myriad of reasons. They come for educational opportunities and safety, social reasons, and a better

quality of life (Chattopadhyay, 2019; Diaz, 2018). Legally allowed access to public schools (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982), young undocumented immigrant students enter public schools as early as Pre-Kindergarten and find themselves ingrown into society. In 2009, Passel and Cohn concluded that most immigrants have lived in the United States for 13 years or more and that more than 2.1 million of the undocumented population had been living in the U.S. since childhood and were attending or had attended public schools.

With nearly 100,000 undocumented students graduating high school every year, an increasing amount of recent research has been conducted on the experiences of undocumented students at the college level (Parkhouse et al., 2020). However, a need for further study and scholarship of undocumented student experiences, perspectives, and barriers exists (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Zong & Batalova, 2019). Sibley and Brabeck (2017) summarized the argument, stating that study of undocumented students is imperative for the implementation of effective interventions for academic growth and to reduce the achievement gap of the population. Chang et al. (2019) added, "Undocumented students are a distinct population to study because of the unique dynamics and paradoxes their stories present, especially in the field of education (p. 2)."

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. This study was accomplished through a review of literature and interviews with participants. Triangulation was achieved by use of

mechanically transcribed interviews, analyzation of voluntarily offered participant high school transcripts, interviews with school faculty who have experience working with the undocumented population, and supporting archival data. Participants were Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri.

Studying the history of immigration law, policy, and practice in the United States allowed for connection of contemporary undocumented students to the overall legal and historical aspects of immigration. This study documented the lived experiences of subjects who were undocumented while attending secondary schools in Missouri, with the intent to learn of the barriers undocumented students faced, as well as the practices which pushed them towards resiliency and persistence. Furthermore, the research expanded upon the lack of literature dedicated to the topic of undocumented youth and students in public high schools (Punti, 2018; Shelton, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Zong & Batalova, 2019), particularly in rural areas outside the Southwest United States and major cities (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Silva, 2019). Even when academic research is conducted, research typically focuses on the highest of achievers who carve a path to colleges and universities, rather than on average or below average students who do not excel academically (Punti, 2018).

Research Questions

This study was a qualitative narrative inquiry, focusing on adults who arrived in the United States as minors. Participants arrived undocumented, or, if arriving legally, overstayed a visa and became undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools. Research was focused on the following questions, all concerning the impact of

an undocumented status on secondary school experiences of participants. The central research question was:

What are the experiences of Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri?

Subquestions related to the topic were:

Subquestion 1: What were the lived experiences of undocumented students related to achievement while attending secondary schools (i.e., attendance, grades, graduation, etc.)?

Subquestion 2: What were the lived experiences of undocumented secondary students in terms of overall secondary school participation (i.e., was the participant able to participate in high school activities the way documented or citizen students were able to participate)?

Subquestion 3: What were the lived experiences of undocumented secondary students concerning postsecondary dreams and aspirations?

Subquestion 4: What were the perceived school practices that contributed to achievement (or lack thereof) of undocumented secondary students?

Significance of the Study

Parkhouse et al. (2020) reported an increasing amount of research conducted concerning the experiences of undocumented students at the college level. This study, however, focused on the high school level and intended to support and increase the amount of prior academic research and scholarship devoted to the study of undocumented youth in the United States who have attended secondary schools in Missouri. The telling of immigrant stories shines light into the oft-shadowed experiences of undocumented

students in secondary schools. The need for more research on undocumented high school student experiences, perspectives, and barriers exists (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Zong & Batalova, 2019) in order to better identify and understand the specific barriers and interventions that affect immigrant student experiences, achievement, and growth (Chang et al., 2019; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Recent literature explains how individual teachers can create climates within classrooms to support undocumented students. Impactful relationships built on trust, emotional supports, and consideration of nonverbal cues are all suggested (Dabach et al., 2018). Further studies on behalf of undocumented students have been conducted, revealing the barriers school counselors face within the school setting. Counselors report personal struggles to meet undocumented student needs due to the sheer volume of work required of school counselors, the lack of preparation concerning specific tasks related to undocumented students, and lack of participation on the part of students and parents (Rutter et al., 2020). In the Rutter (2020) study, counselors believed barriers caused the undocumented students in their buildings to see them as unhelpful – a feeling the students corroborated and agreed with, stating a belief that counselors "were never there for advisement" (p. 24).

As a matter of practicality, through this research, secondary school teachers, counselors, and principals in Missouri and other areas of the New Latinx Diaspora, may better understand life-situations, challenges, and barriers of the undocumented students in secondary schools. Raising awareness to student situations within the context of personal stories and the overall history of immigration in the United States allows teachers, counselors, and administrators to better assist in the persistence and resiliencies of

undocumented students who sit in schools every day, which ultimately serves the community and demographic of the study (Connery, 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020).

Definition of Terms

The following are common terms, defined for the purpose of clarifying and ensuring understanding of the study.

Counternarrative/Counterstorytelling. A narrative that gains meaning by positionality with another narrative with which it is typically in tension (Lundholt et al., 2018). Stemming from critical theories and following what Shapiro and Gross (2013) call the Ethic of Critique, counternarratives provide context and understanding to the status quo and are an increasingly important facet of educational research, in particular as related to race and ethnicity (Lundholt et al., 2018; Pankey, 2018). Positioned against the dominant narrative, counternarratives allow a voice to silenced or marginalized groups (Lundholt et al., 2018).

DACA. An acronym for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a program signed into being by President Barack Obama in 2012 that provides protection to qualifying undocumented youth. According to Immigration Equality, DACA is a policy that allows certain immigrants who arrived in the United States without authorization to legally work and/or attend institutions of higher learning without fear of deportation, provided they meet certain requirements (Ellis et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2018). Pertinent to this study, eligibility requires a) proof of arrival before turning 16 years old, b) uninterrupted residency in the United States since June 15, 2007, and c) enrollment in, or graduation from, high school or completion of a high school equivalency and lack of a criminal record. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals does not provide a path to

citizenship and is a temporary status (Hong, 2018; Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Patler et al., 2019).

Illegal immigrant. In this study, the term "illegal immigrant" is not used to define undocumented persons unless done in the context of a quotation. The term is intended to denote worth to "legal" immigrants, though some circles claim in terms of immigration law, illegal immigrant has no meaning (Hong, 2018).

Illegality. A state of being that is contrary or forbidden by law (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Illegality, however, is used not derogatorily, rather, in terms of a state of being according to immigration law of the United States. Jose Antonio Vargas (2018) stated that illegality is defined by the powerful. He pointed out that slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, and the genocide of indigenous peoples were all legal at the times of occurrence and accepted by the dominant culture in the United States.

Immigrant. Immigrant is defined as a nonnational who migrates to another country in order to settle (Gimeno-Feliu et al., 2019). This study used the terms immigrant and migrant interchangeably. Not all immigrant students are English Language Learners (ELL), but a significant overlap is noticeable. Students who are immigrants are or were often ELL (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020).

Latinx. Consistent with current trends in linguistics research (Garcini et al., 2017), Latinx is a gender-neutral term describing a person whose heritage is Latin America (Diaz, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2020). Though Latinx is varied in representation, many researchers consider the group as homogenous (Diaz, 2018). While only 3% of Hispanic adults use the term to describe themselves and 12% report disliking the term, Latinx is growing in use by the media, news corporations,

government institutions, and universities (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). The current study used the term as part of the literature review, but used "Hispanic" when speaking to or writing about individual participants.

Migrant. For purposes of the study, migrant was used interchangeably with immigrant, as the definition given by the United Nations encompasses both terms. A migrant is a person who is or has moved across international boundaries, away from an established residence. One is considered migrant regardless of legality of the move, whether the move is voluntary or involuntary, the cause of the move, or the length of stay in the new location (United Nations, n.d.).

New Latinx Diaspora. The shift of settlement of Hispanic immigrants from traditional areas in the Southwest United States and metropolitan areas to other, nontraditional areas (Gomez Soler & Fuentes, 2021).

Unauthorized/Undocumented. One who is in the United States without proper documentation, in violation of existing immigration laws (Diaz, 2018). Unauthorized or undocumented may refer to immigrants arriving without proper paperwork all together or overstaying a once legal visa. The unauthorized lack typical protections of society, leaving them at a higher risk for negative outcomes (Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). Though the research focused on immigrants from Latin America, the researcher understands that undocumented and unauthorized immigrants come from all regions of the world.

Undocumented immigration. The movement of peoples across international boundaries without proper documentation or official permission to do so (Garcini et al., 2017).

Limitations

The following are factors that may have influenced the outcome of the research but were not controllable by the researcher (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

1. Biases of the researcher and participants are possible in a qualitative narrative study and, therefore, may have limited the study.
2. In a qualitative narrative inquiry, results were limited to the experiences of participants.
3. The interview process may have limited the information that could be gathered.
4. The study was reliant on retrospective memories of participants. The events discussed occurred some years ago, often during times of high stress and confusion. Implicit was the potential for recall bias.
5. The study relied on openness and honesty of participants about a difficult, sensitive, and potentially legally incriminating topic.
6. The nature of the study limited the sample size of former students willing to talk about experiences. Chang et al. (2019) claimed establishing rapport with marginalized populations can be difficult.
7. The positionality of the researcher, carrying out the research through his own biases (Fusch et al., 2018) that were tied up in privileges of a career, and economic and personal security, was a limitation. The researcher also recognized his position as an educator who had worked with undocumented students and families for many years.
8. The quality of the interview was limited by the experience of the researcher as an interviewer.

Delimitations

The following were factors controllable by the researcher:

1. The researcher was the sole instrument for collection of data and the analysis of said data.
2. The study delimited to personal interviews of participants as the tool for collection of data.
3. The study delimited to secondary, noncharter, public schools in Southwest Missouri.
4. The study delimited to immigrants from Central America and Mexico.
5. The study delimited to current or former adult undocumented immigrants who attended secondary schools in Missouri.
6. The study delimited to adult participants who had already graduated high school, or had, at the least, had secondary school experience.
7. The study delimited interview questions – both the quantity and the quality – to the researcher.

Assumptions

1. Honesty and openness of participants was assumed as the study focused on undocumented immigration during adolescence—a difficult, sensitive, and potentially legally incriminating topic.
2. It was assumed that participants offered responses to the researcher's questions that directly related to their former positionality as an undocumented student.

3. It was assumed the narratives of undocumented students created a tapestry that was generalizable to undocumented secondary students at large and that the lessons learned from the research are applicable to teachers and administrators.

Design Controls

The researcher chose a qualitative narrative inquiry study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mills & Gay, 2019) to examine, understand, and document the educational experiences of undocumented secondary school students in Missouri. As qualitative studies intend to uncover and report on the meanings and experiences of people who have intimate knowledge and understanding of a topic (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018), this study focused on perceived barriers to educational achievement and the resiliencies of the aforementioned population. Narrative inquiries consider storytelling a powerful means from which to generate and gather data while allowing people to create meaning from personal experience (Mueller, 2019). The researcher was able to analyze the narratives of participants, which can provide administrators and teachers with valuable insight into the experiences of undocumented students in schools, the practices that create barriers, and the strategies that help students overcome.

According to Mueller (2019), narrative inquiries include a small number of participants, therefore, six participants were interviewed in a face-to-face setting. For collection of data, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews, followed by open-ended questioning and response. A transcription service, Otter.ai, was used for recording and analyzation of the interviews. Using an outside service assisted in the accuracy of the transcription and data, while helping to prevent unintentional bias of the researcher.

The topic of undocumented immigration was sensitive, containing potential legal implications for participants and families, therefore, trust in the researcher was imperative. Names, personal information, schools, and other physical locations and/or identifying factors were altered, anonymous, and untraceable. The researcher assured participants the interviews and data collection would be completely confidential and anonymous. Guaranteed anonymity was a control employed to encourage honest responses of the participants.

Limitations of the study included biases of the researcher as a former teacher of immigrant students, and participants not answering truthfully or misremembering experiences. Another limitation was the nature of the study, which limited the sample size of participants who spoke of personal experiences. To account for potential biases and reduce the possibilities, the researcher employed the use of Otter.ai, a paid transcription service, for assistance in coding and analyzation of data. Furthermore, the researcher journaled before interviews were conducted to reveal areas that would require intentional avoidance of potential biases.

As a delimitation, the researcher was the sole coder and analyzer of data. The data were delimited to personal interviews, available and voluntarily offered participant high school transcripts, interviews with high school faculty members, and supporting archival data. Other delimitations of the research included researcher field notes, the number of participants, all of whom were Hispanic immigrants who attended public, noncharter secondary schools in Southwest Missouri. Much research has been conducted concerning states with the largest immigrant populations, however, far less study has been conducted in states with smaller immigrant populations (Craven et al., 2017; Silva, 2019).

Participants were undocumented at the time of attendance in school and had emigrated from Mexico or Central America at some point in their lives.

The researcher utilized personal connections to set up initial interviews. Lewin (1947) discussed "gatekeepers" as persons who have preexisting relationships with participants and with whom trust already exists as an important piece of reliable human research. In some cases, the researcher was the gatekeeper due to longstanding relationships (Mueller, 2019); in other cases, someone else filled the role. After personal, purposive connections were used, word-of-mouth and snowball sampling were employed. Snowball sampling allowed the researcher to utilize initial participants to recommend new contacts and participants for the study (C. Parker et al., 2019). The study required assumption of honest memories, recollections, and feelings of participants in response to research questions.

In further effort to control limitations and delimitations, the researcher set boundaries to account for potential weaknesses. Content analysis was conducted by the coding of interview transcripts in order to identify themes and categories brought forth through the interview process. Content and thematic analysis were used to look further into the patterns of information offered by participants. Additionally, triangulation was employed by cross-checking themes developed through mechanically transcribed interviews with voluntarily offered participant high school transcripts, interviews with school faculty who have experience working with the undocumented population, and supporting archival data. The accomplishing of triangulation through multiple points allowed greater achievement of reliability and validity.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to understand the realities of undocumented students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to research educational barriers to achievement of undocumented students in public schools; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. This research sought to fill a gap in literature dedicated to the topic of undocumented students in public high schools (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Zong & Batalova, 2019), particularly in rural areas outside the Southwest United States and major cities – the New Latinx Diaspora (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Silva, 2019). Using a narrative inquiry approach, the researcher documented the lived experiences of subjects who were undocumented while attending secondary schools, with the intent to learn of the barriers undocumented students faced, as well as the practices that pushed them towards resiliency and persistence.

The research was grounded in LatCrit, which allowed for the study of specific societal issues through the lens of history and required usage of counternarratives in order to better understand understudied, oft-maligned populations. This study may assist secondary school administrators and teachers in empathizing with and improving decision-making insofar as the undocumented students who daily sit under their tutelage are concerned.

Chapter Two of the research contains current literature surrounding the issues of unauthorized immigration to the United States as pertaining to undocumented youth in secondary schools. The literature review is organized thematically, beginning with an

historical perspective of immigration in American law, policy, and practice. The historical perspective will be followed by barriers to success for undocumented youth, and finally, student resilience, overcoming, and school practices that lead to persistence. Chapter Three contains the methodology upon which the study was guided. In Chapter Four, the researcher will present the testimonies, counterstories and narratives of the undocumented students themselves, describing the effects and outcomes of being undocumented in secondary schools. Chapter Five concludes the study with a summary of the findings, offering conclusionary statements, which will include implications for educators and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants live in the shadows of the law of the United States of America (Budiman, 2020; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2020). Of the 11 million, nearly 5 million are children or young adults under the age of 30 (Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Shelton, 2018). In 2015, 1 of every 4 public school students in the United States came from an immigrant household and roughly 750,000 were undocumented. Though nearly 100,000 undocumented high school students achieve a high school diploma every year (Camarota et al., 2017; Castrellón, 2021; Crawford et al., 2018; Zong & Batalova, 2019), 40% of undocumented high school students will not reach the finish line (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Undocumented students have a constitutional right to a free and appropriate public education through high school (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982), but undocumented youth often realize their immigration status as adolescents (Gonzales et al., 2018; Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Coming of age is particularly difficult for undocumented who begin to discover access to the American adulthood of their peers is limited. Laws likely prohibit meaningful employment and limit access to higher education. With shrunken access to school and no legal permission to work, undocumented youth are left with few options (Gonzales et al., 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to better understand the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to

document the practices of educational institutions that lead to resiliency and achievement. As a framework of study, the researcher utilized LatCrit, which requires consideration the role of history, historical politics, policies, and laws on lives of underrepresented populations (Castrellón, 2021; Diaz, 2018). The historical review reveals race as a common determinant of immigration policies and laws, as well as a malleable construct of the dominant society, able to be morphed and adjusted to best meet the needs of the dominant caste's current reality. In the second section of Chapter Two, the researcher discusses the barriers undocumented students face in American high schools. Latinx critical theory encourages the study of both intentional and unintentional inequities that increase the achievement gap in education between White students and students of color in order to find ways to assist underserved Latinx populations (Diaz, 2018; Hernández, 2016; Martinez et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2017). Finally, resiliencies of undocumented students are explored. Using LatCrit as the framework for research, educators are implored to consider oppressive practices, analyze them, and work away from a deficiency model towards change of said oppressive practices (Diaz, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative researchers often use critical theories and find them beneficial in studies of the Latinx population (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). This qualitative narrative inquiry was grounded in the theories and frameworks of the Critical theory traditions, in which the purpose of study is emancipation, liberation, and transformation of humans from current states of enslavement (Bohman et al., 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). Critical theories explain society within the context of a changing historical landscape and bring to

bear insights and possibilities for liberation from other social sciences (Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). The original Critical theory, born primarily of the works of Frankfurt School theoreticians Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and Max Horkheimer, allows researchers to consider social inequality, upward mobility, and policies within a complete context of history and culture (Bronner, 2011; Pankey, 2018). While concerned with the context of history, critical theorists are less interested in "the" history than with the way things could be or should be in an ideal world (Bronner, 2011). An interdisciplinary approach becomes appropriate when utilizing critical theories because understanding different identities and experiences depends on worldviews, historical contexts, and perspectives of the subjects (Cain & Smith, 2020). In basic summary, critical theories attempt to determine why negative outcomes are more consistently found within certain groups of people in certain times and certain localities, understanding that determining the root causes of negative outcomes can lead to eventual action and emancipation (Mussell, 2017).

In the 1970s, critical theorists and scholars began to contemplate the gains, or lack thereof, of the Civil Rights Movement for people of color. Theorists noted that many of the initial advances of the 1950s and 1960s had stalled, while others had even reversed course. Drawing upon the ideas of European philosophers of the Frankfurt School, while melding the traditions of American reformers such as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglas, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a new theory of civil rights emerged from which legal studies of race and civil rights in the United States could be viewed. Led by Harvard Law School Professor and lawyer of the Civil Rights Era Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman of the State University of New York Law

School in Buffalo, and spurred by the slow pace of civil rights reform, Critical race theory (CRT) developed as a new strategy for studying the more quiet and nuanced forms of racism legal scholars believed were impeding the Civil Rights Movement from further progression (Bell, 1993; Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Critical race theory was created as a tool from which the relationship of race and power can be studied and seeks to validate voices of color by focusing on lived experiences and knowledge of marginalized populations (Lee, 2018). Critical race theory is closely related to studies of civil rights but also seeks broadening of perspectives, allowing for consideration and inclusion of economics, history, self-interest, group interest, emotions, and the subconscious mind (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Held within CRT is the tenet of intersectionality—the idea that race is only one of many potential demographics one can claim. Intersectionality made the further splintering of critical theories inevitable, and at a legal seminar in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1995, conversations shifted to the ways in which CRT could be used specifically with the Latinx community (Valdes, 2005). Allowance for intersectionality created conditions for the growth of a new critical theory—Latinx critical theory (LatCrit). Over the last 2 decades, LatCrit has become a widely accepted framework (Guajardo et al., 2020) from which to view ethnic studies, sociology, history, law, and education of the Latinx community (Guajardo et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 1997).

Latinx critical theory allows for discourse on educational theory and practice as they relate to race and racism generally (Arreguín-Anderson et al., 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). More specifically LatCrit addresses the study of Latinx students by affirming racism exists outside the Black/White binary and can be based on other labels

of intersectionality, such as immigration status, culture, and language (Guajardo et al., 2020; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Valdes, 1997). Latinx critical theory draws upon multiple areas of study and scholarship with the intent of improving the educational experiences of students of color (Guajardo et al., 2020). Through the LatCrit lens, emphasis is placed upon aspects of Latinx identity, culture, and social justice, all of which are relevant to the improvement of the education of Latinx students (Guajardo et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

According to Guajardo et al. (2020) LatCrit has four basic pillars of evaluation (Valdes, 1997). The first is to understand the Latinx experience through history and the historical impact of immigration on current realities of the community. The second requires application of knowledge and understanding of the Latinx experience, which can incite positive change for marginalized or oppressed groups. The third pillar recognizes the nonhomogenous interconnectedness of the Latinx demographic. Finally, Pillar 4 suggests direct cooperation with the Latinx community to bring about elimination of oppression (Guajardo et al., 2020).

Like CRT, counternarratives and counterstorytelling are essential parts of LatCrit theoretical studies. Latinx counterstories should be fostered by educators who are willing to challenge the structures and beliefs of the educational institution (Cooper Stein et al., 2018). Shelton (2018) stated that counternarratives allow participants to center themselves in the Latinx experience—overall lives, society, language, and culture. Shelton continued, claiming Latinx stories reflect individual experiences, specifically related to race, gender, class, language, and immigration status. Latinx critical theory, therefore, places focus on the experiential knowledge of participants, always seeking to

listen to the voices of persons of color, demanding voice be given to the unheard and marginalized groups through narratives as a way of challenging dominant thought (Diaz, 2018; Shelton, 2018).

Of direct lineage of the original critical theorists who explained society by considering and viewing ever changing historical landscapes (Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Horkheimer, 1972), using LatCrit as the framework for this research required the understanding of history and the role historical politics have played in the lives of undocumented students who sit in American classrooms every day (Castrellón, 2021; Crossman, 2019; Guajardo et al., 2020). In Chapter Two by expounding upon historical documents, laws, and other evidence, the researcher discussed the ordinary occurrence of race as a determinant in immigration politics of the United States since the nation's beginning (Crawford & Hairston, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). The lens of LatCrit allowed for study of undocumented students in the context of a larger story about fear, otherness, rules of belonging, and social bonds (Diaz, 2018; Hernández, 2016). Furthermore, as stated by Hernández (2016), using critical theories as frameworks of study illuminates explanations of educational disparities, uncovering "how inequities of access, power, and resources in the educational system perpetuate the achievement gap" (p. 170).

A cornerstone of LatCrit and the backbone of this study, the use of counternarratives and counterstorytelling was employed in order to offer voice to a marginalized population. Counternarratives are an important strategy for qualitative researchers to make use of, particularly in terms of education as it relates to race, ethnicity, and marginalized populations (Lundholt et al., 2018). Pankey (2018) stated that

the critical theories value the voices of the unheard, and through the use of counternarratives provide understanding to the dominant ideologies of the status quo. Critical theorists believe that few in the dominant culture are able to understand the realities experienced by people of color (what W.E.B Du Bois called "double-consciousness"), and that writers should use counterstories to challenge beliefs and narratives of the dominant status quo (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The hope of this work is that well-told stories about the lived realities of undocumented students in American public schools will increase understanding and empathy between different demographics of people, thereby realizing the four pillars of LatCrit thought.

The utilization of qualitative narratives as a form of research has brought criticisms and attacks, with detractors arguing that narratives are an unreliable way to substantiate arguments (Gordon, 1999). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) pointed out that criticisms have come from all sides of the political spectrum – Conservatives like Richard Posner simply disagree with the premises of the critical theories; leftist scholars such as Mark Tushnet believe that narratives are ineffective and lack any true scientific merit; liberals Daniel Farber and Suzanna Sherry dissent, believing that researchers use narratives as a way to advance personal points of view—particularly points of view lacking in truth and honest merit (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; L. Parker, 2019). Farber and Sherry stated that unverified stories should not take the place of provable facts, which are based on evidence and records (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; L. Parker, 2019).

Countering the argument, critical theorists and adherents of narrative inquiries, counternarratives, and counterstorytelling believe that showing disinterest in, or the

silencing of, the stories of the voiceless neuters the ability of society to combat and convict issues that seem to negatively and perennially affect underclasses of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Lee, 2018; Macombe, 2017; L. Parker, 2019). Furthermore, theorists argue that counternarratives are not intended as an exhaustive account of any particular issue, rather the shared experiences of the subject that are often ignored or silenced by the majority (Lundholt et al., 2018). To summarize the arguments of the critical theorists and champions of narrative inquiries pertaining to the current research, listening to and accepting the stories of underserved, underrecognized populations (undocumented students) as worthy of telling and of study not only allows, but also implores societal institutions (educational institutions) to make positive change concerning said population (Diaz, 2018; Shelton, 2018; Silva, 2019).

Qualitative studies are by nature open to subjectivity and biases of the researcher. Using critical theories as a framework for a qualitative study does not negate the fact, nor inherently reduce bias. To account for potential biases, the researcher recognized the potential for subjectivity and acknowledged his own positionality, which is connected and limited to privileges of a career and economic and personal security, as a limitation of the study. The researcher also recognized his position as an educator who has worked with undocumented students and families for 2 decades.

Immigration in the United States: An Historical Context

Critical theorists consider problems or issues through an historical lens (Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Horkheimer, 1972), which creates the ability for analyzation of institutional agencies within the context of history, power, privilege, race, and legality (Castrellón, 2021). Latinx critical theory, in particular, requires researchers to consider

the impact of history, politics, national policies, and laws on the lives of underrepresented populations (Castrellón, 2021; Diaz, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020). The Chapter Two historical review reveals the ordinariness of race as a determinant of policies and laws pertaining to immigration in the United States over time (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and shows race as a fluid construct of society, altered on occasion in order to best fit the needs of the dominant group (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Diaz, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Immigration policies are consequential in determining the trajectories of young immigrants' lives, how they come of age, and overall experiences (Gonzales et al., 2018; Yoshikawa et al., 2017). Understanding the context of a population, especially in terms of the population's histories and politics, is essential for qualitative conversations concerning the studied community (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). Race, nation, and nationality are not biological realities, rather, they are a construct whose definitions should be examined and realized through the context of psychology and history, both of which are often void as part of the overall immigration debate (Burns & Vaughn, 2021; McCorkle, 2018; Ngai, 1999). Illegality, according to Gonzales et al. (2018), is produced by society and legitimized through history. In the context of education, Parkhouse et al. (2020) claimed the training of school personnel concerning the history of undocumented immigration is necessary. In doing so, educators can better understand students and make them feel they belong.

Immigration follows a created construct of race and nation, based on human political boundaries, rarely foreseeing long-term effects of arbitrary lines created by the

powerful (Burns & Vaughn, 2021; McCorkle, 2018; Ngai, 1999). From its dawn, the United States has described itself as a nation of immigrants and a beacon for the world's poor, huddled masses, beckoning they come—for work, for freedom, and for better lives for themselves, families, and futures—to participate in the cultural melting pot (Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). The tale is scribbled into United States' founding folklore and into the collective memories of times long past. However clean and benevolent the narrative is, according to Rucker et al. (2019), a review of United States immigration laws and policies revealed something far more complicated than simply leaving one's home culture and integrating into the melting pot of the new land.

The complexities are especially true pertaining to the undocumented students of this study—who they were, who they have been, and who they currently are in the context of the United States and the nation's overall history (McCorkle, 2018; Rucker et al., 2019). Migrant scholars find that over time, restrictive and punitive immigration policies have created different castes of immigrants, with illegal and deportable immigrants occupying the lowest of ranks (Ellis et al., 2019). In summary, Ramirez (2018) stated that immigrants of color banned from becoming citizens are prized and recruited for labor purposes but denied political representation, power, and civil rights. The following is a review of literature on the history of immigration policies and laws of the United States of America. The review of literature highlighted ways in which legislative actions of the past foreshadowed more present-day attitudes, policies, and laws that are grounded in fear, race, and/or concerns of labor.

A General Foundation: 1776 – 1800s

The United States, officially a new nation in the year 1776, began attempting to define and control immigration—to determine who belongs and who does not—within the first 2 decades of existence with the passage of the Naturalization Act (1790). The Naturalization Act (1790) forever set the tone on issues of race and nationality, belonging and otherness, by defining original rules for citizenship to the United States. The original rules allowed free White persons of good morality and character to claim ownership in the national story. Aside from the qualifications of being free, White, and of good character, applicants only needed to have lived in the United States for 2 years (Naturalization Act, 1790). Noticeably absent in the description of potential eligible citizens were Indigenous peoples, indentured servants, and any person of color, in particular, slaves (Meyers, 2020; Ramirez, 2018).

Eight years after defining who could be an American citizen and who would be omitted, fear and deportation were written into the national vocabulary through a series of laws coined the Alien and Sedition Acts (Ngai, 1999; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). The collection of laws, for the first time, allowed the federal government to forcibly remove anyone deemed dangerous to the national peace. Any citizen of a foreign country living within the boundaries of the United States whose native country was at war with the United States was deemed a threat (Ngai, 1999; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020).

Despite the exclusive language of early immigration laws written for purposes of citizenship, the United States practiced de facto open immigration in the early years of existence, rarely disallowing European emigrant entrance into the country. Exceptions to the practice of open immigration were peoples of color, and the visibly ill or one

suspected of illegal activity (McCorkle, 2018). By the early 1900s, less than 1% of seekers from Europe were denied entry (McCorkle, 2018). Immigration along the Mexican border was largely ignored and unregulated (McCorkle, 2018; Silva, 2019; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013), and Mexicans were racialized as White by the law (Ramirez, 2018).

In the late 1800s, 100 years after granting citizenship rights to free, White Anglo-Saxons of good character (Naturalization Act, 1790), the first major national policies were enacted that specifically and prohibitively targeted immigrants from certain countries or regions of the world. Efforts of the United States government to restrict immigration began in 1875 with the Page Act (Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). This law banned entrance to the United States for "undesirable" immigrants—mostly from Asia—as fears of negative impacts on employment opportunities for Americans were the fear of the day (Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020, p. 390). Seven years later, the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) was signed into law. American legislators, continuing to fear loss of jobs due to cheaper immigrant labor from Asia, passed the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) banned American companies from using Chinese labor and prevented legal naturalization of Chinese immigrants into the ranks of American citizens (McCorkle, 2018; Ramirez, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). Sulkowski and Wolf (2020) claimed that historians credit the passing of the law as the official starting point for illegal immigration, also noting the law's blatant racism and xenophobia.

The Mexican-American War and Immigration Quotas

Three decades after winning independence from Spain—militarily, politically, and economically vulnerable—Mexico was drawn into war again, this time with the

northern neighbor, the United States. According to Ngai (1999), the war ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and the Gadsden Purchase Treaty (1853), both of which had drastic impacts on immigration and the perception of what it means to be an immigrant in the United States (National Archives, 2022; Ngai, 1999; Yale Law School, 2008). Together, the war, the treaty, and the purchase led to the annexation of nearly half of all Mexican lands, an act whose consequences, according to Tienda and Sanchez (2013), cannot be overstated. Neither the treaty nor the purchase respected the already existent social ties of Mexican nationals who instantaneously found themselves living within the borders of the United States (Ngai, 1999; Ramirez, 2018). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and the Gadsden Purchase Treaty (1853) drew political boundaries for the exclusion of Mexican nationals; however, social and familial ties did not cease to exist post-1854. Beyond social and familial ties, economic partnerships were strengthened as Mexicans were recruited to work as cheap laborers to fill in for shortages, particularly in agriculture (McCorkle, 2018; Ramirez, 2018). A new border existed between the United States and Mexico, but in what became a recurring theme, the border was largely left open, de facto unrestricted immigration was allowed, and regulations went mostly unenforced (McCorkle, 2018; Silva, 2019; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). In order to deal with the contradiction of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), the United States racialized Mexicans living within the new borders as White and granted them American citizenship. However, as the economy of the United States came crashing into the Depression and Americans became more worried about unemployment and wages, the granting of legal Whiteness and the privileges of granted citizenship that came

with it were revoked and stripped away even though immigration back and forth from Mexico to and from the United States continued to be ignored (Ramirez, 2018).

As the 1920s arrived, immigration policies grew more restrictive, as well as more race- and nationality-based. Laws began to prohibit from entry anyone with a disability, known or perceived anarchists, beggars, and anyone who lacked English proficiency (Immigration Act, 1924). The Immigration Act of 1924 saw the dawn of enforced immigration quotas, initially targeted at lowering the number of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and other non-wealthy countries, all while continuing to effectively ban immigration from Asia (McCorkle, 2018; Ramirez, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). Ngai (1999) claimed the 1924 Act was based on race and a nativism that favored immigrants from northern and western Europe over the "undesirable races of eastern and southern Europe" (p. 69).

Agricultural interests in the southwestern United States and business interests throughout Latin America, however, kept immigration restrictions from being enforced as they pertained to Latin Americans (McCorkle, 2018; Ngai, 1999). The impact of agricultural needs on Latin American immigration studies is significant for two major reasons. The first is that Latin Americans—particularly the geographically close and recently conquered Mexicans—viewed lack of enforcement as a quiet acceptance of the status quo. The presence of Latin American laborers in the United States was accepted and ignored, and the lack of deterrents to continued migration resulted in an increase in undocumented immigration (Ngai, 1999; Ramirez, 2018; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). Secondly, despite the intent to lessen and better control the number of Asians and Southern and Eastern European pilgrims, the Immigration Act of 1924 did nothing to stop

the flow of immigrants—documented or otherwise—to the United States. In fact, the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, according to Sulkowski and Wolf (2020), began a new trend in unauthorized immigration. Immigrants denied entry due to new quotas or outright banning, nonetheless emigrated. But instead of using traditionally designated legal ports of entry in the United States, seekers went first to Mexico, and arrived in the United States via the porous, intentionally unenforced Southern border (Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020).

By the late 1920s, a booming commercial agricultural industry was luring more and more poor, landless migrants with the possibility of work. The growing numbers of Mexicans in the Southwestern United States raised fears of depressed wages and drew the ire of lawmakers who began requiring enforcement of restrictions that had long been ignored: labor rules, literacy tests, and exclusion of immigrants likely to become a drain on the state (McCorkle, 2018; Ngai, 1999). Enforcement of policies had an immediate effect on immigration over the Southern border, and between the years of 1929 and 1931, the number of documented Mexican entrants to the United States dropped by nearly 95%. However, in what is a recurring theme when laws grow more restrictive in the United States, as documented immigrants dropped, the number of undocumented Mexican immigrants soared to as high as 100,000 per year during the same time frame (Ngai, 1999).

The Braceros Program

Amidst the confusing and often lenient treaties and laws, Mexican laborers regained favor in the 1940s and were allowed, once again, the ability to work in the United States. In 1942, amidst the throes of World War II labor shortages, the United

States created the Braceros, a guest-worker program for Mexican migrants (McCorkle, 2018; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). The Braceros Program continued to reinforce the dependence of U.S. businesses—particularly in the area of agriculture—on immigrant laborers, bringing over two million Mexican migrants into the United States to address labor shortages during World War II (McCorkle, 2018; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013).

Twelve years after the war, in the midst of the Braceros program but well beyond the labor shortages, an odiously named immigration law was written, debated, and passed: Operation Wetback (McCorkle, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). After World War II, with the return of soldiers to the workforce, the United States had an abundance of Mexican labor in the Southwest. Mexicans had been allowed to enter the United States freely, whether documented through the Braceros Program or undocumented due to de facto open borders. But when Mexican labor was no longer needed, immigrants--legally in the United States or not—were summarily deported and treated as criminals (McCorkle, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). Operation Wetback resulted in the largest mass detainment and deportation in United States history, affecting over one million immigrants in the United States, while also militarizing the border and birthing the Border Patrol (McCorkle, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020).

Ten years after the deportations of Operation Wetback and after 22 years in existence, the Braceros Program officially ended, cutting off the major legal avenue for temporary migration between the United States and Mexico. Left in the wake of Operation Wetback and the shadow of Braceros was a national agricultural system dependent on cheap immigrant labor, as well as masses of Mexicans still in need of jobs, who remained in the United States, and who—without the legal ease of traveling across

the newly militarized border as guest workers—brought their families to the United States to live with them, through legal means or not (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; McCorkle, 2018). The ending of the Braceros Program did nothing to weaken the bonds of social networks for Mexican laborers in the United States. Rather, the termination increased the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States, and in fact, unwittingly encouraged more unauthorized immigration in the United States (Kerwin, 2018; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). The ending of the Braceros Program and subsequent passing of the next major piece of immigration legislation, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1965, increased restrictions, but in real numbers resulted in the net gain of 28 million undocumented immigrants to the United States over the next 20 years (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; McCorkle, 2018).

The Civil Rights Era and the End of Quotas

Cadenas and Kiehne (2021) explained that over the past half-century immigration policies and laws have created a growing Latinx underclass through the narrowing of pathways to immigrant legalization, the militarization of the border, and the criminalization of immigration. In the mid-1960s the United States was marching through the Civil Rights Movement. Spotlights shone on racist practices in previously ignored corners of national practices. Immigration laws were not exempt from criticisms, leading President Lyndon B. Johnson to sign the INA (1965).

The INA was a consequential shift in policy. While the benevolent intent of the INA was to rid the rulebooks of the inherently racist national quotas of the previous decades—quotas that favored Northern and Western European countries—and to make immigration more egalitarian by ridding the immigration code of discrimination on the

grounds race, color, religion, sex, and national origin, its unintended and unforeseen negative outcomes can still be found in the present day (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Ramirez, 2018). As stated by Gonzales and Raphael (2017), the United States could not support a system for immigration that stood in contradiction to the fundamental values of the nation. In an attempt to deal with the contradiction and to practice more global equality, the government placed a more egalitarian cap of 120,000 on migrants from the Western hemisphere. The immediate inherent problem with the decision was caps had previously not existed on immigration from the West (Rabin, 2018). Therefore, countries in close geographic proximity to the United States who had deep social, economic, and familial ties to the United States were offered the same number of entries as countries who were far removed—in all the same ways—from the United States (McCorkle, 2018). As had happened with previous attempts to better control immigration, the new caps did little to change anything other than the words written on legal paper and signed into law. McCorkle (2018) claimed that in neither practice nor in reality did the INA alter the addiction of American agribusiness to cheap labor, nor did the law change desires or the needs of people from Mexico, Central America, and South America. When better futures and opportunities were sought, Latin Americans continued to come to the United States (McCorkle, 2018). After the passing of the INA and the ridding of quotas, the number of immigrants entering the United States, authorized or not, quadrupled, swelling from 9.7 million to nearly 40 million (Budiman, 2020; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013).

The End of the 20th Century

The 1980s and 1990s saw continuing shifts in policies and laws, making the landscape particularly tumultuous for families and children. The intent of this historical

review of research was to show the progression of immigration policies and laws since the inception of the United States, and no line can be drawn more clearly to the present than the changes of the last 2 decades of the 20th century (Silva, 2019). As previously shown, in any decade of American history, the passage of laws that further restrict immigration or increase militarization of the border have also unintentionally further encouraged unauthorized immigration (Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). Prior to the militarization of the border, most of the undocumented in the United States were seasonal workers who returned to their home countries and families in the off-seasons or in some cases, even at the end of every day. When the border closed and militarized, the danger of crossing did not stop the need or desperation of immigrants to come to the U.S., but it did curb the logic of returning to one's home after arrival; the return simply became too dangerous (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017).

During his second term in office, President Ronald Reagan's Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA, 1986). The major goals of the IRCA were to provide a path to legalization for certain undocumented peoples, while curbing illegal immigration by shifting toward an increased stance of enforcement (IRCA, 1986; Parkhouse et al., 2020). The IRCA reinforced security at the border, increasing patrol and enforcement by 50%. The IRCA also introduced employer responsibility into the equation and for the first time in the history of the United States, an immigration law assigned penalties to businesses who knowingly hired undocumented immigrants (IRCA, 1986; Ramirez, 2018). The IRCA did not recognize or attempt to correct any of the underlying issues that created the circumstances that found immigrants willing to risk

breaking the law and incurring penalties for doing so. The new legislation did acknowledge, though, that removing nearly 2.7 million undocumented peoples already in the United States was impossible and extended them amnesty. Of the 2.7 million, 85% were from Latin America (Ramirez, 2018).

Regardless of new regulations on businesses, according to Gonzales and Raphael (2017), sanctions on employers did not stop the hiring of under-waged, undocumented workers. Penalties were often minimal, as businesses claimed to not have known the immigration status of the hire. Meanwhile, the militarization of the border made it more likely that illegal entrants stayed in the United States, not risking the dangers of a return trip to the home country (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017). In the pre-IRCA eras, undocumented immigration was seasonal and circular. Post-IRCA, undocumented immigrants brought their families along and began to create new lives in the shadows of the laws of the United States of America, developing deeper ties to the United States than ever before. Undocumented immigration continued to grow (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017).

Because the IRCA did not curb undocumented immigration as intended, President Bill Clinton was left to try and decipher the puzzle none of his predecessors had been able to solve. In President Clinton's second term, the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) was written, debated, and passed to again attempt to rectify illegal entries and the overstaying of legal visas. The law was pushed through Congress and onto the president's desk quickly, leaving typographic mistakes and clauses that caused countless hours and money spent on litigation through the courts in the years that followed (Hong, 2018). President Clinton, a moderate Democrat, adopted the tough on crime stance of the Republican Party, and by virtue of a significant

funding increase authorized the strengthening and fortification of the border, made deportation easier, and introduced – building upon Ronald Reagan's IRCA – an employer verification program intended to discourage employers from hiring undocumented laborers (Kerwin, 2018; Ramirez, 2018; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). On the surface, a process and expectation of employer verification were incentive for businesses to be diligent in hiring practices. In practice, like the IRCA, the IIRIRA rarely enforced fines or penalties for employers so long as good faith efforts were made to follow legal hiring practices (Tienda & Sanchez, 2013).

For undocumented students in particular, the IIRIRA appeared to make positive allowance for undocumented students to attend public colleges and universities. However, in the same sentence that allowed for admittance, the IIRIRA required individual states that wished to allow the undocumented to attend public colleges and universities to pass legislation allowing potential students to claim residency in said states (Castrellón, 2021; IIRIRA, 1996). Regardless of the potential of the new law for students, the language of the IIRIRA allowed for, and was used for, the restriction of undocumented students from higher education. As a result, many states stopped allowing in-state tuition rates for the undocumented, and in some cases, required students to pay international rates in order to attend. Students were also disallowed access to scholarships, as well as federal and state aid (Craven et al., 2017; Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019). At the time of the Castrellón (2021) study, only six states were reported as having implemented financial aid policies for undocumented students. Twenty-two states currently allow the undocumented to attend higher education, but most do not provide access via financial aid, and therefore, make enrollment and successful

completion, due to financial constraints of students, precarious at best (Castrellón, 2021). The effects of the IIRIRA have been long lasting. According to Hong (2018), "The IIRIRA has created caste without legal possibilities" for the undocumented (p. 267). She continued, claiming the "IIRIRA is irrational, not the immigrants who cannot obtain status because of arbitrary reasons" (Hong, 2018, p. 267).

The 21st Century

In the new century, laws and enforcement of laws continued with stubborn fluidity, shifting, yet always maintaining echoes of generations of laws once tried and many times failed. Silva (2019) claimed that after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, fear of immigrants seemed justified by the public at large, harkening a return to the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. As had been done nearly 200 years earlier by the John Adams administration, the United States government began hunting terrorists, with immigrants tagged as Public Enemy Number One (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Silva, 2019). Paradoxically and at the same time, an abnormal number of tragic natural disasters and continual raging civil wars birthed an influx of new, desperate seekers who began arriving in the United States by any means necessary from Central America—namely El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Many of the Central American arrivals pled asylum under what Frelick (2020) called a contradictory and inadequate status—Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Asylum seekers from designated countries in the 9/11 era were granted TPS designation, making them legal entrants to the United States. However, TPS is a limited program, and when time runs out on participant status, emigrants are expected to return to their home countries (Frelick, 2020; Kerwin, 2018). Under TPS, hundreds of thousands of Central American refugees allowed their immigration statuses to slip from

protected and became undocumented rather than returning to their homelands (Kerwin, 2018; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). As has been consistent throughout the history of the United States, when rules of immigration grew more restrictive, the unauthorized population living in the United States grew (Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). Between the years of 1990 and 2007, despite the efforts of the American government to curb unauthorized immigration, the undocumented population of the United States more than tripled, swelling from an estimated 3.5 million to 12.2 million (Budiman, 2020).

The Obama administration provided another look into the ever-continuing contradictions of U.S. immigration policy. President Obama was often viewed as being reasonable and friendly toward the cause of immigration; he was known for deporting felons, not families (Hong, 2018). Furthermore, by Executive Order in June of 2012, the president instantaneously offered hope to thousands of undocumented children by signing Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which allowed undocumented immigrants who had arrived in the U.S. as children the opportunity to earn work permits, receive identification, and enroll in trade schools, college, or universities (Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Immigrant youth responded, and by 2018, 908,000 previously undocumented immigrants—nearly 70% of eligible participants—had signed up for the opportunity (Patler et al., 2019). Previously undocumented immigrant youth showed appreciation by getting jobs, participating in the American economy, and enrolling in higher education. Ninety-five percent of the nearly one million DACA recipients were doing one or the other—working or attending school—when President Trump temporarily ended the program in 2018 (Hong, 2018).

On the surface, the Obama administration's immigrant-friendly policies looked to shield immigrants, but by 2016, detentions and deportations under the Obama regime neared 3 million, 23% more than the George W. Bush administration after 9/11, and more than all detentions and deportations in the history of the United States added together prior to 1997 (Budiman, 2020; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Hong, 2018). Nearly 80% of detentions and deportations occurring during the Obama years happened without hearing or appeal, as the administration cited powers handed down from the 1996 IIRIRA. Deportations even included immigrants who had served in the military (Hong, 2018). In immigrant circles, the record-breaking number of deportations forced during his two terms earned President Obama the tongue-in-cheek title, Deporter-in-Chief (Golash-Boza, 2018).

The 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump, was much maligned for his stance on immigration. Kerwin (2018) argued that the implementation of practices such as family separation—leading to more than 3,000 children, many younger than 5 years old, being separated from parents—as a deterrent to unlawful entry into the United States, warrants condemnation of the president. But, as has been shown over the course of this review of literature, President Trump was only the next leader in a line of more than two centuries of attempts to control immigration and to define who is, and what it means to be, American. According to Hong (2018), it is important to understand that the former President was not the source of irrational immigration politics. Otherwise stated, President Trump was merely the most recent of our contradictions.

This portion of Chapter Two has revealed the linear contradictions and haphazard enforcement of immigration policies, practices, and laws over the span of the last 2.5

centuries of the history of the United States. Research has drawn a line from the birth of the nation to more present days. Contradictions came into being at the nation's inception as the United States sold itself as a beacon to the world and verbally offered a trusted handshake of welcome. Over the next 2 centuries, though, the United States toiled to define who belongs within the national borders and who does not, all the while fashioning ever-changing explanations to answer the question "why?" (Ramirez, 2018; Shelton, 2018). Former President Donald Trump's (2019) major speech on immigration, *"Modernizing Our Immigration System for a Stronger America,"* provides a coincidental and concise look at the entirety of the history of immigration law in the United States, the manipulation of benevolent words, the policies, the unwritten rules, and the contradictions.

In the speech, the 45th President first spoke words of American graciousness and sameness, recalling origin stories and beliefs of the nation. He applauded the country's history of welcoming newcomers to the land and the belief in *e pluribus unum* – out of many cultures, making one American people beholden to the same destiny, the same American flag (Trump, 2019). In the same speech, though, a mere 25 words later, the former president played upon long-standing, ingrained negative depictions and caricatures of immigrants and national immigration practices. He used the same historical arguments and ideas that have been present from the beginning, claiming "open borders," "lower wages" for American workers, and "lawless chaos." The president touched upon depression of American wages caused by immigrants and the need for protection of the American worker, all while stoking fears of drugs that "pour across our borders." Next, he discussed the building of the Southern wall along the Mexican-U.S. border in the latest

attempt of the United States government to restrict immigration to the United States (Trump, 2019). Unsurprisingly, despite the growing anti-immigrant rhetoric and enforcement of the past decades, the number of undocumented migrants to the United States continued to grow (Nowrasteh, 2021; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020).

Immigration and Education: Plyler v. Doe

It is a continued dichotomy – the contradiction – that is at the heart of this study. In classrooms across the United States, regardless of the political party inhabiting the White House or controlling Congress in any given decade, and regardless of the laws passed during any administration, undocumented students sit behind the desks of U.S. public schools, under the tutelage of public school teachers in the United States. A major requirement of any critical theory is considering a problem or issue through an historical lens (Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). Because LatCrit offers the necessary tools for analyzation of institutional agencies within the context of history, power, privilege, race, and legality (Castrellón, 2021), a LatCrit lens for research must therefore be used for consideration of the impact of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), on undocumented immigrant students and public education.

The intersection between immigration and education provides significant examples of contradictions. The contradictions of immigration policy fall particularly upon vulnerable, undocumented children (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Before 1982, undocumented children did not have an inherent right to attend public schools in the United States. In the absence of a right to attend, in 1975 the Texas state legislature passed amendments to educational law, ordering public schools to deny enrollment to any

student who could not prove they were legally residing in the United States. Furthermore, the statute allowed the state to withhold funding to any school district that spent money on said children (Mead & Paige, 2019). The constitutionality of the amendments was at the center of the *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) case. Citing the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, which uses the language of "any person," *Plyler* was the first instance of the United States Supreme Court considering equal protection as applicable to the undocumented population (Crawford & Hairston, 2018; Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019; Mead & Paige, 2019). The Court's majority argued that all students, regardless of immigration status, should have access to a free and appropriate education and that children cannot be punished for an act—in the *Plyler* case, illegal entrance into the country—over which they had no control (Crawford & Hairston, 2018; Mead & Paige, 2019; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). The majority also argued that student immigration statuses were not the affair of public schools and confirmed that an educated populace, regardless of immigration status, was beneficial for society at large (Parkhouse et al., 2020; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

For the majority, Justice William Brennan, Jr. wrote:

> It is difficult to understand precisely what the State hopes to achieve by promoting the creation and perpetuation of a subclass of illiterates within our boundaries, surely adding to the problems and costs of unemployment, welfare, and crime. It is thus clear that whatever savings might be achieved by denying these children an education, they are wholly insubstantial in light of the costs involved to these children, the State, and the Nation (*Plyler vs. Doe*, 1982, p. 38).

Asking questions about student immigration status is intimidating to students, causes feelings of shame, endangerment, or at the very least makes students feel not included or unwelcome at school (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). After *Plyer*, inquiries about one's immigration status, whether specifically for enrollment purposes or more generally as part of conversation, were an unlawful act for educators and educational institutions (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). Under the ruling's protections, and as years passed, students and families began to feel a certain security within the K-12 educational setting. The implication was that the schoolhouse was a protected space in the United States; public schools became a sanctuary for undocumented immigrant children.

Plyler v. Doe (1982), one of the United States' noble attempts to deal with undocumented youth, though, has wrought consequences. Because of the Court's ruling, Gonzales et al. (2018) pointed out that undocumented youth are not only allowed to attend school, but are also held to the same compulsory education laws of all other American and documented immigrant youth. Undocumented youth are required to take part in the major happening of American childhood and adolescence—attendance in school—where attendance is safe, secure, and protected (Gonzales et al., 2018; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). For all the good of *Plyer v. Doe*, though, the law also pushes hard facts of life further into the future for the undocumented child (Gonzales et al., 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Roth, 2019).

The contradiction, therefore, is that while undocumented youth are raised as American students and to have the same aspirations, dreams, and beliefs in American principles of upward mobility as citizens and documented residents (Gonzales et al.,

2018; Passel & Cohn, 2009), *Plyler* only protects undocumented young people through secondary schooling (Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019). Undocumented immigrant students enter schools, often as early as kindergarten, and graduate high school raised on red, white, and blue American dreams of college and career, only to find that *Plyer* and the protections the law affords end after successful completion of high school requirements and graduation (Gonzales et al., 2018; Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019; Passel & Cohn, 2009). Once beyond the secondary school doors, without some other legal protection, former students will find employment illegal, voting and earning a driver's license impossible, and a lack financial aid for the furtherance of education at trade schools, colleges, and universities. The result is often resignation to a life of low-wage employment opportunities and the burdens of poverty (Gonzales et al., 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Roth, 2019).

Barriers to Educational Attainment

Through the critical theories, intersectionality and interconnectedness are terms meaning a single person always occupies multiple other categories of existence throughout their lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Guajardo et al., 2020). Researchers have claimed that while a person can simultaneously claim statuses of Black, Guatemalan, female, Catholic, and student, an additional status of "undocumented" supersedes all other statuses. In other words, undocumented is a master status that rules over, connects to, and affects all other potential individual, interconnected statuses (Castrellón, 2021; Enriquez, 2017a, 2017b; Gonzales & Burciaga, 2018). Pertaining to this study, undocumented becomes the major impacting force on secondary student success, participation, attainment, or failure. To study the master interconnected class—

undocumented students—the researcher chose to view the topic through a LatCrit theoretical lens.

Latinx critical theory seeks understanding of educational theory and practice and how theories pertain to Latinx students. The goal should always be seeking improvement of educational opportunities for students of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Diaz, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Through the LatCrit lens, emphasis is placed upon aspects of Latinx identity, culture, and social justice, all of which are relevant to the improvement of the education of Latinx students (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Some barriers are common among the total population of students in schools (Alif et al., 2020). Finning et al. (2020) pointed out that factors across child development can be potential barriers for success. The most common negative factors blocking achievement are poor physical health, mental health, lack of parental involvement, familial poverty, poor school climates, poor student-teacher relations, isolation, and lack of support (Finning et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2019).

Unlike other disadvantaged students, though, the mere state of being undocumented creates additional barriers for secondary school students. Challenges intertwine with one another, weaving themselves into knots of potential negative outcomes. Students face educational barriers, poverty, physical and mental health struggles, fear of deportation, and challenges related to facing the future (Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018; Craven et al., 2017; Crawford et al., 2018; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Rutter, et al., 2020; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019).

A legal status, according to Punti (2018), is imperative for the avoidance of barriers in undocumented student lives. Undocumented students face an isolation that other students of other demographics and intersectionalities do not face, created by potential distance from the dominant English language and American culture, which can breed additional feelings of loneliness, otherness, and lack of belonging (Alif et al., 2020; Enriquez, 2017a, 2017b; Gonzales & Burciaga, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). An immigration status of either kind—documented or undocumented—is known to inhibit the educational environment of children (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017), but the inhibition is particularly harsh for students who live in, or whose parents or other family members live in, a state of legal liminality (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). The major themes discovered through this review of literature relate to poverty, exclusion to postsecondary education, mental health, and institutional secondary school practices.

If an undocumented status is the master status (Castrellón, 2021; Enriquez, 2017a, 2017b; Gonzales & Burciaga, 2018), poverty is the master barrier, impacting and anchoring nearly all other barriers. Even without an undocumented status, poverty lessens the likelihood of achieving a higher education, which further perpetuates intergenerational poverty and marginalization (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021). Connery (2018) found that a lack of economic resources had negative effects on physical health, language and overall cognitive development, and academic achievement. Poverty also affects mental, emotional, and behavioral health, issues that if left undealt with, can compound over time and continue to affect later stages of development (Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018).

Familial poverty creates and connects to other stressors and challenges for students as well, such as living in neighborhoods with segregated and underfunded schools, violent communities, unemployed parents, and crowded housing (Garcini et al., 2017; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Whether out of ineligibility or fear due to immigration status, unauthorized students and families are less likely to seek access to social services and programs that are designed to alleviate the very poverty faced (Chang et al., 2019; Garcini et al., 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). First-generation immigrants are the most likely category of immigrant to be undocumented and are most likely to live in a low socioeconomic state (Martinez et al., 2020). The IIRIRA (1996) and the policies that followed have only deepened familial poverty amongst the undocumented (Kerwin, 2018), as 70% of children with undocumented parents subsist around or below the poverty line (Hsin & Ortega, 2018).

The poverty of parents or guardians can create other barriers for the undocumented student, such as unstable housing due to eviction or seasonal work, which leads to frequent school absences and district transfers for children, making success in school a more challenging endeavor (Crawford et al., 2017; Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Passel & Cohn, 2009). Though limited employment opportunities due to legal statuses are available to adolescents and their parents or guardians (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017), undocumented youth are likely to participate and contribute in the overall family income earnings, creating scenarios where students are more likely to drop out of high school and begin working as fulltime employees earlier than citizens or documented peers (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Punti, 2018). In fact, in a recent study 74% of adolescent immigrants were found to be working long hours, even while attempting to

attend secondary and postsecondary schools in an effort to contribute to the economic efforts of the family (Kam & Merolla, 2018).

Poverty makes finishing high school a difficulty for any student (Finning et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2019), but many undocumented students drop out of school after discovering the limitations of the status (Craven et al., 2017; Martinez et al., 2020; Parkhouse et al., 2020). Craven et al. (2017) led a study of students who had realized the impact of an undocumented status. Participants in the study stated that upon learning of the newfound limitations, they disengaged from high school studies, assuming that academic work would not pay off in terms of better employment opportunities or access to a postsecondary education.

An education beyond high school, even for the most driven undocumented student, is prohibitive at best (Craven et al., 2017; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020; Rutter et al., 2020; Sanchez-Gonzalez et al., 2019; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). An undocumented status leads to legal barriers, financial hardships, and policy discriminations that make access to education beyond the free and protected K-12 education provided by *Plyer v. Doe* (1982) out of reach for most undocumented students (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). In fact, only 5%-10% of undocumented high school students enroll in colleges after graduation (Yasuike, 2019). Undocumented students who persist against the odds to a postsecondary graduation may run out of options after graduation anyway, as employment opportunities for unauthorized workers are limited, leading potential students to never attempt enrollment in colleges or universities (Gonzales et al., 2018).

Not unlike other at-risk students, the primary barriers to attending postsecondary schooling for undocumented students are lack of ability for family support (Rutter et al., 2020) and finances (Gonzales et al., 2018; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020; Rutter et al., 2020). However, legal issues create further difficulties to traverse for the undocumented student. Due to language in the IIRIRA (1996), which forced individual states to adopt laws concerning postsecondary education and undocumented students, most states in the United States do not offer in-state tuition rates, scholarships, or financial aid to undocumented students, which leads to a lack of enrollment, even by the most capable of students (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). In fact, some institutions charge undocumented students up to 3 times the tuition rate charged for in-state residents (Craven et al., 2017). Private scholarships do exist for undocumented students, though few students learn of them. Students who do apply and qualify find the scholarships to be limited in number and therefore, quite competitive. Lack of scholarship opportunities leaves students with full tuition to pay, as undocumented students rarely have access to federal or state financial aid or student loans (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Chang et al., 2019; Kam & Merolla, 2018).

Any barrier that stands in the way of educational or career goals, or any generally desired life achievement or outcome, can lead to disengagement, frustration, and insecurity for secondary students (Craven et al., 2017; Finning et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2019; Punti, 2018). An undocumented status creates a reported feeling of helplessness and despair, particularly during the stage of adolescence, which can lead even to suicidal ideations (Kam & Merolla, 2018; Siemons et al., 2017). In a study of the well-beings of undocumented youth, mental health was reported by participants as being the greatest

health concern (Siemons et al., 2017). While illegality is perceived to mostly affect adults and research is limited, a growing body of qualitative work shows that an undocumented status adds stressors by increasing the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and somatization in undocumented youth (Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018; Garcini et al., 2017; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Some studies additionally suggest negative risk is increased during adolescence as youth are becoming more self-reliant and socially responsible (Siemons et al., 2017).

Many undocumented youths have experienced trauma during migratory experiences and suffer from separation anxiety (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Evaluated youth often show signs of post-traumatic stress from border crossings, separation from families, and the acculturative stress upon arrival to the United States, which can even include the stress of reuniting with families (Connery, 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020), all leading to potential incidents of depression (Connery, 2018; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Undocumented youth experience widespread bouts of verbal and psychological abuse; sexual abuse is not uncommon (Garcini et al., 2017). Sibley and Brabeck (2017) claimed acculturative stresses are often internalized, eventually becoming anxiety, which leads to depression, and in the worst of cases suicidal tendencies (Connery, 2018; Mead & Paige, 2019), all of which are known to have negative impacts on student attendance and learning (Mead & Paige, 2019). Over 25% of undocumented male students and 33% of female students report moderate to extreme feelings of anxiety (Chang et al., 2019).

Due to family poverty, undocumented youth attending secondary schools often have to accept roles typically reserved for adults, such as raising younger siblings while

parents work, working jobs to assist with family finances, and translating for non-English-speaking parents or guardians (Gonzales et al., 2018; Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Punti, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Additional adult responsibilities tend to have a negative impact on academics and mental well-being (Connery, 2018; Punti, 2018). Due in part to adult responsibilities, the stage of adolescence brings particular awareness of the stigma associated with an undocumented status. American-born citizens and documented immigrants spend adolescence earning driver's licenses, preparing for and applying to colleges, or working towards vocational certifications (Chang et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2018; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Roth, 2019). The undocumented, though, are excluded from the rites of American passage, resulting in frustration, varying levels of worry and discomfort, withdrawal from school and social activity, shrinking social networks, anger, depression, anxiety, and increased thoughts of suicide or self-harm (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Garcini et al., 2017; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Living underneath a cloud of potential deportation is a major cause of stress for the undocumented student. The reality of separation and deportation leads students to fear for themselves, friends, and family members, which creates insecurities and stress that negatively affect the success of students in school (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Connery, 2018; Crawford et al., 2018; Kerwin, 2018; Mead & Paige, 2019; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler et al., 2019). The fear of deportation is not distant, imagined, or abstract. In February of 2017, the head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) wrote a memo stating that action would be taken against any removable aliens his immigration agents happened to encounter while working (Crawford et al., 2018; Rochabrun, 2017).

At this time, ICE averaged 108 daily arrests of undocumented immigrants who had no prior criminal record (Rochabrun, 2017). Since 2009, the deportation rate of undocumented immigrants has increased by 26% (Alif et al., 2020).

Neither is the disruptive educational impact of deportation on student performance in schools abstract. Fear of discovery and potential deportation for students and family members often causes students to not participate in school activities (Garcini et al., 2017). Attendance is negatively impacted (Crawford et al., 2018; Mead & Paige, 2019); schools report increasingly frightened children—even among authorized immigrant students—who stay away from school when rumors of immigration raids circulate (Mead & Paige, 2019).

Insecurity and stress also factor into one's ability to focus or concentrate (Connery, 2018; Crawford et al., 2018). For adolescents, fear is directly connected to a negative self-image, which is a predictor of stress, already in abundance during the adolescent stage of life. Increased levels of stress are directly related to a decrease in cognitive performance, short-term memory issues, and impulse control (Connery, 2018), all of which are linked to negative academic outcomes. While citizens and documented immigrants struggling with mental health are able to seek outside social agencies for assistance and resources, undocumented students and families suffer in the quiet, fearing a revelation of status and subsequent potential deportation (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler, 2018).

Poverty and mental health create external barriers for undocumented students and documented resident students alike (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Connery, 2018; Craven et al., 2017; Finning et al., 2020; Garcini et al., 2017; Gubbels et al., 2019; Kam & Merolla,

2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Punti, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Siemons et al., 2017), but secondary schools themselves can also present internal stressors for the undocumented student population. Latinx immigrant groups typically show a downward trend in grade point average and achievement during the period of adolescence (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017), often leading to dropping out of school altogether (Martinez et al., 2020; Parkhouse et al., 2020). The age of high school is an important social, behavioral, and emotional developmental period of life for adolescents. For the undocumented student in secondary American schools, school time is often marked by limited access to advanced coursework, disruptive school climates, and segregated English language development programs, which may hinder growth in academic language, leading to a dropout rate of nearly 60% for undocumented secondary students (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

During adolescence, undocumented students often lose belief in education, the institution's ability to impact social mobility, and do not view high school achievement important to future professional lives, thereby wholly rejecting the educational process in the United States (Punti, 2018). Embedded into the difficulties faced by students are uncertainties of school faculty and staff, who often feel isolated and left to personal discretions concerning the undocumented students in classrooms (Chang et al., 2019; Parkhouse et al., 2020). School administrators, teachers, and other staff often lack an understanding of the law and permissible actions for undocumented students, which limits access to potentially available services and supports (Chang et al., 2019; Parkhouse et al., 2020). Furthermore, immigration is a contentious political issue in the United States. Educators who hold anti-immigrant stances are less likely to ally with

undocumented students (Kam & Merolla, 2018); even teachers who hold favorable views are less likely to help if living in a community with unfavorable views (Parkhouse et al., 2020). Parkhouse et al.'s (2020) work suggested school personnel need to be trained and taught about undocumented immigration and the ways educators can make students feel like they belong. Even well-meaning teachers can be unaware of implicitly held biases that are dismissive of non-White student experiences. Cooper Stein et al. (2018) claimed that Latinx students are often accidentally marginalized during class discussions when topics veer into areas of immigration and related issues. Marginalizing events create feelings of not belonging, isolation, and a perception that educators do not care (Cooper Stein et al., 2018).

Resiliencies of Undocumented Secondary School Students

This qualitative narrative study was grounded in LatCrit. Critical theories push society towards resistance and social action, ever-focusing an eye towards justice and liberation for underserved, marginalized populations (Bohman et al., 2019; Horkheimer, 1972) even when resistance and action are not overt or visible. Often, social resistance comes in the shape of personal advocacy and persistence (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Jemal, 2017). Addressing the resilience of undocumented students draws upon the philosophies of LatCrit thought, which implore researchers to find ways to assist underserved Latinx student populations (Guajardo et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2017). In doing so, Latinx students could be supported and equipped with self-advocacy, taught to navigate educational systems, and become engaged in political processes (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021). Review of the literature revealed that active

students with critical consciences led to better academic performance, and positive psychological and health outcomes (Cadenas et al., 2018; Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021).

Under resourced environments are known to inhibit intellectual growth (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017), and therefore, the need for positive resilience is of existential importance to the community of undocumented students. While not all students from any demographic will ever achieve a collegiate degree, doing so yields a greater likelihood of finding stable employment, maximizing opportunities for earning a higher income, and increases the likelihood of social mobility (Kam & Merolla, 2018). For the undocumented student, however, attainment of a higher education is statistically improbable, therefore prohibiting the potential of upward social mobility (Craven et al., 2017; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020; Rutter et al., 2020; Sanchez-Gonzalez et al., 2019; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). Despite barriers, secondary schools can operate in a way that embodies philosophies that foster resilience and positive outcomes for all students, including the undocumented (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Relationships and social networks are important factors related to student success (Finning et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2019). For undocumented students, these elements are among the most important for ensuring empowerment, achievement, and resilience (Crawford et al., 2018; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler, 2018; Rutter et al., 2020; Yasuike, 2019). Family support and encouragement are important for student achievement (Alif et al., 2020; Yasuike, 2019), however, even the most supportive of families often lack necessary resources to help financially, academically, or with the physical processes of schooling (Patler, 2018; Yasuike, 2019). Because family abilities are limited, research suggested supportive relationships must come from a variety of places for the

undocumented student (Alejandro & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015; Rutter et al., 2020). Positive networks might include a combination of family, outside adults, school agents, and peers in the same situation. The deeper the network's roots, the greater potential exists for personal empowerment, improved outcomes, and hope (Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler, 2018; Rutter et al., 2020).

Social circles and networks alone are not inherently beneficial, though. Yasuike (2019) pointed out that surrounding oneself with others who have a similar lack of institutional knowledge merely perpetuates the deficiency, which does not alleviate barriers for undocumented students. The success of networks depends on the quality, variety, and depth of said networks, but unfortunately, the creation of beneficial relationships can be particularly challenging for undocumented students (Yasuike, 2019). Developing trusted allies with school officials is critical for success, yet faith in institutional agents is difficult at best due to the trauma created by an undocumented status and fear of exposure and deportation (Yasuike, 2019). Regardless, developing deep relationships and building positive networks with educational agents with whom students can share struggles and troubles (Parkhouse et al., 2020) is imperative for student success (Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019; Yasuike, 2019) and for the navigation of the bureaucracy of the American educational institution (Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019).

Important networks and relationships are most likely found in the classroom with teachers or in the offices of counselors (Crawford et al., 2018). In Yasuike's (2019) research, over half of the participants named teachers or counselors at high schools as the persons most responsible for helping them through the adolescent stage of recognizing liminal legality and helping them persist to a postsecondary institution. The same study

recognized that Latinx students attending wealthier, predominantly White schools, reported markedly less support from teachers and counselors than did students from less wealthy schools with higher percentages of Latinx students (Yasuike, 2019).

This review of literature revealed other variables related to the resiliency of undocumented secondary students, such as expectation and hospitable environments that reduce stress and discrimination, involvement in extracurricular activities, and inclusionary practices (Connery, 2018; Lauby, 2017; Martinez et al., 2020; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020; Yasuike, 2019). Schools should reach out to immigrant families and show they are valued in different ways, for example, by hosting conferences in immigrant neighborhoods at times conducive to parent participation (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). However, asking undocumented families to join community events of any kind requires caution, as participation in extracurricular activities can be precarious for the undocumented student, causing students to often avoid going out and participating in public, social activities (Ellis et al., 2019).

While most educators consider undocumented students to be part of the overall student body and treat them as such (Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020), teachers need training to ensure instruction and routine practices do not hinder or silence undocumented students. For example, common assignments about family histories can result in unintended negative outcomes and feelings for students, which end up limiting participation (Parkhouse et al., 2020). Furthermore, while immigration status is not a topic schools can bring up with students (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982), administrators, counselors, and teachers should be trained to recognize backgrounds, legal statuses, and other stressors for undocumented students (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Punti, 2018). Knowing students' before

and after migration stories and the fears surrounding the stories better equips educators to support students (Connery, 2018). Increasing undocumented status consciousness makes educational agents more likely to search for community and legal aid, improve school climates for marginalized youth, and better understand students' material and emotional needs (Parkhouse et al., 2020).

Lowenhaupt and Hopkins (2020) revealed general pillars of schools that employ a social justice mindset that pushes undocumented students to resilience and persistence. Schools with a social justice mindset foster belonging, minimize barriers, provide equitable access for learning, and allow possibilities for integration within the school and the community (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020). The more adversity a student faces, the more the educational outcome of the student depends upon the environment the student inhabits (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). The most effective schools are full-service community schools that offer health care, after-school academic supports, mental health counselors, and social workers for students. Full-service community schools show increased engagement and success for students (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Whether or not undocumented students feel support and inclusion at school is often attributed to the interactions with educational agents within the school (Castrellón, 2021). Educational agents can support students through hope communication – positive affirmations used as an agent for change (Kam & Merolla, 2018). In schools, hope communication promotes realistic goals for students, establishes steps for achievement of the set goals, and provides encouragement to see the goal through to fruition (Kam & Merolla, 2018). According to a study conducted by Kam and Merolla (2018), while higher amounts of hope communication yielded higher rates of undocumented students

pursuing entrance to college, undocumented students reported significantly less hope communication from the educational agents of the schools they attended than did the non-undocumented population. A similar study was conducted by Rolón-Dow and Davison (2021) in which the authors found microaffirmations – small, everyday life experiences that affirm racial identity, realities, and justice – linked directly to positive feelings of inclusion and well-being on the part of recipients. Principals and other administration, therefore, should create building cultures dedicated to social justice, critical consciousness, and knowledge about student cultures by fostering counselor support of all students (Cooper Stein et al., 2018), including the undocumented population, providing cultural professional development for teachers, and encouraging caring relationships with teachers (Castrellón, 2021; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Rolón-Dow & Davison, 2021).

In June of 2012, President Barack Obama altered potential outcomes for hundreds of thousands of undocumented youth and young adults by signing an executive order called DACA. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals allowed undocumented immigrants who had arrived in the United States as children the opportunity to earn work permits, receive legal identification, and enroll in trade schools, college, or universities without fear of deportation (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, 2020; Department of Homeland Security, 2012). Among other requirements, eligibility for the program includes a) proof of arrival before turning 16 years old; b) uninterrupted residence in the United States since June 15, 2007; c) current enrollment in, or graduation from, high school or completion of a high school equivalency; and d) lack of a criminal record (Department of Homeland Security, 2012; Ellis et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2018;

Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). It is important to note, though, that DACA does not provide a path to citizenship; it is merely a temporary status requiring renewal every 2 years (Hong, 2018; Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Patler et al., 2019).

Six years after DACA's creation, nearly 70% of eligible undocumented youth had responded to the opportunity. More than 900,000 of the previously unauthorized signed up to live free from the fears of deportation and to seek the betterment of a documented existence (Hong, 2018; Patler et al., 2019). Recipients responded by gaining employment, participating in the American economy, and enrolling in higher education. Ninety-five percent of DACA recipients were doing one or the other—working or attending school—when President Trump temporarily ended the program in 2018 (Hong, 2018).

Immigration status is a critical determinant during stages of difficult life transitions (Gonzales et al., 2018) and many positive correlations have been found related to the transition of undocumented to documented based on DACA status (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). The benefits of a DACA status for recipients are numerous and have the ability to counteract nearly every barrier presented by the undocumented status. For examples, a DACA status improves economic outlooks, educational outcomes, postsecondary access, and the mental health of recipients (Gonzales et al., 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Roth, 2019; Siemons et al., 2017). Within the frameworks of DACA, allowances are made for access to higher education (Immigration Equality, 2020). Overall, the impact of DACA on student outcomes is high. Optimism created by the program has resulted in increased access to education, which is linked to increased high school graduation rates and enrollment in institutions of higher learning (Amuedo-

Dorantes & Antman, 2017; Kuka et al., 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Roth, 2019).

With improved incentive and access to education, poverty is decreased. Of the immigrant demographic, first-generation immigrants are statistically the most likely to be undocumented and are most likely to live in a low socioeconomic state (Martinez et al., 2020). Poverty, regardless of any other intersectionality of demographics, negatively affects mental, emotional, and behavioral health; physical health, language development, overall cognitive development, and general academic achievement (Connery, 2018; Finning et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2019). Studies of previously unauthorized immigrants earning a DACA status show increased opportunities for better, higher paying employment (Amuedo-Dorantes & Antman, 2017; Kuka et al., 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Roth, 2019), the opening of savings accounts, better housing (Roth, 2019), and improved general financial stability (Patler & Pirtle, 2018), all of which have led to a reduction in overall poverty (Patler et al., 2019; Roth, 2019).

Not only are tangible outcomes of educational access and poverty positively affected by a DACA status, but physical and mental health are also improved as recipients transition to a lawful, less fearful presence in the United States (Hainmueller et al., 2017; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Venkataramani et al., 2017). Patler and Pirtle (2018) found that among the undocumented demographic, the most accurate predictor of one's mental well-being was whether or not one was living under DACA protections. Overall health was shown to improve as previously undocumented immigrants transferred to an authorized DACA status (Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Directly connected to the increase in health are newfound feelings of inclusion and belonging in society (Abrego, 2018;

Gonzales et al., 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Roth, 2019). Feelings of belonging bring about relief and a decreased fear of deportation (Abrego, 2018; Gonzales et al., 2018; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Siemons et al., 2017). An anti-example of the positive impact was noted when the revocation of DACA was first threatened by candidate-for-President Donald Trump in 2015. The first 3 years of DACA's existence saw significant, measurable gains in health – both mental and physical – for the undocumented population. The measurable improvements abruptly disappeared in the summer of 2015. Researchers Patler et al. (2019) blamed the immediate disappearance of benefits on the growing anti-immigrant rhetoric of politicians and direct threats to the protections offered by DACA.

President Obama's Executive Order, however, is not without limitations and unintended consequences that have curbed the potential full effectiveness of DACA (Ellis et al., 2019). While inarguable benefits to recipients concerning finances and material gains improved educational access and outcomes, and psychological rewards exist, DACA does not offer a pathway to full citizenship or permanent resident status (Ellis et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2018). Therefore, while granting greater inclusion into American society, recipients remain acutely aware of the fragility of a temporary DACA status (Alif et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2019; Roth, 2019; Siemons et al., 2017). The impermanence of DACA means personal fears of deportation are lessened, but in no way extinguished. Neither does the order address family members who may still live in a deportable state of being. Recipients may become less fearful of personal deportation, but fears and anxieties about separation from family and friends are likely to persist (Alif et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Siemons et al., 2017).

While continued deportability of family members has a negative mental effect on DACA recipients, not addressing the realities of immediate families of DACA recipients recreates stressors, as well. The recipient's improved status can actually put strains on families. While now having greater access to higher education, recipients are still unlikely to have access to financial aid or scholarships due to individual state laws (Abrego & Schmalzbauer, 2018; Chang et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). Families are often unable to financially or culturally support children in efforts to achieve higher education (Rutter et al., 2020). Furthermore, improved individual status increases the collective responsibilities and expectations of DACA recipients, such as transportation of family members and taking higher paying jobs to better financially support the family (Gonzales et al., 2018). Increased feelings of responsibility can deter furtherance of personal goals and negatively affect mental health (Gonzales et al., 2018; Siemons et al., 2017).

Despite shortcomings, DACA has made an overall positive impact on the resilience of undocumented students in the United States (Ellis et al., 2019). Ellis et al. (2019) claimed that DACA changes the views undocumented young people have about themselves and how they relate to others. A DACA status motivates students to greater achievements and pursuance of goals. Most telling, though, are the interviews conducted in the Ellis et al. (2019) study and the defiant resilience of participants who admit to worrying about DACA's revocable nature, but say even if rescinded, they will refuse to return to former existences in pre-DACA life; rather, they will work harder to attain goals and will fight for reform.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to better understand the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the practices of educational institutions that lead to resiliency and achievement. Using LatCrit as the lens from which to understand the challenges of undocumented students, the importance of the causality of unauthorized immigration was highlighted. Critical theories demand societal issues be studied in the context of larger, ever-changing historical landscapes and through the insights of multiple social sciences (Castrellón, 2021; Crossman, 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). Critical theories bring to bear insights and possibilities for liberation through the incorporation of other social sciences (Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). Therefore, the societal issue studied – undocumented students in secondary schools – must be viewed from outside itself, and through lenses across disciplines. The review of literature was viewed through historical, legal, psychological, sociological, and educational lenses.

Historically speaking, traditional frameworks have not specifically considered perspectives of race and ethnicity, which has led to a lack of breadth of study concerning students of color (Diaz, 2018). Offering the necessary tools to analyze institutional agencies within the contexts of history, race, and ethnicity, LatCrit is often used as a theoretical framework from which to analyze educational experiences of students of color (Castrellón, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Hernández (2016), for example, pointed out that researchers use critical theories as an underpinning theory to reveal the differing

collegiate experiences of Latinx students in comparison to the White majority. When investigated, differences are often found to be rooted in inequality, racism, and marginalization (Hernández, 2016).

The first section of the chapter centered on immigration to the United States, both authorized and unauthorized, through an historical, legal, and political lens. Modern debates surrounding immigration in the United States largely ignore the historical context (McCorkle, 2018), but an historical representation is necessary for the understanding of experiences of undocumented students in secondary schools of the United States through the lens of critical theories like LatCrit (Bronner, 2011; Guajardo et al., 2020; Horkheimer, 1972; Pankey, 2018). Through a review of the historical record, Crawford and Hairston (2018) found that immigration policies and laws have been designed to choose the specific traits of peoples allowed to emigrate to the United States, as well as how many members of each group are allowed inclusion into the country. Sulkowski and Wolf (2020) researched further, claiming immigration laws and politics have grown more restrictive over time, and are "driven by white supremacy, xenophobia, and exploitative economic practices" (p. 390). Patler and Pirtle (2018) cited exclusive immigration policies as forms of structural racism that create consequences of long-term, and in some cases lifetime, barriers for entrants. Barriers can last longer than a lifetime. The failure over centuries to enact meaningful immigration reform keeps undocumented individuals and families in hiding, passing poverty and disadvantage from adult to child, from generation to generation (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Kerwin, 2018).

The review of historic literature also showed race as being a construct of society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Diaz, 2018; Ladson-Billings,

1998). Neither race nor nationality are biological realities, rather, they are social creations whose definitions should be examined and realized through the context of psychology and history, both of which are often void as part of the overall immigration debate (Burns & Vaughn, 2021; McCorkle, 2018; Ngai, 1999). For example, when wishing to conquer Mexican territory and subsequently drive Mexican nationals from the conquered territory, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) pointed out that American planters and ranchers pushed a narrative of Mexican inferiority. As part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) at the close of the Mexican-American War, though, the narrative shifted and Mexicans were granted an "inferred legal Whiteness." With Mexicans racialized as White for citizenship purposes in the United States, the maintaining and importing of cheap, Mexican labor was solidified (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). However, in 1930, as arguments were made blaming Mexicans for low American wages, immigration rules grew more exclusive and "Mexican," for the first time, was delineated as a race and showed up as an option on the national census (Dahis et al., 2019).

After the historical perspective of immigration, the review of literature moved to the presentation of struggles and barriers to academic achievement faced by undocumented students in secondary schools. An undocumented status creates barriers for secondary school students. Secondary students face educational barriers, poverty, physical and mental health struggles nationwide (Finning et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2019), but undocumented students face additional fears of deportation and challenges related to facing the future, all which result in negative educational and future-life outcomes (Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018; Craven et al., 2017; Crawford et al., 2018; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Patler & Pirtle,

2018; Rutter et al., 2020; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). Latinx critical theory seeks understanding of how educational practices pertain to Latinx students with a goal of seeking improvement of educational opportunities for students of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Diaz, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998). A LatCrit lens places emphasis upon aspects of Latinx identity, culture, and social justice, all of which are relevant to the improvement of the education of Latinx students (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Literature has also shown LatCrit as an important tool for educational researchers because societal systems and institutions, even unintentionally, contain structures that sustain inequality as far as students of color are concerned (Diaz, 2018). Structures of inequality revealed in Chapter Two were the likelihood of undocumented student poverty; increased mental health concerns, causes, and lack of access to help; and specific barriers and frustrations within the school institution itself.

Finally, resiliencies and successes of undocumented students were explored. Using LatCrit as a framework for research encourages educators to consider practices and systems of oppression, analyze them, and argue for change of such practices (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Diaz, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020). Educators operating from a LatCrit lens are encouraged to disturb and uproot existing systems of oppression, working toward greater justice and equality for all students (Diaz, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020). Researchers have found that undocumented students are resilient and able to transform negative experiences, especially when school agents support them in the formation of a critical consciousness and promote active participation (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Luter et al., 2017). In summary, researching from the theoretical framework of LatCrit requires

consideration of resilience and overcoming, and the construction of improved outcomes for underserved and underrepresented populations.

In Chapter Three, the researcher offered the methodology of the qualitative narrative inquiry. In Chapter Four, the researcher offered findings and the experiences of undocumented students from time spent in secondary schools in Missouri. Experiences were documented through recorded interviews and participant memories. Student transcripts, interviews with high school faculty members, and supporting archival data were also reviewed. In Chapter Five the researcher summarized conclusions of the study, made recommendations for future studies, and gave potential applications for educators.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Though undocumented students have a constitutional right to a free and appropriate public education from kindergarten through high school graduation (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982), undocumented youth often realize their immigration status as adolescents, which can create barriers to personal academic achievement (Gonzales et al., 2018; Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Adolescence is a difficult life stage for many students, but is particularly difficult for the undocumented who begin to discover that their personal access to the American adulthood of their peers is limited. Laws likely prohibit meaningful employment and limit enrollment in higher education. With shrunken access to school and no legal permission to work, undocumented youth are left with few options (Gonzales et al., 2018), leading nearly 40% of undocumented students to make the decision to drop out of high school (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Little has been recorded concerning the experiences of the undocumented Latinx immigrant adolescent (Diaz, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. As qualitative studies intend to uncover and report on the meanings and experiences of persons who have intimate knowledge and understanding of a topic (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018), this study concerned itself with barriers to educational achievement and with the resiliencies of the aforementioned

population. Adding to the gap in literature dedicated to the topic, a study of undocumented immigrant student experiences may assist secondary school educators in better understanding the challenges undocumented students face. In doing so, teachers may also better understand practices that assist students in overcoming an undocumented status.

The researcher used a qualitative narrative inquiry as the design of the study. Qualitative studies are used to better understand what groups of people think or feel about specific topics (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The narrative approach to research began in the social sciences of anthropology and sociology, but have proven beneficial in other areas, such as health care, education, and the humanities (Butina, 2015). Narrative research, particularly in the field of education, is an important attempt to increase understanding through the retelling of stories (Mills & Gay, 2019). Furthermore, narrative studies help construct meaning through participant stories, which can be used to develop general themes over a topic (Adams & Lawrence, 2019). Pertaining to the undocumented population in particular, qualitative studies are the method of choice, typically employing narrative inquiry, phenomenology, or ethnography methods (Chang et al., 2019).

Qualitative narrative strategies of collecting participant stories, interviews, and related documents were used as a means of gathering and documenting participants' experiences (Chang et al., 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative studies, according to Delgado-Romero et al. (2018), are particularly well-suited for the study of Latinx populations as the format encourages *personalismo*, *platicando*, and *cuentos* – all important pieces of Latinx culture. *Personalismo* speaks to the importance of close

personal relationships; *platicando* is the joy of practicing small talk; and *cuentos* refers to the art of storytelling. Qualitative studies are further well-suited due to the potential to highlight the lived realities of marginalized Latinx populations, as well as offering a voice to underrepresented populations (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018; Shapiro & Gross, 2013). The interviews of former secondary school students in Missouri were conducted both in person and individually. Chapter Three makes known the participants of the study and describes the setting and design of the research. It also discusses the methodology of data collection, the instrumentation used, and explains how collected data were analyzed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. The study was accomplished through a review of literature and interviews with participants, the viewing of voluntarily offered participant high school transcripts, interviews with experienced faculty members, and supporting archival data. Participants were Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri.

Studying the history of immigration law, policy, and practice in the United States permitted a connection of undocumented students to the overall legal and historical perspectives of immigration. The study researched educational barriers to achievement of undocumented students, as well as student resiliencies and the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement, and expanded upon the lack of literature dedicated to the

topic of undocumented youth and students in public high schools (Punti, 2018; Shelton, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Zong & Batalova, 2019), particularly in rural areas outside the Southwest United States and major cities (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Silva, 2019). Even when academic research is conducted, research typically focuses on the highest of achievers who carve a path to colleges and universities, rather than on average or below average students who do not excel academically (Punti, 2018). Finally, research documented the lived experiences of subjects who were undocumented while attending secondary schools in Missouri with the intent to learn of the barriers undocumented students face, as well as the practices that encouraged them towards resiliency and persistence.

Research Questions

This qualitative narrative study focused on adult immigrants who arrived in the United States as minors. Participants arrived undocumented, or, if arriving legally, overstayed a visa and became undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools. Qualitative research is undertaken in order to better understand the realities people have constructed from personal experience and stories (Merriam, 2009). Research was conducted to explore barriers to educational achievement, as well as factors related to resiliencies of the aforementioned population. Information was gathered via mechanically transcribed interviews, available participant high school transcripts, interviews with experienced high school faculty, and supporting archival data. The following major question drove this research, with subquestions used as guiding principles for gathering of more detailed information:

What are the experiences of Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri?

Subquestion 1: What are the lived experiences of undocumented students related to achievement while attending secondary schools (i.e., attendance, grades, graduation, etc.)?

Subquestion 2: What were the lived experiences of undocumented secondary students in terms of overall secondary school participation (i.e., was the participant able to participate in high school activities the way documented or citizen students were able to participate)?

Subquestion 3: What were the lived experiences of undocumented secondary students concerning postsecondary dreams and aspirations?

Subquestion 4: What were the perceived school practices that contributed to achievement (or lack thereof) of undocumented secondary students?

Participants

Interviews were conducted of former secondary school students who, at the time of attendance in secondary schools, were unauthorized immigrants in the United States attending public schools in Southwest Missouri. Participants had arrived in the United States as minors, unauthorized, or, if arriving legally, overstayed a visa during secondary school years and, thus, became undocumented. The participants' immigration statuses at the time of the study were generally unimportant, but were discussed or revealed as interview questions turned towards the impact of the undocumented status on the future of their high school selves. Approval to conduct this study of human subjects was obtained through Southwest Baptist University research ethics board and included

Research Review Board approval. Ethical considerations for participants were taken into consideration as follows.

Participants were selected due to unique abilities to be able to share firsthand, as undocumented students, secondary school experiences, both positive and negative. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic—a topic that contains potential legal implications for participants and families—names, personal information, school district and high school names, and other physical locations (aside from the known factor that participants attended high schools in Missouri) or identifying factors—were altered, anonymous, and are untraceable. The sample of participants was taken from former secondary students in Southwest Missouri who were undocumented at the time of attendance in school. Trust in participant honesty concerning an undocumented status and location of their high school was necessary for the study.

Participants were purposively selected for inclusion in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mills & Gay, 2019). Creswell and Creswell (2018) described purposive selection as the intentional choosing of participants who best assist the understanding of the researched purpose, problem, or questions. Convenience, criterion, and snowball sampling were used as techniques for creating the participant pool. Convenience sampling, though not a desirable technique for dissertations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), can be used situationally in cases where location, time, and sensitivity relative to the researcher and participants is of essence (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, convenience sampling was employed and participants were partially chosen based on availability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Criterion sampling refers to identifying participants who meet certain specific criteria (Mills & Gay, 2019). In this study, the criteria were

Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri. Snowball sampling, one of the more popular qualitative sampling techniques, authorized the utilization of initial participants as recommenders for new contacts for the study (Mills & Gay, 2019; Parker, C. et al., 2019). Positive word-of-mouth also helps to build trust within the studied community (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). For this project, the researcher began by reaching out to formerly undocumented secondary students he knew to ask for their assistance in either full participation or in the gathering of others for interview purposes. Contacts were made via email, social media, face-to-face conversations, or phone calls.

There are no established or exact rules about necessary sample sizes in qualitative narrative research (Butina, 2015). Morse (2019) listed several considerations for researchers in determining sample size. For example, a) the more complex the research question, the more participants need to be included; b) the more structured the data collection (i.e., semi-structured vs. unstructured interviews, the more participants are needed; c) the more cohesive the participants, fewer participants are needed; and d) if the topic is taboo, socially unacceptable, or requires extensive emotional energy from participants, fewer interviews are necessary. Morse continued, stating that while the number of participants is not the most important question qualitative researchers should consider, aiming for a smaller sample size can be a costly error for validity, time, and expense. Regardless, Morse claimed most qualitative narrative inquiries have fewer than 15 participants, and often fewer than six; Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended even fewer participants for a narrative inquiry—one or two; Mills and Gay (2019) recommended around five; and Mohajan (2018) proposed that narrative studies should

include “a very small number of cases” (p. 28). Whatever the number chosen, experts implore researchers to consider interviewing until saturation and redundancy are reached (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mills & Gay, 2019; Morse, 2019). For the aforementioned reasons, the researcher chose to interview a minimum of six participants for the study.

Research Setting

The general setting of the research was public secondary schools in Southwest Missouri. Pertaining to interviews, qualitative research typically insists upon in-person, convenient study within the setting of the participant (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the interviewees. Zoom was available for participants who wished to conduct an electronic interview. The personal and sensitive nature of the topic made crucial the comfortability and security of participants. When conducting qualitative research, the importance of feelings of security and safety for the Latinx community – particularly towards the undocumented—cannot be overstated when attempting to gather valid, reliable data. Therefore, when conducting interviews of Latinx participants, interviews should take place in private settings chosen by participants such as places of worship or homes in order to ensure a feeling of security among interviewees (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). For this study, meetings took place at the local restaurants, participant homes, the researcher’s home, and other locations agreed upon by participants and researcher. Zoom interviews were made available to any participant who wished to conduct an electronic meeting.

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. The researcher sought to discover barriers to educational achievement and resiliencies of the aforementioned population. Participants agreed to be interviewed about the topic, allowing the researcher to employ a narrative qualitative design in order better capture lived secondary school experiences of the concerned population. The initial portion of the design gathered former secondary students from Missouri for discussion of their personal experiences as undocumented students. The second portion of the design required interpretation of the data collected from interviews in the first phase.

Lewin (1947) defined gatekeepers as persons who have preexisting relationships with participants and with whom trust already exists. Trust, Lewin claimed, is an important facet of reliable human research. In this study, the researcher acted as occasional gatekeeper; in other cases, as snowball sampling was employed, someone else played the role. Interviews, according to Turner (2010), sanction the gathering of in-depth information relating to experiences and understandings of the selected participants. Conducting interviews also granted opportunity to create what Creswell and Creswell (2018) called "participant meaning." Participant meaning is the idea that participant perspective and reality about an issue should be the focus, not the meaning constructed by the researcher or the literature researched, and is closely aligned with the importance

placed on counternarratives by the critical theories. Participants were contacted by phone, email, social media, text, face-to-face conversations, and by word of mouth to see if they were willing to participate in interviews. Interviews were conducted individually, recorded, and transcribed using the Otter.ai online transcription service. Transcripted interviews were collected, analyzed, and categorized to assist in the interpretation of participant life experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transcripts were coded and found to contain main themes, sub-themes, and patterns which were broken down for analysis.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) discussed the emergent nature of qualitative research. Emergent design is the idea that research, when qualitative, will morph over the course of the project. Flexibility and license to deviate from the prescribed plan of action were necessary in order to create maximum freedom for participant response. Therefore, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questioning were employed to encourage maximum flexibility on the part of participants and understanding on the part of the researcher (Turner, 2010). The semi-structured approach to interviews also encouraged depth, breadth, and candid responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews varied in length, dependent on the amount of information the participant wanted to divulge and the content discussed.

Validity of research requires the researcher to check for accuracy of results through procedural implementation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rose & Johnson, 2020). In this study, the researcher employed mechanical recording of interviews using the online transcription service, Otter.ai. Utilizing recordings in addition to stand-alone researcher notes permits reevaluation of the collected raw data by the researcher and scrutinization by outside parties (Coleman, 2021; Gray, 2021). Providing full transcripts

through recording services yields verbatim, rich data, empowering potential revelation of deeper, more honest depictions of the studied issue (Coleman, 2021). After interviews were conducted and recorded, transcripts provided by Otter.ai were compared to the handwritten notes the researcher took throughout the interviews. The comparison of mechanically created transcripts and researcher notes allowed the researcher to not only check his collection for accuracy, but also gave opportunity to compare to the researcher's journal and consider areas where personal researcher bias may have entered the study.

For further validity, member checking was utilized, which required the researcher to confirm the accuracy of understanding of the data and stories collected (Coleman, 2021; Gray, 2021). Member checking occurred throughout the interview sessions through the use of paraphrasing, echoing, and seeking clarification on any ambiguous participant answer given. In doing so, participants were offered many opportunities to confirm statements or to correct misunderstandings. After the interviews were recorded and transcribed, participants were provided a copy for personal review. The report was offered in physical form or via email. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify misinterpretations or misrepresentations.

Triangulation of data ensures validity of study by examining evidence from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, or other documentation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fusch et al., 2018; Merriam, 2009; Nha, 2021). The comparing of multiple data sources or multiple methods of data collection creates patterns of convergence that corroborate overall interpretation of the data (Coleman, 2021; Fusch et al., 2018; Merriam, 2009). Triangulation was achieved by use of mechanically

transcribed interviews, analyzation of voluntarily offered participant high school transcripts, interviews with school faculty who have experience working with the undocumented population, and other supporting archival data. Mechanically transcribed interviews encouraged verbatim, rich data and a more revealing, deeper, and honest depiction of participant experiences through participant member checking. Participants were asked to voluntarily provide high school transcripts to the researcher. Cross-checking participant transcripts confirmed some participant school experiences reported through interviews, such as attendance, grades, courses enrolled in, and graduation status. Comparing interviews with faculty members who have experience working with the undocumented population added validity to student experiences. Supporting archival data was also employed. For example, utilization of school handbooks, district Lau Plans, school calendars, and other forms of data were used to increased validity of participants' remembered experiences.

Field notes were also used to positively affect validity. Field notes place qualitative research in the context of greater society, providing nontextual information from interviews that become useful in the understanding of participant stories (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). In this study, field notes allowed for rich, thick descriptions and the inclusion of data and participant experiences that would otherwise not be included in the final manuscript. Field notes included such information as age of participant upon arrival in the United States, educational level of parents, as well as a brief description of the high school the participant attended.

Qualitative research is considered reliable if the approach to research is able to yield consistent or stable results (Coleman, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rose &

Johnson, 2020). In order to increase reliability throughout the process, the researcher considered personal positionality, reflexivity, and utilized peer examination for review of the findings. Positionality, also called neutrality and reflexivity (Coleman, 2021; Rose & Johnson, 2020), is the researcher considering and incorporating their own personal background, personality, subjectivities, and experiences into the research project (Coleman, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fusch et al., 2018; Merriam, 2009; Nha, 2021; Rose & Johnson, 2020). While incorporation of positionality and reflexivity means that replication of data by another researcher is unlikely (Nha, 2021), according to Rose and Johnson (2020), the potential for discrepancy and admission of such by the researcher is actually a strength of qualitative study. Therefore, the researcher acknowledged the positionality of personal experiences, assumptions, and biases, all of which are connected to a career, personal education, and economic and personal security. Furthermore, the researcher noted that while not an immigrant – undocumented or otherwise – as an educator, he held potential preconceived perceptions based on personal experiences with undocumented students and families in the secondary school setting, as both an administrator and teacher. To increase reliability, the researcher employed reflexivity by journaling potential personal biases and feelings throughout the process, citing what was learned, how expectations were met, made clear, or altered throughout the study (Probst, 2015).

Additional reliability was created through inspection of recording and transcripts by outside observers. Called peer examination or peer review, the process consists of the researcher sharing data with someone knowledgeable about the topic to verify the plausibility of the outcomes, findings, and analyses (Coleman, 2021; Nha, 2021; Rose &

Johnson, 2020). This study employed peer examination by asking a colleague experienced in working with undocumented students to review the data and the analyses derived from the data. In order to gain the perspective and authenticity of the studied population on the analyses of the project, the same process of peer examination was used by employing a formerly undocumented student who was not otherwise a participant in the study to review the analyses. Participants were informed of, and agreed to the sharing of interview data with peer reviewers.

Instrumentation

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. Gathering information, opinions, and attitudes through the study of a smaller sample of a larger population is an effective research strategy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Guided by the review of existing literature in Chapter Two, personal interviews were conducted by the researcher.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that the researcher is the major instrument for qualitative research and is responsible for the gathering of data, information, and the interpretation of that data. As the major instrument, the researcher employed face-to-face interviews for the collection of data. The literature review led the researcher to create questions that elicited conversations about the types of barriers students faced, as well as practices within the participants' schools that encouraged resilience. The researcher took notes during interviews and recorded the sessions for later transcription and study and

employed the use of a recording and transcription service for ease of transcribing and reviewing the interview sessions.

Narrative inquiries often follow an open-ended interview format, creating an environment of minimal interruptions by the researcher (Chang et al., 2019). Therefore, a semi-structured, open-ended interview technique was employed. This method permitted structuring of interviews in such a way that all participants were asked similar questions, but were granted freedom to answer in open-ended fashion. Follow-up questions were loose and probing, which licensed participants to more fully state and explore experiences as undocumented students (Turner, 2010). As a narrative qualitative study, the researcher allowed participants to tell their own stories, collected data on the stories, and respected the meanings participants created for themselves through personal, specific experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mills & Gay, 2019). After the interviews were transcribed, participants were provided copies of interviews and were authorized to amend, alter, or add if discrepancies or misunderstandings had taken place. The official transcripts were coded; main themes and subthemes emerged as patterns were discovered by the researcher. The information was synthesized by the researcher, who requested peer evaluation from a colleague who had worked with undocumented students, as well as a formerly undocumented student who was not a participant in the study.

Delgado-Romero et al. (2018) claimed that without an admission of a position of power and/or privilege, mistrust of the researcher can develop, rendering the study useless. Stating positionality of the researcher and the ways in which the work may have been impacted by that position empowers considerations of validity, authenticity, and credibility on the part of the reader. The researcher acknowledged potential areas of

underlying biases related to his status as a nonimmigrant, a career in education, and the security his positionality brings. Stating personal positionalities in relation to the population studied forces the researcher to examine his own struggle to overcome racism, his relative privilege, and interconnectedness to the population studied (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018).

Procedures

Approval to conduct this study of human subjects was obtained through the Southwest Baptist University research ethics board and included Research Review Board approval (Appendix A). Ethical considerations for participants were taken into consideration. The qualitative narrative study was achieved using standardized open-ended interviews, allowing for structured questioning with open-ended responses and fluid follow-up questions from the researcher (Turner, 2010). Interview questions are available in the Appendix B.

Through every step of the research process, the researcher must take care to ensure anonymity, respect experiences, and to advocate for the rights of participants (Chang et al., 2019). Interviews were conducted at a place of the participant's choosing in order to provide security and comfort (Chang et al., 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). Security and comfort were also provided by ensuring anonymity of the subjects. Anonymity and privacy are of utmost importance when studying marginalized populations (Chang et al., 2019). Names were changed; locations and other identifying characteristics were altered or hidden. In order to increase confidentiality, consent forms were offered and initialed by participants. All participants

were bilingual, speaking both Spanish and English fluently, thereby forgoing the necessity of a translator or translation device.

Upon commencement of individual interviews, participants were advised of inherent risks involved in participation in this study. Risks included concerns of confidentiality (which, though accounted for through anonymity is a risk, nonetheless), and uncomfortable feelings due to the remembrance of a potentially tumultuous stage of life. An inherent risk in the divulging of sensitive information about participants and families existed.

The researcher desired data from certain specific topics. Topics were originally determined by the review of literature. Therefore, questions were centered around discussions of family and personal background/history, secondary school experiences, barriers related to the undocumented status while in high school, and resiliencies found while in school. Data collection consisted of interview transcripts, participant high school transcripts, interviews with experienced faculty, and other supporting archival data.

Open-ended responses to talking points provided opportunity for rich and detailed narratives, creating access to deeper understanding of participant experiences. Interviews were recorded through the taking of field notes by the researcher, as well as the use of Otter.ai, a paid transcription service, which granted the option for later transcription of notes. Member checking occurred during the interview sessions through the use of paraphrasing, echoing, and seeking of clarification on any ambiguous answer given. Member checking continued after interviews were recorded and transcribed, as participants were authorized to read personal transcripts and to alter, clarify, or change anything that had been misrepresented. After interviews and member checking,

transcripts were coded, and peer evaluation was employed for verification of main themes and subthemes that had emerged as the researcher discovered and synthesized patterns from the study. Available participant transcripts, interview transcripts with school faculty, and other supporting archival data were also reviewed and cross-referenced to seek commonalities in themes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of a qualitative study requires the recognition, connection, and development of emergent themes and ideas gleaned from interviews or other studied literature (Mohajan, 2018). Narrative inquiries empower researchers to utilize interviews for the creation of themes from shared stories (Chang et al., 2019). The overall process of analyzing data followed the basic recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2018): a) gathering of information, b) organizing the data, c) reading through the data, d) coding the data into themes, and e) interpreting the themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Butina (2015), collecting data in narrative studies is not a step-by-step process. Often, analyses begin taking place even during the interview phases of study. The allowance for analyses during the interview or observation forces the researcher to adjust the study, the questions, or the approach as needed (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Narrative analysis is an oft-used form of qualitative data analysis, though there are no particular guidelines set forth for this approach. There are, however, four general methods for the conducting of a narrative analysis of data. The researcher in this study utilized the most common approach: narrative thematic analysis, in which the content created through interviews is the focus of analysis (Butina, 2015). Analyzing collected

data from the research happened in three stages: a) organization and review, b) winnowing of data and categorization, c) and interpretation of data. Interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai, a paid online transcription service. During interviews, the researcher took notes as to possible developing themes and later compared to the Otter.ai transcription to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were downloaded, cleaned, and compiled for participant review and member checking. Personal information on the transcripts were altered or scrubbed to create anonymity for participants. Participants were permitted to clarify, expound, or amend information as needed.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended winnowing the data in qualitative studies. Transcription, followed by winnowing, is a technique that requires the sifting through of qualitative data, narrowing the focus from the mass of information collected into smaller themes. Transcripts, therefore, were coded and broken down into specific themes and subthemes. Some themes were confirmed through the review of literature in Chapter Two, others were revealed through the interview process and were found through participant transcripts, interviews with experienced school faculty, and supporting archival data. Otter.ai reported overall usage of words to help researchers identify recurring themes, though quantity of word usage was deemed less important than meanings created through overall conversation. Otter.ai was utilized, but was followed with a manual review of the data to verify that the themes were accurate and nothing was omitted. Interpretation of the data, though listed last in the process, occurred simultaneously with other stages of analysis (Butina, 2015). Interpretation consisted of coding data from the study, which revealed main themes and subthemes for analyzation of meaning in the data from participants, participant transcripts, interviews with school

faculty, and other supporting archival data. All mentioned undertakings were done with the intent to better and more clearly understand lived experiences of undocumented students in Southwest Missouri secondary schools.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. Utilization of narrative inquiry methods often manifest into counternarratives and counterstorytelling (Chang et al., 2019), which, following a model of LatCrit, challenge mainstream cultural narratives, sanctioning recognition of often unheard voices in academic research (Chang et al., 2019; Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Diaz, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). In Chapter Three, the methodology of the study was presented. The methodology consisted of semi-structured interviews that contained open-ended questioning, a review of available high school transcripts, interviews with school faculty, and supporting archival data.

The participants in the inquiry were Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri. Interviews were conducted in locations approved of, or suggested by, the participant, or via Zoom if participants wanted an electronic meeting. The researcher was the instrument of study, as is common in qualitative studies. Data were collected via recording and transcription

devices, high school transcripts, and other supporting archival data, such as school handbooks and policies, district Lau Plans, and school calendars.

In Chapters Four and Five, the researcher will continue the study of the effect of an undocumented status on student experiences. In Chapter Four the researcher will present the data gleaned from interviews of participants and experienced faculty, participant transcripts, and researcher field notes. In Chapter Five, the researcher will summarize the processes, consider the responses to the research questions and collected data, and discuss implications for school administrators and teachers, as well as the impact this study may have for future studies.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

Nearly 5,000,000 undocumented children or young adults under the age of 30 (Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Shelton, 2018) reside in the United States. Nearly 100,000 undocumented students graduate from American secondary schools every year (Camarota et al., 2017; Castrellón, 2021; Crawford et al., 2018; Zong & Batalova, 2019). However, 40% of the 100,000 will not complete their high school education (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). The purpose of this study was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement.

Studies using critical theories as a framework for research consider issues through an historical lens (Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). Doing so permits analyzation of institutions from contexts of history, power, privilege, race, and legality (Castrellón, 2021). Specifically, researchers utilizing Latinx critical theory should consider the impact of history, politics, and laws on the lives of underrepresented populations (Castrellón, 2021; Diaz, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020). Researchers should attempt to reveal societal systems within institutions that, even unintentionally, sustain and further inequalities for students of color (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Diaz, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Furthermore, researchers should seek justice for all students through disruption of existing systems of

oppression (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Diaz, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2020).

Chapter Two began by reviewing the history and evolution of policies and laws pertaining to immigration in the United States. A study of undocumented immigrants requires a review of history, because immigration policies are direct determinants on the trajectories of immigrant lives and experiences (Gonzales et al., 2018; Yoshikawa et al., 2017). In order to comprehend the overall context of a demographic in qualitative studies, it is essential for researchers of the studied community to have a background and understanding in history and politics (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). As such, researchers and theorists have concluded that race, nation, and nationality are not biological realities, rather constructs, which should be studied within the context of history—a history that is often void as part of the overall immigration debate (Burns & Vaughn, 2021; McCorkle, 2018; Ngai, 1999). Furthermore, illegality, in terms of immigration, according to Gonzales et al. (2018), is a creation of society that has been legitimized through history, policy, and law.

Though a brief history of immigration laws and policies was examined from the inception of the United States to 2020, perhaps the most consequential ruling on any piece of legislation concerning undocumented students in schools was the United States Supreme Court Case of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982). In this case, which considered whether or not schools could block K-12 student enrollment based solely on student immigration status, the Court's majority determined that student immigration statuses could not bar access to a free and appropriate education (Crawford & Hairston, 2018; Mead & Paige, 2019; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). The decision forbids school districts from inquiring about

student and family immigration statuses, and made K-12 schools a safe haven for undocumented students and their families. The ruling, however, has come with consequences. Undocumented students, though under the same expectations of compulsory education as all other students (Gonzales et al., 2018; Passel & Cohn, 2009), will find barriers to furtherance of education at the end of their time in public schools (Gonzales et al., 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Roth, 2019), a time when the protections of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) cease to exist (Martinez Hoy & Nguyen, 2019). Beyond the walls of protection offered by K-12 public education and without the intervention of government aid, undocumented immigrant students will find employment difficult, voting and earning a driver's license impossible, and barriers to achievement of a postsecondary education. The result is often resignation to a life of low-wage employment opportunities and the burdens of poverty (Gonzales et al., 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Roth, 2019).

A second requirement of viewing issues through a LatCrit theoretical lens is the seeking of understanding of educational practices pertaining to Latinx students. The goal of LatCrit research should be improvement of educational opportunities for students of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Diaz, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998). While barriers such as poverty, health, lack of support, and isolation can exist for all students (Alif et al., 2020; Finning et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2019), an undocumented status creates additional layers—barriers on top of barriers—for students (Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018; Craven et al., 2017; Crawford et al., 2018; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Rutter et al., 2020; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). If public schools are to assist in the

resiliencies and successes of undocumented populations, a more complete understanding of the barriers that impede resilience and success is imperative.

On behalf of underserved populations, critical theories view society from a lens of potential resistance, action, justice and liberation (Bohman et al., 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). Latinx critical theory encourages educators to consider practices and systems that even unintentionally lead to oppression and the creation of opportunities for change (Cooper Stein et al., 2018; Diaz, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2020). Resistance is found within oppressed populations, even if resistance is not overtly visible, and is often revealed through personal advocacy and persistence (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Jemal, 2017). If undocumented student resiliencies are revealed, school personnel are better able to equip students through use of practices that encourage those resiliencies. Therefore, though barriers exist, through understanding undocumented student experiences, schools can better operate in a way that embodies and fosters philosophies of resilience and positive outcomes for the undocumented (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Qualitative studies are designed to better understand feelings of groups about specific topics (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, this qualitative narrative inquiry was designed for improved understanding of both the positive and negative experiences of undocumented students, particularly in secondary schools of Southwest Missouri. The study was designed to view schools from the perspective of the students who have lived a personal, undocumented experience. In doing so, the researcher hoped to more fully comprehend the barriers students face that lead to struggle and failure, as well as the actions and practices of both students and schools that lead to resilience and the overcoming of obstacles.

The researcher accomplished this end by conducting interviews with six adults who were undocumented at the time of their attendance in secondary school. Interviews were conducted in open-ended fashion, but centered around the following major question, with subquestions used as guiding principles for gathering of more detailed information:

What are the experiences of Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri?

Chapter Four presents the findings of the conducted participant interviews. Included in the chapter are participant descriptions, data analysis and coding explanations, and participant narratives with supporting evidence from outside sources. Finally, developed themes from the collected data are reported.

Participants

This qualitative narrative inquiry was conducted with the cooperation of former secondary school students who, at the time of attendance in secondary schools, were unauthorized immigrants in Southwest Missouri. Participants had arrived in the United States as minors, unauthorized, or, if arriving legally, overstayed a visa during high school years and, thus, became undocumented. Participants were purposively sampled based on criterions that allowed sharing of insights and experiences, both positive and negative, during secondary school as undocumented students. Anonymity of participants was guaranteed as the topic of undocumented immigration contained privacy and potential legal implications for participants and families. In order to maintain confidentiality, names, personal information, school districts, and all other potential identifying factors were scrubbed from recordings, transcripts, and the final manuscript.

Participants were delimited to immigrants from Mexico or Central America, but varied in other ways. Demographics such as gender, country of origin, and age at the time of immigration were noted, but were not delineating factors in the study. Each participant was labeled by order of interview as a Participant (P) who had lived as an undocumented student while in secondary schools (Table 1). Interviews were conducted during the month of July 2022, in person, and at a location suitable for the participant. It is noted that, though the researcher set out to interview participants from at least three Southwest Missouri school districts, the reliance on snowball sampling may have limited the geographic scope of participants, leading to participant representation of only two school districts in Southwest Missouri. Further issues of diversity or lack of diversity that could have affected experiences are noted in Table 1. Five of six participants—all female—were from Guatemala; the sixth participant was male and from El Salvador. The researcher recognized the lack of diversity as a potential limitation of the study.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Gender	Home country	Age at U.S. entry
P1	Female	Guatemala	7 years
P2	Female	Guatemala	9 years
P3	Female	Guatemala	13 years
P4	Female	Guatemala	4 or 5 years
P5	Male	El Salvador	8 or 9 years
P6	Female	Guatemala	16 years

Data Analysis

The researcher's goal was not to prove or disprove experiences of participants. Rather, the intent was to accept participant experiences as legitimate. Experiences and remembrances can then be utilized for the informing of educators, ultimately seeking the

betterment of education for current and future undocumented students. Though all interviews were loose in structure, initial interviews were conducted with more rigidity than later interviews. The researcher noted early in each interview that (aside from P2, who was direct and succinct in her responses) participants were willing to discuss research questions, but arriving at answers to specific questions required sharing of personal details and backgrounds not necessarily directly related to the questions. Delgado-Romero et al. (2018) discussed qualitative narrative studies as particularly suited for the study of Latinx populations, insofar as the conversational nature of the format creates conditions for *personalismo* (personal relationships), *platicando* (joy of small talk), and *cuentos* (the art of storytelling). In allowing more space for open-ended questions and answers—not all of which related to the study—all research questions were eventually addressed, though not always in a linear fashion or as directly as the researcher intended. Member checking was employed during interviews, as the researcher sought clarification to answers given. Due to the nature of narrative interviews, conversations varied in length (Table 2). To be noted, P4 and P5 interviews were combined, as the originally contacted participant (P5) employed snowball sampling and asked his wife, who fit the demographic, to participate with him (Mills & Gay, 2019; C. Parker et al., 2019). This may have impacted the amount of information shared by either participant (possibly noted in the fewer high frequency words for P4 noted in Table 3), but also assisted in the fostering of trust between participants and the researcher (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). Though they were interviewed together, participants' information was separated for data mining purposes. Furthermore, P5 was not a perfect fit for the study as far as "high school" was concerned, but secondary schools are

typically considered Grades 6-12, and P5's experiences fit this definition (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). However, he was undocumented through the sixth grade, at which point he earned TPS. He had lived under TPS protection from then until the present day, having annual reviews with immigration to determine his eligibility to stay in the United States. The tenuous liminality of temporary statuses through programs such as TPS, DACA, and simply having a general undocumented status was discussed in the literature review of Chapter Two. More importantly, his experiences with the liminality of TPS and with his family—many of whom have remained undocumented—were pertinent and matched the purpose of the study.

Table 2

Descriptive Interview Table (July, 2022)

Participant	Interview Length	Transcript Length
P1	53:23	16 pages
P2	20:58	7 pages
P3	37:55	15 pages
P4 & P5	82:32	22 pages
P6	79:31	20 pages
T1	22:48	8 pages

Note.T1 is the notation given to the faculty member with experience teaching undocumented students. The data collected from the T1 interview were used as part of the triangulation process.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with participant permission using the Otter.ai transcription service. Otter.ai generated a detailed account of each interview that was eventually sent to each participant to allow for member checking. During multiple playbacks, the researcher edited and scrubbed Otter.ai transcriptions in order to ensure anonymity. Themes related to the overarching research question and subquestions emerged throughout the data-gathering process. Sometimes before an interview, nearly always afterward, and at other times as thoughts emerged, the researcher utilized personal

journaling, which allowed collections of self-reflection, researcher biases, questions he hoped to have answered, ways to improve the process in the future, and general thoughts and insecurities of the researcher (Probst, 2015). Triangulation of data created opportunity for increased validity and reliability within the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation for this study was achieved through digitally transcribed interviews; archival data, such as offered high school transcripts, and perusal of classes and course offerings from participant schools, immigration law; and a review of qualitative interview data from an experienced faculty member.

Coding

Otter.ai transcriptions are not completely accurate in the creation of transcripts. Therefore, in scrubbing interviews, the researcher made edits as necessary and attempted to remove redundant or unnecessary terms from consideration of the study (Peoples, 2021). For example, the researcher chose to ignore words that lacked usefulness in the research, such as school, high school, undocumented, student, and Hispanic were obvious high-frequency words for each participant, but were only generic relations to the topic at hand. The Otter.ai transcription device provided the researcher with the top terms utilized during each interview. The researcher created a spreadsheet of most spoken terms, minus terms deemed superfluous to the study, and organized terms by participant (Table 3).

Table 3

Most Used Coded Participant Terms From Interviews

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Apply	Daughter	Mom	Mom	Mom	Money
Feel	Friends	Recommendation Letters	Parents	Parents	College
People	Language	Kids	EL classes	EL	Grandma
Asylum	Helped	People	Work	Papers	Feel
Kids	DACA	Church	Papers	Family	People
Graduate	EL teacher	Class	Family	People	Pay
Papers	Mom	Work permit	People	Kids	Lawyer
Paying	Lawyer	English		Money	Teacher
Mom	Teacher	Degree		Grant(ed)	Brother

Following the initial listing of terms shown in Table 3, the researcher sought to incur meaning from said terms. In order to accomplish this, the researcher created a second spreadsheet that combined participant most used terms (Table 3), listed the number of times the terms were used across all interviews, and the number of participants who used the term throughout conversation, as is shown in Table 4 (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In creating Table 4, the researcher noted the top 25% most frequently used terms: helped (54 times), people (52 times), mom (51times), class (41 times), work (40 times), feel (38 times), and teacher (36 times).

Table 4

Combined Terms From Participant Interviews

Coded Terms	Total Times Used	Number of Participants
Apply	10	3
Asylum	4	2
Brother	33	4
Class	41	6
Church	12	2
College	33	5
DACA	6	4
Daughter	8	3
Degree	13	3
English	28	6
EL	18	6
EL Classes	4	3
EL teacher	5	4
Family	23	4
Feel	38	5
Friends	17	6
Graduate	22	5
Grandma	12	2
Grant	14	3
Helped	54	6
Kids	27	4
Language	12	4
Lawyer	26	5
Mom	51	6
Money	30	5
Papers	25	5
Parents	13	5
Pay(ing)	33	5
People	52	6
Recommendation (Letters)	4	2
Teacher	36	5
Work(ing)	40	6
Work Permit	10	3

As a means to acquire further understanding of word importance, the researcher placed focus on terms used by most participants (Table 5). The frequency and breakdown of these commonly used terms surrounded ideas of barriers and factors in resilience.

Table 5

Terms by Number of Participants

Used by 6 participants	Used by 5 participants	Used by 4 participants
Class	College	Brother
English	Feel	DACA
EL	Graduate	EL Teacher
Friends	Lawyer	Family
Help	Money	Kids
Mom	Papers	Language
People	Parents	
Work	Pay	
	Teacher	

Participant Narratives

Interviews were conducted in person and at a location of convenience and comfortability for participants. Participants initialed interview protocols (Appendix C) and the informed consent form (Appendix D) prior to interviews, agreeing to the understanding of potential risks and for the recording of interviews. Otter.ai was utilized for recording and producing transcriptions. The following is a basic summary of each participant's interview, organized by research subquestions, which centered on undocumented student experiences connected to achievement, participation, aspirations, and resiliencies. Each narrative begins with general background information about the participant that the researcher found beneficial in understanding the overall situation of each participant. After interpreting, combining, and collecting all data from participant narratives, triangulating documents, and reviewing literature, overall themes were developed and recorded. Increased reliability and validity were attained through triangulated use of the digitally transcribed interviews, high school transcripts, perusal of classes and course offerings from participant schools, immigration law, and a review of qualitative interview data from an experienced faculty member.

Participant 1

Participant 1 arrived in the United States at 7 years of age from Guatemala. She made the trip with her mother and her siblings. She was the youngest of the siblings to emigrate, but has a U.S.-born younger sister now. She does not remember much of the trip to the United States, but has flashbacks when the family talks about the journey. Participant 1's family came to the United States hoping to seek asylum, but after arrival, being fearful of misinformation and the possibility of deportation, P1's mother did not initially apply for a protected status for the family. When P1 was in the eigth grade, asylum was officially sought, but denied. At this time, P1 realized she was undocumented and without papers in the United States. As the younger sibling, she also watched her brother and sister struggle with possibilities beyond high school. She criticized policies, laws, and outcomes, and openly shared pent up frustration:

> …we pay taxes and work…but we don't get the return. Yeah, still called illegal. Then what do I have to do in order to be incorporated into America? What else do you guys want us to do that we're not doing? What else is there?

Research Subquestion 1: Achievement

Participant 1 recalls her undocumented status as having a negative impact on her achievement in high school, though she noted that it was perhaps not longterm. P1 stated "There was a time where my brain, like, went down." Much of the negative impact was attributed to witnessing the struggles of her older siblings, both of whom were slated to attend area colleges, only to have scholarships and financial aid revoked due to lack of a Social Security number, making attendance nearly impossible. Participant 1 also expressed feelings as an outsider. Even though she had attended schools in the United

States since she was 7 years old, she still had fears that teachers or other students thought pejoratively towards her. She was worried others thought she did not "belong here," or that she "should not be here if you don't understand" how to do something related to school work. Though not noted directly with questions of achievement, experiences of the typical senior year of high school were reflected upon negatively as P1 spoke with frustration about counselors asking if she needed letters of recommendation for college, or if she had filled out scholarship information, or needed help with grants for postsecondary schooling.

Research Subquestion 2: Activities

Participant 1 was the most active of all interviewees. She participated in track and field, cross country, and an orientation program for incoming high school freshmen. Participant 1 did not view the undocumented status as prohibitive for participation in school activities. Concerning participation, P1 found all three to be related to her persistence and resilience as a student, giving her an outlet for the other negative feelings she experienced as an undocumented student. The feeling of activities being an outlet was particularly present during her senior year of high school when her peers were applying for colleges and scholarships. She remembered activities as "…something I could focus on." Her attention needed to be diverted from "basically kids applying for scholarships, letters of recommendation, graduating with honors…and there was a time where I was like, 'Yeah, I can't do anything.'" In P1's case, activities were not prohibited by her undocumented status. Rather, they contributed in her resilience and ability to overcome.

Research Subquestion 3: Aspirations

Participant 1 wanted to be a veterinarian when in high school but gave up pursuit in her later years. While watching older siblings' access to higher education diminish, P1 initially held to the hope that perhaps laws or her personal status would change and allow her the opportunity to attend college. But as time closed in about her, she did not want to feel the rejection or to be told, "No. You can't apply here because you have…because you're not a citizen." Participant 1 abandoned not only the aspirations of veterinarian school, but postsecondary schooling altogether and any type of career beyond the secondary school years.

Research Subquestion 4: Resiliencies

Throughout the interview, P1 mentioned the human agents over the course of schooling who assisted in her successes. On her very first day of school in the United States, the only two Hispanic students in her class adopted her and began to teach her. In high school, P1 spoke of teachers who gave her immeasurable support by making her feel welcome, "part of the group," or that "there was no difference in me and them." Other teachers gave her extra help, but also held her to high standards. She recalled teachers forcing her to write the best papers she could write, but making sure she understood everything along the way, continually probing P1 to further elaborate, asking if there was anything else she could add to her work for improvement.

Within the structures of the school, P1 found other assistance, as well. Related to Subquestion 2, participation in athletics offered daily time to focus on something unrelated to life, school, or her future. As a long-distance runner, P1 ran as "a way to escape reality." Furthermore, P1 applied for, and was accepted as a leader for incoming

freshmen, an opportunity for P1 to help other students like her. She did not recall going out of the way to speak to students about immigration statuses, but felt like she could tell when a student was undocumented. She felt a sense of purpose working not only with the freshmen, but with upperclassmen, as well, in a class called Workroom. In the class, P1 was assigned to a teacher and was allowed to work on her own homework in the class. But she most enjoyed helping other students who were limited English speakers. Together, they worked on their homework. In doing so, she was able to help students with much more than daily school lessons. P1 said it was

> …like I was involved in helping my community and that's something I wanted to do. If you don't know how to make an appointment to go to the doctor, "Hey, here's where you can go." Or, "This is cheaper to go here."

At the time of the study, Participant 1 was a DACA recipient and was employed as an administrative assistant and translator for a public high school. Participant 1 appreciated her DACA status, but still expressed frustration over things she could not do. Participant 1 mentioned that she could enroll in college now and would like to do so to earn a degree in education. However, she lacked the financial means to attend, as state financial aid—whether in the form of loans, or state or institutional scholarships—was not a possibility for DACA recipients in Missouri (Beamer & Steinbaum, 2019; Benevento, 2021; Bjorklund, 2018), regardless of how long they have lived in the United States.

Participant 2

Participant 2 arrived in the United States at the age of 9 with an older brother and an aunt. She remembered the trip to the United States, but did not elaborate on the topic.

From the time she arrived as a 9-year-old until she was 16 years, P2 attended American schools. Upon leaving for summer break after her ninth-grade year, she found employment and never returned. She was stoic in her responses to questions. Participant 2 did not lament realities or worry about the ways in which reality could have been different. Rather, she worked within her reality to make the best of the situation.

Research Subquestion 1: Achievement

The only achievement issue P2 noted as connected to her undocumented status was language. She recalled needing assistance via EL classes and knew that her lack of English made learning difficult at times. Of the participants in the study, though, P2's experiences had the most drastic negative effect on her schooling. When specifically asked if dropping out of school was related to her undocumented status, P2 responded in the negative. "No, no," she retorted. "It was not related to that." She relayed the story, though, not recognizing that in fact, her undocumented status—and that of her family—was the master barrier to her achievement and that this barrier led directly to dropping out of school. In P2's explanation, she stated that after the ninth-grade, she decided to get a summer job and planned to return to school in the fall. But her mother was laid off from work, and due to her mother's undocumented status, it was hard for her to find another job. Participant 2 felt the responsible thing to do was to continue working at her job and financially help the family. She never returned to school. "What am I going to do?" she still questioned, years later. "I was working and she [her mother] kind of had that pressure for herself. So, can I do something for her? Yeah. So, I took over the responsibility to make money." Her voice faded, and then she picked up again, nearly inaudibly adding, "16 years old."

Research Subquestion 2: Activities

Participant 2 did not participate in school activities. Again, she refused to blame her status as an undocumented student on lack of involvement in activities. Neither did she feel bad about not having participated or wish she had. Participant 2 also noted her mother as a reason for lack of participation: "Mom was like, very strict and she wanted me to leave from school, then back to the house, to school, and back again." She also noted her mother was stricter with her than her brother. Laughing, she said, "He's a boy, you know?"

Research Subquestion 3: Aspirations

Participant 2 did not recall having dreams for a future that differed from her expectations of a life as an undocumented immigrant. She knew that no matter how well she might do in school, her opportunities were going to be limited. "I knew right after I finished school there was no other option for me than to find what I *can* [emphasis added] be." Participant 2 made a conscious decision to focus on what was possible, not what was impossible. "I think of like having my foot on the ground," she said. "And like, I'm not gonna live something I'm not gonna to be able to do…I think I was just more realistic about what was going on around me." She continued to claim the perceived importance of realism: "It has helped me a lot because I don't have to make or live a story and then not be able to accomplish it."

Research Subquestion 4: Resiliencies

Though time in high school was short, P2 remembered fondly her experiences with other Hispanic peers who assisted her in successes. Furthermore, P2 praised the EL classes in which she was placed to help her learn English and to understand her work in

other classes. Participant 2 has worked many jobs since leaving school, and as of the time of the study, owned a construction and painting company. In a follow-up thread of text messages, P2 reiterated the interview, expressing her beliefs of "not wasting time and energy on things I cannot change." She continued, "I just live the process through tears and celebrate achievements with joy and happiness." Additionally, she noted that owning a business as an undocumented immigrant requires surviving many rejections. "It is tough," she said, "but it is not tough enough for someone who wants to succeed and have a better life." Along with a picture of her two daughters around a yard sign advertising the family business, she sent a final text that read, "We are the ones setting up our own barriers."

Participant 3

Participant 3 arrived in the United States at 13 years of age. In Guatemala, she was attending school as an eighth-grade student. Upon arrival in the United States, she was entered as a sixth grader due to lack of English proficiency. Participant 3 arrived with her aunt and siblings and distinctly remembered the trip, though she did not know it was illegal or that she and her family could be in trouble for their relocation.

Research Subquestion 1: Achievement

Secondary school achievement was not overly affected by P3's undocumented status. Her grades were good, though P3 felt some isolation from other students. Though achievement was not considered an issue, P3 mentioned many barriers to achievement faced during her time in schools. Participant 3 spoke of the poverty created by her family's journey to the United States and the debt incurred by her parents—in this case to pay *coyotes*—to have their children transported in the US. Poverty also forced her parents

to work long hours, which resulted in a lack of involvement in P3's school life. Upon arrival in the United States, due to a lack of English, P3 was placed in the sixth grade, though she had been in the eighth-grade in Guatemala. In the interview, P3 mentioned misplacement as "discouraging" and as a possible reason for the lack of development of solid peer relationships throughout her time in school.

Furthermore, P3 discussed a fear of deportation as impacting high school attendance, noting that the family—the children and parents—would not leave the house on days when immigration enforcement was rumored to be in town. Participant 3 also mentioned language as a barrier, citing not only the difficulties of learning in a foreign tongue, but also that she was a recipient of bullying due to lack of understanding of English or even due to her accent after having become proficient in English. Participant 3 discussed the difficulties of affording a college education without access to loans, grants, or scholarships. She worked two jobs while attempting to attend college. She said, "I could work with my permit. I was able to get credit cards…to pay for school books and other school related stuff." Participant 3 gave more effort to attend college than any other participant interviewed. For her efforts, she achieved 3 semesters of credits, no degree, and no certification. However, she did accumulate massive amounts of credit card debt, explaining, "I told my mom I've paid for school like maybe twice or three times."

Research Subquestion 2: Activities

Participant 3 participated in two activities while attending secondary schools, but participated in only one for an extended period of time. Participant 3 started to run track and field one year, but upon arrival, found no other Hispanic athletes. Her fear of conversing in English caused her to not pursue this endeavor further, saying, "I think it

was because there was no other Hispanics and I didn't want to communicate with the other kids; I feel like I'm not going to be able to talk to them." She spoke fondly, though, of the coach who encouraged her to stay and was disappointed when she did not. The other activity was Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), a program to which several other Hispanic students had already been attracted. Participant 3 spent 3 years in the club. Overall, she did not believe her undocumented status kept her from partaking in activities.

Research Subquestion 3: Aspirations

As stated, P3 participated in FBLA. Naturally, she wished to earn a business degree in college. Realizing the limitations of her status "was terrible." Participant 3 became restless, feeling she had to find a way to accomplish her goals and "all the plans I had." After a year, she enrolled herself in a private, religious university in Texas, the results of which were discussed under Research Question 1.

Research Subquestion 4: Resiliencies

Participant 3 recognized people as necessary to her resilience. From her earliest days in United States schools, she mentioned peers. She also discussed EL teachers, mainstream teachers who worked on her behalf in tandem with her EL teacher, and teachers who made her feel a part of the larger whole. Outside of school and throughout the interview, she told stories of her mother, her stepfather, her brother, and her sisters. Some were light-hearted stories about learning English and the funny things she and her siblings would say when they were children. Other stories were heavier. Participant 3 believed her mother and stepfather felt guilty that their children were unable to attend school and earn degrees. The parents encouraged success and pushed the importance of a

high school diploma, themselves not realizing the limitations of their children's statuses. Also noted under Research Question 1, P3 mentioned her parents' inability to attend school events due to work schedules. Regardless of whether the stories were positive or negative, the number of mentions of her family alone warranted notation and spoke to the importance of human agency in the successes or failures of undocumented students throughout secondary schooling.

Another noted factor in resilience of P3 was a study hall type class that gave her extra time with an EL teacher. She claimed this class helped her create deep relationship with the teacher, but also allowed her the opportunity to assist other students in the class. Outside of secondary school doors, but nonetheless important to the participant, was a story she told about her time in Texas. Despite the hardships of P3's experiences in college—at times not knowing where meals would come from—P3 showed her ability to find positive in bleak situations. "Even though I didn't get a degree, I saw the goodness in people." She told stories of an older man—a pastor—who on her worst days would show up and ask if her and her brother would like to go to dinner. "It was just good people that we found along the way." She trailed off, though, finishing the thought with lamentation. "It still affects me now because I am older and I have no degree. I have nothing as far as certifications…nothing…and it's hard."

Participant 3 was a DACA recipient and had been working for a multinational corporation for several years in the business division. She is where she wanted to be—working in the business world—but had limited opportunities for advancement due to her lack of a college degree. She recently applied to work in a hospital—not where she saw herself—but the hospital promised advancement opportunities and increased job security.

Participant 4

Participant 4 came to the United States from Guatemala at 4 or 5 years of age. Her mother was already in Texas and planned to send for her daughter, but the process was sped up when P4 became ill. Participant 4's mother told her that she would have died if she had stayed in Guatemala. She did not recall the trip to the United States. Every year of P4's education was in the United States; she began kindergarten in Laredo, Texas and moved to Missouri when she was 10 or 11 years old. In Missouri, P4 completed the remainder of her school years, ultimately graduating high school with honors. Participant 4 grew up with the knowledge that she was undocumented, as she remembered her mother working through issues, filing paperwork, and overhearing conversations between family members.

Research Subquestion 1: Achievement

While admitting it seems likely that an undocumented status would, according to P4, "bring you down," she did not believe her achievement in school was impacted by the undocumented status. She graduated with honors, even while knowing continuance of schooling outside of high school would not be feasible. She did not allow that knowledge to affect her attitude towards school. "Being undocumented didn't stop me from doing good in school." She added, "That's just who I was." Regardless of high achievement, barriers were mentioned as obstacles to P4's success in school, namely postsecondary limitations, worrying about deportation for herself and for her mother, and the feeling that she was judged—even by other Hispanic students—for her status.

Research Subquestion 2: Activities

Participant 4 only participated in Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) as a high school activity. Participant 4 joined the group because of friends and "just normal high school stuff." Participant 4 also spent free time working for cash at a local laundromat.

Research Subquestion 3: Aspirations

Participant 4 was always well aware of her status and the limitations the status would present. Multiple times in the interview, P4 mentioned the reality of work that lay ahead after her graduation. Despite the deep understanding of the reality to be faced, it was impossible not to want something different. Participant 4 found herself imagining a career in nursing and healthcare after taking nursing courses at her high school. All the while, though, "it was in my head that I wasn't able to do it."

Research Subquestion 4: Resiliencies

Because she began attending school as a kindergartener in the United States, P4 did not recall participating in EL classes during her secondary school experience. However, she had members of her family who had come to the United States as undocumented students and she recognized the importance of having classes available for students. Though she was employed in high school, she did not feel pressured to do work by her family, due to the active participation of her mother, aunt, and uncles in her life. Also noted from P4's experiences were a group of students who bonded some over their undocumented status. "There was a group of us. And like, you talk. You know? You talk. 'Are you legal here?'" Other students, though, made her feel like an outsider if they were legally in the United States, pointing out their status and "showing off or something." At

the end of the interview, P4 shared a story about recently helping an undocumented mother of a junior high student get insurance so her child could participate in school athletics. In doing so, P4 addressed a factor in resilience, namely the importance of people and human agents who meet the needs of undocumented students and their families.

After graduating high school, P4 did what she always knew she would have to do and purchased a false identity so she could begin working better jobs. Applying for a driver's license with a false identity, though, set off a series of events that caused her to spend time in jail, though the experience ended with P4 hiring a lawyer who helped lead her to her current status—United States citizen. She had worked for a local company, progressing from the assembly line to an office position as a configuration specialist. Now free from the binding status and limitations of "undocumented," P4 spent the summer with her children in Central America, visiting the children's grandparents.

Participant 5

Participant 5 journeyed to the United States from El Salvador at around 8 years of age. He made the trip with his siblings, as his mother and father had already arrived in the United States. Participant 5's memories of the trip to the United States were vivid, strong, and still impactful. He recalled walking through the desert with a jug of water and pulling rugs to cover footprints in the sand. He lived for what seemed like a month in holding houses at the border, subsisting on little more than water, tomatoes, and eggs. In large part due to clear memories of the migration, P5 never questioned the legality of his family's entrance into the United States. Participant 5 and his siblings were eventually granted TPS some years after arrival. His parents were not allowed to claim this status, as

it was deemed they had illegally trafficked immigrants over the border. The immigrants "trafficked," of course, were their own children. The experiences of living under TPS are not synonymous with the experiences of being undocumented. For example, P5 recognized the advantageous position of his ability to achieve a driver's license and to legally hold employment without need of purchasing false papers or working for cash. However, P5 lived with an undocumented status through the sixth grade, his parents continued to suffer lack of documentation, and his retelling of liminal life under TPS was very similar to the experiences undocumented students faced and felt—both through collected interview data and through the review of literature in Chapter 2. For the aforementioned reasons, and due to the richness of the interview data produced by P5, the researcher chose to include P5's interview and the data incurred from said interview in the study.

Research Subquestion 1: Achievement

Like P3, P5 remembered that upon arrival in United States' schools, he was placed in a grade lower than his actual grade in El Salvador. Participant 5 did not view this as a bad decision by the school, because it gave him a chance to learn English. Though P5 did not hold animosity towards the misplacement, he claimed to have eventually calculated his age and realized that the misplacement would cause him to be in school longer than he should be. Upon realization of this fact, P5 argued for an accelerated placement in order to be more age-appropriately placed; the request was granted. Participant 5 finished high school early by means of an alternative graduation path called General Educational Development (GED) Options.

As an early graduate from high school as a second language learner, and as a student who was semi-shielded from an undocumented status by TPS, P5 did not view his earlier undocumented status, nor his temporary status as having affected his achievement in school, though he noted many barriers to achievement. Participant 5's memories of the trauma of traveling to the United States were ever present in his mind, "cemented in my head forever." Through storytelling about the difficulties of his parents' attempts to escape poverty, P5 relayed his belief that there is a cyclical nature to immigration that makes it harder for undocumented immigrants, and even the next generations, to rise from poverty.

Participant 5 detailed the journey with his siblings and the aftereffects, which are embedded in his consciousness today: "Those experiences don't ever go away and they're vivid, you know?" Other traumas existed due to a fear of deportation—especially deportation of his parents—which was "constant" and "occupied a huge amount of energy inside your head…energy that could be spent somewhere else." Participant 5 said it depleted his motivation at times and worried that in the end, everything might "be good for nothing." Regardless, P5 acknowledged that logically being undocumented or fearing for one's temporary status created difficulties, he made it clear that no matter the status, "we put in the same effort…we're just like all kids."

Research Subquestion 2: Activities

Due to an early graduation through the GED Options program and the need to work and help support the family financially, P5 was not in high school long enough to participate in many activities. He noted participation in sports, though. Activities were

not central to P5's interview, nor were they given more importance than was offered by the participant.

Research Subquestion 3: Aspirations

Participant 5 had thoughts of college, but felt he needed to earn and save money for tuition in order to avoid placing extra burdens on his already financially strapped parents. Though P5's parents neither pressured nor discouraged postsecondary attendance, his plan was to save money for 2 years and then enroll in college. He acknowledged the potential error in thinking, "…because as we get older, we gather more and more responsibilities." At this point, P5 reverted to his family's undocumented status, and stated that though he was still under TPS, he witnessed his parents' unauthorized situation every day. Their struggles affected him deeply, and he knew he needed to work. "One thing led to another and I never went back." He quietly contemplated, "Man, if I would have gone to college, who knows where I'd be?"

Research Subquestion 4: Resiliencies

Participant 5 believed EL programs for undocumented students, and immigrants in general, were imperative to his successes. More than simply helping students learn a language, P5 viewed EL as a way to integrate students, who would otherwise be on the outside, into the larger community. He also viewed the option to graduate early through alternative routes as essential for students who felt the need to assist in family finances.

As an adult, P5 still felt the anxiety of a liminal, temporary state of being. He worried for any mistake that could lead him to not have his status renewed—a process that happens every 6, 12, or 18 months according to The American Immigration Council (2022). He felt he and others in similar situations were asked to be "more than perfect,"

and referred to the constant state of anxiety as "the long road ahead of us." At the time of the study, Participant 5 worked for the same company his father worked for when his father lived without legal papers in the United States. The position Participant 5 held was a "senior lead type job" that paid well. Participant 5 was proud of gains he and his family had made despite the obstacles they faced. The family owned their second home, and had rental property and other investments.

To P5, struggles and difficulties are simply realities to be handled. Ultimately, he was thankful for his parents, who lived many borders away, back in the land of their birth. "We've been separated for a very long time now. [Parents are] living in Salvador." Participant 5 felt guilty that his parents were back in Salvador, and recently told his mother that she "can't let [his father] die alone." He is ever thoughtful and thankful for the minimum wage labor of his "uneducated" parents that earned him and his siblings' passage into the United States; he was thankful for their sacrifices. "Everything we ever needed was instilled in the decision they made to bring us to the United States. I owe everything to my dad and my mom because they gave everything."

Participant 6

Participant 6 left her Guatemalan home at 15 years of age. She arrived in the United States as a 16-year-old with an older brother and a younger brother. Participant 6 was detailed in her memories of Guatemala and shared several stories about the incidents that led to her emigration. Among other concerns, she and her brothers left Guatemala due to neighborhood extortion by gang members, fear of violence, threats, and general concerns of safety and welfare. Participant 6's mother remained in Guatemala, and though her father had been in the United States for 10 years, P6 and her brothers were

coming to the United States in order to reside with an uncle. The siblings' efforts were interrupted, though, as they were detained at the border and transferred to a facility in Chicago. In Chicago, P6 began to learn English. Eventually, P6 and her brothers were reunited with their father in Southwest Missouri. Participant 6 did not come to the United States for an education. Rather, she came to escape violence and to work. Participant 6 attended high school only as a requirement of her release from the immigration detention facility.

Research Subquestion 1: Achievement

Participant 6 did not directly correlate experiences as an undocumented student to school achievement, but through stories, it was apparent that barriers to positive achievement existed. The experiences of the violence of her childhood in Guatemala and the trip to the United States, including detainment at the border and detention in Chicago, are reminiscent of the impact of trauma noted in the literature review. She said of the family's decision to send her and her brothers to the United States: "Yeah. We were basically escaping Guatemala." In school, P6 discussed the difficulties of going to school and working at the same time and stated, "Most students that don't have documents, they always ask theirself [*sic*], 'Why would I finish high school if at the end of high school, I will be working anyways?'"

Participant 6 also considered the negative impact of classmates on experiences. She faced racism from White students who directly questioned why she was in the United States. She recalled a time in Physical Education when another student asked her, "I don't even know why they let you guys be here." Participant 6 replied she didn't understand. The student continued, "Do you just come to get everything that's for us? Are you

coming to get all the jobs Americans have?" Other negative experiences with students in the school were revealed through the interview, as well. Participant 6 spoke of "bad influences" in the school. She felt that as undocumented students, she and her brother were targeted by other students who were running drugs through the high school. Participant 6 and her brother were offered drugs on multiple occasions. When they replied they did not use drugs, the dealers explained they only needed P6 and her brother to deliver. She thoughtfully considered the reasons she believed her and her brother were targeted.

> …some kids that are from other countries, they're having trouble at home because their parents are not paying attention to them…or maybe they're not mature enough to understand that it is not right. If people like this come to them and offer them these things and they think, you know, "I can't work because I have no papers. How can I help my family so easily?" It's so sad because they don't understand. They don't see in the future what's going to happen to them.

She continued, but spoke to the issue from a more global perspective:

> They're [Americans] gonna say Hispanic people come to the United States just to bring drugs in here…and I don't want that for the Hispanic people. I want them to know Hispanic people are doing a good job here. They are helping the United States.

Within the structures of every day school, P6 mentioned classes where a particular teacher made her "feel dumb" and usually gave her crossword puzzles and word searches to do in class, "not like real homework." She told a story about a substitute who turned her feelings upside down when he asked her why she turned in

different homework than other students. Participant 6 explained the regular teacher did not think she was capable. Participant 6 fondly recalled the substitute asking her to return to her desk and create a PowerPoint presentation about the topic—a task she took seriously, completed, and presented to the substitute teacher.

Research Subquestion 2: Activities

Participant 6 did not participate in school-sponsored activities, but offered, "Well, if anything, I wanted to be on the soccer team." Time did not permit participation, though, because she worked after school to help support her family. Participant 6 did belong to the church youth group and found participation a positive experience. She called church, "I will say like my hobby" because "the two hours, they took me away from all the problems I was making [*sic*] at the home and I didn't remember anything about school." She continued, "For two hours I was being a person of my age."

Research Subquestion 3: Aspirations

Participant 6 spoke at length on the topic of the aspirations held, even as an undocumented student who arrived in the United States at 16 years of age. Multiple mentions were made of the desire to attend college for a degree in architecture and the barriers that impeded advancement towards the goal. While acknowledging money and an undocumented status as impediments, the majority of her mentions on the topic expressed a difference in belief and philosophy between P6 and her father. "I always came home so happy with my grades and trying to be As and Bs." When she told her father she wanted to go to college, he said, "Why? You can't because you have no papers. Don't bring that idea. You can't." Participant 6 said her father felt it was better to

tell her the truth now instead of in the future. “I think he said it because he thought that was the right way to say it, but he was hurting me so bad.”

Research Subquestion 4: Resiliencies

Participant 6 also had much to say about the positive aspects of her experiences during her secondary school years. Though she did not participate in school-sponsored activities, P6 was active in her church and referred to church as her “hobby.” She remembered the impact church had on her psyche and explained that church activities took her mind off the present, allowing her to forget the things that troubled her.

Aside from church, the rest of P6’s resiliencies related to the importance of human agents in her life. Even in the Chicago detention center for undocumented youth, P6 remembered tutors who took time to teach English and other subjects, who took her places, and who encouraged her when she was fearful of leaving the center to come to Missouri. When she was desperate for money and was considering transporting drugs for other students in the high school, she recalled praying that God would help her. She went to the store the next day and the owner offered her a consistent job, working for cash. When P6 said she needed it and would take the job because she had to help with family finances and to send money to Guatemala for her mother and grandmother, the owner gave her $200 before her first day of work. “It was a miracle for me,” she remembered. “It was my gift for not doing the bad thing.”

Participant 6 also recalled teachers who pushed her towards resilience—teachers willing to spend extra time with her, willing to explain concepts in different ways when she did not understand. Of a Physical Education teacher, she specifically noted, “She is the teacher who believes in you even if it’s just playing basketball.” The Physical

Education also stepped in and involved herself in a racist event against P6 that occurred in her class, an event P6 remembers well. Other teachers were important, as well, especially EL teachers, who were always "teaching us in a way that we could all learn together."

Participant 6 continued to go through immigration hearings, and at the time fo the study, works as an administrative assistant and translator in a high school under a legal work permit. In her position, P6 now found herself as a human agent with the ability to positively impact undocumented student lives in the way human agents impacted her life. She shared a story about a student at the high school where she worked that the researcher felt compelled to recount, as the story embodies the continued barriers and struggles faced by undocumented students. She told a story of a student who was in trouble day after day. Participant 6 sat down with him at lunch one day and told him she understood his struggles. She asked him to tell her what was happening in his life. The student told P6 about his friend who died in a car wreck the previous year. The student said he and his friend had planned a trip they were going to take the summer after they graduated. After his friend died, the student felt that "if he didn't graduate, I don't want to graduate."

Through the conversation, P6 learned the deceased student was undocumented and was working night shifts to help ease the financial burden of the family. Because he had no papers, opportunities for work were limited. He found a factory that would employ him in a town 45 minutes from his home. He attended school during the day and worked at night, sleeping little. On the return trip from work in the early hours one morning, the student fell asleep at the wheel and died in the ensuing wreck. After the

telling of the story, Participant 6 encouraged the grieving student, hoping to exhibit the kindness shown to her by other human agents along her personal journey as an undocumented student. Highway patrol reports corroborated some of the story, insofar as the wreck occurring due to the driver swerving and overcorrecting, ultimately hitting a tree, the location of the accident, and the time of the wreck.

Teacher 1

Teacher 1 was a veteran EL teacher. In her career, she taught students at both the elementary and high school level. Teacher 1 was more than a teacher; she was an advocate for the well-being of even former students, as was made obvious in the stories she told of interactions over the very recent past. Two of T1's former students had moved in with her and her family during times of high stress. Both students—and others—had maintained close and consistent contact with her even outside attendance in high school. Teacher 1 spoke not only to experiences at the high school level. She also included remembrances from her time as an elementary EL teacher, which the researcher found valuable, relevant to the study, and connected to the overall review of literature in Chapter Two.

Research Subquestion 1: Achievement

Teacher 1's outlook and interpretation of the achievement of undocumented students differed in some ways from student participants' recollections. Like undocumented participants, though, stories of student achievement effortlessly devolved into achievement's antithesis—barriers to achievement. Teacher 1 mentioned that most of her experience at the high school level was with students who already knew their status and therefore, coming to understand the limitations of an undocumented status was not an

issue she often faced. Overall, T1 believed the major factor in academic success was more basic than schooling. She believed the support system surrounding the student, primarily within the family structure, was the major determinant: "I mean, it'd be easier for it to be something at school, then we could fix it." Recognizing the different living scenarios students find themselves in, she also opined, "A lot goes back to who they are here with. Their parents? Are they here with a sponsor? A sibling? A lot of [things like this determine] whether or not students show up to school every day."

Through her stories, T1 acknowledged another key barrier to the academic successes of undocumented students when she told stories of the trauma some of her students had faced in their lives. Relating to the support system or lack thereof, she mentioned multiple instances of involvement with female students who were sexually assaulted by stepfathers. In other stories, she told of immigration sweeps through her town. As an elementary teacher, she recalled a student drawing in class one day—a drawing T1 had kept in her possession. "Kids were standing there with crying faces and dad was in handcuffs." She recounted stories of her students' parents hiding in the trunk of the car while the kids answered the door, telling law enforcement their parents were not home. On one occasion a 7-year-old girl was crying in class, eventually explaining to T1, "They took my mom last night." When asked why and how she was in school today, the little girl responded that she ran to the pastor's house and he dropped her off at school that morning. Teacher 1 nodded her head in irony: "It was parent-teacher conferences that day."

Research Subquestion 2: Activities

Teacher 1 did not witness many of her secondary school students participating in activities. She related the fact back to the barrier of poverty and the need many of her undocumented students felt to work to support families, families both in the United States and still in their home countries. “We have kids that go to school all day until three o’clock.” Students “go to work until three or four in the morning” then go to school again. A life-schedule like this did not leave time for involvement in many school activities for T1’s students.

Research Subquestion 3: Aspirations

Teacher 1 believed the majority of student dreams were centered around the desire to make money to help parents, whether in the United States or abroad. She thought perhaps dreams were not necessarily applicable to the undocumented students’ lives within her purview. She wondered if students had ever been taught to dream “about what they could be” or whether parents had ever talked to them “about doing bigger and better things.”

Research Subquestion 4: Resiliencies

Teacher 1’s most important perceived factor in the resiliency of undocumented students, in her experiences, was the support system surrounding the students. Within the context of support, she believed the family and who students were living with to be the greatest determinant of present and future success. Not overlooking the importance of life’s necessities in determining student achievement, she asked, “Are you eating every day? Do you have what you need?” From the perspective of the school, T1 also focused on connections. She mentioned the best program she witnessed was her school forcing

relationships between faculty and students. Faculty members chose students with whom they would make consistent weekly contact. No evidence was available, but she believed this to be a successful program for undocumented students, as it made positive connections where perhaps none had existed. Furthermore, she mentioned her students who were able to participate in activities, noting "if you can get them involved in soccer or wrestling or something, that's a good thing, because it's a community." She also mentioned the importance of teachers she worked with who were not EL teachers. Teacher 1 encouraged all teachers to find their niche, because EL teachers cannot alone meet all student needs.

Themes

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. The study was guided by a central research question and subquestions designed to explore the aforementioned purpose and were centered on concepts found in Latinx critical theory (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). The central research question was: What are the experiences of Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri? Subquestions related to the topic concerned experiences connected to achievement, activities, aspirations for the future, and resiliencies.

After interviews were conducted, scrubbed, and condensed, the researcher contacted participants for verification of the accuracy of the information gleaned from the

interviews. The researcher utilized available participant school transcripts, an interview with a faculty member who was experienced in the teaching undocumented students, and other archival data as means of triangulation and increasing reliability and validity. As these processes were carried out, themes of research developed.

Achievement "Not Affected," but Barriers Persisted

Of the six participants interviewed, only one claimed to have been academically affected by her undocumented status (P1). Participant 1 recalled her achievement only "went down" for a short time. Even P2, the only interviewee to not have finished high school—who dropped out due to the need to help her also undocumented mother earn money—did not believe her achievement was impacted by anything other than learning English. However, while denying a negative impact, through open-ended conversations dedicated to storytelling, each of the participants remembered barrier after barrier to their academic achievement. Barriers experienced by participants were supported by the review of literature. Barriers such as poverty (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1), working and attending school at the same time (P2, P4, P5, P6, T1), mental and emotional trauma from violence or from travel (P3, P5, P6, T1), fear of deportation for oneself or for one's family (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1), and frustrations for lack of a future beyond high school (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1) were all mentioned as personal experiences through the interview process. Whether the participant was ultimately a high school graduate or not, the oft-mentioned hurdles to success no doubt impeded potential greater successes and achievements in secondary school and beyond.

Involvement: "A Good Thing, Because It's a Community"

Another theme developed around student activities and experiences—connected or not connected to school. Within the school or without, students who found a common community outside the classroom fared better in participant memories and personal estimations and were pushed towards positive gains in life while attending secondary schools and beyond. Participants were clear that activities outside the school day were a constructive use of time (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1). The only participant to not mention some involvement in an outside activity was P2, who was also the only participant to not finish high school.

Other participants mentioned school or church activities as specifically allowing for periods of mental and emotional escape from the realities of the struggles of an undocumented life (P1, P3, P6). Participant 1 remembered her time as a track and field athlete—especially when her peers were applying for college and filling out scholarship applications—as a time every day of "no worries because there was something else to focus on." Others claimed the benefit of participation in activities as something far simpler: it gave them a chance to feel like a normal high school student (P3, P4, P6).

The Positive Human Agent

Teacher 1 stated her view that the most important factor for undocumented students was outside the school's purview—that the major player in achievement fell upon the shoulders of family support. Regardless of parental support, though, there are structures within schools, viewed from the vantage point of undocumented students, which revealed ways schools can be of assistance. Though an undocumented status does not necessarily signify a need for English language development classes (P1 & P4),

participants who qualified mentioned EL classes as imperative in their personal successes (P2, P3, P5, P6). Even P4, who attended school in the United States from her first day of kindergarten through graduation and was not part of EL classes at the secondary level, conceded the positive experiences her younger family members—some of whom are undocumented and currently in public schools—had had in EL classes. Participant 5 viewed his experiences in EL classes as more than simple language learning. "EL classes," he posited, "are absolutely crucial if you want people to integrate into the community."

Language development classes were not only deemed important due to increased access to the English language (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6). EL classes also created important connections to adults who positively influenced the school experience and lives of the participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, T1). Participant 1 (who did not qualify for EL services in high school) and P3 both mentioned having a study hall type class with an EL teacher who allowed them to complete homework and receive extra help. Both students were also given opportunity to help other students—recent immigrants and new to the school. To P1, the class became much more than a study hall or tutoring session. To P1, the class and the teacher made her feel like she "wasn't an outsider" anymore. Without school structures allowing for viable, well-staffed EL classes, many undocumented students would lack access to empathic teachers (T1) who become the first line of positive human agents to potentially impact student lives and further positive gains in student achievement.

English Learner teachers were not the only human agents who made a positive difference in the remembered experiences of participants. Participant 1 discussed a

freshman orientation program she was asked to participate in as a senior. She was assigned a group of immigrant students to lead through the coming year. Participating and helping was a factor of resilience for her, and also for the students she served, showing the importance of allowing students to participate as fellow positive human agents for others and to become advocates for their own personal resistance to marginalization (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Jemal, 2017).

Other teachers were influential as well. Influence tended to center on belief in the student, treatment as an equal with other students, willingness to offer extra time or help, or offering a welcoming presence (P1, P3, P6, T1). For example, P6 recalled an incident when a coach intervened on her behalf after a White student lied about an altercation, which began with racist remarks from the White student toward P6. The coach did the right thing, according to P6, "…and it was so surprising because [the coach] was like, 'If you have any more problems, let me know.'" Participant 6—not an athlete—fondly mentioned the coach multiple times over varying portions of the interview. Participant 6 also spoke about a substitute teacher who believed she could do the same assignment as other students. Participant 1, P3, and P6 all mentioned teachers who politely and with patience pushed them to do better, or whose classrooms simply felt welcoming. Teacher 1 remembered an intervention program at her school where struggling students were connected to teachers. She believed "connections with people" were of vital importance to the successes of her undocumented students, whether through outside activities, teams, or simply "soft-hearted" teachers.

Though not the focus of the research, agents outside the school who made a positive difference in participants' lives were also evident. All participants revealed a

deep connection to family. The feeling of indebtedness to parents—a need to repay a debt of love financially or otherwise—led to a desire to achieve in school (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1). For other participants, existence of the simple need to care for family financially and to make money as early as possible was ever-present (P2, P5, P6, T1).

Other human agents of positive change for undocumented students also came from outside the scope of education, but were no less impactful on ultimate resiliencies of student lives. In some cases, other students offered daily support (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, T1) and in one case even counseled a path forward for college as an undocumented student (P3). Free meals from a local pastor were offered when extreme need and hunger existed (P3). Business owners offered to pay students cash when undocumented students were desperate for money (P2, P4, P6). Perhaps most importantly for participant futures in the United States, reputable lawyers found participant cases and brought them through immigration court, leading to positive outcomes for their lives (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6).

Summary

This qualitative narrative inquiry sought to better understand the lived experiences of undocumented students in Southwest Missouri. Guided by LatCrit theory, Chapter Four provided information regarding the experiences of formerly undocumented students in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri by reviewing data collected through the interviews of six participants, all of whom experienced an undocumented status during adolescent, secondary school years. The study was driven by the central research question: What are the experiences of Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri? Subquestions related to

the topic followed, and were centered on student achievement, participation in activities, postsecondary dreams and aspirations, and school practices that led to student resilience.

Interviews revealed major themes, which were also supported by the research outlined in the review of literature in Chapter Two. The first theme centered on overall participant belief that school achievement was unaffected by an undocumented status, though each participant spoke at length about the barriers to achievement faced during their years in school. The second theme to develop was the importance of involvement in activities—school related or not—on the psyche and resilience of undocumented students. The third and final theme to emerge was the overwhelming importance of positive human agents in the experiences of undocumented students. The theme of the positive human agent is the theme that connects all other themes. EL classes were mentioned by every participant, but the reasons EL classes were mentioned had as much to do with the relationships created with impactful teachers as for instruction and learning of the English language. Further human agency—whether family and a feeling of indebtedness or responsibility to loved ones; or whether impactful school teachers, coaches, other personnel; or whether at times even strangers—it was the connections to other positive people that helped lead participants through the barriers of undocumented statuses and into the resilient lives they have now created for themselves in adulthood.

Throughout participant interviews, the researcher was reminded that critical theories focus on resistance and social action (Bohman et al., 2019; Horkheimer, 1972), and though not always overt or even visible, resistance, advocacy, and action often can be found in the very lives, daily interactions, personal advocacies, and persistence of marginalized populations themselves (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Jemal, 2017). The

former undocumented students in the study have all found resilience in their adult lives. Participants were DACA recipients, TPS qualifiers, and even a U.S. citizen. They had children of their own; they worked in schools, for multinational corporations and in hospitals; and they owned their own businesses. Participants advocated and resisted; they persisted; they were resilient.

Chapter Five concludes the study, offering thoughts and the findings of the researcher, based on the experiences of formerly undocumented students from secondary schools in Southwest Missouri. The researcher will discuss implications for public schools—faculty, staff, administrators, and the institution as a whole—who offer academics, tutelage, and mentorship to undocumented students within their classrooms and school walls every day. Finally, the researcher will discuss recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Undocumented students are constitutionally allowed access to a free and appropriate education from kindergarten through high school (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). Despite access to school, during the period of adolescence many undocumented youths begin to realize the barriers created by their status (Gonzales et al., 2018; Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Undocumented students are one of the most vulnerable groups attending American public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Sibley and Brabeck (2017) claimed an undocumented immigration status has a negative impact on the educational environment of children. Much research has centered on high-achieving undocumented students at the postsecondary level (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Punti, 2018), but more study is needed concerning experiences and barriers to undocumented student success at the secondary level (Diaz, 2018; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Silva, 2019; Zong & Batalova, 2019). The need for study particularly holds true in rural areas outside the Southwest United States and major cities (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Silva, 2019).

This qualitative study was guided by one central research question. The driving question was: What are the experiences of Hispanic students who were undocumented at the time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri? Subquestions related to the topic centered on the lived experiences of undocumented students related to academic achievement, participation in activities, dreams and aspirations, and school practices that led to resiliency.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. The researcher upheld tenets of LatCrit thought, including understanding the Latnix experience through history and the historical impact of immigration (Castrellón, 2021; Crossman, 2019; Guajardo et al., 2020), and partnership with the community for the improvement of educational opportunities (Guardardo et al., 2020; Valdes, 1997). Framing research within the bounds of LatCrit theory also created opportunity for the researcher to explore the experiential knowledge of participants. Latinx critical theory researchers should listen to the stories of marginalized groups and use participant narratives as a way of challenging dominant thought (Diaz, 2018; Shelton, 2018). The research was conducted and data collected through the use of interviews, which allowed for counternarratives and counterstorytelling, techniques specifically suggested for use by educators willing to challenge structures and beliefs of the educational institution (Cooper Stein et al., 2018).

Chapter Five brings the study to conclusion by revealing a summarization of the researcher's findings. The researcher will then discuss the findings in detail, analyzing the results and placing them in the context of the study's limitations. Furthermore, the researcher will offer implications for professional educators working in the secondary school environment and suggest recommendations for further study.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative narrative inquiry was centered on one research question and included four research subquestions. All questions were created as a means of better understanding the lived experiences of undocumented students in Southwest Missouri secondary schools. The researcher set out to interview six participants who were undocumented at the time of their attendance in secondary schools.

Initial participants were contacted via face-to-face conversations, text messages, and emails. Snowball sampling was employed, and participants were asked for names of other contacts who would be interested in interviewing and who fit the criteria for participation. Interviews were conducted in locations of each participant's choosing and recorded with participant permission. Transcriptions were created through the use of Otter.ai, an online transcription service, but nonsensical inaccuracies and the need to scrub identifying information required much altering of the final transcript by the researcher. After cleaning, transcripts were sent to participants, who were allowed the opportunity to correct any information in the transcript. Participant 5 took advantage of this opportunity and clarified a statement and the context in which it was made. No other requests for clarification came.

The researcher was required to read transcripts multiple times in order to understand context and meaning. Along the way, the researcher highlighted text, scribbled notes, and created charts in order to encounter developing themes. Sometimes before an interview, nearly always afterward, and at other times as thoughts emerged, the researcher utilized personal journaling, which allowed collections of self-reflection, researcher biases, questions he hoped to have answered, ways to improve the process in

the future, and general thoughts and researcher insecurities (Probst, 2015). In order to add further reliability and validity, the researcher employed the technique of triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation was achieved as the researcher utilized digitally transcribed interviews in conjunction with other archival data. The researcher used participant high school transcripts and perusal of classes and course offerings from participant schools to corroborate narratives of participants. Also, participant comments concerning experiences with immigration were cross-checked with immigration laws and practices when applicable. As a final piece of triangulation, a review of qualitative interview data from an experienced faculty member was conducted. The teacher interview was included in the findings of Chapter Four.

Throughout the development of the project, research themes and findings developed. Themes were compared to triangulated data, as well as the research already conducted through the literature review. The first theme noted was the paradox of participants not feeling academic achievement was impacted by their experiences of being undocumented while simultaneously listing and retelling stories of the barriers that impeded academic achievement. All participants except one believed their status to not impact their school achievements (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6). All participants, through counternarratives told, listed struggles and barriers to achievement, such as poverty (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1); working and attending school at the same time (P2, P4, P5, P6, T1); the mental toll of migration to the United States (P3, P5, P6, T1) and the trauma created by fear of deportation (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1); and frustration aimed at the lack of postsecondary opportunities (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1).

A second theme to develop centered on the importance of involvement in outside activities. Whether directly sponsored by the school or not, finding community amongst others was deemed important for the betterment of undocumented student experiences. In some cases, participants said involvement allowed all obstacles and struggles to be temporarily forgotten (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1). In others, activities simply gave an opportunity for a kid to be a kid (P3, P4, P6).

The third and final theme to surface was the crucial importance of positive human agents in the lives of undocumented students. Teachers played a major role in the resiliencies of student lives, particularly teachers who made undocumented students feel included and capable, and whose classrooms were welcoming (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1). But school was not the only place human agents revealed importance. Undocumented students themselves relished the opportunity to be a positive agent for other students through study halls and freshman orientations (P1, P3, T1). Furthermore, the feeling of indebtedness to parents persisted and pushed students towards success, as did pastors, employers, other students, and trustworthy immigration lawyers (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6).

Discussion

The intent of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. The researcher led with the major research question: What are the experiences of Hispanic students who were undocumented at the

time of attendance in secondary schools in Southwest Missouri? Four subquestions followed. Subquestions centered around experiences related to achievement, activities, future aspirations, and practices that led to resiliency. Research subquestions did not need to be asked verbatim to each participant. Due to the open-ended nature of interviews and the emphasis on storytelling, at times the researcher merely started the conversation and extracted the addressed topics from multiple places in the interview and conversation.

Open-ended questioning also created an environment in which the researcher was able to employ tenets and research practices of LatCrit theory. Latinx critical theory addresses the study of Latinx students and can be based on immigration status, culture, and language (Guajardo et al., 2020; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Valdes, 1997). Latinx critical theory draws upon multiple areas of study and scholarship with the intent of improving educational experiences of students of color (Guajardo et al., 2020). Through the LatCrit lens, emphasis is placed upon the improvement of the education of Latinx students (Guajardo et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Latinx critical theory places focus on the experiential knowledge of studied participants and gives voice to marginalized groups through counternarratives as a way of challenging dominant thought (Diaz, 2018; Shelton, 2018).

Participant feelings and remembrances of personal achievement in secondary schools were unanticipated by the researcher. The researcher assumed overwhelmingly that participants would have associated achievement in school to have been negatively impacted by their own undocumented statuses. However, participants did not believe undocumented statuses to have had a negative impact on academic achievement. Though

participants did not believe a correlation existed, numerous barriers surfaced throughout the interviews that could have only impeded, if not halted, progress towards achievement.

Only one participant blatantly claimed her achievement in school was affected by the undocumented status when she realized the limitations the status would present (P1). She thought this would have happened around the time she was 15 years old. Even so, her downturn was stated as for only "a time," the implication being the impediment was finite in nature and did not persist. Through triangulation efforts by the researcher, P1's transcript did not reveal any drastic differences over her years in high school. Her sophomore year, though, reflected the lowest GPA of her academic career. Considering the transcript as a whole, as a professional educator of 26 years, the researcher would attribute the lower GPA more to continued struggles in the subject of math than an overall downturn in performance. Regardless, all other participants argued in the negative, claiming an undocumented status had no bearing on school achievements.

Worth noting, two participants who claimed no effect did not finish high school with their assigned class cohort (P2, P5). Participant 2 dropped out of school after the ninth grade in order to assist her undocumented mother—who had lost her job—with the family finances. Participant 2 commented on her status, "…it didn't matter [to me]. But right now, with my daughters, it'll matter to them because they are in school and they'll have their education." The statement is in direct contradiction to the belief that an undocumented status did not hinder P2's achievement in school. The quote is an admission of the barriers an undocumented status created for P2—barriers that cost her an education. These barriers, according to P2, will not exist for her young, American-born, United States citizens daughters, one of whom recently told her mother, "When I

grow up I want to be a lawyer to help all Hispanic people because of the struggles you guys been through."

Participant 5, though he did not graduate with his cohort, did in fact graduate high school. By the time of attendance in high school, formerly undocumented P5 had achieved TPS, though his parents—accused of trafficking minors (their children)—were not so fortunate and remained undocumented. Participant 5 chose to graduate early through an alternative graduation program offered in the state of Missouri called Missouri Options. "It's something I'm proud of, to be honest. English is not my native language" he said. The decision to opt for an early graduation was made by P5 in order to help his undocumented parents with family finances. An undocumented status played a role in his decision, and while it did not affect his final achievement of a high school diploma, the undocumented status of his parents and his tenuous temporary situation undeniably played a role in his achievement and ability to participate in normal high school events, even if ultimately, the outcome (graduation) was positive.

In general, the overall feelings participants held—that achievement was not impacted—were not supported by research. However, the actual barriers students experienced were supported by the review of literature, which generally found an undocumented status to present multiple barriers for students (Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018; Craven et al., 2017; Crawford et al., 2019; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Rutter et al., 2020; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). Theoretically, though, under the major critical theory umbrella, LatCrit offered a possible explanation for participants' refusal to see themselves as negatively impacted by status. The theoretical framework of this study

noted social resistance as often being covert, invisible, and occurring in the form of simple personal advocacy and persistence (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Jemal, 2017). Perhaps student resistance was covert to the point participants found it to be unrecognizable.

Other participants who claimed achievement to be unaffected by undocumented statuses, indeed, had nothing on transcripts to show otherwise. However, through the interview process, each participant listed several barriers to academic achievement that the researcher can only surmise as having had a negative effect on experiences during secondary school years. Barriers mentioned by participants through counternarratives told were also previously discovered and were corroborated through the review of literature in Chapter Two.

Finishing high school is difficult for any student facing poverty (Finning et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2019). In this study, participant poverty, which drove P2 and P5 into decisions about high school graduation, was expressed as a hurdle present for other participants, as well (P1, P3, P4, P6, T1). Poverty often results in living in segregated neighborhoods and attending segregated schools, unemployed parents, and crowded housing (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018). First-generation immigrants are the most likely demographic to be undocumented and are also most likely to live in a low socioeconomic state (Martinez et al., 2020). Seventy percent of children whose parents are undocumented subsist below the poverty line (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). Poverty creates a need for students working to support the family unit (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Punti, 2018). According to Kam and Merolla (2018), 74% of adolescent immigrants work long hours while attending schools.

Traumatic experiences create barriers for students, as well. Participants in the study recounted stories that revealed trauma faced, whether through personal journeys to the United States (P3, P5, P6) or the persistent fear of deportation (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1). Literature showed the prevalence of trauma in undocumented youth who show signs of post-traumatic stress from border crossings (P3, P5, P6) and separation from families (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6), which often result in bouts of depression (Connery, 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020). Stress of deportation causes stress for undocumented youth, and the realities of deportation often lead to insecurities that negatively affect student success in school (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Connery, 2018; Crawford et al., 2018; Kerwin, 2018; Mead & Paige, 2019; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler et al., 2019). Mental health concerns wrought by migratory trauma and fear of deportation must be considered for the improvement of educational experiences of Latinx students, which is a key focus of LatCrit theory (Guajardo et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

An education beyond high school, even for the most driven undocumented student, is prohibitive at best (Craven et al., 2017; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020; Rutter et al., 2020; Sanchez-Gonzalez et al., 2019; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Yasuike, 2019). Craven et al. (2017) led a study of students who had realized the impact of an undocumented status on their futures. Findings stated that upon learning of the limitations and difficulties that lay ahead, students disengaged from high school studies, assuming that academic work would not pay off in terms of better employment opportunities or access to a postsecondary education (Craven et al, 2017). If critical theories seek answers as to why negative outcomes occur more frequently within certain demographics (Mussell, 2017), and if the intent of LatCrit studies is to improve the

educational experiences of students of color through considerations of Latinx culture and social justice (Guajardo et al., 2020; Shelton, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001), postsecondary barriers would be a necessary point of discussion. Frustration at postsecondary limitations was mentioned by participants in the study (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1). Some participants ultimately resigned to the limitations of an undocumented status (the reality of the overall effect of the undocumented status of the family in the case of P5), and did not appear to spend much effort or time bemoaning the lack of opportunity (P2, P4, P5). Others expressed sorrow, even as adults, at the perceived shortcomings of life opportunities due their statuses as young adults in secondary schools (P1, P3, P6). Even for participants currently living under TPS and DACA statuses (P1, P3, P5), which allow for attendance in postsecondary institutions, a college education effectively remains out of reach due to the inability to secure meaningful financial aid (Beamer & Steinbaum, 2019; Benevento, 2021; Bjorklund, 2018; Gonzales et al., 2018; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020; Rutter et al., 2020). Further connections to LatCrit involve explaining educational disparities amongst different demographics and the revelation of inequitable access to the educational system, which perpetuates an achievement gap (Hernandez, 2016).

Continuing utilization of LatCrit theory, the application of knowledge and the understanding of the Latinx experience are intended to incite positive change for marginalized or oppressed groups (Guajardo et al., 2020, Valdes, 1997). Participants spoke to positive practices or happenings that aided, rather than impeded, persistence to high school achievement and beyond. The importance of activities for student resilience was consistent. As T1 stated, activities create common communities outside the

classroom walls, and were remembered fondly by participants (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6). Both the researcher and T1 expected the ability to participate in activities to be limited due to an undocumented status (Garcini et al., 2017), but participant interviews did not reveal limitations or lack of access to be true for most participants. Participants joined school athletics (P1, P3, P5), school clubs (P1, P3, P4), and participated in church activities (P3, P6).

Activities outside the school day were perceived as beneficial for other reasons, too. For undocumented students, relationships and social networks are among the most important factors for ensuring empowerment, achievement, and resilience (Crawford et al., 2018; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler, 2018; Rutter et al., 2020; Yasuike, 2019). Research suggested supportive relationships must come from a variety of places for the undocumented student (Alejandro & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015; Rutter et al., 2020). Participating in activities outside of school increases the likelihood the undocumented students will create new networks of positive relationships. These findings were supported by the review of literature, which revealed the importance of hospitable environments, expectation, and involvement—all qualities typically embedded into voluntary extracurricular youth activities—on the resilience of undocumented students (Connery, 2018; Lauby, 2017; Martinez et al., 2020; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020; Yasuike, 2019).

Participants recounted many stories that highlighted the importance of positive human agents in student development in schools. Literature revealed the need for positive networks to come from a combination of areas (Alejandro & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015; Rutter et al., 2020) and showed the deeper the positive network, the greater the potential

for improved outcomes (Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler, 2018; Rutter et al., 2020). Participants in the study spoke often about the positive impacts of human agents on their school experiences and lives. Teachers were most often mentioned, and when spoken of in a good way, were described as being some form of caring, welcoming, fair, and holding participants to high expectations. Traits mentioned by participants matched the body of literature already in existence (Connery, 2018; Lauby, 2017; Martinez et al., 2020; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020; Yasuike, 2019). Most often, networks within the school setting are found in relationships with teachers or counselors (Crawford et al., 2018; Yasuike, 2019).

Literature also suggested school networks as not always sufficient (Kam & Merolla, 2018; Patler, 2018; Rutter et al., 2020). While interview questions all centered on school-related topics, when the researcher implored conversation about experiences leading to resiliencies, participant narratives strayed. For example, participants felt in debt to families, and the feeling of indebtedness impacted student decision making (Alif et al., 2020; Yasuike, 2019). Other areas where positive networks and human agents appeared were other students (P1, P2, P3, P4), church (P3, P6), and lawyers (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6). Addressing the resilience of undocumented students draws upon the philosophies of LatCrit thought, which implore researchers to find ways to assist underserved Latinx student populations (Guajardo et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2017, 2020). In doing so, Latinx students can be supported and equipped with self-advocacy, taught to navigate educational systems, and become engaged in political processes (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021).

Both LatCrit and DACA assist student resilience by finding practical processes to empower underserved Latinx student populations (Guajardo et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2017, 2020). Six years after DACA's creation in 2012, nearly 70% of eligible undocumented youth had responded and more than 900,000 of previously unauthorized immigrants signed up for the program, allowing recipients to live free from the fears of deportation while under DACA protections and to seek the betterment of a documented existence through gainful employment or postsecondary schooling (Hong, 2018; Patler et al., 2019). Based on the popularity, success, and determined benefits of DACA nationwide (Amuedo-Dorantes & Antman, 2017; Gonzales et al., 2018; Kuka et al., 2018; Patler et al., 2019; Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Roth, 2019; Siemons et al., 2017), the researcher anticipated DACA would be discussed as a topic of resilience for participants. However, interviews revealed only P1 and P3 had applied and were recipients. Participant 2 did not qualify as she dropped out of high school and had never earned a high school equivalency—a requirement for qualification (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, 2020; Department of Homeland Security, 2021); P4 served time in jail for possession of false identification before hiring a lawyer who was able to eventually help her earn citizenship; P5 continued to live under TPS, and P6 found a lawyer who helped her earn a temporary work permit. Even P1 and P3—DACA recipients—did not spend much time discussing the topic. Both participants were appreciative of the additional opportunities in their lives, but also recognized the limitations. Neither could afford to attend schools that would not offer them scholarships or grants (Beamer & Steinbaum, 2019; Benevento, 2021; Bjorklund, 2018), and the impermanence of the program, which requires tenuous renewal every 2 years (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, 2020;

Department of Homeland Security, 2021), has resigned both to a life that is less than they dreamed of before learning of the liminal state of their lives as high school students.

The researcher was also surprised at the responses to questions of dreams and aspirations outside of high school. Participants varied in response to the topic, but aside from P1 and P3, both of whom wept during this portion of the interview, not much conversation ensued from other participants. Participants stated dreams as present during the stage of adolescence, but the answers—college, nurse, architect—seemed to the researcher to be offered with similar conviction as answers are given to the oft-asked question: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Interesting responses came from P2, P4, and P5, who intuitively seemed to believe that American dreams grew on American trees whose fruit was forbidden, and therefore, consciously chose to focus only on the realities of their situations. For example, when specifically asked if P2 aspired for opportunities that were ultimately limited by her status, she simply said, "No, because I knew right after I finished school, there was no other option for me than to find what I *can* [emphasis added] be."

Important to note, the qualitative narrative inquiry possessed limitations and factors that may have influenced the outcome of the research but were not controllable by the researcher (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Though not originally included in the list of potential limitations, the research may have also been limited by the lack of diversity of participants: 5 of 6 participants were female, 5 of 6 originated from Guatemala, and only two schools were represented from Southwest Missouri. Other limitations to the study are as follows:

1. Biases of the researcher and participants are possible in a qualitative narrative study and, therefore, may have limited the study.
2. In a qualitative narrative inquiry, results were limited to the experiences of participants.
3. The interview process may have limited the information that could be gathered.
4. The study was reliant on retrospective memories of participants. The events discussed occurred some years ago, often during times of high stress and confusion. Implicit was the potential for recall bias.
5. The study relied on openness and honesty of participants about a difficult, sensitive, and potentially legally incriminating topic.
6. The nature of the study limited the sample size of former students willing to talk about experiences. Chang et al. (2019) claimed establishing rapport with marginalized populations can be difficult.
7. The positionality of the researcher, carrying out the research through his own biases (Fusch et al., 2018), tied up in privileges of a career, and economic and personal security, was a limitation. The researcher also recognized his position as an educator who had worked with undocumented students and families for many years.
8. The quality of the interview was limited by the experience of the researcher as an interviewer.

Professional Implications

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explain the realities of undocumented Hispanic students within the larger context of historical immigration laws,

policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement. The study researched educational barriers to achievement of undocumented students, as well as student and school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement, and expanded upon the lack of literature dedicated to the topic of undocumented youth and students in public high schools (Punti, 2018; Shelton, 2018; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Zong & Batalova, 2019). A lack of study particularly exists in rural areas outside the Southwest United States and major cities (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Silva, 2019).

Much of the research conducted through participant interviews resulted in the connections to previously discovered information in the review of literature. Information gleaned largely solidified and deepened the findings of previous researchers. Through the combination of the literature review and participant interviews of this qualitative study, the researcher will put forth recommendations for practitioners in the field of secondary education.

The first implication for the secondary institutions educating undocumented students in Southwest Missouri is the need for consideration of becoming full-service schools, which can offer supports to students and families. Poverty for any student imposes limitations on secondary achievement and postsecondary opportunities (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021) and has negative effects on physical health, language, cognitive development, academic achievement, and mental health (Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018). All participants in the study experienced the limitations of poverty, created in part due to the undocumented status of their families.

Furthermore, growing amounts of qualitative work show an undocumented status increasing the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and somatization in undocumented youth (Chang et al., 2019; Connery, 2018; Garcini et al., 2017; Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Nexuses of mental health concerns for undocumented students are often related to traumas endured during the migratory experience (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler & Pirtle, 2018) and fear of deportation for students or family members (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021; Connery, 2018; Crawford et al., 2018; Kerwin, 2018; Mead & Paige, 2019; Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler et al., 2019). Through interviews, P3, P5, and P6 mentioned the trauma of migration; P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 discussed traumas connected to concerns of deportation. Teacher 1 validated concerns through remembered experiences with former students on the topic.

Whether due to poverty—which can impede access to assistance—or due to fears associated with deportation, undocumented students and families often avoid seeking potential mitigating community services out of fear of the revelation of statuses, which could lead to potential deportation (Parkhouse et al., 2020; Patler, 2018). Therefore, recommended by the researcher and backed by literature, effective educational institutions for undocumented students operate as full-service schools. Full-service schools offer community-type services—health care, after-school academic supports, mental health counselors, and social workers—for students. Full-service community schools are known to show increased engagement and success for students (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

In addition to aforementioned services, the researcher would suggest schools serving undocumented families add immigrant rights advocates and reputable immigration lawyers to the potential list of community resources made available to families in order to promote discussion of legal avenues or status improvement through programs like DACA, TPS, asylum, or progress towards work permits, residency, or full citizenship. The specific fear of seeking help caused long-term negative issues for both P1 and P3. Both participants relayed stories of parents who were counseled to remain in hiding versus hiring lawyers and applying for a protected status.

Additional recommendations for secondary schools serving undocumented students are intentional considerations as to the academic structure of the school. Of vital importance is the understanding of the importance of positive human agents in the lives of undocumented students (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1). If schools are to have maximum impact, school agents must understand the plight of students and seek social justice on their behalf. Schools with a social justice mindset are known to assist students in efforts of persistence (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020) through pillars revealed by participants in the study. Participants specifically mentioned teachers or classes as factors of resilience in fostering a sense of belonging (P1, P3, P6, T1), providing equitable access for learning through language development programs (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1), and allowing for the possibility of integration within the school and the community (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6).

Specifically mentioned by P1 and P6 was appreciation of teachers who expected more from their undocumented students, but approached the expectation with kindness. Classes that increased access to the curriculum through language development were

crucial in participant experiences. Opportunities to assist other students were also viewed as factors in success.

Secondary schools can also better serve undocumented students by educating faculty and staff on the issues surrounding undocumented students (Parkhouse et al., 2020) and changing the nature of postsecondary conversations with students. Undocumented graduate needs are different than other student needs, but are just as varied and important. Frustrations felt by students related to postsecondary opportunities (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6) can be lessened, and more opportunities created, if teachers, counselors, and administrators have an educated understanding of the realistic options undocumented students will have to face after high school. The task will no doubt be difficult, as schools do not have the right to inquire as to immigration statuses of students (*Plyler v. Doe,* 1982), and therefore cannot simply call a meeting for undocumented students to discuss postsecondary planning.

Schools also often lack an understanding of the ways in which immigration law affects students (Chang et al., 2019; Parkhouse et al., 2020), and teachers with unfavorable views towards immigration or living in communities whose views towards immigration are negative are less likely to provide support (Kam & Merolla, 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2020). Nonetheless, including honest conversations about limitations and possibilities into the routines of postsecondary counseling has potential to be impactful. After all, private colleges can enroll undocumented students and offer scholarships and grants; it is public institutions using public monies that are deemed unlawful if spent on undocumented students (Beamer & Steinbaum, 2019; Benevento, 2021; Bjorklund, 2018). Certificated postsecondary programs may also be accessible.

Professional development and conversations leading to deeper understandings by institutional leaders about student options could lead away from the damaging situations students like P1 had to face. On the topic, P1 recalled her awkward frustrations:

> Basically, kids are applying for scholarships, letters of recommendations, "Yeah, I got this grant." And I can't do anything. Or you had your counselor say, "Have you done this? What are your goals? Have you applied to college?" And those were some questions I tried to avoid because I had no answer. I was embarrassed. I cannot explain to them my situation.

Because of the limitations undocumented students face outside of secondary school protections (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982), the researcher also suggests that interested parties within school faculties and staffs participate in political action on behalf of students whose voices are, by law, muted. Advocacy, in particular, for the possibilities of postsecondary opportunities for students should be paramount to the mission of secondary schools who educate undocumented students.

A requirement of LatCrit research is to apply knowledge of the Latinx experience as a means of inciting positive change for the population (Guajardo et al., 2020; Valdes, 1997) and to utilize counternarratives to challenge structures and beliefs of educational institutions (Cooper Stein et al, 2018; Diaz, 2018; Shelton, 2018). In order to remain grounded in LatCrit thought, the researcher would be remiss to not further and more directly include the voices of the participants on the topic of implications for secondary schools. In pursuit of a LatCrit theoretical end, the researcher will reiterate once again P5, whose statement conveyed the reliving of positive memories of his time in school,

followed by the offering of advice to currently undocumented students, the schools who educate them, and the policymakers who control their futures.

> Everything about school, you know? Man, it was such a lovely time. It was fun creating those relationships…Life is so much better here, you know? If there was any way possible to give peace of mind to a [undocumented] kid who just entered this country, you know, to give a peace of mind that if they do this or that in a certain [wrong] way that they wouldn't be allowed to stay here permanently…Or if they've been here a certain amount of time they can have some kind of permanent status that way. All you're doing is just making them a member of the community. People are not likely to leave. We're all grouped together…we are all grouped together somehow.

At the conclusion of P5's soliloquy, the researcher commented, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called it the 'inescapable network of mutuality.' All things are connected to each other." Participant 5 summarized, "Yeah, yeah. Which makes us all responsible for each other in some ways."

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative narrative inquiry set out to better understand the experiences of undocumented students in secondary schools of Southwest Missouri. While six participants were an acceptable number for a qualitative narrative study, further gains could be made by continuing the research with more participants. Saturation in research is a goal for qualitative narrative studies (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mills & Gay, 2019; Morse, 2019). The researcher interviewed a sufficient number of participants to achieve repetition and patterns, but the researcher cannot be sure of

saturation. Therefore, expanding the number of participants is recommended for further study.

In expanding the research to further participants, more diversification of participants should be sought. The researcher realizes the need for more male opinions in the study, as only one volunteer participant was of said gender. Other areas of diversification that could be positively affected by further intentional study and selection could be birthplace or country of origin, as all six participants came from Central America and 5 of the 6 participants hailed from Guatemala. Undocumented immigrants are often thought of as Latin American. Undocumented immigration, however, is not bound to any country, region, or race of people. Therefore, further extensions could also relate to experiences of undocumented students of other races or nationalities, comparing their experience to the experiences of the Hispanic undocumented students from Central America of this study.

Overall, the researcher did not conclude that the geographic limitation of Southwest Missouri made an impact on the overall research or experiences of participants and believes helpful study could be continued by comparing experiences of students from schools with differing percentages of EL students. English Learner does not denote an undocumented status, but does likely indicate a recent arrival in the United States, which makes schools with higher rates of EL students more likely to having undocumented students enrolled and in attendance. A comparison of experiences of undocumented students in schools with a higher portion of EL students versus schools with lower portions of EL students could help more accurately pinpoint practices and programming that lead to resilience. Schools with more undocumented students are likely equipped

with more resources than schools with fewer undocumented students, leading researchers to isolate variables of resilience. Searching out more exact practices could also include a study comparing experiences of undocumented students who graduated high school versus students who did not, with the researcher attempting to answer the question "why?".

Aside from participants needing to be beyond the age of a high school graduation, the ages of participants were not a limitation in this study. Additional research should be conducted, limiting the study to recent graduates within zero to 5 years, or even another to minor students who are still in school. Doing studies in this manner could yield different, perhaps more up-to-date information for academic and researcher analysis.

The researcher included one interview of an EL teacher with experience teaching students of an undocumented status. The interview was conducted in order to achieve triangulation. However, further studies of teacher (EL or not), counselor, and administrator experiences would shed light upon perceptions of school personnel in relation to undocumented students. Data of this type could be used to further inform staff trainings and professional development, which were discussed in the Professional Implications sections of Chapter Five. Trainings of staff—the dominant and powerful demographic in schools—and deeper personal and professional understandings of the challenges faced by the unique population of this study could result in more assistance for students in developing further resiliencies.

Conclusions

Many demographics of students in secondary schools have to face barriers to achievement of one kind or another. But "undocumented" represents a master status of

barrier for its recipients (Castrellón, 2021; Enriquez, 2017a, 2017b; Gonzales & Burciaga, 2018), making undocumented students one of the most vulnerable groups of students in American public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This qualitative narrative inquiry considered the experiences of undocumented youth who began to navigate liminal legality during secondary school years. By listening and attempting to better understand student experiences from the perspectives of participants, the researcher hoped to gain valuable insight into the school practices and participant practices that lead to resilience and achievement.

The qualitative study was conducted from the frameworks of LatCrit theory. LatCrit has become a widely accepted framework (Guajardo et al., 2020) from which to view ethnic studies, sociology, history, law, and education of the Latinx community (Guajardo et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 1997). Latinx critical theory originates from the Critical theories, whose purposes of study are emancipation and liberation of people from current states of suppression (Bohman et al., 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). Critical theories explain society within an historical context and seek to illuminate possibilities for liberation (Bronner, 2011; Crossman, 2019; Horkheimer, 1972). Through this study, the impact of history on undocumented students must be accepted as reality. Aside from the researcher's discussion of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), which allowed undocumented students access to the K-12 American educational system, and the impact of a TPS (Frelick, 2020; Kerwin, 2018), personally felt by P5 and his family, no blatant historical line was drawn from the review of literature to participant interviews. However, the policies and national laws revealed in Chapter Two and the historically noted effects of said policies and laws are clearly related to the very fact that undocumented students

are enrolled and in attendance in American schools. As was revealed many times in the literature review, when American laws grow more restrictive, undocumented immigration increases (Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020; Tienda & Sanchez, 2013).

Another important aspect of LatCrit is rooted in the rationale for the study and the manner in which the study was conducted: the application of knowledge of the Latinx experience as a way to incite positive change. Through counternarratives, an important piece of LatCrit research, the researcher allowed Latinx participants a major voice in the study. Latinx stories reflect individual experiences specifically related to race, gender, class, language, and immigration status (Shelton, 2018). Through participant narratives, the researcher placed focus on the experiential knowledge of participants and listened to the voices of immigrants, ultimately wishing to utilize participant experiences to challenge dominant thought (Diaz, 2018; Shelton, 2018). Latinx critical theory asks researchers to cooperate with the Latinx community in efforts to bring about elimination of oppression (Guajardo et al., 2020). Through the use of counternarratives in this research, the researcher documented the experiences of undocumented former students, hoped to accurately utilize their voices as a meaningful way to challenge prevailing and dominant thought (Diaz, 2018; Shelton, 2018), and sought to ultimately bring about positive change for undocumented students in secondary schools.

Participants for the study were selected purposively and based on the criterion that the participant was undocumented during the years of their secondary schooling. Snowball sampling was employed to find willing participants for the study. Data were collected through open-ended interviews with participants. Interviews were conducted in person at a location of the participant's choosing and were recorded using Otter.ai with

permission granted by each participant. Interviews, though open-ended and allowing for uninterrupted narrative flow from participants, followed a specific protocol (Appendix C) and were loosely grounded to the interview questions (Appendix B). Interview questions were created, in part, from information gleaned from the review of literature.

Immigration into any country follows a sociologically created construct of race and nation, based on human political boundaries that rarely foresee the long-term effects of arbitrary lines created by humans in power at the time (Burns & Vaughn, 2021; McCorkle, 2018; Ngai, 1999). Migrant scholars conclude that over time, restrictive and punitive immigration policies have created different castes of immigrants, with illegal and deportable immigrants occupying the lowest of ranks (Ellis et al., 2019). Historically speaking, the implementation of national measures to curb immigration—authorized or not—have resulted in increased illegal immigration into the United States (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; McCorkle, 2018; Ngai, 1999; Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020).

Therefore, as debates on immigrants and immigration continue from the highest and lowest levels of government in the United States, it is irresponsible for school systems to ignore the issue or the realities of undocumented students in schools. For as long as immigrants continue to arrive on American shores, so too will undocumented students arrive at American schoolhouse doors. Protected by *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), some may not understand, nor fully accept the limitations of their existences (P1, P3, P6). Some will see through *Plyler's* freedoms, recognize the inevitability of the shackles they wear, and plan their lives accordingly (P2, P4, P5). Still others will look deep into America's soul and ask, "What do I have to do in order to be incorporated into America? What else do you guys want us to do that we're not doing? What else is there" (P1)?

Undocumented students will continue to find ways to persevere and achieve despite the barriers presented in their lives. They are unlikely to ever return to their home countries and will stay put (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017; P5). More likely than leaving, they will create lives and raise families in their respective communities, eternally woven into the tapestry of American life. Justice, therefore, requires schools continue to offer and improve aid in the form of positive human agents and to sow seeds for undocumented student successes within the confines and reaches of the scope of public education. Educational institutions must also lobby to ensure students legal access to the fruits of the seeds sown by students themselves, in conjunction with all other positive human agents in their lives—family, teachers, employers, pastors. After all, we are "all responsible for each other in some ways" (P5). The researcher concludes that stubborn student disbelief, despite admitted barriers, that they are academically affected by their statuses; the formation of many communities through participation in activities within and without the school; and the relentless participation of positive human agents in undocumented student lives, ultimately provide promise, hope, and potential for the resilience of the undocumented students who sit in secondary school classrooms every day.

Literature and participant narratives revealed overarching themes of the study, which directly correlate to the problem studied and the purpose of the research. The problem studied was the negative impact of an undocumented status on the educational environment of students (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). The purpose of the research was to explore and explain the realities of undocumented student lives in Southwest Missouri secondary schools through a review of literature and through participant personal

narratives. The first theme revealed an irrepressible attitude of undocumented students who refused to view the many barriers faced as a hinderance to achievement. The second theme was the importance of activities—connected to school or not—as a means of building community for undocumented students. The final theme was the fundamental need for positive human agents in the lives of undocumented students as a means of fostering resilience. School teachers, counselors, and administrators can employ the findings of this study as a tool to dullen the inevitable barriers and, as a result, sharpen opportunities for achievement and resilience of undocumented secondary students.

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Appendix A

RRB Approval

Southwest Baptist UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS
1600 University Avenue
Bolivar, Missouri 65613
(417) 328-2099

June 26, 2022

Re: Educational Experiences of Undocumented Students in Missouri Secondary Schools Principal

Dear Matthew Huntley,

On June 26, 2022, a review of your application and supporting documents for the above named research proposal was completed. The Research Review Board (RRB) for Southwest Baptist University has determined that the proposed research project meets the criteria for Exempt status as per policy 1.15.3 (A.1) in the faculty guidelines. As per the above policy "If the project is certified exempt, the principle investigator need not resubmit the project for continuing RRB review as long as there are no modifications in the exempted procedures". The study has now been approved, therefore, work on the project may begin.
If any modifications to the exempted procedures are made, the RRB will need to complete a new review of the changes to determine if the project remains Exempt or if further review is necessary.

Congratulations on the approval of your project, we wish you well during its completion.

Sincerely,

Joseph Sartorius, Ph.D.
Chair, Research Review Board
Professor of Graduate Studies

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Introductory Questions

1. When (what years) were you attending high school?
2. What is the educational level of your parents? How many years did they attend school?
3. How old were you when you arrived in the United States?
4. Did you arrive in the United States with your parents? If not, with whom did you arrive or come?
5. What do you remember about the trip to the United States?
6. When did you first realize that your immigration status was "undocumented"?

Research Subquestions

1. RSQ1: What were your experiences in school in terms of achievement?
    a. What were your experiences in terms of grades, attendance, persistence to graduation, etc. related to the undocumented status?
    b. Did your achievements or desire to achieve change upon learning of a personal undocumented status?
    c. Describe the barriers or difficulties an undocumented status presented for you during your secondary school years?
        i. *Prompts from Chapter Two: poverty, postsecondary barriers, mental health, fear of deportation*
    d. Do you think your experience in high school was different than other students (documented or citizens)? Explain how they were different or in what ways they were similar.

2. RSQ2: In what activities did you participate while attending high school (clubs, sports, dances, etc.)?
    a. Did your experiences with activities change due to an undocumented status? Were your experiences limited? If so, how? If not, why do you think they did not change?
    b. Do you think your experiences with activities were different than other students (documented or citizens)? How or in what ways were they the same?
3. RSQ3: What did you want to be in life? What were your dreams and aspirations after high school?
    a. Do you think the undocumented status changed your dreams and aspirations?
    b. Did your undocumented status affect your ability to achieve those dreams? If so, how were your dreams affected? If not, why do think your goals were not affected?
        i. *Prompts from Chapter Two: prohibitive laws, financial strain*
4. RSQ4: Describe the experiences in high school that helped your resilience or persistence to achieve.

Prompts from Chapter Two: relationships and social networks, relationships with school officials, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this study with me. This interview will last between 30 minutes and one hour. In that time, I will ask you several questions about your experiences in high school as they related to your undocumented immigration status. Your name will remain anonymous, as will any other identifying information about you, such as where you live or the high school you attended. If at any point you don't want to answer a question or if you would like to stop the interview, that is fine.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences undocumented students face while attending high schools in Missouri.

I would like your permission to record this interview. Again, no names or other identifying information will be used in the final report. The recording is made only so that I can go back, listen to it several times, and try to better understand your experiences.

Do you agree to participate in this interview with me? (Please initial)

Yes ____ No _____

Do I have permission to record this interview? (Please initial)

Yes _____ No _____

If "no," I will take notes only, but I will review notes with a colleague and/or another non-participant to verify findings.

Before beginning, do you have any questions of me? If you have questions as we talk, please ask me and I will do my best to answer them.

Appendix D

Consent Form

The advisor of this dissertation project is Dr. Benny Fong, Professor at Southwest Baptist University. The study has been approved by the Research Review Board of Southwest Baptist University.

The purpose of the study was to explain and understand the realities of undocumented Hispanic students in Missouri within the larger context of historical immigration laws, policies, and practices in the United States; to understand the educational barriers of undocumented students through personal narratives; and to document the school practices that lead to resiliency and achievement.

Potential Risks: Even though the researcher will take all pertinent steps to ensure participant anonymity, there is potential risk taken by participating in the study. Examples of risk may include concerns of confidentiality and uncomfortable feelings related to the remembrance of a potentially tumultuous stage of life. There is also a possible risk in the divulging of sensitive information about participants and families. Furthermore, the findings of this project may be used for improvement of school practices and understanding related to undocumented secondary school students. Research may also be utilized in other articles, journals, or publications. Though the researcher has taken care to protect the identities of participants and to keep confidential and anonymous all identifying information, risk is nonetheless associated with participation.

Confidentiality: All information associated with project participants will be kept in a locked storage space accessible only to the researcher. Information will be destroyed after seven years. Nothing said through the course of interviews will be attributed to participants by name in any report or publications related to this study. Participants will be given fictitious names for identifying purposes. Neither will geographic locations be used, nor school names. Any potential way to identify a participant will be wiped or altered from the record.

Participants may choose to not answer certain questions. Participants may also stop interviews at any point. If a participant chooses to withdraw from the project, all interview data pertaining to the interview will be destroyed.

Interview Method: To provide flexibility and a feeling of security, interviews will be completed in person or via Zoom. If the interview is conducted in person, it will be at a place of the participant's choosing. Whether in person or over Zoom, interview sessions will be recorded so the researcher can return to the transcripts for clarification and completion of the study. The recordings will be kept locked away and destroyed after seven years.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my advisor. I can be reached at huntleym@carthagetigers.org or 417-793-0302. Dr. Benny Fong can be reached at bfong@sbuniv.edu. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be directed to the Southwest Baptist University Research Review Board.

By adding your initials below, you are consenting to participate in this research effort.

Sincerely,

Matt Huntley
Ed.D. Student, Southwest Baptist University

Participant Initials: _____

Date: _____