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Undocumented Students' Access to Higher Education in San Francisco, Bay Area

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The University of San Francisco

**Undocumented Students' Access
to Higher Education
in San Francisco, Bay Area**

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

by
Sandra Miklosic
December 2017

**Undocumented Students' Access
to Higher Education
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MASTER OF ARTS

In

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by

Sandra Miklosic
December 2017

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Dr. Melissa Canlas
Instructor / Chairperson

Date **12/11/2017**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The DREAM Act, also known as Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act was introduced in the Senate on March 26, 2001. The DREAM Act was intended to have a life-changing impact on the students who qualify and would increase the welfare of the undocumented persons in the United States. This Act would have permitted immigrant students, who had been brought to the United States as minors and had grown up in the United States, to apply for a temporary legal status and allow for them to apply for a permanent status and eventually become U.S. Citizens (American Immigration Council, 2016). For many of these children and young adults who would qualify for the DREAM Act, the United States is their only home, and English is their first language. Many of these children assist their parents in becoming more adjusted to the U.S. society by serving as interpreters and cultural guides. These children have the potential to be future doctors, nurses, soldiers, teachers, and entrepreneurs; but they experience unique barriers to achieve success in the United States (American Immigration Council, 2016).

Under the current immigration law, young people inherit their immigration status from their parents; but in cases when their parents are undocumented, they find themselves in the immigration limbo and cannot obtain legal residency, even though they lived in the U.S. most of their lives. The DREAM Act was introduced several times in the Congress but has always failed to become a law. On the other hand, several states have passed their own versions of immigration legislation named as DREAM Acts, such

as: California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin, that permit undocumented students, who have attended and graduated from the state's primary and secondary schools, to pay the same college tuition as other state residents. However, these state acts do not confer citizenship or legal status for undocumented students (American Immigration Council, 2016).

DACA, also known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, was signed by former U.S. President Barack Obama on June 15, 2012. This executive order provides individuals, who came in the U.S as children under the age of 16 and were under 31 years of age in 2012, with the immunity from deportation for a period of two years and a possibility of an extension. Therefore, DACA is helping to defer removal action against an individual for a certain period of time but does not provide a lawful status (USCIS, 2017). DACA recipients are also eligible to access higher education, work, obtain driver's license and apply for state scholarships. These benefits allow undocumented students to actively participate in the society, and to have better chances at fulfilling their dreams about future. Also, many DACA recipients in California were now finally able to have more affordable access to higher education by having access to work, by paying in-state tuition, and having access to private and state scholarships (Gonzales, 2016).

According to the National UnDACAmented Research Project (NURP) report from 2016, DACA has improved undocumented students' lives in many ways. For example, undocumented immigrants who are in possession of DACA, are now able to enroll in public and private universities, and also into trade schools. Additionally, in some states, like California, they are also eligible for scholarships. Some short-term certificate programs offer flexible class schedules which allows students to work full-time or part-

time while pursuing their degree (NURP, 2016). By having a work authorization, DACA recipients who are enrolled in colleges find it easier to meet their tuition needs since they can apply for the better paying and more stable jobs than before (Gonzales, 2016). Before the announcement of DACA, the majority of undocumented high school students were not trying to enroll in colleges or universities since they had no work permit, which meant they had no guarantee that they would be able to access the jobs they were educated for, after obtaining a degree (Gonzales, 2016). However, DACA helped with breaking this stereotype and encouraged students to pursue the career of their dreams (American Progress, 2015).

Moreover, according to the American Progress Report (2015), 65% of the survey respondents were enrolled in schools and 70% were working as well. Ninety-two percent of the students surveyed that were enrolled in schools declared that because of DACA, they were able to pursue the educational opportunities they were not able to before (American Progress, 2015). According to the survey results, 83% were pursuing bachelor's or associate's degree, and 17% were pursuing advanced degrees (American Progress, 2015).

Moreover, another important act for undocumented student's access to higher education is California DREAM Act. This legislation allows undocumented students, that were brought to the U.S. under the age of 16 and have attended school in the U.S., to apply for financial aid benefits. It was signed by the California Governor Jerry Brown on July 25, 2011 (CSAC, 2017). According to the California Dream Act website (2017), undocumented students who meet certain provisions, are able to apply for and receive private scholarships, university grants, college fee waivers, and Cal Grants. A student can

qualify for a California DREAM Act if; he/she lives in California, meets requirements of the Bill AB 540, is a DACA recipient (but not necessary), or a U-Visa holders (CSAC, 2017). Bill AB 540 exempts students who qualify from paying out-of-state tuition. To qualify under the AB 540, a student has to attend California high school for at least 3 years or have already graduated from a high school (CSAC, 2017). However, California Dream Act does not grant access to the federal student aid for the undocumented students (CSAC, 2017).

This paper will explore the question: “in what ways does DACA status influence undocumented students’ ability to access higher education in San Francisco and Bay Area, California?” Even though DACA does not encompass any direct policies regarding access to education, there is a very strong correlation between having DACA status and accessing higher education for the undocumented students.

In this research, I highlight the voices of undocumented students through the method of testimonio. Each participant reflects on their personal experiences with DACA while accessing postsecondary education. In this research, I explore how testimonio, as a methodology and a theoretical framework, reflects the undocumented students’ experiences while they reveal their stories in the powerful interviews.

Background and Need for the Study

On June 15, 2012, the former U.S. President Barack Obama enacted DACA as an executive order which temporarily deferred deportations from the U.S. for about 1.9 million eligible undocumented young adults. Furthermore, the DACA recipients were provided with the temporary Social Security numbers and two-year work permits (American Immigration Council, 2016).

Now, more than five years into the program, approximately 700,000 undocumented individuals have obtained DACA status. The majority of DACA's approved applicants are of Mexican descent (963,462), followed by El Salvador (45,375), Guatemala (30,458) and Honduras (29,238). There are also applicants from other countries such as Peru, Brazil, South Korea, Ecuador, Colombia and the Philippines (USCIS, 2016).

Before the establishment of DACA, the undocumented students who have gone through the U.S. public school system have been limited to pursue higher education or a career due to insufficient funds and ineligibility for an in-state tuition at colleges and universities (American Progress, 2015). After the implementation of DACA, the NURP was started in 2013 by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, in order to better understand the experiences of DACA recipients. The NURP survey included a total of 2,684 responses from 46 states and the District of Columbia, D.C. The research has shown that DACA has broadened educational and work opportunities for undocumented students and has also improved their access to the public schools and universities (NURP, 2014). Work authorization helped the undocumented students to meet their tuition needs and helped them gain additional experiences.

According to NURP (2015), 68% of DACA beneficiaries expressed that they feel more motivated and hopeful for the future. According to the research, DACA not only helped the beneficiaries with the access to job opportunities but also increased their earnings. On the other hand, the research has also shown that not all of the DACA recipients were able to afford tuition at the four-year institutions and not all of them wanted to have a degree (NURP, 2014). Thirty-three percent of them found job-training

programs in the trades at community colleges or community-based organizations (NURP, 2015).

DACA provides lower tuition costs and greater access to certificate programs with flexible class schedules that allow students to work while pursuing their degrees. By participating in these certificate programs they were able to live at home and save the money they would spend on campus accommodation (NURP, 2016). According to the Center for the American Progress (2015), DACA also helped undocumented students overcome psychological barriers to success like exclusion, anxiety, and stress they have experienced by being undocumented. According to the NURP report (2016), 45% of the students who received DACA while in high school, expressed the increase in their motivation in attending college and working in the fields they dreamt of. Those who received DACA in the college also reported motivation to pursue jobs in their fields after graduation. All in all, DACA has offered a lot of opportunities for the beneficiaries which resulted in a new hope, higher goals, and better performance at school and work.

However, there are still persistent limitations of DACA like for example the cost of higher education, since the average tuition and fees for public four-year institutions have risen by 5 percent per year. Additionally, many states do not allow undocumented students to receive any state or federal financial aid, which makes it difficult for them to finance their education (American Progress, 2015).

Moreover, in the states that do not offer the lower tuition rates or in-state tuitions for DACA recipients, students must work long hours, which makes it harder for students to attend schools and also takes away time for their schoolwork, which results in bad school performance and lower grades (Keyes, 2013).

According to NURP (2016) research, another issue that DACA recipients are facing is the lack of knowledge of their teachers and counselors. In some cases, it is difficult for DACA students to know which paths are available for them after they finish high school or obtain a college degree. While many of teachers and counselors are supportive, they don't fully understand the legal landscape of DACA, nor are they educated enough to provide the appropriate assistance like career exploration or consulting for DACA students (NURP, 2016).

The bigger issue that is currently worrying more than 800,000 DACA beneficiaries is the executive action of the President Donald Trump, who started a process of repealing DACA on September 5, 2017 (LA Times, 2016). This executive order might diminish protection from deportation and cancel work permits which could have endless consequences for the undocumented community. Also, undocumented students with DACA fear that President Trump and his administration will have access to the personal information that they had to disclose in order to apply for DACA status (Galindo, 2012). Trump's administration could potentially reverse DACA program that has protected hundreds of thousands of people and execute deportation for those undocumented individuals and also their families (Galindo, 2012).

Need for the Study

One of the foremost reasons for undocumented immigrants to bring their children to the United States is for their children to have better access to education and work opportunities than in their home country. Education is essential for undocumented immigrants to achieve upward mobility which means that education should be equally available for everybody. Having DACA status has helped to reduce the inequality gap

between undocumented students and the U.S. citizens when accessing higher education, but that access is still not equal for the undocumented students (Gonzales, 2016). With no doubt, the benefits of having a work permit and work legally in the United States are the main reasons why undocumented students apply for DACA (Gonzales, 2016), but the economic aspects of the executive order are not the focus of this study. This study will focus on how the undocumented students' increased economic position affects their access to higher education.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this paper is to examine in what ways does DACA status influence undocumented students' ability to access higher education in San Francisco and Bay Area, California. This study focuses on highlighting the voices of undocumented students who are DACA recipients and are currently on a post-secondary academic level. Even though DACA does not encompass any direct policies regarding educational attainment, there is a very strong correlation between having DACA status and accessing higher education. This study was formed through the interviews with undocumented students that are current DACA recipients. The findings of this study will contribute to the absence of research on this particular topic.

Research Question

The testimonios explore the relationship between DACA status and the access to higher education for undocumented students in San Francisco and Bay Area, California. Specifically, this study is guided by the following research question: "in what ways does DACA status influence undocumented students' ability to access higher education in San Francisco and Bay Area, California?"

Theoretical Frameworks

The use of testimonio as a theoretical framework for this study is crucial in exploring the truthful and unique experiences of undocumented students with DACA. Even though testimonio serves as a methodology in this study, it also impacts the theoretical frameworks of the study. This study also references the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) through the lenses of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework.

Testimonio

According to Beverley (2005), the term testimonio is determined as “witness account”, and it embodies narrative research methodology that stems from Latin American history of the 1950's. Described by Beverley (2005), testimonio is a first-person narrative from a person who had been marginalized and had experienced a form of oppression and inequality. The narrator her/himself is the ‘research tool’ that conveys the story from the personal experience (Beverley, 2005). The primary goal of testimonio is to transcend awareness, question institutional power, and to promote justice and solidarity (Beverley, 2005).

Moreover, testimonio is very important in forming the intercultural dialogue since it helps a complete outsider learn about the history of another community that had experienced marginalization (Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). In this instance, testimonio has the power of highlighting the narratives of marginalized communities not just in Latin America, but around the globe (Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012).

Even though we cannot determine the exact beginning of testimonio, Reyes & Curry Rodriguez (2012) point out that testimonio has been used in literature since the

1970s as a means of liberation against the imperialism in Third World countries. The earliest U.S.-based testimonios include Hurston (1970), Denton (1994), Pérez (1996), Chinchilla (1998), Medrano (2010), etc.

In the early 2000s, immigrant youth have used testimonio to address the experiences of undocumented students. In 2008, the University of Southern California published a handbook titled *Undocumented Students*, followed by the book titled *Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out* by Madera, Wong, Monroe, Rivera-Salgado, & Mathay (2008). As Reyes and Curry Rodriguez (2012) point out, in these two works, students used self-names like Chicana/o and DREAM students, as opposed to the racial classification of ‘illegal’, which provides an important piece of evidence of the power of ‘self-naming’ in testimonios.

The framework of testimonio in this research provides a unique lens to keep the focus on the stories of undocumented students and to: “highlight their voices, transcend awareness, question institutional power, and to promote justice and solidarity.” (Beverley, 2005, p. 547) More importantly, testimonio plays a powerful role in piecing together the form, process, and content to convey stories and to tell the truth.

Community Cultural Wealth

Critical Race Theory (CRT) as defined by Delgado & Stefancic (2013), is a theoretical framework that examines racism across dominant cultures. By adopting CRT approach, scholars intend to understand in what ways are victims of systemic racism affected by the cultural perceptions of race and ethnicity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). CRT scholars also highlight the importance of sharing the unique experiences of marginalized individuals (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). As Richard Delgado and Jean

Stefancic (2013) explain in their third edition of *Critical Race Theory* “Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct with its words, stories and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world” (p.18).

The focus of this research will be specifically on Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), which is a part of CRT. According to Yosso (2005), community cultural wealth is a challenge for the CRT since it confronts the traditional interpretations of the cultural capital. CRT shifts the perception of Communities of Color being places of disadvantage and cultural poverty, towards seeing them as full of cultural knowledge, skills, and contacts possessed by marginalized communities like the undocumented students in this study. According to Yosso (2005), schools both marginalize and empower their students by urging self-awareness and education, while repressing community cultural wealth. Yosso (2005) defines this framework through six forms of capital that are represented as strengths and values of students of color:

- 1. Aspirational Capital** is defined by Yosso (2005) as the ‘hopes and dreams’ that students have. She explains that members of the marginalized communities continue to have high academic aspirations despite the educational barriers they face.
- 2. Linguistic Capital** refers to the possession of multiple languages and communicational skills that marginalized students bring into their college environment (Yosso, 2005). She also argues that ‘storytelling’ is a part of

marginalized students' lives and that these skills that can be used by teachers for a great academic success.

3. **Familial Capital** extends the notion of family, social and personal human resources that students possess from their pre-college years.
4. **Social Capital** is a form of possessing social contacts and utilizing them to gain access to higher education (Yosso, 2005).
5. **Navigational Capital** refers to students being able to navigate 'social institutions' like educational spaces and to maneuver through hostile environments that were not 'built' for the marginalized (Yosso, 2005).
6. **Resistance Capital** refers to the security of equal rights and the collective freedom. According to Yosso (2005), these sources derive from students' parents and community members, and through historical legacy.

Every form of capital plays a significant role in understanding the experiences of social and racial justice for the communities of color. Moreover, through CCW, we can begin to understand the testimonios of the undocumented students since all six forms of capital help shaping the marginalized individuals and assist them in reaching beyond their limits.

Additionally, Araujo (2012) talks in her study about students utilizing their home experiences to influence their success throughout higher education. For example, Araujo's study (2012) focuses on the educational experiences of Santiago, who is a Mexican farmworker in California, and how he uses his CCW knowledge in order to be successful in the first year of college. Araujo's study is a very important example for my research study since it shows how a theory of CCW can relate to the success of a marginalized student, and in a way deepen his sense of agency.

The combination of the testimonio and CCW theory is a strong fit for my research study because the testimonio highlights the stories of the undocumented students, who actively use CCW in order to succeed in higher education.

Methodology

I performed four interviews with the undocumented students who are DACA recipients and are currently studying in San Francisco, Bay Area, in order to explore their experiences and magnify the voices of undocumented students. I sampled the participants, who are in possession of DACA status and are currently enrolled in the higher education program. The goal was to understand their reasons for applying for a higher education program, their benefits and limitation of applying for DACA, and to analyze how DACA has influenced their educational experiences.

To protect the participants in this study, I have only used their names or changed them into pseudonyms. The study was approved through IRB blanket approval for Master's research through the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS). The participants were given the Participant's Rights Form, and they also signed the Participant's Consent Forms.

The setting of this study was held through private conversations over the phone or in-person interviews in San Francisco, Bay Area. All of the participants have graduated from high school, are attending college or university, and are undocumented students who currently have DACA status. Participants ranged in age from 19-27 years old. Two participants were male and two were female.

This research focuses on findings from the interviews that were conducted over a period of one month. The interviews were held in English and were voice recorded. The interview questions were structured as follows:

1. How old are you and where did you immigrate from?
2. Did you already graduate from high school and what was your GPA if so?
3. What were your reasons for applying for higher education?
4. Did any member of your family went to high school or completed any degree?
5. Did your educational aspirations change after receiving DACA? If so, then how?
6. Was your family struggling to keep paying for the DACA filing fees every two years?
7. How did your DACA status influence your path to higher education?
8. What has been the biggest challenge in your studies?
9. How do your educational goals fit into your future plans?
10. What do you think is important for people to understand about DACA students and what advice would you give people who want to support DACA students?

Limitations of the Study

The primary challenge with executing this study was being able to find the undocumented students, conduct the field research and have in-person interviews with the students that are undocumented. Finding undocumented students is not an easy task since they do not know if I am the legitimate researcher or if talking to me will possibly lead to their deportation. With undocumented students, you have to be specifically careful to explain in detail what the project is about and where it would be published.

Due to the time constraint of this study, the research was executed with four participants over the course of a month. All of the participants have graduated from high school, are attending college, and are undocumented students who currently have DACA status. They all come from different communities, cultural and social backgrounds, but what they all have in common, is the story of being undocumented and receiving DACA protection from deportation. When using participants' testimonios as a qualitative data, we need to take into the account that their stories cannot be completely generalized since each individual participant experienced their story in a completely unique way.

Considering the limitations, the study could be executed with a larger sample of undocumented students from various educational institutions for the research to have more depth and credibility. The study could be furthered by conducting a complex survey and gathering the quantitative data on this research question.

Significance of the Project

This study examines positive and negative experiences of undocumented students who want to pursue higher education and are limited to applying for a DACA status in order to do so. Unfortunately, undocumented students in some states are still unable to enroll in colleges or universities around the country since they're not eligible for federal or state scholarships and they simply cannot afford the cost of applying for a three or four-year degree. Despite its relevance, higher education for undocumented students has been put on a back burner in some states. This study will provide the analysis of how possession of DACA status has influenced access to higher education for undocumented students in California, and then compare it to the existent reports from other U.S. states.

Definition of Terms

CRT: Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a theoretical and interpretive mode that examines the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression. In adopting this approach, CRT scholars attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

California DREAM Act: A package of California state laws that allow children, who were brought to the U.S. before the age of 16 and have no immigration documentation, to apply for student financial aid benefits.

CAL GRANT: To qualify, students must apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act Application (CADAA) by the deadline and meet the eligibility and financial requirements as well as minimum GPA requirements. Cal Grants can be used at any University of California, California State University or California Community College, as well as qualifying independent and career colleges or technical schools in California (CSAC, 2017).

DACA: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is an American immigration policy established by the Obama administration in June 2012.

DAPA: Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), sometimes called Deferred Action for Parental Accountability, was a planned American immigration policy to grant deferred action status to certain illegal immigrants who have lived in the United States since 2010.

DREAM Act: Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) is an American legislative proposal for a multi-phase process for qualifying alien minors in the United States that would first grant conditional residency and, upon meeting further qualifications, permanent residency.

FAFSA: Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a form that can be prepared annually by current and prospective college students (undergraduate and graduate) in the United States to determine their eligibility for student financial aid.

Illegal immigrant: a foreigner who enters the U.S. without an entry or immigrant visa, especially a person who crosses the border by avoiding inspection or who overstays the period of time allowed as a visitor, tourist, or businessperson.

IRCA: Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986); a public law that was passed in order to control and deter illegal immigration in the U.S.

NURP: The National UnDACAmented Research Project is a national study that seeks to understand the effects of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on the everyday lives of young people receiving (or wishing to receive) its benefits.

PLYLER vs. DOE: A case in 1982 in which the Supreme Court of the U.S. decided that states cannot constitutionally deny students a free public education on account of their immigration status.

Undocumented immigrant: A person who is in the U.S. without legal paperwork (illegal immigrant). Many immigrant advocates and undocumented students themselves prefer using the term ‘undocumented immigrant’ since there are thousands of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. who were brought here by their parents and had no choice.

USCIS: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

No one can map the possibilities of a young person who has yet to master the skills and knowledge needed to navigate the society in which he or she lives. The ethos and drive behind immigrants' economic and social success is a complex amalgam of courage, risk taking, and determination, whether they come to find religious freedom or to escape war or poverty.

(Gregory H. Williams in *The New Face of America*, 2007, n.p.)

The U.S. economy trends majorly shifted since the 2000's, making a post-secondary education degree a must for everyone who wants to be successful in the modern day labor market (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). With the growing population trends in the upcoming decades, occupations that require a higher level of education, than just high school diploma, will be more common. Immigrants in the United States represent a fast-growing division in the U.S. labor force but the majority of them are still working in hard labor jobs, food service or private households (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). The undocumented immigrant youth, who have gone through the U.S. public school system, did not want to pursue higher levels of education due to lack of funds, ineligibility for college scholarships and had no permission to work in the U.S. (E4FC, 2015). The situation of many so-called DREAMers (undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as minors by their parents and have lived here ever since) changed in 2012 with the establishment of DACA. Now, the numbers of educated and highly-skilled immigrants are growing rapidly since the implementation of DACA (E4FC, 2015).

The background of this research explores the legal landscape, the benefits and opportunities, and the limitations and the struggles of DACA recipients in the United States. First, I will begin with an overview of what legal definition of the DREAM Act was, how it affected the lives of undocumented immigrants in the past, and how it shifted the political conversations about immigration policy in the U.S. Second, I will introduce the legal term of DACA, the application process, the benefits and the limitations of it. Third, I will provide the current research that has been done in the area of undocumented students in higher education. Lastly, I will recommend some implications for the future of undocumented students in higher education.

DREAM Act and the Unsuccessful Path to Citizenship

Requirements and Barriers

The DREAM Act or also known as Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act was a proposal from the U.S. Government in 2001 that would have provided eligible undocumented youth and young adults with a path to legalization of their status. However, it would not have provided a permanent legal status for the beneficiaries right away, but rather it would have allowed them to apply for the legal permanent residency on a conditional basis. After six years their status would be re-evaluated and the conditional basis would be removed if they successfully completed at least two years of post-secondary education or military service (Migration Policy Institute, 2010).

If the DREAM Act were enacted, the requirements to be eligible for it would be: 1) applicant must be under the age of 35; 2) applicant has arrived in U.S. before the age of 16; 3) applicant has lived in the U.S. at least for the last five years; 4) applicant has obtained a U.S. high school diploma or equivalent (Migration Policy Institute, 2010). The

analysis from Migration Policy Institute (2010) has shown that more than 2.1 million undocumented immigrants could qualify for the permanent legal status if the legislation would be enacted in 2010. DREAM Act was first introduced in the year 2001 and has been repeatedly defeated in Congress ever since.

The following two sections will provide information on two different groups of undocumented students who formed in 2010, and advocated in support of undocumented students' access to higher education by exposing themselves to media, and consequently influenced the conversations about the undocumented community.

DREAM Act 5

DREAM Act 5 was a small group of five undocumented students who in May 2010 performed an act of civil disobedience as a new political strategy to support the DREAM Act. They exposed themselves in front of the former Senator McCain in Tuscon, Arizona and organized a sit-in, wearing caps and gowns in support of undocumented students' access to education. Three of those students were arrested and turned over to immigration authorities. Those students were risking the deportation in order to advocate for all undocumented students whose lives became politicized in the present anti-immigrant climate. DREAM Act 5 was engaging in public demonstrations and exercising their free speech since 2010. They have addressed letters with their personal stories to the President Obama's office between July and August of 2010 in support of the DREAM Act (Galindo, 2012).

The Trail of DREAMS

The Trail of DREAMS began as a group of 4 young students from Florida who have left Miami, FL on January 1, 2010, in order to begin the 4-month, 1,500-mile

journey to the capitol in Washington, D.C. They were all brought to the United States as children and have been here ever since. Their mission is to share their stories with the rest of the world and to urge the government to fix the issue with undocumented immigrants by walking through various communities, raising awareness about the struggles of undocumented students, and to meet with representatives to encourage them to sponsor the DREAM Act (The Trail of DREAMS, 2010).

About DACA

DACA or also known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is a program initiative that grants certain undocumented immigrants a temporary deferred action from deportation for two years and also allows them to work legally in the U.S. for two years, with the possibility of renewal. The deferred action was announced by President Barack Obama on June 15, 2012, and it came into effect on August 15, 2012 (Singer & Svajlenka, 2013). DACA applies to the individuals who came to the U.S. as minors and do not present a risk to national security or public safety. Beneficiaries receive deferred action from deportation for two years and are also able to apply for work authorization for the period of two years (American Immigration Council, 2015). While DACA protects beneficiaries from deportation and allows them to apply for work permits and increase their economic stability, it does not grant the beneficiaries with a legal status or citizenship.

Implementation of DACA changed the situation of more than 700,000 undocumented immigrant youth that were now able to obtain Social Security number and legally work in the U.S., apply for scholarships (in some states) and enroll into universities (Singer & Svajlenka, 2013).

DACA Eligibility and Application Process

The DACA application process was comprised of submitting the Form I-821D (Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), Form I-765 (Application for Employment Authorization), and the fee of \$495 (American Immigration Council, 2015). At the time of the announcement of DACA in 2012, 900,000 individuals were estimated to be eligible for the deferred action and now, more than 5 years into the program, more than 750,000 people have been granted DACA (USCIS, 2017).

To be eligible for the DACA program, applicants needed to meet the following requirements:

- Have arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16;
- Have continuously resided in the U.S. since June 15, 2007, until now;
- Were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012;
- Were physically present in the U.S. on June 15, 2012, and also when requesting DACA;
- Have entered U.S. without inspection before June 15, 2012, or any lawful immigration status expired before June 15, 2012;
- Are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate from high school or GED certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the U.S.
- Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors occurring on different dates, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety (USCIS, 2017).

DACA in Numbers

According to the Brookings FOIA (2013) research, DACA applicants come from 192 different countries and 74.9 percent of the applicants were born in Mexico. They are followed by 4.0 percent by El Salvador, 2.7 percent from Honduras, 2.5 percent from Guatemala, 1.5 percent from South Korea, 1.4 percent from Peru, 1.2 percent from Brazil, 1.1 percent from Colombia and 0.7 percent from the Philippines. In total, Central Americans encompassed 10 percent of the total applications, followed by South Americans, Asians and Caribbeans (Svajlenka, 2013).

The largest number of DACA beneficiaries come from states like California, Texas, Illinois, Florida and New York, which are also the states with the largest foreign-born populations. While the majority of beneficiaries, who live in the Western and Southern States, were born in Mexico, the East Coast states had more diverse applicant composition (Brookings, 2013).

According to the Brookings FOIA Data from 2013, DACA applicants were split almost evenly between male (49 percent) and female (51 percent) applicants. More than third of all DACA applicants were between the age of 15 and 18, and more than 54 percent of all DACA beneficiaries were under the age of 21.

DACA applicants were minors when they were brought to the U.S. with the median age of arrival 8 years old. However, almost 31 percent were five years old or younger when they arrived in the U.S. Most DACA applicants arrived in the U.S. between the 1990s and 2000s, which means that majority of DACA beneficiaries have been in the U.S. for at least 10 years when applying for the deferred action (Svajlenka, 2013).

Economic and Educational Benefits of DACA

Various different research studies have been conducted on the impacts of DACA between 2012 and 2016, and they have shown very similar results - positive economic outcomes for the beneficiaries. One of the important research studies in the field is National UnDACAmented Research Project (NURP) that was launched shortly after the implementation of DACA in 2012 in order to get a better understanding of how these young adults who have been granted DACA are experiencing their new status. NURP has published the results of a one-year research study in 2013, that has surveyed 1,402 undocumented young adults who were approved for DACA through June 2013. According to NURP research findings from 2013, a year after DACA was implemented, 61 percent of DACA recipients surveyed have expressed that they have been able to acquire a new job, 54 percent have been able to open their first bank account and 61 percent have been able to obtain a driver's license. Also, many of the beneficiaries surveyed are seeking for further social integration besides DACA, and they expressed that if given an opportunity, they would apply for the U.S. Citizenship (NURP, 2013).

According to the NURP (2016) report, DACA has improved undocumented students' lives in many ways. Undocumented immigrants who are in possession of DACA are able to access public universities and trade schools, and in some states are also eligible for scholarships. Some short-term certificate programs offer flexible class schedules which allows students to work full-time or part-time while pursuing their degree. Some students reported that these non-residential certificate programs allowed them to stay at home and save the money they would otherwise spend for on-campus living expenses (Gonzales, 2016).

By having a work authorization, DACA recipients who are enrolled in colleges find it easier to meet their tuition needs since they can apply for the better paying and more stable jobs than before. Some students also report they are receiving better benefits in the higher paying jobs and that their work conditions are less stressful (Gonzales, 2016). Furthermore, work authorizations provide DACA students with a kind of assurance that they are going to be competitive for employment after they complete their programs (Gonzales, 2016).

Many DACA recipients have become more integrated into the U.S. economy and society in general (Gonzales, 2016). DACA gives young adult immigrants an opportunity to apply for the job with a higher salary, open a bank account and apply for a credit card, obtain a driver's license, and buy a car or a new home. DACA recipients who are still enrolled in high school expressed the major change in their motivation because attending college and working in their preferred fields has become a real option for them (Gonzales, 2016).

Limitations of DACA

However, despite having access to enrollment into colleges and universities and the ability to increase their earnings, a lot of DACA beneficiaries still struggle to afford the cost of higher education. Not all DACA recipients are able to afford a four-year tuition at a higher education institution. Instead, many DACA recipients choose job-training programs at community colleges or trade schools (Gonzales, 2016). The lack of financial aid or the out-of-state tuition prices in many states are blocking thousands of DACA recipients from pursuing higher education or completing their degrees (American Immigration Council, 2016). Furthermore, students who have been able to apply for

higher paying jobs and enroll in the college, are now facing long working hours so they can afford to pay thousands of dollars of tuition, which takes away the time for doing their homework (Gonzales, 2016). Consequently, these barriers do not only decrease students' ability to perform well in schools but also prevent them from attending schools full-time (Gonzales, 2016).

In addition, many DACA recipients choose special vocational programs that require a professional license in order to be employed in that profession. The license requirements vary state-by-state, and in some states, they are limited to only citizens and legal permanent residents (Gonzales, 2016). Additionally, some states in the U.S. have used a federal law as an excuse to prevent the state government from issuing licenses to non-citizens like DACA recipients (Gonzales, 2016). These states prevent many DACA beneficiaries from working in the job fields for which they are educated and in some cases, like nursing, they are discouraged to even enroll in the program. DACA recipients in one state might have access to the in-state tuition, get a scholarship or obtain a license, whereas in some other state the same DACA recipient would not have the same opportunities (NURP, 2016). Also, many students expressed in the research that the biggest issue, according to their experience, was that teachers and counselors did not have the sufficient knowledge about the legal landscape surrounding DACA and weren't able to provide assistance for students (Gonzales, 2016).

Finally, DACA does not give any benefits or provide protection to the immediate relatives of the recipients of DACA (USCIS, 2017). Although DACA gives young undocumented students bigger economic opportunities for the period of their deferred action, it does not address the continuous threat of deportation for their loved ones. That

is why many DACA beneficiaries are in fear for their family members and friends that could be deported due to their unlawful status. According to NURP research (2013), two-thirds of the DACA recipients surveyed personally know people who were deported, whether they were their immediate family or friends. Consequently, these young adults are more likely to suffer from depression and experience family hardship due to being separated from their close family members (Gonzales, 2013).

DACA Repeal and the Proposed DREAM Act 2017

On September 5, 2017, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a memorandum that ended DACA (NCSL, 2017). According to the NCSL (2017), DACA program will be phased out over the course of six months to not impact the beneficiaries right away and to give Congress some time to finalize the new legislation called ‘the DREAM Act of 2017’. As of September 5, 2017, no new applications are accepted, and the renewal applications were extended until October 5, 2017, and currently are not accepted anymore (USCIS, 2017).

The common fear among DACA students is - what will happen with them after graduation - since they would no longer be able to apply for the work authorization, meaning that they would no longer be able to afford to pay the tuition or will not be able to pay for their living (EdSource, 2017).

The most recent version of the DREAM Act of 2017 was proposed in the Senate in July 2017 (American Immigration Council, 2017). The latest DREAM Act proposal would allow current, former and future undocumented high school graduates and GED recipients a pathway to U.S. citizenship through either work, school or by joining the armed forces (American Immigration Council, 2017).

Since the beginning of DACA in 2012, numerous states have enacted their own legislation that helps undocumented students in accessing higher education. Due to that state legislation, undocumented students are able to attend state universities and they also qualify for the in-state tuition (American Immigration Council, 2017).

Undocumented Students and Access to Education

Undocumented students are trapped in a legal paradox in which they have the right to primary and secondary education and are generally allowed to continue college, but their economic and social mobility is severely restricted due to their undocumented status.

(Roberto G. Gonzales, 2009, p.4)

According to the National Immigration Law Center (2011), undocumented students who are enrolled in primary or secondary schools make up approximately 16% of the U.S. population, with about 65,000 undocumented high school students graduating every year. Undocumented students in the U.S. are facing significant challenges when pursuing higher education due to systemic, institutional and cultural barriers that directly impact their academic success. These students are subjected to discrimination, racism, constant immigration paperwork, and constant fear of deportation for their loved ones (Kantamneni, 2016).

Immigration Legislation for Undocumented Students

Before DACA, other significant legislation and legal cases have been released in the immigration politics since the 1980s, and they directly affect the postsecondary education of undocumented students (Kantamneni, 2016). In 1982, the Supreme Court in the case of *Plyler v. Doe* made a historical decision after which undocumented students in

the U.S. were able to attend public primary and secondary schools. The Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children are also persons under the Constitution and are entitled to the equal protection under the law of the 14th Amendment (Gonzales, 2009). *Plyler v. Doe*, however, failed to address the access to the postsecondary education for the undocumented students (Kantamneni, 2016). Although there is no federal law that would prohibit undocumented immigrants to enroll in public colleges, the barrier is the financial aid which is restricted to them.

Furthermore, in 1986 the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was implemented by Immigration and Naturalization Services (Kantamneni, 2016). IRCA provided temporary resident status to individuals who entered the United States before January 1, 1982, and a possible pathway to lawful permanent residency status (LPR) for the temporary residents (Kerwin, 2010). There were several requirements in order to obtain LPR status, like having the minimal knowledge of English, U.S. history, and government, or to provide evidence of being educated in these areas (Enchautegui, 2013). The goal of IRCA was to have better control at regulating unauthorized immigration by implementing a broader legalization program that included reinforced border control and verification of employment (Gonzales, 2009). After the implementation of IRCA, the employers were prohibited from knowingly hiring undocumented immigrants for work (Kantamneni, 2016).

Moreover, DREAM Act, as mentioned before, has never been enacted as law, but it has been frequently debated since it was introduced in 2001 (Gonzales, 2009). DREAM Act would allow former, current, and future undocumented high school graduates to obtain legal status (Gonzales, 2009). Undocumented students would be able to apply for

conditional lawful permanent residency if they met certain requirements described above and also obtain driver's license (Kantamneni, 2016).

With the implementation of DACA in 2012, the legislation changed its focus to address the undocumented children's needs. DACA provided young qualifying undocumented immigrants with the possibility of the deferred action against the deportation for the period of 2 years (Gonzales, 2009). Since its implementation in 2012, DACA has directly affected undocumented youth's access to higher education (Gonzales & Bautista-Chavez, 2014). The results of NURP (2014) have shown that DACA recipients were able to become more economically and educationally integrated into the United States. Gonzales and Bautista-Chavez (2014) have argued that DACA recipients still may experience challenges when accessing the postsecondary education since DACA does not supersede federal and state policies that exclude them from accessing financial aid.

Access to Higher Education for the DACAmented Students

According to the research of Wong et al. (2016), 46% of the research participants with DACA status, were in school and 83% were also working, which can be due to the limited options for in-state tuition and financial aid for DACA students. Among those participants who were in school, 4% were pursuing GED diploma, 20% were pursuing associate degree, and 70% were pursuing bachelor's degree or higher (Wong et al. 2010)

DACA has significantly reduced structural barriers that stood between undocumented students and the higher education. The most important aspect of DACA is that the undocumented students now have access to public and private universities across the U.S., and are also eligible to apply for scholarships (NURP, 2016).

Secondly, by having a work permit, undocumented students are able to increase their earnings which consequently means they are a step closer to being able to finance their higher education (Gonzales, 2016). Additionally, according to NURP (2016) research, increased earnings are a number one reason why DACAmented students decide to pursue postsecondary education in the first place. While their parents, that mostly come from the low-income households, are supportive of their children's higher education dreams, they might not have financial means to help them out (Gonzales, 2016).

Thirdly, having DACA also means having the access to the short-term certificate programs, which offer flexible class schedules that allow DACAmented students to work while going to school. A lot of students see these programs as the stepping stones to the four-year programs or as a path to a specialized career in a certain industry, which makes them competitive for employment in the future (NURP, 2016).

Furthermore, DACA recipients who are still enrolled in high schools expressed a major change in their motivation because attending college and working in their preferred field after their graduation has become a real option for them. Moreover, these students pointed out that the opportunities that came with DACA have given them a new sense of hope, new goals and a better performance at school or work (Gonzales, 2016). However, barriers to access higher education still exist for the undocumented students.

Educational Barriers for Undocumented Students

Leisy Abrego (2006) has published in her qualitative inquiry that undocumented youth, especially children of working-class Latino immigrants, face multiple barriers when accessing higher education. Due to academic barriers such as lack of financial

resources, no adequate knowledge, lack of advocacy, etc., some youth experience decline in academic motivation (Abrego, 2006). McWhirter, Ramos, and Medina (2013) have examined in their quantitative study the correlation between barriers (immigration status, sex, and age), the academic outcome and the expectations of undocumented high school students. What McWhirter and colleagues (2013) found, was that undocumented students had lower academic expectations and on the other hand they have anticipated experiencing more barriers when pursuing higher education, if compared to students without the legal issues. These two studies show how powerful the educational barriers are in the academic development for undocumented students in the United States (Kantamneni, 2016).

Firstly, the most important education barrier for the undocumented students is a lack of financial resources. Students with undocumented status are able to apply for college without the Social Security number, but they are not able to apply for any kind of federal financial aid and in some states, they have to pay the out-of-state tuition (Kantamneni, 2016). It happens a lot of times that financial aid offices advise undocumented students to apply for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) where they realize they cannot since they don't have a Social Security number (Kantamneni, 2016). Also, due to the lack of financial resources in undocumented students' families, undocumented students are having issues to make ends meet since they have to fund their educational career on their own (Garcia & Tierney, 2011).

Secondly, undocumented students who attend low-income high schools, usually don't possess adequate academic knowledge in order to successfully transfer to colleges (Garcia & Tierney, 2011). With that said, these students might not possess enough 'social

capital' or networking resources in order to access greater cultural resources or to increase their economic capital (Garcia & Tierney, 2011). Enriquez (2011) has studied how social capital affects undocumented students' success when pursuing higher education. She concluded that the social capital, derived from emotional and financial support from family, friends, and teachers, has been a main source of empowerment for the undocumented youth (Enriquez, 2011). In addition, Enriquez (2011) describes that undocumented students a lot of times exercise 'patchworking' - meaning that they have to join together limited resources from various sources in order to overcome the academic barriers.

Thirdly, some undocumented students experience educational barriers due to the issues with transportation. Undocumented students face restrictions when applying for the driver's license since they must have DACA in order to be eligible (Kantamneni, 2016). Also, the lack of funds affects the access to travel resources for some undocumented students that may live far from their campuses. Flying or renting a car might not be accessible to all undocumented students (Kantamneni, 2016).

Lastly, undocumented students might also experience the lack of advocacy and support in colleges they go to (Kantamneni, 2016). Sometimes campus offices might not be prepared for the changes in immigration policies, and therefore, they might provide wrong or outdated information to undocumented students. Consequently, this might affect undocumented students' ability to access financial aid in colleges (Kantamneni, 2016).

All of the above-mentioned barriers are influencing the undocumented student's mental and psychological well-being. Last, but very important part of the conversation

about the educational barriers for undocumented students is stress and the fear of the exposure.

Acculturative Stress and the Fear of the Exposure

The research from Arbona et al. (2010) has shown that socioemotional development of undocumented students may be influenced by environmental and cultural factors. When undocumented students apply for college, they undergo acculturative stress over the process of adapting to the new environment. This stress is also influenced by the parent's involvement, teacher and peer support (Arbona et al., 2010). According to Arbona et al. (2010), acculturative stress also directly affects the mental health outcomes of undocumented students. Additionally, undocumented students might experience discrimination due to the systemic barriers, which might result in the anxiety over applying to the college (Perez et al., 2010 as cited in Kantamneni, 2016). Consequently, undocumented students experience poor mental health and insecurity in relation to their academic goals (Perez et al., 2010 as cited in Kantamneni, 2016).

Moreover, the fear of deportation negatively affects the self-esteem of undocumented students (Cavazog-Rehg, Zayas, & Spiznagel, 2007 as cited in Kantamneni, 2016). Consequently, undocumented students might live in a constant fear of their undocumented status being exposed to their peers and friends, or also the faculty. This might reflect the shame of not being able to participate in 'normal' college life (Garcia & Tierney, 2011). Some undocumented students might also be discouraged from seeking counseling because they are concerned with their status being revealed (Garcia & Tierney, 2011).

The powerful aspect of undocumented student's success or failure of their academic careers is definitely the family (Kantamneni, 2016). Many undocumented students come from low-income families with parents who have never pursued higher education, which might result either in inspiration and encouragement from these parents, or the lack of support and resources (Kantamneni, 2016). Some parents might undergo hardship in order to help their children to pursue their career goals, others might not see the value in education and might not support their children (Kantamneni, 2016). The study from Perez et al. (2010; as cited in Kantamneni, 2016) has shown that undocumented students with supportive families and friends demonstrated higher levels of the educational success in contrast to their peers with fewer support.

CHAPTER III: RESULTS

The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research study was to highlight the voices of undocumented students by exploring the connection between DACA and the access to higher education for undocumented students. Undocumented students' narratives provide a valuable insight into the struggles they need to overcome in order to access higher education.

The main goal of this research was to understand the process and challenges of applying for a higher education program for the undocumented students, to explore the reasons why they chose to apply for DACA and how DACA has influenced their educational experiences.

Using interviews as 'testimonios' was very important to gain the insights into the undocumented students' lives and to explore social, economic and cultural relations inside their communities. The interviews were held in English and were voice recorded. I used open-ended questions during interviews which encouraged participants to reflect and assess their feelings.

Participants

This following section will include a brief introduction to each of the undocumented student that participated in this study. The testimonio is about humanizing the experiences of undocumented students, therefore, this information will help illustrate their stories, which is crucial in order to give the reader a sense of an individual.

Kevin. Kevin grew up in Santa Ana, California, where his parents brought him when he was two years old. He was born in Acapulco, Mexico. He is currently pursuing his Bachelor's degree at a public four-year university and wishes to continue his

educational career at the medical school to become a doctor. He shares about how DACA had a great impact on his educational career.

Kim. Kim is a medical student at a university in San Francisco. She was brought in the U.S. from North Korea when she was four years old. She is currently working on her Bachelor's and wishes to become an Orthopedist in the future. She shares how DACA status definitely helped her to become more hopeful about the future and with pursuing her degree.

Paulina. Paulina was born in Colombia and was brought in the U.S. when she was three years old. Paulina currently lives in Silicon Valley and is completing her Master's in Psychology. She actively participates in her community in San Jose and wishes to become a Psychologist. She shares how DACA influenced her path to higher education and how hard it was to save for DACA renewal fees.

Salinas. Salinas is pursuing his degree at a public four-year university. He was born in Acapulco, Mexico and brought here by his parents when he was three years old. He shares how DACA helped him to apply for multiple jobs, so he was able to cover costs of his tuition. He exposes the idea of mental health and stress in the undocumented community and raises awareness about the work that can be done to help undocumented students.

Each of the participants shares about their experiences of being undocumented in California, how DACA affected their well-being, and their experiences with higher education.

Setting of the Study

The setting of this study was held through private conversations over the phone or in-person interviews in San Francisco, Bay Area. All of the participants have graduated from high school, are attending college or university, and are undocumented students who currently have DACA status. Participants ranged in age from 19-27 years old. Two participants were male and two were female.

Testimonios

I have performed four personal interviews over the course of one month. I have distributed IRB Consent forms and the Participant's Rights Forms between the participants (see Appendix). I recorded the interviews with a voice recorder application on my phone. I compared the answers to the research questions between all four participants. The themes that emerged, and will be discussed include: (1) reasons for applying for higher education, (2) challenges in higher education (3) DACA as an agent of change, (4) mental health, (5) fear of the future, and (6) participant recommendations. Themes that reflected in the interviews will be illustrated by direct quotations from interviews.

The reasons for applying for higher education

In this section, the participants share their testimonios about reasons for applying for higher education. Testimonios of all four applicants are connected through the stories of their families. Participants share testimonios about the positive impact their families had on their success in higher education, whether their families were present or not.

In his testimonio, Kevin talks about how his family has a great impact on his educational success. His family has been encouraging him to pursue higher education and supporting him mentally and financially since the beginning. Kevin also expresses gratitude towards his parents and describes the story of how his mother would always talk about how higher education is a must and how they will help him with all the means necessary.

Kevin

I guess, so it's always been a plan, I remember going ... and my mom would always mention college, and sometimes, I know we would have this conversation all the time, like: I don't know how we're gonna do it as a family but somehow we're gonna get you there. Somehow we're gonna, you know.

When growing up, my mom would always talk about other students who were undocumented and they always find a way to finish off school and everything. And that's what my mom would tell me the same thing, she would tell me like 'oh, we're gonna do the same thing, you know, somehow we're gonna help you. Even if I have to recycle like bottles and all that, like we'll get you the money you need or whatever you need.

Kevin shares in his testimonio about his parents supporting him financially and mentally on the path to higher education. In her testimonio, Kim shares a similar story of her mother supporting her through her higher education and working multiple jobs in order to provide her daughter with a chance of better life than she has.

Kim

My mom is working class people. Like my mom works at clothes factory in Korea and works all the time. She works two jobs to help me pay for school. But my mom always told me that I need to go to school and study! She always motivated me to be better in school, even though she wasn't part of my life, she wanted better future for me than she has. I would look up to that example and I will always be grateful for what she does for me.

Kim shares how much she appreciates her mother's constant support and the access she has to higher education. On the other hand, Salinas's testimonio reveals the other side of the story, when students do not have strong parental support. In Salinas's case, he is supporting himself by working multiple jobs and saving for the DACA renewal fees in order to achieve his goals.

Salinas

Since the early age my mom was absent in my life. My whole family was absent, actually. I managed to get it in my head that education is a must for my brother and I. I didn't know I was undocumented until I was trying to find my SSN number. I called my mom and she told me 'Son you don't have one', and that was the first time when I was aware of the situation, that I was undocumented. I knew I wanted to go further in life, but there were boundaries because I was undocumented. I got a shot and got accepted to UC Berkeley.

My family was very absent from my life, so I had to do everything on my own. I always had to work extra hard since I had nobody to help me with this. I

got lucky that Liberty Hill provided me with funds. I'm first generation in my family to pursue higher education. There is not a lot of us in the family that pursued higher education.

Salinas's story to access higher education is different from Kevin's and Paulina's since Salinas had to figure things out on his own. As Kevin and Paulina share in their testimonios, the aspiration to be a better version of yourself and to have a successful career was the other reason why they decided to pursue higher education next to the family support. In his testimonio, Kevin shares how his educational path got inspired by his wish to be a doctor one day.

Kevin

There was always that aspiration that you know, this reason, if we're here in United States, you should always go for the highest thing you can. In high school, I will still say the same thing, I will tell myself that eventually I'll become a doctor. Like right now, I'm still in a pre-med track and I'm still thinking of going to medical school after college.

He shares that the other reason for him to apply for higher education was the idea that being in the United States means that striving for higher and better education is a must if he wishes to prosper in this country and build a successful career. In her testimonio, Paulina shares the story of her hometown community where being educated is not that important and how lucky she was that her family persuaded her to continue to higher education.

Paulina

The thing is that, where I come from, kids just give up about school. It's not popular or something... Some students don't see the point in trying and being in school all day and do homework all night, that's why my parents came here. To be better, to make something out of myself. I am so grateful to them for giving me an opportunity for that.

Even though education is very expensive in the United States it never like discouraged me or stopped me... and my 'mama' would never let me stop! (laughs) She would be like 'mija, you need to work harder than anyone else, you need to be the best you can'.

Participants' testimonios show the very common reasons for applying for higher education. All four testimonios are connecting the reason to apply for higher education to either the presence or the absence of their families and the wish to be better, and successful. Overall, participants express very inspirational thoughts about their hard-working experience when applying for higher education.

Challenges in Higher Education

Undocumented students who have completed their high school degree and want to pursue higher education often face many challenges in the process. Students' testimonios suggested, that the expensive tuition and a general financial burden are the primary obstacles for them to decide which school to choose. Kim and Paulina express that their parents, who support them financially, have to work two jobs in order to be able to provide for the family and also to assist them financially. Kevin and Paulina express that

it's really hard to survive day-by-day by having to pay for tuition and also for their living expenses.

Kevin

My dad is working two jobs. He works at a Taco Bell and he works at this other taco place, which is just fast food, and then my mom works at a factory, so my parents don't have much money. I didn't grow up with much money. Like most of my childhood I was being in one room with all my family, which is just my parents, my sister and I.

Financially, like my first year, I was just really tryna' have money for myself, like to eat and actually I pulled through.

Kevin shares in his testimonio the financial hardship of his family and how challenging it was to pay for his tuition and bills. In her story, Paulina has a very similar situation:

Paulina

It's frustrating to not have money, especially when it comes to school and education. Like my parents are working so hard and they have to take care of my two younger sisters, too. We never had a lot of money in my family, so like I had to work since I was 16. During my Bachelor's I would work two jobs to pay for my school. I used to work like from 6am to like 8pm in the summer to like save money and be able to pay for my expenses. I wasn't like spending too much or anything but just like one year tuition costs about \$8,000...

Although, having DACA status has helped Kevin, Kim, Salinas and Paulina to access higher education, keep paying for DACA fees is not the easiest thing for them.

Next to the long process with extensive paperwork, the fee for the DACA renewal is a challenge itself. All four participants expressed frustration with having to save \$495 every two years for the DACA renewal fee. Kevin and Paulina were very fortunate to have their parents assist them with the payment of the fee, but Salinas and Kim were less fortunate and had to figure that expense on their own. Salinas expressed being thankful for the private loan company that lends him the funds he needs to support himself throughout the Bachelor's Degree.

Salinas

As I said before, my family was very absent from my life, so I had to do everything on my own. I always had to work extra hard since I had nobody to help me with this. I got lucky that Liberty Hill provided me with funds.

In their testimonios, Kevin and Paulina share how expensive it is to keep paying for the DACA renewal fees.

Kevin

Oh yeah, it is expensive. I know my parents would talk about it like 'we need to raise money for that', I remember I applied in September or November the first time, so I remember the biggest thing in months before was money and my mom usually saved up that money with my dad. They knew it was something we can't ignore, like I should take that opportunity. So yeah it was something you had to save up for the application. But my mom just knew like 'you can't miss this, you're gonna have to do it. We're gonna get you that money.'

Paulina

Yeah, paying for DACA is always a challenge, or it was a challenge, now that it's gone. Since I remember my mom would have those conversations with me like 'mija, we need to start saving for this now' and we would like not eat out or like my parents would save for it for months. It's very expensive.

I can't imagine paying for it for like forever, but then what choice do I have, right? Like am I not going to get that permit renewal? Of course not, I just have to figure it out every two years.

Moreover, Kevin expresses a common frustration over the feeling of academic unpreparedness and a challenge of transition to a new environment when applying for higher education.

Kevin

Most of the students I felt were way more prepared, they had a lot more resources than I did. I know going to my Math class and Chemistry I felt so lost. Most of these students already took Calculus in high school and Math I had in my high school was like pre-count. So like just going in there was making me feel lost and everything. I guess the biggest thing is preparation.

Academically, I guess one of the biggest challenges for me, not only was it transition, cuz' there's a level to it academically and financially, also. Transition-wise, like being homesick sometimes... but I think everybody gets that.

Kim expresses in her testimonio the feeling of not being on the same educational level as other students who do not share the same immigration status. Also, she expresses the feelings of being lost in the new environment:

Kim

I definitely felt a culture shock when I got to college. It was weird from the beginning being an Asian person trying to integrate into mostly White American college. I would get defensive at the beginning, like I would have to stand up for myself all the time.

Also I felt like I wasn't ready for the classes at all. I needed to hire tutors all the time to understand medical processes and stuff. I just couldn't follow classes at beginning sometimes.

Overall, the participants felt that higher education in the United States is very expensive and it is something they have to work hard for and save their money, or be very lucky to have a family by their side, who is willing to support them throughout their academic decisions. Kevin and Paulina expressed it is hard to keep up with paying for the DACA renewal fees every two years and that they needed to work multiple jobs or get assistance from their parents in order to be able to sustain their DACA status.

Additionally, Kim and Kevin expressed their frustration over the lack of academic preparedness they have felt when they started their studies at the universities, and how hard it was to transition to a new environment.

DACA as an Agent of Change

The previous testimonios showed that undocumented students face barriers, like high tuition costs, DACA renewal fees, and the lack of academic preparedness, when accessing higher education. Despite these barriers, all of the participants expressed the strong feeling about DACA being the means for them to work, study, and live in this country. Kevin shares that having DACA has made access to higher education a lot easier and it enabled him to get a work permit and be able to afford the high tuition costs.

Kevin

I guess it made it a lot easier. I know my mom was really happy, and I remember going to my first appointment and everything. DACA made it a lot easier, like now I'm realizing it. I understand that DACA is what gives us money for us to be here, and that's what I love about it. I remember, knowing that I had DACA was just a lot better, like I knew that going to college is going to be a lot easier, or it wasn't going to be that big of a deal.

Similar to Kevin, in her testimonio, Paulina shares that DACA gave her financial stability and it opened up the chances to apply for higher education.

Paulina

Oh, I remember my parents being so happy when DACA was announced in media in 2011. Like this is the ultimate solution for me and my sisters to go to school and work. It definitely helped me realize how much education is actually important for me. And also, I am able to work as much as I want and I can save money too. It gave me financial stability, definitely.

When asked about how much influence DACA had on their path to higher education, Salinas expressed that he can't imagine being where he is right now without DACA.

Salinas

I was pursuing college without DACA for my first year. Then I applied for DACA and that helped me with getting work-study jobs, so I was being able to pay for my tuition. Without DACA, I can't imagine how I would be able to pursue higher education. I just can't imagine being here without DACA.

Moreover, Kim, Salinas and Kevin express that having DACA offered them more options to decide where to pursue their degree and what profession they would be able to pursue. At the same time, the research was conducted in California, where undocumented students can qualify for the California DREAM Act and benefit of paying for the in-state tuition. In his story, Kevin has stated that if not for DACA, he would have to pay the double of what normal students have to pay.

Kevin

If not for DACA we would have to pay the double of what a normal students have to pay here, or the triple. So like tuition for most students that are California residents is like \$30,000 a year, but since we're DACA it would be like \$64,000 a year, so it just doubles because we're considered out of state. With DACA we get like a waiver fee, depending on what institution we go to. I think if it weren't for DACA, I might still could've been at a community college and then hopefully, eventually raised enough money to go to a higher education. One of the

biggest things is not worry so much about money, like right now the only thing I need to worry about is being able to pay off some tuition and being able to just pay for rent. I could not imagine where I would be right now if I didn't have DACA. I don't think I would be here, I would've stayed back home and go to one of the community colleges.”

I would say DACA gave me more options, cuz if if there was no DACA I don't think I would've stayed not only closer to home but maybe I would've ended up in SoCal at community college, because money was the biggest factor to where I would go. I think if it weren't for DACA, I might still could've been at a community college and then hopefully, eventually raised enough money to go to a higher education.

Furthermore, Salinas expresses that having DACA feels like having a 'safety blanket' and a 'band-aid' at the same time, since it opens up the world of possibilities for him but it could also have been easily taken away from him.

Salinas

DACA was as I call it a 'safety blanket'. I also call it a 'band-aid' protection, since it can be easily 'stripped' away from you. Without DACA, I can't imagine how I would be able to pursue higher education. I just can't imagine being here without DACA I was able to utilize DACA and get SSN which gave me privileges. During that summer, I remember, I got multiple jobs and it inspired me to pursue higher education. I was very resilient to pursue the degree.

In her testimonio, Kim expresses that she can't imagine being able to finish college without having DACA.

Kim

I honestly can't imagine finishing college without having DACA. It's not perfect but it's something. It was easy to apply for it and then pay for the fee and all that, but I know that it's not 100% reliable. Like what happens if they don't extend it? I want to go for my Master's but I don't know how that would be possible now that my status expires in a year...

Participants' testimonios imply that students are met with multiple challenges when applying for higher education, but having DACA opened the door to access higher education, provided a safety blanket, and gave them access to work. Moreover, with having the access to the job market, these four students were able to pay for their tuitions, loans and living expenses. Most importantly, all of the participants in the survey have expressed gratitude towards having DACA that gave them new opportunities and opened the door to higher education even though they are undocumented in the United States.

Mental Health

When asking participants about the biggest challenges in their studies, they all had a similar response - 'mental health and stress'. Their testimonios revealed that Kevin, Kim, Paulina and Salinas felt the enormous weight on their shoulders by keeping their undocumented status a secret for many years. Living in the 'shadows' made them feel secluded. In his testimonio, Salinas shared in his deepest thoughts about mental health.

Salinas

The biggest challenge during my studies...? Definitely mental health.

Mental health is a very taboo subject with undocumented students. I actually think we (undocumented students) are the strongest people in the world. I mean, don't get me wrong, there's a lot of strong people out there, but I think we, undocumented students, are definitely the strongest! We got to make it work day after day and make every penny stretch. There is not a lot of support offered for undocumented students in United States in general.

Am I mentally prepared? I ask myself that question a lot...

Being at UC Berkeley where they have an undocumented program is great, but other than that, there is not a lot of spaces to talk about mental health or about being undocumented. The whole educational system is not good enough in supporting undocumented youth.

Salinas shares in his testimonio that talking about mental health in general, is not very desirable in the undocumented community, since there is a stigma that undocumented students are supposed to be strong and fierce, but in reality a lot of them suffer from not being able to open up and discuss their feeling because 'who can you even trust?' In his testimonio, Kevin expresses his feeling about the challenges in higher education. He feels the pressure on him since not a lot of people who understand his situation and there is not a lot of support for undocumented students.

Kevin

Academically, I guess one of the biggest challenges , not only was it transition, cuz going here like even though there's a lot of students from

everywhere in the world, there's a level to it academically and financially. Transition-wise, like being homesick sometimes, but I think everybody gets that. Financially, like my first year I was just tryna have money for myself, like to eat and actually I pulled through, but there is that stress cuz you're the first one to go to college and there's not a lot of people who understand you. And sometimes you might not get the support that you need to continue on, and I guess that could be hard sometimes. I don't know the pressure sometimes gets to you.

Kevin's testimonio reveals various factors that affect his mental health and well being, like the academic unpreparedness, homesickness, financial issues, and lack of support. In her story, Kim expressed similar concern about not being able to talk about who she is and let people in her life because she was afraid of her status being revealed.

Kim

It is very hard not to be able to talk about who you are and be yourself sometimes. I feel I pushed people away because I didn't wanna get too close, you know? I thought that if I tell anyone, they are not gonna understand me. I'm still afraid to form deeper connections with people because I don't know how they will react and then how do I respond and answer the questions... I don't want people to know my business and at the same time I just wanna be honest with people around me. It feels like I'm carrying so much weight on my chest, and it's hard sometimes.

Also, at school, some teachers don't know what undocumented even is, you know. Like they just don't care to educate themselves either. So sometimes

it' just better to not tell anyone about your personal stuff. Like I feel they should be educated about it and help us instead.

In her testimonio, Kim opens up about not being able to talk to people about her story and therefore she does not want to form long and meaningful relationships with people. Moreover, she expresses that one of the issues she is concerned with is connected to the school staff not being supportive enough or not being educated about the issues of undocumented community, therefore they are not able to provide adequate help to the undocumented students. In her testimonio, Paulina shares her thoughts on not being able to open up to other people and of her mental health being compromised in the process.

Paulina

It's hard to not be able to talk about it you know... Personally I talk to my other undocumented friends, but for other students it's hard for them to understand what undocumented means. I feel like not talking about it for years made me immune to certain situations, definitely it made me stronger. Like I can face the fear, but thinking about it now that I'm older, it definitely feels like my mental health is compromised.

And there is not enough spaces to talk about it at all. And also, in schools, I feel like I'm keeping this big secret away from some professors and students cuz' I feel like I'm living a double life. And personally, I think it's better this way, you know?

Salinas, Kevin, Kim and Paulina express very similar thoughts about the lack of mental support throughout their studies due to school staff not being educated and aware,

or their families and friends not being supportive enough. Participants also expressed that there is not enough safe spaces where they can be open about their undocumented status in the United States, and that they often feel scared to open up and speak about their undocumented status.

Fear of The Future

When asking participants about their future plans, they all had a similar response - ‘who knows what’s next?’ All four participants expressed their worry about the future since they are not sure what will happen with their DACA status after the recent DACA repeal. Are they going to be able to get citizenship? Are they going to be able to stay in the country and continue with their studies and future careers, or are they going to be deported into the country they have never been to? Nobody knows what is going to happen next.

In his testimonio, Kevin shares a story of him dealing with the DACA renewal on the day that President Trump announced the DACA repeal and he was very confused and afraid for the future. He hopes to finish his degree by 2019, or until hi status expires, and then, who knows.

Kevin

It’s crazy to think about it. About two months ago I went back home to renew my DACA, my renewal, right? So I had to do my fingerprints, it was September 4th and that was the same day that Donald Trump said that DACA is ending. So I had to go back home because I applied for it back home. So I went back on a Tuesday just to get my fingerprints and I remember waking up that

morning cuz I woke up like at 9 and then at 11 he announced it, and in one hour I had my appointment, so that was just crazy to think about. I didn't know like do I show up to the appointment, like I don't know what's going on. So I was lucky enough to be able to get 2 more years, so my card doesn't expire until 2019.

So honestly, thinking about it right now is like I'm a tryna finish by 2019, but from then on what's next...? I don't know. I don't know if I'll be able to have money, so that's the biggest thing to be able to continue on... I'll be able to finish my undergrad, but next step is really "who knows what's next"... I actually don't know what's to come. We don't know if there's gonna be something for us. Like what other options we have. Financially that's the biggest concern for sure.

My goal is always gonna be the same, no matter what goes down I know people figured it before, people have found a way. I hold on to that idea that people have done it before DACA. Even if I don't have DACA, I don't know how imma do it but somehow I'll get there. That's what I'm holding on. It's still the same thing, I wanna go to medical school, become a doctor, study Oncology and hopefully, yeah that's the dream! The biggest thing people are worried is that if I'll be still able to work, we just wanna work...

Kevins adds in his testimonio that he will keep going to school and finish his degree no matter what. He states that students have figured it out before and that he will manage to do so, too. In his testimonio, Salinas

Salinas

What are my future plans? That is a really good question. I think pursuing graduate school was always important to me. I have to be honest, it is scary if

DACA does end. DACA is the only resource to help us get there. I am fortunate to be at UC Berkeley - financially and career-wise. It's funny how I got turned down by some jobs because they said I was overqualified for their positions just because I had a degree at UC Berkeley.

As undocumented, gay, and Latino person, I honestly don't look into the future. I only look into surviving day-by-day. I have to make sure my fear is not defeating me! Without DACA, I can't imagine how I would be able to pursue higher education. I just can't imagine being here without DACA.

Similar to Kevin, Kim and Paulina share their testimonios about the fear of the future. In her testimonio, Kim shares that her future plans are pretty much unknown for now.

Kim

I think that like pursuing a graduate degree has always been my end goal. No matter what happens, I would like to finish school and work in my field. I am happy that I have a chance to work on my dreams for the past few years and I appreciate education I have. I don't really plan long-term stuff now but I just wanna finish what I started.

I have status until end of 2019 so I hope government signs a new law or something. Like expecting citizenship is not so realistic, but I think some kind of law should be accepted. Similar to Kim's testimonio, Paulina shares the story about her future plans. She will hopefully graduate by the end of 2018 and find a job.

Paulina

I don't know what all that means for our status but I do know it scares me. My dream is to graduate by the end of 2018 so I hope I'll be able to work by then and work on the next thing... I honestly don't know what's about to come for me. Or even for my sisters, they're not even close to the start of college and now all this Trump drama happened... Like I'm worried about my status every day because I can't imagine not having work permit now, all of a sudden. And what am I gonna do? I have no idea...

The stupidest thing ever is those rumors about undocumented people to be deported. Like, I mean how, and where? I never seen Colombia, you know?! I was here since like a baby and have never been to Colombia.

Salinas, Kevin, Kim and Paulina feel concerned about their future with DACA being repealed. Their biggest concern is to be able to stay in the country, work and be able to finish what they have started, and continue with their careers. Also, they express concern with not being able to plan their future for the long-term, instead they have to live day-by-day and worry about what the next day might bring.

Participant Recommendations

Lastly, participants were asked a question regarding the importance of the understanding of DACA status for other people, their recommendations for the people who want to help undocumented students, and their additional thoughts. Participants shared valuable thoughts on the importance of understanding what DACA is and gave pragmatic recommendations for people who want to support DACA students. In his final

thoughts, Kevin wanted to encourage people to be undocumented students' voices because they are voiceless without the support of others. For he educators, his thoughts were addressed to academic support, especially in higher education. Most importantly, he highlighted the importance of understanding that undocumented students, like himself, are human beings, and that he just wants to be equal to other students in this country. Also, he expresses his wish for citizenship or a permanent legal status.

Kevin

Allowing them to be our voice, because most of the times we can't do anything as DACA students. I remember like, USC Berkeley is very political atmosphere with protest going on sometimes. I'm trying to stay away from that because you know you don't wanna have that on your record or anything. So I guess allowing other people to be our voices, cuz they're the ones who actually can fight for us, they're the ones who can vote, that's what really will help us out.

Educators, just give us a support in education system, being able to not make us more obstacles than we need. At the end of the day we just wanna be like any other student, you don't wanna jump these obstacles, like having to apply for all these things just so we can get on the same level as other students. We just wanna be like everybody else.

Granting us citizenship is something big. I just think there should be an easier path. It's hard to say what is right for everybody at the same time, for me I know I just want the citizenship to make it all easier.

In her testimonio, Paulina explains her thoughts on what being undocumented means for her and what she wants for people to understand about the issues of

undocumented community. She expresses her concern with people not treating undocumented students as people, and she is wondering why is that so. She add that she is working hard and a lot of times she cannot reach the same level as other students who are documented. Her wish is for people who want to help, to advocate for undocumented students, like herself, and to reach out to them and help with anything they can. Paulina also thinks that schools need counselors and teachers who care about the issues of undocumented community.

Paulina

First of all, I wasn't asked if I wanted to live here. My parents decided that for me, and honestly I will be grateful forever, but I didn't do anything. I wanna people to realize that this is my country too and even if I wasn't born here, I grew up here and I speak the language, and I go to school here, and I'm paying my taxes! Why does my status make me less of a person now? Why are we seen as outsiders? I wish people understood the struggle we have every day.

Like I have to work three times as hard to be on the same level as other 'white' citizens and I'm not even treated as equal and I'm not paid as much either! I just wish for people that want to support us to really try to help us with everything they can – advocating or voting, it doesn't matter, just do what you can. I really appreciate when people want to hear our stories, just hear our voices and spread the word, you know. It helps to talk about it, and that way other people can understand us better, too. I wish that schools would give jobs to people who like actually care about us and our problems, like a counselor or something; somebody, that can help us with advice at school.

Similar to Kevin and Paulina, Kim's testimonio expresses gratitude toward people who advocate for the undocumented students. She wants people to understand that they are human too.

Kim

My wish is to people to give us opportunity. Like this is my home, you know, like I don't feel welcome in my home honestly. I feel like I don't belong here. I just wanna belong and contribute to this country that's my home. I guess that's what I would want for people to understand. We are human, too! For people that want to support us, I'm really thankful for those who advocate for undocumented students.

In his testimonio, Salinas points out that undocumented students are no less human than any other person in this world. He wishes for people who want to help undocumented students to not just talk about it with other people, but to actually advocate for them and to check in with them, and be there for them.

Salinas

I want people to understand we are human beings and accept us in this world as humans. We go to school, we pay taxes, we work our asses off. We breathe! Just like anybody else, we are human. Under the skin we all have blood. We're all the same under our skins. I want people to understand that we are people too.

Also, I don't want to be rude, but I hate when people say 'I know what you're going through', because they don't. People cannot understand it until they

are going through the same that I've been through. Even with other undocumented students - even though we share the same identity, we have such different stories and nobody can say that they completely understand you.

To support undocumented students, I would say to support us, but don't just talk about it, be there for us! Advocate for us. Check in with people, how they are doing and be there for them. I think that is what makes a difference. To be there for us.

All four participants urge people, who want to advocate for undocumented students, to be their 'voice' and to support undocumented students in different ways, not just talk about the issues but also take initiative and be there for these students. Also, recommendation for educators is to give their support to the undocumented community and treat them as equals to the rest of the population, and try not to make the system harder for undocumented students just so they can at the end be on the same level as other students.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Results of the research have shown that undocumented students decided to proceed to the post-secondary education out of two reasons, on one hand due to the support and encouragement of their families, or on the other hand, the absence of their families. In cases when undocumented students have the parental support, they are encouraged and financially supported by their families. Their parents are working two jobs so that they can assist their children financially. On the other hand, students without parental support, are encouraged by the lack of the role model guidance, and usually try to prove themselves to be able to be successful. These students are working very hard to be able to survive and that makes them even stronger.

Additionally, according to NURP (2016) research, increased earnings a very important reason for DACA students to decide to pursue postsecondary education, and the results of my research have confirmed that. All four students have expressed that DACA helped them get access to work and also achieve financial stability. Next to having access to work and being able to pay for tuition, some students are able to save money, but some are still facing the economic hardship.

Moreover, higher education in the United States is a great financial burden, especially for the undocumented students. As I mentioned, American Immigration Council (2016) published a report that links the lack of financial aid or the out-of-the-state tuition prices block many undocumented students from pursuing higher education. Also, according to NURP (2016) report, undocumented students' access to higher education differs state-by-state due to the state's policies regarding the undocumented

students. Participants in this study are attending colleges and universities in California, and all of them qualify for in-state tuition fees, which make the situation a bit easier, but the tuition is still pretty much expensive. As Gonzales (2016) indicated, undocumented students enrolled in colleges and universities face the issues with paying the high tuition costs and living expenses, and according to my research that is true. All four participants feel great financial burden when it comes to supporting themselves. Students shared in their testimonios that attending schools while working is a great challenge. Students have to work long hours, have multiple jobs in some cases, and that takes away time for their homework, which confirms the claims from Gonzales (2016), who talks about students who have been able to apply for higher paying jobs and enroll in the college, are now facing long working hours so they can afford to pay thousands of dollars of tuition, which takes away the time for doing their homework.

In addition, according to Garcia and Tierney (2011) have indicated that undocumented students, who have attended low-income high schools, usually don't possess adequate academic knowledge, which results in gaps in their knowledge. The results of this research have shown exactly the same result. Students have reported the experience of academic unpreparedness when going to colleges or universities, the feeling of being lost, and the general culture shock when transitioning to a new environment. Those are the main reasons they have to work even harder to achieve the same level of knowledge as the other students in the class.

Regardless of challenges in accessing higher education, participants expressed that DACA offered them more options for higher education, access to work, and a 'safety blanket'. This correlates with the Gonzales's (2016) discussion on opportunities that

came with DACA that have given undocumented students a new sense of hope, new goals and a better performance at school or work.

Lastly, as Arbona et al. (2010) points out, when undocumented students apply for college, they undergo acculturative stress over the process of adapting to the new environment. Consequently, undocumented students experience poor mental health and insecurity in relation to their academic goals (Perez et al., 2010 as cited in Kantamneni, 2016). Moreover, according to Cavazog-Rehg, Zayas, & Spiznagel (2007), the fear of deportation also negatively affects the self-esteem of undocumented students. Consequently, undocumented students might live in a constant fear of their undocumented status being exposed to their peers and friends, or also the faculty. The results of my research directly correlate to other researchers' statements and prove that undocumented students undergo severe pressure and stress which reflects in poor mental health of these students.

The interesting fact from the research findings was the importance of the family as the reasons to apply for higher education for undocumented students. When exploring the literature, the idea of family as a reason to apply for the higher education has never been exposed and I thought it was really interesting how powerful the notion of the family could be for potential career choices of undocumented students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine in what ways does DACA status influence undocumented students' ability to access higher education in San Francisco and Bay Area, California. This study focused on highlighting the voices of undocumented students who are DACA recipients and are currently on a post-secondary academic level.

This study was formed through the interviews with undocumented students that are current DACA recipients.

This study examined positive and negative experiences of undocumented students who are currently in pursuit of higher education and were limited to apply for a DACA status in order to do so. In this study, I analyzed how having DACA status has influenced access to higher education for undocumented students in California, which provided an insight into the reasons for applying for higher education, challenges faced, the role of DACA, and students' pragmatic recommendations for different ways to assist undocumented students in the future.

According to the results of this research, there is a very strong correlation between having DACA status and accessing higher education. DACA status has changed the life of all four participants in this research. It has affected them economically and educationally. Students reported to being able to apply for work permit, driver's license, having various options to apply for colleges and universities, and also they got access to private and state scholarships in California. Students reported that DACA provided them with various higher education options, financial stability, and a 'safety' blanket from deportation. All four participants expressed a strong agreement of DACA being the means for them to be able to study and work and to be successful as they are at this moment.

Undocumented students are also facing countless challenges like financial struggles, DACA renewal fees, the challenges of transition to a new environment, and also academic unpreparedness when pursuing higher education. These barriers influence the undocumented students' abilities to access the academic resources or restrain them

from upward mobility. Undocumented students therefore cannot reach their full academic potential. Based on the research I conducted and the review of the existing research in the field, it is evident that systemic barriers play a significant role in relation to undocumented students' academic and career-related choices. According to my research, students are still experiencing struggles when accessing higher education.

Having access to DACA helps undocumented students to fulfill their dreams, be successful, and to function in the U.S. society. The current DACA repeal is going to severely affect undocumented students and their access to higher education. If students are no longer able to apply for a work permit, they would no longer be able to financially support themselves, which would negatively affect not only their financial stability, but also the U.S. economy. By not having access to work or scholarships, students will not be able to afford the cost of higher education, therefore in the future that could lead to a decreased number of students who apply for higher education. All in all, DACA is crucial in undocumented students' lives and their educational futures.

Recommendations

Education substantially affects the mental well-being of undocumented students, which could be reduced by increased efforts of school psychologists and counselors to work closely with undocumented youth and to familiarize themselves with students' cultural and systemic factors (Kantamneni, 2016). School counseling might help undocumented students with vocational concerns and help them be confident about their career outlook. It might also help with building skills that are necessary to manage the stress and to overcome the challenge of transition experienced by undocumented students.

For the teachers, school psychologists and counselors it is very important to establish a climate of trust when working with undocumented students (Chan & Dorador, 2012). Some undocumented students might be looking for somebody to confide in and to overcome the fear related to sharing the undocumented status. According to the results of this research, one of the biggest challenges in higher education for these students is mental health. Firstly, teachers, school psychologists, and counselors should receive some form of education about undocumented status and everything related to it. Secondly, they should declare that their class is a safe space for undocumented students, which would allow these students to come forward, talk about their issues and bring awareness to the rest of the class. Additionally, scholars and counselors should promote programs that offer support for undocumented students in order to create more safe spaces for them.

For the funders and financial aid offices, it is very important to reach out to undocumented students and present them with different financial options in order to give them a possibility to apply for financial aid. The current issue with financial offices is that usually they do not consult on undocumented students' status financial aid options and undocumented students do not want to reveal their status to financial aid offices to prevent being legally prosecuted. The second important recommendation would be to offer a special scholarship for the undocumented students at every college and university to provide more undocumented students with a possibility of financial aid.

These recommendations have potential to increase student's economic and social capital, inform students about the academic possibilities and to advocate for them. The undocumented college graduates have proven many times that they can succeed academically, despite all of the social, financial and legal barriers they are facing.

Despite all the barriers, they are some of the most entrepreneurial and hard-working students this country has to offer. In order to better meet needs of undocumented students, it is essential to hear their stories (testimonios) and to highlight their voices. By listening to their stories, we can better understand the issues of the undocumented students are facing. Nevertheless, undocumented students can serve as powerful models in our communities for next generations to come.

The goal of this thesis is to contribute to the existing scarce research on the subject of undocumented students' access to higher education. Undocumented students must have a safe space in schools and other social institutions in order to be able to combat the dominant paradigms. Most importantly, these testimonios support the continuation of DACA and promote the importance of it for the benefit of not just undocumented students, but also the U.S. society since undocumented students are one of the most hard working, diligent, resourceful and intelligent people United States has to offer. If DACA policy does not get renewed, or if the government does not apply a similar policy or offer a path to citizenship for more than 700,000 DACAmented persons, then the consequences for both sides will be catastrophic.

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APPENDIX



PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Principal Investigator: Sandra Miklosic

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher/member of the research team. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at their professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the researcher, who will answer my questions.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact Sandra Miklosic at sandra.miklosic@gmail.com or phone number: 415-849-6453 or her supervising professor, Dr. Melissa Canlas at mlcanlas@usfca.edu in the Department of International & Multicultural Education, School of Education, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton St, San Francisco, CA 94117; Or the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (415) 422-6091.

- I should receive a copy of this Participant's Rights document.

I give my consent to be audio taped. I understand that written, photographic and/or audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator. My consent indicates that materials may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.

My signed consent on the consent form means that I agree to participate in this study.



Consent Form for Adults

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study entitled Undocumented Student's Access to Higher Education in San Francisco, Bay Area, conducted by Sandra Miklosic, a Masters student in the Department of International and Multicultural Education at the University of San Francisco. The faculty supervisor for this study is Professor Melissa Canlas, a professor at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this research study is to examine in what ways does DACA status influence undocumented students' ability to access higher education in San Francisco, Bay Area.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

During this study, the following will happen.... I will kindly ask you to participate in a short interview with me, where I will ask you questions related to the educational choices you made and why you made them, and how did those choices affect your access to higher education. The conversation will be focused on your status as a DACA student.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve one session that will last between 30 minutes to an hour and will take place over the phone, Skype, or in person (over coffee).

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

The risks and benefits associated with this study are a loss of your time and the risks associated with regular activities. The benefit of the study is that it may add to the research on the field of education and international/multicultural issues. This information, once collected, might be read by policymakers, educational experts, educators and scholars and could affect the educational practice. If you do not want to participate in the

study, you will not be mentioned in any documents of the study, and your decision to not participate will not be told to anyone. You may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty. If you are upset by any of the questions asked, the researcher will refer you to counseling services available publicly or at the university if you are a member of the academic community (student, staff or professor).

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, all information will be stored on a password-protected computer and any printouts in a locked file cabinet. Consent forms and any other identifiable data will be destroyed in 2 years from the date of data collection.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Sandra Miklosic at 415-849-6453 or sandra.miklosic@gmail.com. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

DATE