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Undocumented Latino College Students and Identity Development:

A Qualitative Analysis of

Undocumented Latino College Students' Movement Towards Developing Purpose

Theresa Danielle Lyon

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Undocumented Latino college students face numerous legal, social, and financial barriers as they attempt to pursue a postsecondary degree. The psychosocial stressors that accompany being labeled as an undocumented immigrant put these students at risk of disengaging from their postsecondary education as they face limited career options and social rejection. Researchers have noted the psychosocial development that occur as students transition to an adult identity, yet little research has been done on how undocumented Latino college students navigate barriers to their identity develop and attempt to define their purpose as not only college students, but members of U.S. Society. This thesis explores how undocumented Latino college students develop a sense of purpose as a result of their psychosocial identity development that occurs during their postsecondary experiences. This study utilizes hermeneutic phenomenological methods to interpret how the narratives provided by study participants reflected Chickering and Reisser's definition of developing purpose, as well as the barrier navigation that occurs as undocumented students face the challenges of pursuing a postsecondary education within an ambiguous legal climate.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Every year, it is estimated over 65,000 undocumented students, the majority of whom identify as Latino, graduate from high schools across the United States. Undocumented high school graduates represent the children of immigrants who entered, or continued to reside, in the United States without legal permission (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Often brought to the United States without conscious choice, undocumented youth are immediately immersed into a new culture through compulsory public school attendance. Undocumented youth who are aware of the limitations of their legal status are in danger of disengaging from school prior to earning a high school diploma (Gonzales, 2011). For the undocumented youth who persist to their high school graduation, only 5-10% will enroll in a postsecondary institution, while even fewer will obtain a bachelor's degree (Immigration Policy Center, 2011).

Documented and undocumented Latino immigrants face a similar set of psychosocial stressors and challenges; yet, lack of legal citizenship has a notable effect on the academic performance and identity formation of undocumented students (Dozier, 2001). Research has noted how undocumented students often struggle to conceptualize the benefit of a postsecondary degree when faced with limited career options after their high school graduation (Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010). As undocumented youth transition to adulthood, they must also face a transition to a state of illegality as they lose tenuous legal protections that were offered to them as minors (Gonzales, 2007). As such, the importance of transitioning to a postsecondary institution is paramount as it offers one of the few legal options through which undocumented youth can hope to gain the social capital needed to progress vocationally and developmentally in the United States (Enriquez, 2011).

Many undocumented college students define success as improving their socioeconomic standing through postsecondary degree attainment (Gonzales, 2011). Stressors such as securing funding, societal isolation, and familial pressures all add to the complexity of undocumented college student enrollment and persistence (Dozier, 2001). Growing awareness of the limited vocational options post-graduation may also hinder undocumented college students in conceptualizing the benefit of higher education (Dozier; Ellis & Chen, 2013). Given the barriers undocumented students must navigate in order to pursue a postsecondary degree, their likelihood of disengaging from their education is high without a network of internal and external supports (Gonzales, 2011). More specifically, no research has been conducted that examines how undocumented students attempt to *develop purpose* during their postsecondary journey. As part of a student's identity development, developing purpose can be defined as the way a student "views one's life in a manner that encompasses career plans and aspirations as well as personal interest and interpersonal and family commitments and responsibilities" (Chickering & Braskamp, 2009, p. 27). While undocumented students are challenged to navigate the external barriers to higher education, they are also in the process authenticating what is important to them as students, future professionals, and members of society.

Much of the current research on undocumented youth and college students has identified the positive benefit of protective resources, both internal and external, which can lead to greater academic persistence and resilience (e.g., see Gonzales, 2010; Hallett, 2013; Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009; Perez, 2010). While these studies point to supportive external and internal factors that impact the lived experience of undocumented youth, scant research has been done on this population's psychosocial identity development, or more specifically how a sense of purpose develops as these students pursue their college education.

Rationale

The U.S. born Latino population is, for the first time in history, set to exceed the number of Latino immigrants in the United States (Krogstad & Lopez, 2014). A report by Krogstad and Lopez (2014) suggested that this shift reflects the impact of punitive immigration policies in addition to a rise of naturalized Latino children born to immigrant parents. Despite the decline in overall Latino migration, media reports have highlighted the rising number of unaccompanied undocumented minors crossing the U.S. border in search of greater opportunities (Archibold, 2014; Giris, 2014; Krogstad & Gonzalez-Barerra, 2014). For immigrant children who successfully enter the United States, either unaccompanied or with family members, the chances that they will remain in the country, regardless of their legal status, are high (Lopez, Funk, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). The recent introduction of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) raises the likelihood that undocumented youth will remain in the United States to pursue educational and vocational opportunities, thus the development and retention of these students has the potential to become an even more pressing issue in the near future at postsecondary institutions across the nation (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], n.d.).

Undocumented Latinos who pursue a postsecondary degree have a high chance of disengaging early due to an ever-present host of barriers including: A perceived lack of career options after graduation, fear of social rejection, and familial obligations (Ellis & Chen, 2013). Undocumented youth who have spent the majority of their lives growing up in the United States will remain in the country after graduating from high school, making the social implications of continuing their education a priority for higher education professionals (Passel, 2005). With the recent introduction of DACA, combined with a lack of other forms of large-scale federal immigration reform, research on the psychosocial identity development of undocumented Latino

college students is both timely and necessary. By understanding the ways in which this population develops purpose, higher education professionals can more adequately support undocumented Latino college students as they attempt to navigate beyond the limitations of their externally defined legal status, and towards a greater sense of personal and professional fulfillment.

While useful in providing context to the social, legal, and academic struggles of the undocumented Latino population, recent research rarely identifies how this population utilizes various personal and external resources to conceptualize a sense of purpose through the authentication of their personal, vocational, and educational values. Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) briefly touched on the topic of purpose by asking undocumented college students about their post-graduation goals. The ambiguity of the responses in Diaz-Strong and Meiner's study exemplifies the complex nuances of examining undocumented Latino's development of purpose solely through a narrow vocational lens, as undocumented Latino students may be unable to vocalize a long-term vocational purpose due to the limiting nature of their legal status. Instead, researchers must look beyond immediate career aspirations to the more complex personal, familial, and vocational values that contribute to undocumented Latino college students' psychosocial identity development.

Undocumented college student psychosocial identity development is further complicated by the ambiguity that is inherent in being categorized as undocumented on a college campus. Undocumented students are neither international visiting students, nor native-born U.S. citizens (Gildersleeve & Ramero, 2010). As such, undocumented Latino college students must face the challenges of navigating the restraints of their ambiguous legal status on campuses that may have little to no resources intentionally developed to support students without documentation

(Gonzales, 2010). Even on campuses where undocumented students are welcomed to apply and attend, access may not be enough to ensure persistence, and higher education professionals must seek to understand the developmental challenges this population faces in order to holistically support this population through their degree completion and barrier navigation (Ellis & Chen, 2013).

Background

Passed in 1982, the landmark federal case, *Plyler v. Doe*, guarantees all children residing in the United States, regardless of immigration status, the right to a primary and secondary education (Immigration Policy Center, 2012). Appearing to denote a cultural shift towards greater acceptance and support of undocumented immigrants in the United States, the passage of *Plyler v. Doe* has also resulted in the creation of a legal paradox for undocumented adolescents as they transition to adulthood. After completing high school, undocumented students lose the tenuous protection provided under *Plyler v. Doe* and face severely limiting social (e.g., experiences with prejudice), financial (e.g., lack of access to federal financial aid), and legal (e.g., fear of deportation) obstacles should they choose to pursue a postsecondary education (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007).

The Latino population, both documented and undocumented, has demonstrated significant growth within the past decades. From 2007-2008, the growth of the Latino population accounted for almost half of the population growth in the United States (Fry, 2008). The undocumented population also approached near record numbers in 2012, reaching over 11.7 million (Passel, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). Passel et al. (2013) noted that this number could be even higher due to the difficulty in identifying undocumented immigrants who likely adhere to a protective climate of self-imposed anonymity. Clarifying the difference between

documented and undocumented immigrants requires a basic understanding of immigration policies in the United States. Undocumented immigrants are categorized as persons who entered the country without permission, or outstayed a tourist or student visa yet remained in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2008). The vast majority of undocumented immigrants are of Latino origin, making up over 77% of the undocumented population. The greatest portion of undocumented Latinos are of Mexican origin, with additional representation from countries in Central and South America (Passel, 2011). Documented immigrants also migrate to the United States, but are protected by being granted permission to legally live and work in the country without fear of deportation or other punitive action.

One proposed solution to the plight of undocumented youth is the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which was first introduced into the U.S. Congress in 2003 (Immigration Policy Center, 2011). In addition to proposing federal tuition assistance for qualified undocumented college students, the DREAM Act would present a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who either attend college or join the U.S. military. Nevertheless, the DREAM Act has yet to pass on the federal level despite widespread support from immigration rights groups (Halett, 2013). Many researchers and immigrant support agencies have now begun to refer to eligible undocumented immigrants as *DREAMers*, highlighting the hope for more inclusive federal immigration policy in the near future (Immigration Policy Center, 2011; Rodriguez Vega, 2010). Despite the DREAM Act's inability to pass at the federal level, the introduction of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) offers protections to a number of undocumented college students.

DACA has the potential to impact postsecondary access and attendance for over 1 million undocumented persons (AFT, n.d.). DACA eligible individuals are able to secure three-year

work permits, relief from the threat of deportation and, in some states, may apply for a driver's license or other form of state identification (Hallett, 2013). While DACA does not provide a pathway to citizenship, it does give undocumented college students the ability to obtain employment or internships as well as openly attend college without the fear of punitive legal action (Ellis & Chen, 2013). DACA eligible students can also re-apply for benefits, potentially enabling them to utilize a postsecondary education for future career endeavors. DACA presents numerous benefits for a large portion of undocumented youth, yet the long-term benefits of DACA remain unexamined. Temporary reprieve from the threat of deportation, without a pathway to citizenship, may only serve to exasperate the frustrations of undocumented persons should large scale federal immigration reform fail to pass in the future (Cebulko, 2013). Also, DACA benefits do not extend to youth who entered the United States after June of 2012, leaving a growing portion of potential future undocumented college students in the same perilous position as their predecessors (AFT, n.d.)

Even with the introduction of DACA, one of the greatest threats faced by undocumented high school graduates is the ever-present fear of the implementation of more aggressive immigration reforms or deportation. In 2012, there were over 400,000 recorded deportations, almost double those of the previous year (Light, Lopez, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). Popular U.S. social stigmas portray undocumented individuals as criminals or fugitives; yet, less than half of the deportees recorded in 2012 had a criminal record (Light et al., 2014). Public misconceptions, and the increasing threat of deportation faced by otherwise law-abiding individuals, have created a climate of fear and secrecy among the undocumented population. This fear directly impacts undocumented immigrants' vocational and social aspirations (Gonzales, Suarez-Orizco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013). Labels such as *illegal alien* also ascribe

a criminal context to the action of migration (Lahamn, Mendoza, Rodriguez, & Schwartz, 2011). This perception is especially troubling when used to label youth who were brought to the United States as children, without conscious choice. Latino immigrants, whether documented or not, are also frequently stereotyped as lazy, incompetent, or criminal (Huber, 2009). The post 9-11 culture in the United States has perpetuated irrational fears of the influence of foreign groups and has added a high level of complexity to the social context within which education administrators, faculty, and students approach supporting undocumented students on campus (Hallett, 2013). Irrational fears and bias are further perpetuated by general misconceptions regarding the motivators to immigrate, further complicating the public's understanding of undocumented migration.

One common misconception is the belief that migration, legal or otherwise, is a purely voluntary action (Furman, Sanchez, & Nalini, 2007). Motivations behind the decision to migrate to the United States are often the result of a host of pressures including, but not limited to, civil unrest in one's native country, the search for improved economic opportunities, or to reunite with family currently residing in the United States (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007). The pressures that force a family to consider undocumented migration rarely fit into the traditional definition of *criminal*. Exasperating social tensions surrounding undocumented immigrants in the United States is the misconception that this population uses up welfare resources that are intended to benefit legal U.S. citizens (Green, 2003). However, a study by Green revealed that undocumented immigrants are far less likely than other populations in the United States to utilize welfare resources due to the ever-present fear of discovery and a lack of familiarity with the U.S. welfare system. In addition, Green (2003) argues that families migrating to the United States, to

escape unrest in their native country, are more focused on familial safety and anonymity than utilizing welfare resources (referred to in Green's study as *freeloading*) long-term.

With immediate safety as a priority, many undocumented immigrants may not consider the limiting nature of U.S. immigration policy when making the decision to migrate. Some undocumented youth are unaware of the implications of their legal status until reaching traditional U.S. milestones, such as applying for a driver's license or applying to college. In some instances, parents will withhold details regarding their child's legal status in an attempt to protect their children from the social stigma of being labeled undocumented or illegal (Gonzales et al., 2009). This, in turn, leads to a potential point of crisis when undocumented youth are forced to confront the limitations of their legal status and reassess vocational, personal, and social goals as they transition to adulthood (Green & Hall, 2013).

In spite of social stigma, over 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools in the United States each year (AFT, n.d.). During their primary and secondary education, undocumented students are offered limited protections under the federal ruling *Plyler v. Doe* (Enriquez, 2011). After graduating from high school, undocumented students lose any form of protection and face an uncertain vocational and academic future (Immigration Policy Center, 2011; Passel, 2011). In order to pursue a postsecondary degree, undocumented adolescents must knowingly take the chance of exposing themselves, and their families, to the threat of deportation (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007). The issue of undocumented Latino college student attendance is important as Latinos, both documented and undocumented, are showing an increased presence in higher education. Between 1996 and 2012, the enrollment of Latinos in two-year and four-year institutions tripled (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). In 2012, more Latinos enrolled in postsecondary institutions than any other demographic for the first time in U.S. history (Hugo Lopez & Fry,

2013). Researchers have theorized the economic recession of 2007 had a strong impact on the increase of Latino student enrollment by driving greater numbers to pursue a postsecondary education in the search of more lucrative employment options or financial security (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Despite the upswing of Latino college enrollment, this population only makes up 14.5% of young adults under the age of 25 with an earned bachelor's degree (Hugo Lopez & Fry, 2013). This degree attainment gap could potentially be attributed to the tendency of the Latino population to enroll part time or in two-year institutions (Fry & Taylor, 2013). For undocumented Latinos, the degree attainment gap is even greater, highlighting the impact legal status can have on undocumented college student persistence (Gonzales, 2007). Often, the impact of one's legal status is felt most greatly by undocumented Latinos who are ineligible for federal financial aid, and must shoulder the burden of financing their education without government assistance (Perez, 2010).

A few states have made intentional strides towards closing the affordability gap for undocumented students. In 1996, Texas became the first state to offer in-state tuition to students who may have previously been ineligible in a concerted effort to support a growing undocumented immigrant population (National Immigration Law Center, 2014). Similar to the provisions required by the DREAM Act, states that have passed in-state tuition benefits for non-residents usually require that the individuals have graduated from an in-state high school and have spent a specified amount of time living in the state prior to applying for college. While these policies do not always explicitly reference undocumented students, they are often the ones that benefit the most from more inclusive in-state tuition policies (Flores, 2010).

Following Texas, a multitude of other states passed similar legislation. California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey,

New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah and Washington have all passed state legislation offering in-state tuition benefits to undocumented college students (National Immigration Law Center, 2014). In contrast, some states, namely Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, Indiana, and Arizona have banned undocumented students from enrolling in public postsecondary institutions in their respective states (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014).

The option to pay in-state tuition may make a postsecondary education more attainable for undocumented students; yet, there is a persistent gap between undocumented students who graduate high school and those who go on to earn bachelor's degrees (Flores, 2010). Even with in-state tuition, lack of access to federal funding may account for the educational attainment gap. In addition, without a social security number, undocumented students are ineligible for many private scholarships, leaving them with few options with which to fund their tuition and living expenses. Those who do pursue a postsecondary education are more likely to choose the financially feasible option of attending community college; thus, further limiting their degree options and likelihood of obtaining a bachelor's degree (Perez, 2010).

The recent introduction of DACA offers relief from the constant fear of deportation while simultaneously implementing temporary immigration reform on a national level. DACA, like the unpassed DREAM Act, comes with a set of criteria that undocumented immigrants must meet in order to be eligible. DACA eligible immigrants must have migrated to the United States prior to the age of 16, been under 31 years of age by 2012, lived in the United States since June 15, 2007 without interruption, and have no criminal record (Immigration Policy Center, 2011). In terms of educational or vocational requirements, immigrants who are DACA eligible must have graduated from a U.S. high school, have earned a General Education Diploma (GED), or have been

honorably discharged from the U.S. military. Persons who meet the requirements are relieved of the threat of deportation for two years, can obtain a work permit, and in many cases can also obtain a driver's license (AFT, n.d.; Passel & Lopez, 2007). While DACA benefits are renewable, DACA is not a pathway to citizenship (Passel & Lopez, 2012). Select institutions, in states such as Arizona, Florida, Massachusetts, Missouri and Ohio, have taken DACA benefits one-step further by also offering in-state tuition to *DACAmented* immigrants. This, in turn, opens additional options to DACAmented students, even if they reside in states that have traditionally not supported in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants (AFT, n.d.).

Arguably, the significant legal and financial barriers to higher education for undocumented Latinos make postsecondary degree attainment a difficult goal to accomplish. Despite a lack of large scale federal immigration reform, the introduction of DACA increases the likelihood undocumented Latinos will pursue higher education and remain in the United States to utilize their skills and knowledge (Passel, 2005). While college access is a prominent topic in current undocumented college student research, higher education professionals would be doing this population a disservice if they failed to consider how the developmental objectives of higher education interact with the complex social and legal reality of living as an undocumented person.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to conduct a qualitative analysis of undocumented Latino college students' development of purpose during their psychosocial transition to an adult identity. Utilizing a phenomenological research design, I gathered data through semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed and examined for emergent themes. By contributing to the existing research on undocumented immigrant psychosocial identity development, the overarching purpose of this study was to establish a greater understanding of the ways in which

undocumented Latino college students *develop purpose* as defined by Chickering and Reisser's (1993) during their transition to an adult identity. According to Chickering and Reisser, developing purpose involves setting intentional goals that are formed through the authentication of interest, values, and interpersonal commitments. The intent of this research is to act as an additional resource for higher education administrators and faculty so that they may better understand the developmental processes of undocumented Latino college students.

Research Question

Using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) definition of developing purpose, the research question guiding this study was:

In what ways do undocumented Latino college students develop purpose?

Design, Data Collection, and Analysis

This study gathered narratives from undocumented Latino college students in the Midwest United States through a semi-structured interview process. Interviewees were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling methods. Though it is not illegal for undocumented students to attend a post-secondary institution, they are often private regarding their status. Thus, convenience sampling, according to Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012), is appropriate in cases where systematic nonrandom or random samples would be extremely difficult to obtain. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and underwent three rounds of coding to identify phenomenological themes that were then examined to identify their relationship to Chickering and Resisser's (1993) sixth vector, developing purpose. The first round of coding identified themes from individual interviews. The second round of coding identified group themes, or thematic patterns, that adequately described the group phenomena. The group themes were then organized into a set of final themes that were organized based on their reflection of elements of

Chickering and Reisser's definition of developing purpose. It should be noted that, for this study, themes were not intended to be removed from the context of the lived experiences of the interviewees, but rather act as a way to point to what has been important in impacting the participants' development of purpose (Smythe et al., 2007). Participants were asked to approve the transcription of their narratives prior to the first round of coding, a form of member checking, to ensure the data captured through the interview adequately represented their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Key Terms

Undocumented student/youth - For the purpose of this study, the term *undocumented student* or *youth* will refer to the children of both immigrant workers and migrators, who entered the United States without permission or documentation prior to the age of 18 (Johnson & Janosik, 2008). To narrow the scope of this study, a focus has been placed on the largest sub-population of undocumented students, Latinos.

Latinos - The term *Latino* refers to individuals of Latin American and Mexican origin who currently reside in the United States (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007). For the purpose of this study Latino encompasses Latinos and Latinas.

Psychosocial development - *Psychosocial development*, as originally defined by Erik Erikson (1959), refers to the developmental identity transitions that occur through an individual's lifespan. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) conceptual model of college student psychosocial development was used in this study to examine how undocumented Latino students attempt to develop purpose while navigating the challenges of achieving a postsecondary education and transition to adulthood.

Delimitations

This study focused on only one of the seven vectors presented by Chickering and Reisser (1993) in order to identify how undocumented Latino college students develop purpose. This study focuses on undocumented Latino college students, and does not include the experiences or data regarding other undocumented populations.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Due to the pervasive culture of self-imposed anonymity amongst undocumented Latino college students, purposive convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques were utilized; thus, limiting the sample to individuals who were willing to self-identify and disclose their legal status. Although not the intention of the recruitment strategy, all respondents recorded Mexican or Mexican-American as their cultural identity, thus the findings of this study do not wholly demonstrate the cultural perspectives of other Latino groups. Also, respondents currently attended, or had attended four-year public institutions in the Midwest. With the variability of state immigration law, the experiences of the participants in this study may not reflect those of undocumented college students pursuing postsecondary degrees in other regions of United States.

Organization of the Thesis

The next chapter introduces the theoretical framework that guided this study as well as the rationale and a detailed review of the literature. Chapter Three outlines the research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four presents the findings of this study. Chapter Five discusses the implications of the findings discussed in Chapter Four, as well as implications for future research on undocumented Latino college students.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

To offer context to this study of undocumented Latino college student psychosocial development, I summarized relevant research and media reports. In this chapter I begin with an introduction of the theoretical framework that was used to guide this study. In the synthesis of the research literature, I include an examination of policy issues that impact undocumented immigrants' educational and vocational achievement. Next, I outline research that has analyzed the social and educational factors that impact undocumented students as they transition to adulthood. This chapter concludes by examining how relevant research supports the importance of studying undocumented Latino college student psychosocial development. This chapter focuses primarily on studies of undocumented Latinos, but also acknowledges the contribution of studies that have examined the experiences of all undocumented persons.

Theoretical Framework

Chickering's (1969) theory of college student identity development, later revised with Reisser (Chickering & Ressier, 1993), introduced seven vectors of college student psychosocial development. These seven vectors are identified as: (1) *developing competence*, (2) *managing emotions*, (3) *moving through autonomy towards interdependence*, (4) *developing mature interpersonal relationships*, (5) *establishing identity*, (6) *developing purpose*, and (7) *developing integrity* (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Influenced by Erikson's (1959) theory of life span development, Chickering (1969) focused on the transition from adolescence to adulthood, particularly in the context of college student identity development. Chickering's theoretical model presents psychosocial development as a non-sequential series of movements that often occur in response to the challenges faced, and choices made, when transitioning to

adulthood. His use of the term *vector* implies that movement through each of the seven developmental milestones can occur at various rates and to varying degrees, rather than a prescribed sequence or extent (Chickering, 1969).

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model offers a guide through which student affairs professionals can understand college student psychosocial identity development, and guide them in challenging and supporting these students in the navigation of developmental barriers. While researchers debate the relatability of a model that was developed based on a study of primarily White male college students, Chickering's theory of college student psychosocial development remains one of the primary resources student affairs professionals can utilize to conceptualize a college student's complex transition to adulthood (Flowers, 2002).

Chickering (1969) addressed the criticism that popular studies on psychosocial identity development gave little credence to students who did not identify as White males by revamping his initial study with Reisser (1993) to conceptualize a model that would be more broadly applicable to a diverse student body. In *Education and Identity*, Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that college student development is "a process of infinite complexity" (p. 34), referencing the increasing diversity of college student populations. Chickering and Reisser argued that it is impossible to subscribe one interpretation of college student psychosocial development to diverse student bodies; thus, context is noted to play a significant role in the identity development of a particular population or person.

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) sixth vector, *developing purpose*, requires the ability to demonstrate intentionality in the creation of personal and vocational assets. More specifically, developing purpose involves setting goals and priorities within the context of "vocational plans and aspirations, personal interests, and interpersonal and family commitments" (Chickering &

Reisser, p. 212). For this study, developing purpose was examined as it relates to undocumented Latino college student psychosocial identity development. Taking into consideration the role context plays in the application of college student development theory, this study takes a closer look at the lived experiences of undocumented Latino college students as they develop a sense of purpose while pursuing a postsecondary degree.

When developing purpose, college students are challenged to focus their vocational path and clarify personal interest and strengths. Students, when developing purpose, must also demonstrate an increased level of intentionality in their pursuit of goals and aspirations. External influences, such as interpersonal and family commitments also play a large role in providing sources of challenge and support. Chickering and Reisser (1993) highlighted the complexity of developing purpose noting, "It is difficult to construct a plan that balances life-style considerations, vocational aspirations, and avocational interest" (p. 229). In choosing the term *purpose*, Chickering and Reisser also sought to define a level of commitment that is authentic to personal values and desires. Rather than focusing on purely career-based aspirations, developing purpose can be understood through the context of an individual student's values, which in turn can be recognized as powerful enough to define their purpose. A commitment to a particular set of values also offers an "anchoring set of assumptions about what is true" (Chickering & Reisser, p. 234). Understanding purpose as that which can supersede career goals is important as this study explores how personal values, along with more traditional vocational aspirations and goals, play a role in undocumented Latino students' development of purpose.

When examining college students' psychosocial identity development, Hoare (1991) cautioned that it is important to consider the cultural context within which developmental transitions occur. Hoare highlighted that "trends in American individualism and self-centrality

help us to understand the American idea of the person" (p. 46). This mindset, according to Hoare, does not prepare us to understand the ways in which identity may be culturally defined. Research has shown that cultural context is particularly relevant to the psychosocial development process of undocumented college students (Ellis & Chen, 2013; Gonzales, 2011). Undocumented Latino college students demonstrate a tendency to internalize both native and U.S. cultural values, demonstrating the underlying complexities that impact this population's identity development (Arbona et al., 2010; Ellis & Chen, 2013).

The importance of examining the psychosocial identity development of undocumented Latino college students, in consideration of their unique legal, social, and familial contexts, is supported by studies that outline the links between identity development and college student persistence (e.g., Robinson, 2003). Robinson (2003) suggested that identity development might have a direct impact on the persistence behavior of undergraduate college students. While Robinson's study did not seek to address the identity development of undocumented Latino college students, it supports the need for further research on the psychosocial developmental factors that could bolster the persistence and retention of the undocumented Latino population. With a more specific focus on developing purpose, Martin (2000) noted a clear relationship between student-faculty interaction and the development of purpose as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993). Lounsbury et al. (2005) noted similar connections when examining how a sense of identity can contribute to higher academic achievement, which in turn may support a student's persistence. Most importantly, the studies of Robinson (2003), Martin (2000), and Lounsbury et al. (2005) noted the importance of fostering positive psychosocial identity development as a form of support for college student persistence.

Synthesis of Research Literature

Policy

In recent years, the rising number of undocumented children migrating to the United States has captured the attention of U.S. politicians and the media (Archibold, 2014; Giri, 2014; Preston, 2014). In 2014, the number of undocumented children caught attempting to cross the border separating Mexico and the United States doubled, prompting President Barack Obama to declare the situation a "humanitarian crisis" (as cited in Rhodan, 2014, p. 1). Despite elevated attention in the media, U.S. immigration policy has largely stagnated within the past decade (Flores, 2010; Giri, 2014; Hallett, 2013). The introduction of the DREAM Act and DACA point to a growing political awareness of the undocumented immigration crisis in the public consciousness (AFT, n.d.; Immigration Policy Center, 2011). Regardless, lack of large scale federal reform has left many undocumented adolescents in a state of legal limbo, both unable to secure citizenship yet considering the United States their home (Flores, 2010).

Olivas (2009) argued that the label *undocumented* is inherently confusing and complex. The U.S. government fails to recognize undocumented immigrants as either non-resident aliens or resident aliens; thus, trapping those who are labeled undocumented by a vague application of immigration categories. As a result, undocumented immigrants are caught in a holding pattern, unable to secure citizenship yet often unwilling or unable to return to their country of origin (Gildersleeve & Ramero, 2010). Understanding a Latino's undocumented status becomes even more ambiguous when examining the discrepancies in procedures that are practiced by the U.S. government regarding immigrants caught at the border.

U.S. government officials have responded to the recent influx of undocumented border crossings, and President Barack Obama's decree that it denotes a humanitarian crisis by

distinguishing undocumented Mexican immigrants from those that immigrate from Central and South America (Krogstad & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). According to Krogstad and Gonzalez-Barrera (2014), Mexican youth who enter the United States without permission are often sent back to family members in Mexico through an expedited deportation process. In contrast, undocumented immigrants from Central and South America are often processed, released, and asked to report to immigration authorities at a later date. Many fail to report to immigration authorities and subsequently join the population of undocumented Latinos residing in the United States, encouraging rumors that U.S. officials will bestow amnesty on undocumented women and children caught at the border (Krogstad & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014).

Deportation, as a popular solution to the rise of undocumented immigration to the United States, is a dangerous option for undocumented youth. Given their inherent vulnerability as minors, undocumented youth who manage to cross the U.S. border are often subjected to violence and exposure to dangerous natural elements (Archibold, 2014; Preston, 2014; Rhodan, 2014). Many immigrant families fall prey to the influence of Mexican drug cartels, as they are extorted for money in exchange for safe passage into the United States (Krogstad & Gonzalez-Bareera, 2014). Unwilling to send undocumented children back to the influence of violent gangs, the U.S. government has attempted to temporarily assist the growing number of unaccompanied, undocumented minors by placing them with sponsors or family members already residing in the United States (Archibold, 2014; Giri, 2014; Rhodan, 2014). After placement, the U.S. government assumes responsibility for educating undocumented children under the federal ruling of *Plyler v. Doe* (Vargas, 2010).

Passed in 1982, *Plyler v. Doe* struck down a Texas state law which prohibited undocumented children from attending public primary and secondary schools (Vargas, 2010). As

a pivotal case in support of the education of undocumented immigrant youth, *Plyler v. Doe* guarantees all children residing in the United States the right to a public primary and secondary education, regardless of legal status (Immigration Policy Center, 2012). Unfortunately, lack of definitive federal immigration reform for undocumented college students has left individual States to define admission and tuition policies at public institutions. By lacking U.S. citizenship, an undocumented student cannot legally be classified a resident of a state (Immigration Policy Center, 2011). Seventeen states (i.e., California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Washington) have addressed this issue by passing laws that grant in-state tuition to undocumented college students (National Immigration Law Center,2014). To date, no federal case has enacted overarching protections for undocumented immigrants who wish to pursue a postsecondary education, yet two items of federal legislation have been proposed to support undocumented immigrants who enter the United States as children: The DREAM Act and DACA.

The DREAM Act, introduced in 2003, has failed multiple times to pass on a federal level despite strong support from immigration reform and political groups (Flores, 2010). The DREAM Act proposes a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who meet a set list of criteria, which includes college attendance or U.S. military service (Immigration Policy Center, 2011). Undocumented immigrants eligible for DREAM Act benefits would have the threat of deportation permanently lifted and they would be eligible to apply for full constitutional rights as U.S. citizens. In 2007, The DREAM Act once again failed to pass at the federal level and a subsequent lack of large-scale immigration reform continues to impact the undocumented community (Olivas, 2009). Without a pathway to citizenship, undocumented college students

must rely on more limited forms of governmental support, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals that was introduced in 2012 by the Department of Homeland Security (Passel & Lopez, 2012).

Unlike the DREAM Act, DACA does not provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth, but instead grants a temporary reprieve from the threat of deportation for eligible individuals. Undocumented immigrants are eligible for DACA benefits if they possess a high school diploma, have earned their GED, or have received honorable discharge from U.S. military service. Age parameters also apply, requiring undocumented immigrants to be over the age of fifteen to meet eligibility requirements. DACA eligible persons must have entered the United States prior to the age of 16 (AFT, n.d.). Additionally, those who are DACA eligible can reapply for benefits and, in some states, obtain a driver's license or other form of legal identification. While DACA may enable more undocumented youth to pursue a college education, *DACAmented* college graduates are still unable to apply for U.S. citizenship and may continue to face limiting social and legal restrictions (Ellis & Chen, 2013). DACA benefits are also not available for undocumented youth who entered the United States after June 2007, perpetuating the personal, social, and academic transition struggles of previous undocumented generations (AFT, n.d.).

Despite the protections and opportunities offered by *Plyler v. Doe* and DACA, no federal policy or case has granted undocumented college students access to federal financial aid (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Hallett, 2013). Even with the potential benefit of in-state tuition, lack of access to federal financial aid makes a postsecondary education a distant dream for many undocumented youth (Gonzales et al., 2013; Perez et al., 2009). Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2013) argued that the issue of undocumented immigration can no longer be ignored as one that relates

to federal educational policy. Until educational policy is enacted which supports the college access for undocumented students, this population must navigate the limiting nature of their legal status and the pre-college context within which they develop.

Pre-College Educational and Social Contexts

Without supportive immigration reform, the social and political response to undocumented immigrants in the United States has been largely punitive. The Obama administration recorded over 400,000 deportations in 2012; almost double that of the previous administration (Light et al., 2014). Studies have noted the stressful, and sometimes dangerous, reality of living with the labels *undocumented*, *illegal*, or *unauthorized* (Arbona et al., 2010; Enriquez, 2011; Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sangiometi, 2013). Undocumented and documented immigrants, particularly those who lack English language fluency are often treated as scapegoats for the economic instability in the United States (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007). Lakoff and Ferguson (2006) present the idea that powerful language in the media has framed the concept of immigration as illegal or criminal. Recent statistics point to a contradicting reality, as less than half of the 400,000 immigrants deported from the United States in 2012 were noted to have criminal record (Light et al., 2014). For undocumented youth, the negative perception of illegality, which is externally applied, has had negative implications for their identity development, educational persistence, and mental well-being (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2013).

Research conducted by Furman et al. (2007), Gonzalez-Barrera et al. (2014), and Tyler et al. (1992) outlined the powerful motivation for migration provided by the desire to flee poverty and violence in one's native country. The consensus of recent research is that motivations that spur a family or person to migrate, even without proper documentation, rarely fall under the

traditional definition of *criminal* (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Llhaman et al., 2011; Segal & Mayadas, 2005; Yakushko). Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) highlighted the concept of *innocence* in an effort to remove the criminal association often attributed to undocumented youth, despite the bias and prejudice they may face through public school attendance and potential exposure of their undocumented status.

Lyons et al. (2013) found that negative assumptions and bias are more common among populations that identify as *in-group*, who in turn exert their influence against the perceived threats of *cultural others*. Specifically, Lyons et al. found the more individuals identified as a part of the in-group (i.e., U.S. citizens), the more negative their attitudes regarding cultural others (i.e., undocumented immigrants). Undocumented students who arrive as adolescents, rather than as young children, are more likely to face instances of prejudice and rejection due to limited English language skills or unfamiliarity with U.S social customs (Green, 2003; Gonzales et al., 2013). Thus, undocumented immigrants who enter the United States at an older age may be more likely to be subjected to in-group bias. Regardless, the stressors and bias imposed by in-group prejudice make coming of age as an undocumented student a complex transition fraught with feelings of fear, anxiety, and hopelessness (Gonzales et al., 2013).

Much like adult immigrants, undocumented youth must navigate the stressors and anxieties that accompany adjusting to a new language and culture. As noted by Arbona et al. (2010), undocumented individuals primarily experience stress when confronted with situations where they are unable to cope or that are perceived as detrimental to their wellbeing. Numerous studies have outlined the stressors unique to the migration process, describing it as one of the most impactful transitions that can occur during a person's lifetime (e.g., Furman, Langer, Sanchez, & Nalini, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2013; Green, 2003; Lhaman et al., 2011; Perez et al.,

2009; Segal & Mayadas, 2005). Separation from one's family, whether immediate or extended, and the daunting task of acquiring new cultural and language skills all contribute to what researches have labeled *acculturative stress* (Arbona et al., 2010; Olvera, Rodriguez, Hagan, Linares, & Wiesner, 2010; Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987; Yokusho, 2010). While undocumented adults and youth encounter similar trials when combating acculturative stressors, undocumented youth must confront a unique set of challenges as they transition to public school and enculturation into U.S. social values (Arbona et al., 2010).

In the United States, public schools serve as the traditional environment where immigrant youth are immersed into U.S. values and customs. As undocumented youth begin adopting U.S. values and customs, familial tensions may arise. U.S. society values autonomy above all else, which often conflicts with the more central family values of the Latino community (Gonzales, 2011). Studies have shown that adult immigrants are more likely to adhere to native traditions, forcing undocumented children to balance the traditional expectations of their parents with a growing desire for social acceptance. Ellis and Chen (2013) metaphorically noted this challenge, unique to undocumented immigrant youth, as being "sewn with two threads" (p. 225).

The need to balance the expectations of one's family with U.S. societal norms may also be impacted by the educational background of undocumented parents. In a comparison of the educational attainment of undocumented, documented, and native parents, Greenman and Hall (2013) found that undocumented parents only averaged 7.8 years of education, compared to the 8.6 years averaged by U.S. born Latino parents. Parents of U.S. born White students highlight a larger gap, with a combined average of 14 years of education. This academic achievement gap is perpetuated as undocumented students approach their high school graduation and become at-risk

of dropping out of school (Immigration Policy Center, 2011). Socioeconomic factors also impact the familial context of undocumented youth identity development. Studies have shown that families composed of undocumented immigrants are more likely to live within a lower income bracket than either documented immigrants or native U.S. families (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2013; Green, 2003). Living in high poverty areas impacts an undocumented family's access to educational resources, such as high-performing schools, local libraries, and extra-curricular offerings (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007). Undocumented youth with limited English language skills are at risk for being placed in remedial classes, and may receive less academic assistance or attention than their advanced placed peers (Gonzales, 2010). While the stressors of residing in a high poverty area are not unique to the undocumented population, researchers contest that a permeating climate of fear and suspicion further hinders undocumented students' ability to reach out to teachers or peers for support.

To mitigate the threat of deportation and the fear of social rejection, undocumented youth will often intentionally disguise their cultural background or actively avoid interacting with untrusted authority figures or peers (Dozier, 2001). In Dozier's (2001) interviews with undocumented Latino youth, participants consistently outlined the efforts taken to hide connections to their country of origin. Participants reported disguising traces of an accent or purposefully avoiding a display of their family's cultural customs as common steps taken to preserve anonymity. A study by Gonzales et al. (2013) highlighted how undocumented youth utilize "alternative narratives" (p. 1184) to further conceal their identity by creating stories to excuse their inability to take part in U.S. cultural milestones such as obtaining a driver's license or continuing onto college. Some undocumented youth have been reported to engage in high-risk behaviors, such as drug or alcohol abuse, to cope with these constantly shifting narratives

(Arbona et al., 2010; Dozier, 2001; Gonzales, 2011). The dangers of self-imposed anonymity are further complicated by the legal constraints that impact an administrator's ability to identify undocumented students in primary and secondary institutions.

Plyler v. Doe dictates that undocumented students cannot be denied admittance to school because of their inability to provide a social security number or U.S. birth certificate (Immigration Policy Center, 2012). While protecting students from potential bias, which may result from exposing their undocumented status, *Plyler v. Doe* also limits administrators' and teachers' ability to identify potentially undocumented students, making it more likely that struggling undocumented youth will fall through the cracks (Gonzales, 2010). Instead, to secure external support, undocumented youth must self-disclose their legal status, which poses a risk not only to their personal safety and anonymity, but that of their family. Rather than risking exposure, the undocumented community has largely embraced social isolation or secrecy as a protective measure even among their children in school (Gonzales et al., 2013). As such, interventions for this population at the primary and secondary level largely rely on self-disclosure on the part of the undocumented youth (Gonzales, 2010).

Contradicting the popular perception that undocumented students are a drain on school resources or may hinder the performance of legal U.S. students, a study by Hill and Hawes (2011) found no connection that suggests undocumented students negatively impact their documented peers in the classroom. Other recent studies support the findings of Hill and Hawes, highlighting how undocumented students often perform academically as well as, or better than, their documented peers (e.g., Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Hallett, 2013). Noting that undocumented students are as capable as their documented peers may contribute to a more accepting academic climate in the future; yet, studies have shown that supporting this population

through their transition to adulthood also requires an understanding of the legal and social implications of an undocumented student's transition to adulthood (Gonzales, 2011).

Transitioning to Adulthood

Offered "de facto legality" (Gonzales, 2011 p. 603) through compulsory primary and secondary school attendance, undocumented high school graduates must face the limiting implications of their legal status as they transition to adulthood. Gonzales (2011) synthesizes the experience of undocumented high school graduates stating, "For undocumented youth, the transition into adulthood is accompanied by a transition into illegality" (p. 605). For undocumented youth who persist through primary and secondary school, having overcome obstacles such as language barriers or social isolation, this transition to illegality can pose a serious threat to their postsecondary aspirations.

Positive mentor relationships play a significant role in encouraging the academic success of undocumented high school and college students who are willing to risk exposing their legal status (Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2013). Positive mentor relationships primarily impact the ability of undocumented high school students to persist through their high school graduation, and can also help these students conceptualize the benefit of a postsecondary education (Enriquez, 2011). After high school, mentors can also assist undocumented students in navigating the college application process (Greenman & Hall, 2013). This has been shown to be especially important as undocumented parents may be unfamiliar with the U.S. college educational system, thus unable to assist their children in the application process (Gonzalez, 2011). Mentor support is especially important as undocumented adolescents navigate potentially face mounting financial obligations (Gonzales, 2011).

A desire for financial stability, both as an individual and for one's family, often motivates undocumented adolescents to transition directly into the workforce following their high school graduation (Gonzales, 2011). Gonzales (2011) argued that many undocumented adolescents lack the ability to cope with the physical labor positions available to undocumented high school graduates, as they are conditioned to the U.S. cultural belief that an education is the key to obtaining desirable employment and financial stability. Gonzales also noted that undocumented high school graduates must be able to conceptualize the value of continuing their education, despite limited vocational options, in order to persist onto a postsecondary institution. DelliCarpini (2010) cautioned mentors and educators about the pitfalls of encouraging postsecondary education for purely vocational objectives by examining how traditional career development activities lack applicability to the undocumented population. DelliCarpini noted that many educators lack a comprehensive understanding of how legal status shapes vocational and educational aspirations of undocumented college students. Thus, postsecondary administrators may be unprepared to support undocumented student identity development within the scope of their limited legality (Enriquez, 2011).

Themes in Undocumented College Student Research

When examining current research on undocumented Latino college students, the themes of *access*, *persistence,* and *resilience* are prevalent. Studies on undocumented Latino immigrant access to postsecondary institutions focus on the availability of financial resources as well as tuition policies which foster enrollment (e.g., Herrera, Garibay, Garcia, & Johnston, 2013; Flores, 2010; Nienhusser, 2014; Olivas, 2009; Perez, 2010; Vargas, 2010). Some studies focus on the role community colleges play in offering more affordable postsecondary options for the undocumented community (e.g., Contreras, 2009; Flores & Osegyera, 2009; Nienhuesser, 2014).

Other studies have examined the impact of federal and state financial aid policies on undocumented student access (e.g., Flores, 2010; Olivas, 2009; Vargas, 2010). While other studies have taken a broader look at the socioeconomic factors (e.g., residing in high poverty neighborhoods) which impact access (e.g., Herrera et al., 2013; Perez, 2010).

Flores and Oseguera (2009) highlighted the important role community colleges play in undocumented college student access by noting how they can serve as engines of success for a population which may otherwise not pursue a postsecondary education. Some researchers argue funneling undocumented youth into community colleges, primarily for financial reasons, is less beneficial than it may appear. Contreras (2009) found that undocumented Latino college students who attended community college were more likely to be disengaged from their campus community and were often less aware of campus resources. Conger and Chellman's (2013) study of undocumented college students attending New York public institutions found that undocumented students were more likely than their U.S. born peers to finish an associate's degree on time (within two years), but were far less likely to complete a bachelor's degree on time (within four years). This gap persisted even as researchers lengthened the degree completion timeline to six years. Conger and Chellman theorized that these results indicate undocumented students may, at some point after enrollment, face financial, socioeconomic, or developmental barriers that hinder their ability to reach degree completion on time. Understanding access is incredibly important as it relates to undocumented college student enrollment; yet, it should not overshadow the importance of understanding how undocumented college students are able to persistence towards postsecondary degree attainment after they are enrolled (Hallett, 2013).

Notably, recent studies have highlighted the benefit of protective resources, or *buffers*, that can support undocumented Latino students when facing numerous social and legal barriers (Enriquez, 2011; Ellis & Chen, 2013; Perez et al., 2009). Enriquez (2011) utilized the term *patchworking* to describe ways in which undocumented students pull from a variety of resources to facilitate academic success and support persistence. When faced with high levels of adversity, the undocumented Latino students in Perez et al.'s (2009) study were able to draw from personal and environmental resources (i.e., parental and friend valuing of schooling, participation in extracurricular activities, and bilingualism) when developing the resiliency needed to navigate a multitude of social and legal barriers.

Recent studies have noted the powerful role familial relationships play in supporting the academic achievement of undocumented college students (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Hallett, 2013; Perez et al., 2009). Though the support offered by family members is generally positive, Gonzales (2011), noted that undocumented parents, while believing a college education may be their children's means to financial success, are also aware that their children are facing professional roles that may be only marginally better than those in which they themselves are employed. Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) also found that familial support, while invaluable to supporting postsecondary persistence, could often be limited in scope due to language barriers or a lack of understanding of the U.S. college system.

Beyond the external support offered by family members or mentors, research has shown that undocumented college students can also be supported by a high level of resiliency, developed through years of navigating social and legal barriers (Ellis & Chen, 2013; Perez et al., 2009). The resiliency of undocumented Latino college students is often fostered through the development of internal and external means of support (Morales et al., 2009). Constant barrier

navigation is central to the identity development of undocumented college students, yet the successful navigation of these challenges suggest that undocumented college students possess the skills needed to move beyond the limitations of their legal status and develop a positive sense of self-worth (Ellis & Chen, 2013).

Summary

DACA could potentially remove the threat of deportation for over 1.09 million undocumented immigrants (AFT, n.d.). DACA benefits, including the ability to work, secure an internship, and operate a vehicle, open up a new set of postsecondary possibilities for many undocumented college students. Though still ineligible for federal financial aid, *DACAmented* college students are even more likely to remain in the United States post-graduation to utilize their education and skills (Passel, 2005). By understanding how undocumented Latino college students develop purpose in a way that supports postsecondary degree attainment, administrators have the potential to increase the enrollment and retention of this vulnerable yet capable population on college campuses across the United States (DelliCarpini, 2010).

Few researchers would argue a public education is detrimental to undocumented student development; yet, numerous studies have outlined the abrupt, and sometimes unexpected, transition that occurs as undocumented youth near their high school graduation (e.g., Arbona et al., 2010; DelliCarpini, 2010; Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Gonzales, 2011; Perez et al., 2009). By placing undocumented children in the U.S. public schooling system, and promoting enculturation into society, the government is inadvertently creating a population that will be "virtually incarcerated" by their legal status upon reaching adulthood (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007, p. 3). Even in high school, undocumented adolescents are often acutely aware of the limited financial returns of a postsecondary education. This awareness, as noted by Greenman

and Hall (2013), suggests that undocumented high schools students must be able to conceptualize a non-monetary benefit to secondary and postsecondary degree attainment. To date, no studies have been conducted which examine how limited career options impact undocumented students' ability to develop purpose during the psychosocial transition to adulthood.

In spite of these barriers, researchers argue that empowering undocumented students to pursue a college degree should be a priority for education professionals (e.g., Ellis & Chen, 2013; Enriquez, 2011; Hallett, 2013; Passel, 2005). Furthering the education of the undocumented Latino population will allow them to contribute politically, socially, and financially to U.S. society. Socially and politically, a postsecondary education can mold undocumented Latinos into positive agents of change (Enriquez, 2011). Enriquez (2011) argued that supporting undocumented Latino students through a postsecondary education will empower them to disrupt the social systems that marginalize them. Gonzales (2011) noted that peer networks are an invaluable resource that can support the persistence of undocumented Latino students, thus increasing the current support of undocumented Latino students could have a beneficial trickledown effect on future undocumented college students.

Contreras (2009) offered an overarching argument for further research and activism amongst the undocumented Latino community by noting, "Our nation will be ill-served if it continues to turn its back on these deserving students" (p. 629). Developmentally, Wolf-Wendel and Ruel (1999) noted that adapting to diverse student bodies, in support of holistically educating all students on campus "calls for not only new approaches to established theory, but also for the creation of new theory" (p. 41). A study conducted by The Pew Hispanic Center noted that the majority of undocumented college students will continue to live and work in the United States post-graduation (as cited in Passel, 2005). While this study of undocumented

Latino college students' development of purpose is not intended to conceptualize an entirely new theory, it utilizes Chickering and Reisser's (1993) articulation of developing purpose and extensive research on college student psychosocial development to understand how the unique social and legal context within which undocumented Latino college students experience a postsecondary education interacts with their development of purpose.

Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction

This study utilizes hermeneutic phenomenological methods to interpret how undocumented Latino college students develop purpose, using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) sixth vector of psychosocial identity development, *developing purpose*, as an analytic frame. In this chapter I outline my justification for utilizing hermeneutic phenomenological methods, as well as include a description of the research population, the data gathering, and the analysis process.

Participants/Subjects

For this study, I used purposive convenience sampling to identify six participants. Convenience sampling, according to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012), allows researchers to select participants who are conveniently located and specifically meet a particular aim of a study. To meet the aim of this study, I recruited participants by emailing Latino college student groups and community partners in the Midwest. During this process, I contacted sixteen postsecondary institutions, primarily initiating contact through multicultural or Latino resource centers on each institution's respective campus. Community partners were identified by researching legal aid and Latino community organizations in the Midwest, resulting in contact with ten organizations. Initial participants were notified of the study via email and invited to contact the researcher to set up an interview time. Once participants finished the interview portion of the study, they were asked to pass along my information to other possible participants, thus enabling this research to benefit from snowball sampling techniques, where initial participants assist the researcher in identifying other potential participants throughout the duration of the data collection phase (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

A total of six respondents were interviewed for this study. Five participants were female and one was male. All participants were attending, or had attended, a four-year public university located in the Midwestern United States. All participants were also current students in a post-secondary degree or certificate program. Two participants had earned degrees (an associate's and a bachelor's degree, respectively) and the remaining four were working towards their first bachelor's degrees. Three participants noted previous experience with community college courses prior to their transfer to a four-year public institution.

Research Design

Giorgi (2005) noted that phenomenology denotes a shift away from empirical research methods in order to understand the phenomena of human experiences. Russ (2012) defined phenomenology as a research method that is "collaborative, mutually reflective, and oriented towards discovery." (p. 5). For this study, I utilized hermeneutic phenomenology, which aims at uncovering and interpreting, through rich participant narratives, the hidden meaning that lies within a phenomenon (Parson, 2010; Schacht, 1972).

Hermeneutical phenomenology does not aim to explain the causes behind meaning, but instead seeks to interpret how humans establish meaning by interacting with the world (Parson, 2010). Hermeneutical phenomenology was initially conceptualized by Heidegger (as cited in Kakkori, 2009) as a move away from earlier descriptive forms of phenomenology towards a more interpretive frame. Hermeneutic phenomenology also appreciates the context of lived experiences and how these contexts impact the interpretation of experiences as narrated by a person or group (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Because hermeneutic phenomenological methods take context into consideration, traditional forms of bracketing, or suspending one's bias,

deemed essential to the research design of descriptive phenomenological studies, is considered unnecessary (Parson, 2010).

While earlier phenomenological philosophers stressed the importance of bracketing, or shedding one's preconceptions, interpretive phenomenological researchers argue it is impossible to completely separate oneself from preconceptions or context (Parsons, 2010). Parsons suggested that researchers enter research studies carefully by acknowledging their own context and making this context explicit. Thus, rather than bracketing my preconceptions, I chose to acknowledge my prior knowledge through reflective memo-writing and articulating my background and expertise to research participants. These steps allowed me to understand how my own context played into my interpretations of the narratives provided by the participants. Entering a phenomenological study within one's own context has inherent difficulties, such as the risk of imposing a pre-conceived interpretation onto a participant's narrative. To combat this risk, I utilized the *hermeneutic circle* (also referred to as the hermeneutic spiral) to orient my research towards the phenomena experienced by the participants. The hermeneutic circle consists of reading, reflective writing, and interpretation (Kafle, 2011). By entering this circle, as a researcher, I was able to implement reflective measures that would allow me to code the emergent themes from participant narratives without needing to suspend my own context or prior knowledge of the subject. This method is reflected in the work of Ricoeur (1976), who proposes a method of interpretation that involves first conducting a naïve reading of the interview transcripts, followed by breaking up the text into meaning units, or themes, and finally performing a critical read (or a final read) of the text while reflecting on the naïve read and the themes interpreted. This in-depth process of reading, and re-reading the text, combined with

reflective memo-writer and interpretation, allowed my interpretation of the data to remain as true as possible to the lived experience, or phenomena, of the participants.

In exploring the lived experiences of undocumented Latino college students, credence must be given to how externally established constructs, such as illegality and citizenship, interact with identity development of this population (Ellis & Chen, 2013). By coding and interpreting the narratives given by the research participants, I was also able to examine how living as an undocumented Latino college student, while developing purpose, using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model of psychosocial identity development as an analytic tool. It is important to note that Chickering and Reisser's theory was in no way *applied* to the population, rather, utilizing hermeneutic phenomenological research methods allowed me to interpret the participants' experiences to further understand how they interacted with preconceived psychosocial developmental constructs.

Wojnar and Swanson (2007) summarized the goal of hermeneutic inquiry by describing the approach as a combination of "the researchers understanding of a phenomenon, participant-generated information, and data obtained from other relevant sources" (p. 177). The literature review in Chapter Two provided my understanding of current research regarding undocumented college students as well as a psychosocial theoretical base. After reviewing the current research, I was then able to use phenomenological interviewing techniques to structure open-ended questions that would encourage the participants to provide rich narratives. Lastly, coding the individual narratives for themes, as well as reflecting on the experiences of the group, provided the qualitative data which could be interpreted in relation to the participants' development of purpose.

Data Collection

Phenomenological inquiry requires direct interaction between the researcher and subjects, thus interviewing is the most widely accepted form of data collection in phenomenological studies (Bevan, 2014). For this study, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. There is no universally accepted interview structure in phenomenological research, leaving researchers to structure interviews in ways that encourage a thorough investigation of participants' experiences (Bevan, 2014). Interview questions in this study were designed to reflect aspects of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) sixth vector, developing purpose, by asking participants to reflect on their experiences with career development, future goals, current responsibilities, and motivations to pursue a postsecondary degree or program. Questions were intentionally left open ended in order to allow participant's narratives to guide the data gathering process.

Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to go beyond the mere description of an event, into a greater interpretation of the lived experiences of a person or group (Fagerberg & Norberg, 2009). As such, rich descriptions from participants are needed to co-construct an interpretation of the phenomena. In order to facilitate rich descriptions, one-on-one interviews were scheduled in locations that allowed for the privacy and comfort of the participants. When time or interest permitted, participants were allowed to give tours of meaningful spaces on their campus or neighborhood before the interview to give further insight into the context within which they exist and develop.

In phenomenological research, evidence often emerges through collaborative conversation between the research and the participants (Walsh, 2012). Though the researcher may be considered the tool through which the data are gathered, it is through mutually reflective

and collaborative conversations that data is gleaned. In this study, an additional step towards collaboration, and mitigating potential bias, was taken by allowing participants to read, and potentially edit, their transcripts before continuing further analysis. In taking this additional step, I allowed the interpretation of the phenomena to be co-constructed with the participants providing the narratives.

Interviews for this study lasted between thirty five to seventy five minutes in length. To protect the anonymity of participants, identifying information was not gathered and pseudonyms were assigned. I recorded the interviews, which were then transcribed. Transcriptions were sent to research participants and they were encouraged to review them for accuracy or to elaborate on any area they felt needed to be addressed further. This form of member checking ensured the comfort of the participants with the data collected as well as provide a form of data validation, in ensuring the data collected accurately represented the lived experiences of the participants (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

Bevan (2014) noted

> In phenomenological research initial reflection is by the person who has undergone a particular experience, and this reflection is a primary interpretation. It is through thematized verbalization of this reflected experience that we gain access to the thing that is experienced. (p. 137)

After the initial transcription, narratives were sent to the participants for their review, serving as a form of member checking (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Participants were allowed to elaborate or retract information they were not comfortable having analyzed. After participants reviewed their transcripts, or initial reflection, final transcripts were then read line-by-line for a

naïve understanding of the data, and initial reactions or interpretations were noted. The transcript was then re-read line-by-line to identify emergent codes. Lastly, a final read of the individual transcript occurred while reflecting on the codes identified and the interpretation of the naïve read as the data related to the participant's development of purpose. Each transcript was analyzed individually before I examined the group experience (Fageberger & Norberg, 2009). All the narratives were also analyzed for repetitious thematic patterns among the group of narratives, which were then reviewed through the lens of psychosocial identity development as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993). This second phase of thematic coding allowed me to identify the "underlying structure" (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 432) of the phenomena experienced across the entire group of participants. Emergent themes were then illustrated by using exemplary quotes, as suggest by Benner (1994), to allow the participant's own words to summarize themes gathered from the narratives.

In analyzing the lived experiences of undocumented Latino college students, through the lens of developing purpose, I used Chickering and Resisser's (1993) definition of their sixth vector to guide the formation of interview questions. Emergent themes, which were interpreted from the narratives, were then reflected upon to identify any connection with the participants' experiences developing purpose. Thus, while there was no formal application of Chickering and Reisser's theory to the data, the theory was used to support the interview design and reflective analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The aim of this study was to understand how a select group of undocumented Latino college students developed purpose using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of college student psychosocial identity development as a theoretical guide. With the potential for future

studies on undocumented college students, it is important to note that this population is vulnerable and can often be subjected to threats against their safety and anonymity. By gaining the trust of the participants in this study, I became ethically responsible for protecting their anonymity and respecting their efforts to maintain their personal safety and peace of mind.

In order to protect the anonymity of participants, only pseudonyms were used and identifying information, such a higher education institution, was not recorded, or was omitted from the final transcription. Participants were able to revise transcriptions of recorded interviews in order to provide clarifications or take out any information they were not comfortable having published or reviewed. Participants were also given a complete overview of the study prior to agreeing to participate, and were also informed they were free to leave the study at any time or leave questions unanswered.

Caalli (2001) also cautioned about another ethical consideration in phenomenological research studies, by noting how participants may be reflecting on some of the experiences extracted through the interview(s) for the first time. As such, Caalli noted that researchers might be unprepared to support the potential life changes that may occur as a result of growing awareness or reflection among their research population. Though my context was not bracketed in this research approach, I had to remain aware of my duty as a researcher to listen with sensitivity and accept the descriptions or reflections provided by the participants without prompting them to act or otherwise utilize the reflective conversations further than they were personally comfortable. Because a single interview format was used for this study, the ethical danger was minimal but still one that requires mentioning.

Summary

It is hoped that this study will encourage future researchers to engage in similar studies across various regional and ethnic contexts in order to better understand the lived experiences and identity development of undocumented college students. By utilizing an interpretive phenomenological framework, the intent of this study was to understand the collective narrative of a group of undocumented Latino college students in order to examine how their lived experiences interacted with their development of purpose. Through semi-structured interviews, participants were able to provide rich and descriptive narratives of their experiences developing purpose as an undocumented Latino college student.

Chapter Four: Results

Context

A total of six participants responded to the invitation to participate, via the study letter, which was sent to community organizations and postsecondary institutions located in the Midwestern United States. Of the six participants, five were female and one was male. All recorded Mexican or Mexican-American as their ethnic identity or cultural background.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Pseudonym	**Sex**	**Age**	**Post-Secondary Level**	**Degree Sought**	**Type of Institution**	**Major or Emphasis**	**Degrees Previously Obtained**
Leila	Female	18	Freshman	Bachelor's	4-year Public	Nursing	H.S. Diploma
Ricardo	Male	18	Freshman	Bachelor's	4-year Public	Graphic Design	H.S. Diploma
Mariana	Female	21	Senior	Bachelor's	4-year Public	Communications with minors in Marketing & Event Management	H.S. Diploma
Carolina	Female	27	Freshman	Bachelor's	4-year Public	Arts (Associates Degree) and Biology with minor in Chemistry (Bachelor's degree)	Associates Degree (A.A.)
Ana	Female	22	Freshman	Bachelor's	4-year Public	History: Secondary Education with minor in Spanish	H.S. Diploma (some community college courses taken)
Alma	Female	27	Post-Bachelor's	Master's Certificate	2- year Public & 4 year Public	Urban Agriculture (Master's Certificate) and Women and Gender Studies (Bachelor's Degree)	Bachelor's Degree

Participants were asked to fill out a demographic information sheet (see Table 1) prior to the start of the recorded portion of the interview. This sheet not only provided demographic data, such as age and gender, but also lent a starting point for questions revolving around future goals and academic major of the respective student. Though grade point average (GPA) was not recorded, all participants discussed becoming high performing or honors students at some point in their academic career, either at the primary, secondary, or postsecondary level. Participants all also noted being very involved in campus life or community organizations, though areas of interest varied. The age of participants ranged from 18-27 years of age, with a median age of 22.

Also worth noting is that all six participants were recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) benefits, which enhanced their ability to seek internships, obtain a driver's license, and plan for employment post-graduation. Three of the participants had begun, or completed, portions of their postsecondary education without DACA benefits, but later applied in 2012 when the executive action was passed (Immigration Policy Center, 2011). The remaining three participants had begun receiving DACA benefits either prior to enrolling in college, or very shortly thereafter.

Findings

The findings of this study outline the emergent themes of the individual interviews as well as the thematic clusters that reflected the group experience. Final themes were then identified as representative of the group phenomena (see Table 2). The final themes were then analyzed to interpret their relation to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of psychosocial identity development, focusing on the participants' development of purpose. A more in-depth look at the connection between the literature and the group phenomena will be reviewed in Chapter Five's discussion section.

Table 2

Themes

Elements	Final Themes N= 7	Thematic Clusters N= 15	Emergent Thematic Codes N= 41
Vocational Plans/ Aspirations	1. Being Better Off	1. Doing better than the generation before	1. Cultural Expectations 2. Upward Momentum 3. Generational Achievement
		2. Being better off than parents	4. Parent's Education 5. Parental Support 6. Cultural Adaptation 7. Avoiding Labor Careers
	2. Realizing Potential	3. Understanding potential	8. Academic Potential 9. Achieving Goals 10. Choice of Major
		4. Learning from those who struggle	11. No Excuses 12. Avoiding Pitfalls
	3. Not Wasting Opportunity	5. Don't worry about the future/ do what you can now	13. Immediate Plans 14. Navigating Barriers
		6. Recognizing Opportunity	15. Opportunity 16. Being Prepared
Personal Interest/ Values	4. Looking Towards the Future	7. Hope/ Optimism that everything will work out in the future	17. Changing Laws 18. DACA Impact 19. Optimism
		8. Uncertainty surrounding future	20. Short-Term Planning 21. Political Change 22. Future Planning
	5. Doing Something for Yourself	9. Discovering oneself	23. Self-focused 24. Self-Care
Interpersonal/ Family Commitments	6. Repaying a Debt of Gratitude	10. Validating Family's Sacrifice	25. Family Sacrifice 26. Acculturation 27. Immigration
		11. Making a better life for oneself and family	28. Safety 29. Financial Security 30. Family Support
		12. Thankful for the support of others	31. Faculty Support 32. Counselor Support
	7. Becoming a Resource	13. Sharing knowledge/ bringing others up	33. Involvement 34. Mentoring 35. Access
		14. Acting as a role model	36. Role Model 37. Helping Others
		15. Becoming known/ putting yourself out there	38. Meeting Others 39. Speaking Up 40. No- Shame 41. Honesty

Forty-one emergent codes were identified after an initial analysis of the individual interview transcripts. These emergent codes were then clustered into thematic clusters that represented similar codes. For example, the codes *opportunity* and *being prepared* were clustered under the theme of *recognizing opportunity*, as they were determined to be similar enough in nature to be clustered under an umbrella theme. After completing this form of analysis for each interview, the thematic clusters were examined to determine final themes representative of the group experience. The final themes were grouped according to their reflection of elements of developing purpose, as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993). These three elements include "(1) vocational plans and aspirations, (2) personal interest, and (3) interpersonal and family commitments" (p. 212). As such, the themes in this study were organized based on their reflection of the aforementioned elements. This organization makes for a logical ordering of the final themes and lends itself to a meaningful discussion using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) definition of developing purpose, and the research question guiding this study that is:

In what ways do undocumented Latino college students develop purpose?

Vocational Plans and Aspirations

Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that a vocation is something that energizes, fulfills, motivates, utilizes current skills, or challenges for the creation of a new skill-set. In this sense, a vocation can be more than a career and can include anything that a person seeks align their goals, time, and effort around. For the participants in this study, vocational plans and aspirations were directly impacted by their legal status and their concept of a vocation reflected the political and social context of their lived experiences. The three themes that emerged in regards to vocational plans and interest were (1) *being better off*, (2) *realizing potential*, and (3) *not wasting opportunity*.

Being better off. Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that "many returning adults are ready to make a commitment in order to move into more desirable social and economic environments" (p. 231). Although not all participants identified as returning adult students, they were acutely aware of their parents' educational and vocational achievement, and their desire to lead a better life. Most notably, participants consistently referenced a desire to leave behind the labor positions of their parents, who had little to no postsecondary degree attainment and were ineligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or other benefits.

In the case of Leila, her parents were seasonal farm workers, which motivated her to do well in high school to obtain her diploma and stay away from the fields. Reflecting on her high school experiences Leila noted, "My goal was like, alright I'll finish high school and I'll be perfect. I'll be good. And my parents thought that, too." It was not until Leila began approaching her senior year of high school that she realized how limited she would be without a postsecondary education:

> My mom only got a middle school education and my dad didn't even finish high school so it was like that kind of thing that they were like, "You're going to go to high school and you're going to do better than us." and I didn't realize alright not in this time…with a high school education you can't get very far.

While respecting her parents and their efforts to provide for the family, Leila's first hand experiences watching her parents struggle day in and day out to make ends meet motivated her to "not do better than them, but be somewhere where it wouldn't be as hard as that labor work that they do." Leila was then driven by this desire to commit to pursuing a postsecondary education.

Ana, at age 27, and a mother herself, saw the generational growth and upward momentum that could guide her vocational aspirations away from the labor roles filled by her grandparents and parents:

> Even though some people might see them and say, "Well what opportunity?" You know? Some people might see it that way but I feel like my parents are better off than my grandparents and hopefully I'm going to do better than my parents.

Ana was driven by the desire to continue the upward trajectory set by her family and this provided a sense of purpose to her educational goals, despite her initial hiatus from higher education due to lack of funding and motivation.

Carolina was motivated by the concept of doing better as a way to escape a neighborhood rife with poverty and violence. Carolina noted, "I've seen so many bad things happen where we use to live, and I don't want to go back there." Before the introduction of DACA, the desire to be better off prompted Carolina to forgo her college education in order to work long hours and help her family leave the neighborhood she had grown up in. Dissatisfied with her inability to go further with her employment, without a postsecondary education, Carolina found her way back to school and was able to authenticate her value in continuing her higher education.

Often with the participants, the concept of doing better was supported by the desires of their parents. Much how Leila's parents encouraged her to complete her high school education to open her up to better employment opportunities, Alma received similar advice from her mother:

> So, I think she knew or thought that if we get our degrees, no matter what the degree was in, then that would give us an advantage in society, and she wanted us to get as many

> advantages as we could because there aren't that many advantages that we could have gotten.

Alma's discussion regarding her mother's push for higher education reflected less concern regarding the participants' major of choice, which was noted amongst all participants. Some participants chose majors based on personal interest, while others merely followed what a teacher, counselor, or family member suggested. In short, the degree itself, as a means for gaining an advantage in society and doing better, provided a sense of purpose rather than a particular major or professional field.

Even with more complex family bonds, participants echoed the desire to do better than previous generations, and often saw within themselves the hope for a better future. Ricardo received little academic support from his single mother, but realized a college education may lead him to vocational opportunities not realized by his mother's generation:

> Most of them just got to working, and it's kind of upsetting that happened, and now it's kind of like I'm one of the last ones between them and I'm going to do it whether I have help from my family or not.

Realizing Potential. For the participants, the idea of doing better was often prompted or reinforced by the realization of their personal academic and leadership potential. Two out of the six participants mentioned that college was expected of them by their families, yet the other four referenced the uncertainty they faced their senior year of high school as they debated their future plans. Regardless of whether their journey to higher education had been the result of long-term planning or a last minute decision in high school, all participants realized a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment as they explored their potential for success in college courses and co-curricular activities.

Leila did not decide on pursuing a college education until her senior year, but was driven by her growing realization that she could perform academically as well, or better, than her peers. In Leila's words: "I saw people with like really low grades and like lower standards. I was like if they can get in, why can't I?" Even when frustrations would arise due to their legal status, participants cited instances when the realization of their ability and potential supported them in pushing past the barriers presented. For Carolina, this meant working long hours, supporting family members, and being active in extracurricular activities:

> It was kind of hard because last semester I was going on two, maybe three, hours of sleep. For the whole semester I was falling asleep everywhere, but you know I did good in all of my classes. I was just proud of myself working, going to school, trying to balance, and then we have to do volunteer hours for honor's college as well.

For Ana, the transition to college allowed her to realize her ability to face challenges and build resiliency. Her experiences living up to the high standard set for her in college allowed her to view herself as a capable and academically skilled student, and opened up vocational and personal aspirations she had previously stifled due to a perceived lack of ability:

> I mentioned I didn't think I was good enough for college. But then I started realizing, you know what? I can do much more things, and then I started putting effort and I started seeing, you know, student "A" has a twenty something on his ACT but he can't do this, or I did better on an exam than him and maybe I'm just a bad standardized test taker….And so it was a demanding program but I learned a lot from it because a professor was always willing to help you but didn't lower the standard.

This growing appreciation of her ability to perform as a student helped Ana discover her passion for the sciences and led to her career aspiration of becoming a dentist:

> When I took that chemistry class I had an epiphany and I was like oh my god….like chemistry is so cool! Like I feel that students should learn their chemistry even before their biology. Because that's like everything that goes on. And, I just became very, I mean I was very astonished with chemistry and I had a true epiphany and that's when I discovered that I was capable of more challenging things.

For all the participants, being recognized for their academic and leadership potential was an integral part of developing their vocational aspirations. Without the benefit of understanding their true potential, these students would have likely stopped short of applying for college and given up their dreams of leaving behind labor roles in society.

Not Wasting Opportunity. With the drive to be better off, and a growing realization of their potential as students and campus leaders, participants were also cognizant of not wasting the opportunities available to them. For some participants, the drive to not waste an opportunity provided a foundational purpose to their desire to pursue a college degree. DACA had a unique impact on the development of the participants by offering a limited, yet newly found, window of opportunity. Participants were eager to take hold of whatever opportunities surfaced, but they were also acutely aware of the limits of DACA benefits and their educational and vocational aspirations. For Leila, this presented a dilemma as she noted, "Well as far as DACA goes, I guess that it is kind of a barrier in itself just because….say tomorrow they take it away," and later she noted her desire to take hold of the opportunities available by stating, "So it's the simple fact that there is something. That there is an option. That, like, right now you do what you can right now and if later on you can't do something you'll find a different way."

For the participants in this study, DACA played a pivotal role in shaping their aspirations as they began to tentatively plan for the future during a time when the current

legislation offers little in the way of long-term stability. For Ricardo, the possibility of long-term stability, via U.S. citizenship and career security, led him to consider taking advantage of an opportunity to enlist in the military:

> I am definitely enrolling. Since I am not a U.S. citizen I don't get to be in ROTC because you have to be a U.S. citizen, so over the summer I'm going to enroll in the Army or National Guard….So I'm like I might as well do it because I don't know what I am going to do after I graduate, so at least after I graduate I have that. And also when I went to talk to the ROTC people, one of the guys from the National Guard emphasized the fact that they could make me, um give me, nationality for the United States, and I never really thought of that, getting to be a U.S. citizen through that, but I mean if it's there and I want to do it might as well take care of it.

Like Ricardo, the other participants also referenced taking ahold of opportunities as they arose, due to the relative uncertainty of future opportunities. For some participants this enhanced their abilities to navigate barriers and discover a sense of purpose that allowed for adaptability and change as the political climate evolves. Ana likened her purpose to a sense of optimism that there are always things she can do to overcome the barriers she faces: "I always look on the bright side of things. I don't like to focus on the things that I cannot do. I like to focus on the things that I can do now and how I can do them better." Ana also began to understand her level of opportunity on a global scale:

> If you think about it globally there are so many women, you know, that don't even have a right to an education. Period….So I also think about it at a global perspective where I am at a great place to do something with my life.

For all the participants, pursuing a college education had more to do with what they could do in the moment, and less to do with what they would have to face after obtaining their degrees. For all of the participants, this also translated into a desire to become involved on-campus with student organizations and co-curricular programming to take advantage of the opportunities for networking and connecting on their respective campuses. The eagerness to engage in immediate opportunities did not mean that the participants were unwilling to plan for the future, but rather that their sense of purpose was often developed in an environment characterized by a level of uncertainty and change that necessitated an appreciation of the immediate opportunities that could be taken.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that "developing purpose entails an increasing ability to be intentional" (p. 209), and nowhere else was higher levels of intentionality demonstrated than through the conscious effort participants put into taking advantage of immediate opportunities during their educational journey. The fact that these participants were high achieving and involved students was not an accident, but was the result of a concerted effort to not waste resources that could support their transition to higher education and beyond.

Personal Interest/Values

In regards to personal interest and values, Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that "as commitment increases, role considerations began to be felt" (p. 225). Chickering and Reisser contended that this constitutes a surrender of personal interest in favor of vocational interest, but rather that students begin to explore how their personal interest and goals interact with career aspirations and plans post-graduation. For the participants in this study, the ever-changing political climate in the United States had a direct impact on their ability to reconcile personal interest and values to their vocational aspirations.

Looking towards the future. Participants in this study noted numerous struggles with the concept of planning for the future, and understanding how their goals and interests could guide them towards a long-term plan of personal and professional fulfillment. For some participants, avoiding future planning was a form of coping and barrier navigation, allowing them to stem growing frustrations with the limitations of their legal status by staying adaptable to what they could do in the moment. After the introduction of DACA, students referenced a growing awareness of their future goals and interests.

For Alma, having already received her bachelor's degree and currently pursuing a graduate certificate, her growing awareness of future plans was directly based on a hope for change and being prepared for opportunities as they arise. In authenticating her academic passions, Alma noted:

> Think about where you want to be when these laws change, and that's the thing that really stuck with me because up until the point the path I had been following for my education had been things that I liked but not necessarily things that I was very passionate about.

In Alma's case, reconciling her personal interest to her vocational interest was a concept she was ready to consider after years of not planning for the future. She elaborated on her struggles with integrating her personal desires into her future plans:

> I feel like I'm barely getting the hang of thinking ahead. I've spent a lot of my life not thinking about my future life in the U.S. because I wasn't planning on having a future in the U.S., so most of the things I did weren't like this is what I am going to do to prepare for my future.

As mentioned previously, the introduction of DACA, and the hope for political change impacted the ability of the participants to visualize a future that encapsulated not just financial and socioeconomic stability, but one that was also aligned with their personal interests. The impact was perhaps most strongly noted in the challenge of choosing a major. All of the participants had declared majors, with little to no noted interest in major exploration or a potential change of major. Leila noted, "I've seen people drop out and even change their majors which I didn't think happened." Mariana noted similar concerns, but had hope that her status would not impact the entirety of her adult life:

> It's just that I personally haven't put as much thought into it as my sister did, just because I really hope I'm married before 30. That's not the reason whatsoever that I want to get married, but I'm just like it will kind of work out. I'm just optimistic.

For other participants the idea of turning towards the future loomed large on their consciousness, and provided an added level of stress:

> It's becoming a big problem because I don't know what I want to do after I graduate. It's like the main reason I came to the United States is to study. Now I'm here, well I got to college, that was the big deal, now where do we go from here? (Ricardo)

For a group that was so intent on not wasting the opportunity to obtain a college degree, the uncertainty of long-term goals post-graduation appeared to be a challenging concept to master. For some participants the uncertainty, coupled with the willingness to not waste their current opportunities, led them to integrate their personal values and interest in a more adaptable fashion, which allowed for future planning. With Carolina, her lifelong dream of becoming an art teacher had taken many detours on her journey to pursuing a postsecondary degree. Rather than

be discouraged by her inability to articulate a plan for success, Carolina found the strength in the options she could find to practice her passion:

> I'm kind of, it's sad to say, but I am kind of use to it. I use to care a lot like "I don't know what to do." I would literally cry about it [undocumented status] for days and days and days to come because I wouldn't know what to do. But now it's like well I guess if I can't do it here I'll try somewhere else and just try to find different places or different people who I can get the information from just so I could know I did my best to look for other options…even if I wasn't getting paid. You know, there's other things not just teaching high school.

For all participants in this study, long-term planning often resulted in barrier navigation as they sought to authenticate what they enjoyed to do, professionally and personally, and sought to unify their future goals within the context of a potentially limiting political climate.

Doing Something for Yourself. Participants in this study were adamant in the integral role family played in their everyday lives. They also noted a growing desire to do something, whether academically or personally, for their own benefit and personal growth. This is not to say that the participants were not able to reconcile their desire to support others with a need for personal validation, but instead that college proved to be the ideal environment for exploring values and interests that emanated from the person directly rather than relationships with family, teachers, or friends. For some students this proved to be a daunting challenge, as they questioned personal values for the first time:

> What do I value? That's a question I have been asking myself all this time…and that is a question I still pursue because I still don't know what's the big deal. What's the bigger picture, what's the value? There are many little things I value. I value my siblings…I

> value my cousin…I value every single one of my friends…but I still haven't found that thing that I value the most…I guess family; I value it a lot, and it's right on top of my list, but I feel like there is something I have to value for myself that I have not found within me. And that's why I am going here [college] and there because I still want to, I want to find that value (Ricardo).

For Mariana, family was also a big consideration, but she saw the purpose of her education as a means of empowerment, which is evident through her remark: "I know eventually I am going to have to take care of my parents and this makes them proud but I'm getting an education for myself. It's to empower myself." For Mariana empowering herself was also viewed as a way to assist others based on the concept that "you can't help others until you help yourself." For other participants, the idea of doing something for themselves equated to a growing self-knowledge that allowed them to authenticate their future paths. According to Carolina, a sense of self-knowledge allowed her to "reevaluate yourself, and see I've gotten from here to there and maybe I can do this or give back." For the participants in this study, *doing something for yourself* did not necessarily equate to abandoning the care of others, but instead highlighted their need to find personal value in their experiences as college students. For the majority of the participants, they found the value in supporting themselves as an eventual means to helping others grow and develop.

Interpersonal and Family Commitments

Authenticating values, long-term vocational goals, and immediate self-care concerns must all be balanced within the context of interpersonal and family commitments (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). As previously mentioned, familial concerns play a large role in the lived

experiences of Latino college students, and participants in this study reflected a similar sense of dedication to their family and close friends.

Repaying a debt of gratitude. While the participants in this study immigrated as children, they faced constant reminders of the sacrifices their parents, friends, and counselors made to provide them with a brighter future. In the face of future political uncertainty, and the transition to long term career planning, participants were supported in their persistence in navigating barriers to their higher education by a desire to demonstrate gratitude for the sacrifice of those who helped them. This debt of gratitude went beyond the aforementioned desire to do better than the labor positions frequented by previous generations. Mariana reflected on a conversation between her sister and her mother, where her mother encouraged her sister to persevere so that she could avoid cleaning houses. As Mariana noted:

> That resonated with me just knowing that my parents have sacrificed so much. Um, I don't know making them happy. Like taking care of them. I mean it's natural in the Hispanic culture; you usually take care of your parents afterwards and just because I am well aware of the fact that I will have to because they clearly aren't saving….all their money is going towards us which I really appreciate.

Repaying a debt of gratitude was not limited to the sacrifices of parents. In Ricardo's reflection, a promise to his great grandmother to pursue his education in the United States constituted a purposeful debt of gratitude that drove him to persist despite obstacles:

> I think that's one of the things that pushed me because I'm like I cannot fail now. If I fail then it's going to all be for nothing and I'm pretty sure she would want me to…so I guess that's really when I started pushing myself further.

For some participants, the effort of counselors or teachers was also acknowledged in gratitude for the effort taken on behalf of the student. Carolina noted, "I mean if I hadn't had help I wouldn't have even applied for it [college]….if it wasn't for my counselor." For Ana, repaying the debt of gratitude was linked to her ability to rise in socioeconomic status. According to Ana: "My parents immigrated to this country to give us a brighter future. It makes no logical sense for me to keep doing labor…I feel like I was here for a purpose." Ana's debt of gratitude went beyond the sacrifices made in immigration, but also to the consistent support of her parents as she pursued her bachelor's degree:

> If it weren't for them I wouldn't be able to be a mother and be in school. They help me take care of my son when he's not in daycare and I feel, you know, safe because I know my son is in good hands with my parents so it's less work for me. Even though they cannot academically help us with some resources they do give us that support where you know we'll just find a way.

Carolina echoed the sentiments of Ana, noting that her motivation to persevere despite barriers was linked to her parent's sacrifice:

> I know there are things that my parents think that I don't know or that I haven't noticed along the way. Just things that they have done for us and everything that they have sacrificed that they have left behind. I know it was very hard for them.

Whether the gratitude was for the effort of family, friends, counselors, or teachers participants valued the effort made on their behalf and felt indebted to the sacrifice others had made to support their postsecondary aspirations. For some, this provided the support needed to work beyond immediate obstacles to their vocational goals or aspirations. For others, the debt of gratitude guided their vocational goals as they sought to support their family or parents in return

for the sacrifice given. With Carolina, repaying the gratitude to her parents guided her towards a career in nursing. According to Carolina: "My family and I haven't really had the benefits of like healthcare the same as everyone else.., and then I was like alright well let's try out nursing." For Ricardo, his gratitude for his art teacher's support and care in high school translated into a major in art:

> She's like, "I want you to do art," and that was her emphasis. "You're going to do art because you are going to do art," and it was funny because when I got my scholarship she was like, "Well I've done my job because I've wanted you to go to college since your freshman year when you walked in here…that's where I wanted you to go…so I've done my job"…when I really thought about it, like whoa she really has helped me out. She had been the one who pushed me through.

Even without concrete future career aspirations, as in the case of Ricardo, the debt of gratitude defined his purpose for continuing to pursue a degree in art and succeed in college. For some participants, feelings of gratitude went a step further and translated into assisting their peers and the upcoming generation to navigate the barriers of higher education with an undocumented status.

Becoming a resource. Participants in this study embraced an idea of community that often reached beyond immediate familial bonds. As such, participants saw their obtainment of a postsecondary education as not only a resource for the individual, but as a conduit for helping others in similar situations. Through their trials, frustrations, and successes, the participants were able to translate their experiences into a helpful resource and source of support for others.

Knowledge sharing, as a way to better a community, was a popular topic among the participants. Leila noted:

> I really want to get involved here, especially since I grew up here and I know the society more. There's a lot of people that, even my peers, I'd try to help them out, too, and I have helped them out just because when I know something it's not about keeping it to yourself. It's about, you know, spreading it out and knowing it and letting other people know it, too, and bringing them up with you.

For Carolina, knowledge sharing also meant pushing past her innate shyness and ensuring people knew who she was and what she had been through so that she could act as a personal resource:

> It's not about people knowing who you are but just like, oh you know, if somebody needed my help they can be like, "Oh she went through this or she did that so you can go talk to her." So that way you can help other people as well.

Beyond empowering themselves through a college education, participants also saw their experiences, as college students, as a way to empower others in their community to take charge of their future. As Ana noted, "I always tell people, don't ask me what the requirements are. Why don't you go get yourself a DACA application and read the requirements." Alma, saw herself as a resource but valued empowering others to articulate their lived experiences: "I was the one who would go out to high schools and government schools and do presentations and make sure that it wasn't just us talking."

As Alma noted it's "not just individual care, but the care of the community" that gave her a sense of purpose and meaning. For Mariana, the gratitude she felt for the sacrifice of her parents helped her focus her sense of purpose on helping those who may not have had the benefit of familial support:

> I love listening to my students and helping them figure out certain things. I just try to think of students who may not have had support. Like I got really lucky with my parents who were supporting me and I went to a pretty sweet high school where they push you, but what about students who don't?

In many cases, the concept of becoming a resource for others also took the shape of role modeling for close family and friends. In this sense, becoming a resource had less to do with actual knowledge sharing, and more with being cognizant of how an individual's actions are perceived by others. For Ricardo, role modeling included exemplifying behaviors that he believed were important for avoiding common pitfalls in his community. In role modeling for his younger cousin, Ricardo stated, "Since I don't smoke, he doesn't smoke and since I don't drink, he doesn't drink." Mariana also realized the importance of role modeling and avoiding pitfalls as she reflected on her cousin who had recently had a baby:

> He doesn't value education and it just breaks my heart…as soon as his daughters start growing up I'll step in more into their life because I'm just like they need real moms. I don't want them to ever think that an education is not a possibility for them.

Summary

A total of six participants were selected who fit the criterion of identifying as an undocumented Latino, 18 years of age of older, and pursuing or having had pursued a postsecondary education in the Midwestern United States. As noted in the findings, legal status played an integral role in the participants' ability to conceptualize long-term vocational aspirations and impacted participants' sense of purpose as they transitioned to an adult identity in the United States.

Participants self-identified as high-achieving individuals, both in terms of leadership roles and academic performance. Realizing their ability as academic performers and campus leaders played a large role in participants' ability to persist despite setbacks and conceptualize more complex goals for the future. The introduction of DACA opened new horizons for the participants, and their need to not waste the opportunities presented motivated them in their persistence and formulation of vocational aspirations. For participants who had graduated, or begun college, prior to the introduction of DACA, the opportunity to obtain a work permit or driver's license proved to be a turning point in the trajectory of their sense of purpose. Before DACA, these participants felt cornered by their lack of future career options and often stagnated in their schooling or vocational exploration. With the opportunities provided by DACA, participants also reported being more willing to explore interests that resonated with them, rather than remaining in roles that did not fit their interest or perceived potential.

Interpersonal and familial factors played a central role in guiding the participants' definition of purpose as degree-seeking students. They reported being indebted to their family members for the hard work and support that lent them the ability to pursue a college degree. Not all participants were receiving financial support from their parents, but instead, felt they were recipients of the emotional support necessary to face the stressors of navigating higher education as an undocumented student.

The desire to do better than previous generations, or even societal standards, provided an underlying sense of purpose for the participants in this study. A consistent theme among the participants was the desire to move away from traditional labor roles. In this sense, participants were sometimes less concerned with their major of choice, and more focused on completing the degree as a stepping stone to a more favorable socioeconomic standing. Family members

perpetuated this ideal among the participants, as the participants were encouraged to use their education as one of the few legal opportunities for socioeconomic improvement.

Outside of family, participants often remarked on the impact a counselor, teacher, or mentor made in their transition to higher education. Even when familial support was less apparent, participants were able to draw on their interpersonal skills and locate individuals who were able to serve as a resource. This ability to build the interpersonal resources needed to succeed in higher education was two-fold, as participants were also eager to make themselves available as a resource to others. Knowledge sharing and community building were central values to the participants, and grounded their desire to remain connected to others through volunteering and leadership roles on campus.

Finally, participants voiced their hope for brighter futures for all undocumented immigrants in the United States. For these students, developing purpose had much more to do with a global perspective and bringing up the entire community than it did with individual success or aspirations. Arguably, the participants in this study also demonstrated high levels of resiliency and the ability to navigate barriers on their path to degree completion.

In the next chapter, the findings presented are discussed in relation to their connection to the current literature and the theoretical framework of this study. Lastly, implications for policies and procedure in higher education are also presented.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this chapter I provide an overall summary of the study as well as a discussion surrounding the results of the data analysis, as it applied to the theoretical framework of the study, and implications for policy and practice in higher education.

Summary of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine a specific aspect of undocumented Latino college student's psychosocial identity development. A focus was placed on what Chickering and Reisser (1993) labeled as *developing purpose*, or the psychosocial development that occurs as college students seek to authenticate their values during the conceptualization of future plans and goals. Interest in this study was prompted by the lack of research surrounding the psychosocial development of undocumented Latino college students as they strive for postsecondary degree completion and vocational planning. Rather, much of the current research had focused on the accessibility of higher education for the undocumented population, or the psychosocial development that occurs as this population nears their high school graduation. This study was also motivated by the rising number of undocumented Latino college students who are now eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) benefits, which may enable an increasing number of students to find the resources necessary to pursue higher education.

Given the lack of research on undocumented Latino college student psychosocial identity development, and the barriers unique to this population, the research question guiding this study, using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) definition of developing purpose was:

In what ways do undocumented Latino college students develop purpose?

The research design consisted of semi-structured interviews that were created to elicit the participants' experiences with authenticating values, crystalizing career or vocational aspirations,

balancing interpersonal and familial relationships, and the barriers they faced as undocumented students.

Volunteer participants who fit the pre-determined criterion were invited to participate in this study. The selection criterion included: (1) Identifying as an undocumented Latino, (2) eighteen years of age or older, and (3) pursuing a postsecondary education in the Midwestern United States. A hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was used to analyze participants' experiences. Interviews were recorded, manually transcribed, and coded to analyze emergent thematic codes. A second round of analysis allowed for the identification of group thematic clusters and final themes. The data analysis resulted in 41 thematic codes, 15 thematic clusters, and 7 final themes. Themes were then organized according to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) classification of developing purpose as a combination of (1) vocational plans and aspirations, (2) personal interests and values, and (3) interpersonal and family commitments.

Conclusion

The qualitative data provided by participants in this study, as interpreted through Chickering and Reisser's (1993) definition of developing purpose, demonstrated the intentionality and value authentication recognized as components of a student's psychosocial identity development. While participants were able to reflect on their experiences with developing values and their growing levels of intentionality, they did diverge from Chickering and Reisser's description of developing purpose in ways that are not accounted for in current studies on predominately White U.S. citizens. For the participants in this study, their sense of purpose often had less to do with defining long-term career goals, or calculating steps to a desired career, and more to do with taking advantage of opportunities presented and respecting the sacrifices of others who supported their success. Familial and interpersonal concerns played a

large role in the development of purpose for this population. Long-term goal setting and career planning was challenging, or a times not possible, and strongly impacted the participants ability to consider their current actions in terms of long-range vocational benefit. Instead, participants found a sense of purpose in moving beyond the barriers set before them and doing today what they may not be able to do tomorrow. In the next section I provide a thorough discussion linking the theoretical aspects of Chickering and Reisser's sixth vector, developing purpose, to the experiences of the participants in this study.

Discussion

The transition to adulthood, and more specifically the transition to college, can be a developmentally rich period as young adults are challenged to define their career goals, future interests, and place as individuals in a complex society (Gonzales, 2011). For undocumented students, the transition is further complicated by confusing legal parameters and socioeconomic contexts that exert an influence over their ability to perceive the purpose of a postsecondary education in the face of potentially limited professional options post-graduation.

For participants in this study, their transition to an adult identity was threatened by the stressors inherent in identifying with two cultures, yet feeling unaccepted by the one within which they live their daily lives. Huber's (2010) study on racist nativism in the United States highlights how the concept of a *non-native* is often used to label any race other than White, regardless of the age or generation of immigration. Participants in this study were cognizant of the levels of rejection they faced from the U.S. government and public, in the form of deportation threats or limited vocational options, but were also aware of their identity as members of U.S. society. Similar to the observations of Ellis and Chen (2013), participants in this study internalized not only the native cultural values of their parents, but also their new

identities as U.S. college students, and at times were torn between balancing cultural expectations. This dual sense of identity was often reflected in their desire to do something for themselves in college, and explore personal growth, while acknowledging their desire to care for their families as dictated by Latino cultural norms. This, in turn, served as a form of support for the participants of this study, but also provided instances of dissonance that prompted them to authenticate their personal values and vocational interest in the face of future political uncertainty.

The external factors that impacted the psychosocial identity development of the participants in this study, particularly their legal status, were further complicated by the introduction of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which grants undocumented childhood arrivals temporary access to work permits, identification cards, and driver's licenses (Immigration Policy Center, 2011). Two participants in this study were recipients of DACA benefits early in their college careers. Three of the participants were able to apply for DACA later in their college careers, and one participant finished a bachelor's degree prior to the introduction of DACA. For two of the participants, the introduction of DACA was a turning point in their education and prompted them to go beyond community college courses and pursue a bachelor's degree. Though DACA provided new vocational opportunities for all participants in this study, it also frustrated some participants as yet another iteration of their limited legality without a pathway to citizenship. This was evident as participants were able to recognize the benefits of their DACA eligibility, while referencing their anxieties regarding future plans without more substantial immigration reform.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that "to have a good plan, we must first have an image of the desired outcome" (p. 210). Though the introduction of DACA supported the

participants in this study in their pursuit of a college education, they appeared divided on their ability to articulate long-term career goals in the face of a politically uncertain future. Only two of the participants were able to lay out long-term plans that included concrete steps to goal attainment. Others were able to outline long-term goals but were less clear on their plans for goal completion. Some participants would readily admit to their inexperience with long-term planning in response to the limiting nature of their legal status. Most of the participants were able to navigate this barrier to long-term vocational planning by focusing on the present and taking advantage of all opportunities available to them at that moment. With these participants, the inability to formulate long-term plans stemmed from their tenuous image of a future in the United States under restrictive legal constraints, thus their image of the desired outcome tended to be more of a vague guidance point than a specific desired outcome. While noting the difficulties inherent in their legal status, participants in this study also demonstrated high levels of adaptability and resilience in the face of change. Regardless of whether the participants were able to articulate long-term career goals, they all understood that striving to do the most that you can in a moment was the key to success as an undocumented student.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) also noted that college students often "have energy but no destination" (p. 50), yet the participants in this study contradicted this notion by utilizing a living-in-the-moment approach in order to remain adaptable and resilient to unforeseen future challenges. In this sense, the vague future goals and lack of long-term vocational planning was used as a coping mechanism to allow participants in this study to define a sense of purpose that could not be easily derailed by their inability to control the political climate of the United States.

One area where all participants were able to articulate the long-term benefits of their college education was in reference to a desire to increase their socioeconomic standing through

higher education. Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) noted that financial considerations can be both a barrier and a motivator for undocumented college students. They remarked, "While being undocumented limits your educational and professional horizons, education and work are means for avoiding jobs such as mowing lawns and cleaning houses" (p. 11). Participants in this study vocalized similar concerns in regards to avoiding the traditional labor roles generally populated by their parents', or even grandparents', generations. Some participants had direct experiences working in labor roles, or had witnessed the struggle their parents made to make ends meet without the benefit of a college degree. Thus, the vocational aspirations of the participants often had less to do with a dream career and more to do with their ability to foresee increased vocational options and socioeconomic status through the attainment of a postsecondary degree.

While remaining adaptable to change, a common characteristic among the group of participants was an unwillingness to engage in major exploration for the duration of their college career. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993):

> College may be the one time in life when people can sample new fields of knowledge, pursue familiar topics in more depth, test hunches about career possibilities, discover new capabilities through experiential learning, and leave comfort zones to do a novel class assignment or partake of curricular options. (p. 217)

For participants in this study, certain levels of exploration were simply not feasible given their hard earned, yet limited, resources. Often, the unwillingness to engage in major exploration stemmed from financial concerns. Participants in this study were cognizant of their limited financial resources, and were unwilling to risk derailing their academic plans by switching majors or taking potentially unnecessary classes. For one participant, the need to use financial resources wisely prohibited them from pursuing a college degree until they felt absolutely

confident in their choice of major. Participants who had completed previous degree programs, whether an associate's or a bachelor's degree, were more aware of the implications of their limited major or career exploration but cited the need to complete their degree program as their primary, and more pressing, purpose as undocumented college students.

A connection has also been noted in the literature between developing purpose and a student's involvement in co-curricular activities (Martin, 2000). For the participants in this study, the uncertainty of the future, combined with their determination to take advantage of all the opportunities on their path, led them to become involved on their campuses or in volunteer activities. Reflecting their dedication noted in their degree programs, participants in this study were equally dedicated to their co-curricular activities. Even the participants that were working long hours and contributing to family finances noted multiple organizational involvements or leadership roles. These students did not see these activities as a burden, but rather a necessary result of their desire to take advantage of any opportunity presented to them. Often, leadership roles in student or community organizations allowed these students to explore their capacity as leaders in an environment that did not limit them based on their legal status. Not only did this empower participants to explore additional leadership options, but it also allowed them to engage in a form of goal setting and commitment that rewarded their dedication. For many of the participants, these leadership opportunities often came about through happenstance, or because they were known to a certain individual who recommended them for a position. In this sense, their community engagement had less to do with conscious planning (Chickering & Reisser, 1993); yet, it allowed participants to utilize a more adaptable range of skills, such as networking and opportunistic engagement, to explore their values and aspirations.

The determination to stay the course, in terms of major choice and dedication to co-curricular activities, demonstrates a level of intentionality that is integral to a student's development of purpose. Although the participants in this study may not have always explored majors and career options based on "what we love to do, what energizes us, what fulfills us" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 50), some participants were driven to pursue their academic and vocational goals based on a desire to complete the mission and be as financially savvy and resourceful as possible. Thus, while participants were unable to articulate long-term career plans, they tended to be incredibly intentional in the steps they took towards degree completion. A longitudinal study of undocumented Latino college graduates would provide the additional insight needed to determine the impact of these adaptations and coping mechanisms as undocumented college graduates transition to their roles as professionals in society.

Developing a sense of purpose for the participants in this study was rarely a purely autonomous journey. Instead, participants cited numerous interpersonal and familial factors that impacted their daily decision-making. Hoare (1991) noted, "The process of conceptualizing oneself in the abstract future of one's social scheme may, in fact, occur uniformly. It seems clear however that the Western world's idea of autonomous identity is simply one mode of self-definition" (p. 51). In short, Hoare was not opposed to the idea that there may be a uniform approach to understanding psychosocial identity development, as proposed by Chickering and Reisser (1993), but rather that a theory which prizes autonomy as the apex of developmental maturity is only one approach in a global society.

Scholars (e.g., Contreras, 2009; Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Gonzales, 2011) have noted the importance of family in the Latino culture, and participants in this study not only remarked on their duty to support their family but also a sense of gratitude to the sacrifices made

to support them. Contreras (2009) proposed the concept of *ganas*, or an undocumented Latino student's work ethic and desire to give back to their family or community, that echoes the experiences of participants in this study. Participants were similarly driven by the need to give back to their families, although not always in a monetary fashion. While some participants were responsible for contributing to their families financially, all were eager to repay a growing debt of gratitude to the people who pushed and supported them in seeking a better future. Even more so than future vocational plans, this desire to succeed on behalf of a family member or mentor gave meaning to the struggle for a postsecondary education and a sense of purpose when long-term career goals were less definable.

A relationship between student and faculty interaction and the development of purpose has also been shown to have a positive impact on students' psychosocial identity development (Martin, 2000). For participants in this study, the guidance of a counselor or teacher was often accepted as a valuable resource for barrier navigation. Often, this support came in the form of a faculty member of counselor challenging participants to want more for themselves, or to fulfill their potential. Similar to the results noted in studies by Greenman and Hall (2013) and Gonzales (2011), positive mentor relationships played a large role in supporting the persistence of the participants, especially during high school or their early college years. This support, in turn, also contributed to the sense of gratitude referenced by participants and often defined their purpose as they attempted to repay this support through their academic performance and degree completion.

Not noted as frequently in the literature, was the intentional transition the participants in this study made to being role models in their own right. Participants were eager to influence and support other undocumented students or family members by modeling advantageous behaviors (i.e., avoiding alcohol or smoking) as well as helping others in navigating the college application

process. For some participants, role modeling and knowledge sharing also allowed them to repay their debt of gratitude to supportive faculty and family members by transforming themselves into similar forms of support for the next generation.

Enriquez (2011) coined the term *patchworking* to describe the ability of undocumented college students to pull from a variety of different resources to support their persistence towards a college degree. Participants in this study displayed similar levels of adaptability, and were often adept at finding support or information even when assistance was not readily made available. Again, central to the experience of all the participants in this study was their desire to, in turn, translate this knowledge and become a resource for others. In this sense, the participants were not only able to pull resources to assist in their own educational and developmental journey, but they were also eager to share what they had learned with the greater undocumented community. As noted by Chickering and Reisser (1993), this "commitment to a value or belief" (p. 234), was strong enough to give participants a sense of purpose as cultural navigators for future generations and a voice of encouragement for their community.

Perhaps the hallmark of the participantss' experiences was their ability to persevere despite setbacks and externally placed barriers (i.e., lack of financial aid or future career options). Perseverance is also integral to the level of intentionality and persistence needed to align a student's actions with their sense of purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The participants in this study repeatedly reflected on their ability to navigate the barriers laid before them, and not be dissuaded in their goal of a postsecondary degree. Even when setbacks did occur, participants were able to pull together the external and internal resources needed to get "back on track." For the participants in this study, bravery, and the ability to move beyond initial

challenges to their academic and personal success, was a key component to developing a greater purpose.

Implications for Policy, Practice & Research

With the introduction of DACA, postsecondary institutions need to be prepared to support the psychosocial identity development of a potentially increasing number of undocumented students on campuses across the country. The implications of this study relate most strongly to the duties of academic advisors and career counselors, but also provide meaningful insight to institutional practices that could support the development of undocumented students campus-wide.

First, a lack of long-term career goals was a learned adaptation skill utilized by undocumented college students in this study as a way or remaining flexible to future political changes. Reflecting on the participants' experiences, professional skills and development should not be ignored with this population, but rather understood as a life-skill that will benefit these students regardless of the capriciousness of political climates. Even with the work permits provided by DACA, undocumented students, such as those in this study, may also benefit immensely from volunteer and leadership opportunities that allow them to authenticate their personal values and aspirations in a work-like setting.

Second, the connections with peer mentors, faculty, or counselors played a positive role in the psychosocial development of the participants in this study. While some undocumented students may choose not to disclose their status, an interpersonal connection that allows the student to understand the strength of their potential and ability appeared evident in this study to be a positive force for persistence, regardless of disclosure. It is worth noting that the undocumented students in this study were sensitive to the authenticity of a faculty member's

advice, especially given the cultural expectation of postsecondary degree attainment in the United States. Some students perceived the push for higher education as the status quo, especially when a faculty member was unaware of their legal status. In this case, the participants in this study were less likely to seek the assistance of a counselor or faculty member when struggling with a barrier. Thus, any assistance given must focus on the individual student's narrative, as opposed to relying on cultural norms, to be truly effective in empowering undocumented students on college campuses.

Lastly, administrators should consider setting the cultural tone on their campuses in regards to the subject of undocumented immigration and support for all students on campus. Participants in this study were drawn to organizations that supported a campus-wide understanding of undocumented students' issues, and often found the support of campus administration integral to their ability to work cross-culturally on support programs and fundraising. Creating space for cultural engagement empowered these students to leave behind fear and embrace their multifaceted identity as undocumented college students, and similar practices might be useful for other students, particularly undocumented students, on college campuses.

Because this study did not analyze data from community college students, further research on the psychosocial identity development, and the development of purpose, of undocumented Latino community college students would add depth to the current literature on the undocumented student experience. Also, more longitudinal studies on the impact of DACA on the identity development of undocumented college students may lend insight into the ways in which a legally restricted form of opportunity, without long-term adjustments to one's legal status, impacts how these students perceive long-term vocational and career goals. In this study,

it was noted that participants often avoided long-term planning due to the relative uncertainty of their vocational future without citizenship. Where the current research—this study included—falls short is in identifying how lack of citizenship impacts undocumented college graduates as they continue to pursue vocational goals without the benefit of a direct path to citizenship after obtaining a college degree.

This study did not examine the experiences of other undocumented populations, outside of those who identify as Mexican-American. Thus, further studies on the experiences of these undocumented populations are needed for a more comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial development of undocumented college students. Also, given this study's focus on only one of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) six vectors, more research is needed on other aspects of psychosocial identity development that may be impacted by a student's legal status.

As members of U.S. society, undocumented college students are among some of the most resilient and adaptable student populations. Having navigated barriers to their postsecondary education, the participants in this study demonstrated an intentional dedication to their education and personal development that was sparked by their ability to thrive on a college campus. With the advent of more inclusive state and federal immigration policy, undocumented students are poised to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. In developing a sense of purpose that factors in immediate opportunities, and remains adaptable to change, these students are able to identify values that support their persistence in higher education and impacts their dedication to assisting their community by supporting future generations in navigating their postsecondary journey.

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Appendix I

Study Introduction Letter

12/08/2014

Dear Student:

This is an email request for you to be involved in a research study titled **"Undocumented Latino/a College Students and Identity Development: A Qualitative Analysis of Undocumented Latino/a College Students' Movement Towards Developing Purpose"**.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to reflect upon your experiences as an undocumented Latino/a college student. Through your contributions higher education researchers, professionals, and I may learn more about the lived experiences and identity development of undocumented Latino/a students. Data will be gathered through one-on-one interviews, and all information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. To participate in the study, you must identify as a Latino/a college student and currently be enrolled at a post-secondary institution in the Midwest. Individuals enrolled part-time or at the community college level are welcome to participate.

If you are willing to participate in the study, I would like to forward you the informed consent document, explaining your involvement and the study in further detail. You may contact me at lyonth@gvsu.edu or (540) 809-1438 if you need any additional information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Theresa D. Lyon
M.Ed. Graduate Student
Grand Valley State University

Appendix II

Example Interview Protocol

Pre-College/ Applying for College: The following questions will ask you to reflect on your middle school and high school years, as well as the process of choosing and applying for college.

1) Tell me a little about yourself
2) Describe your experiences in middle and high school:
    a. What were your hobbies?
    b. Who influenced you?
    c. Did you have responsibilities outside of school?
    d. How did you perform academically?
    e. Were you aware of the limitations of your undocumented status?
        i. If so- how did this impact your experiences?
        ii. If not- when did you become aware of your status and how?
3) What prompted you to pursue a college degree?
4) Describe your experience applying for college.
    a. How did you find out about potential schools or programs?
    b. Did you have any assistance in the application process?
5) Did you perceive any barriers to pursuing a college degree?
    a. If so- how did you overcome the barrier(s)?

Degree/Major Choice: The following questions will ask you to reflect on your intended degree or choice of major.

6) Have you declared a major?
    a. If so- what prompted you to select that particular major?
7) How do you feel your choice of major will play into your future goals?
8) Were there any internal or external factors which impacted your choice of major?

Career: The following questions will ask you to reflect on your past, current, and future career goals.

9) What were your career aspirations growing up? How have they changed and why (or why not)?
10) Reflecting on your experiences thus far as a college student, how have your career goals changed since your high school graduation? Why do you think that is?
11) What are you career goals post-graduation?
    a. What steps have you taken towards achieving these goals?

Values and Responsibilities: The following questions will ask you to reflect on your personal values and responsibilities.

12) Outside of classes, what other responsibilities do you have?
13) What are your current hobbies?
14) What do you consider your most important personal values as a young adult?
15) Who or what has influenced your personal values?
16) Can you give any examples of how you incorporate your person values into your schoolwork, hobbies, or other responsibilities?

Final Questions.

17) Is there anything else you would care to share?

Appendix III

Consent Form

Project Title: **Undocumented Latino/a College Students and Identity Development: A Qualitative Analysis of Undocumented Latino/a College Students' Movement Towards Developing Purpose**

Principle Investigator: **Theresa D. Lyon, Grand Valley State University (GVSU)**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

You are being invited to participate in a research study designed to explore how undocumented Latino/a college students develop purpose. You are being asked to reflect on your personal, academic, and professional experiences and how these experiences have shaped your identity and, more specifically, your purpose as a college student.

PURPOSE OF CONSENT FORM

This consent form gives you the information needed to help you decided whether to participate in the study or not. Please read to form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer participant, and anything that you feel needs clarification. When all of your questions have been answered, you may then decide whether or not to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, I will need verbal consent.

PROCEDURES

I will meet with you one time during the school year for a 45-60 minute interview. The interview location will be one that is convenient for you and allows for privacy.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with participation in the study include: emotional or psychological discomfort. The interviews will be conducted in a way that should not inflict any harm. However, interview questions ask for you to reflect on your experiences and that may be uncomfortable. At any time, if you feel that reflecting on your experiences is too much I will stop the interview. If at any point you decide you would no longer like to participate in the study, you are free to leave. The risk for emotional of psychological distress is minimal. There are no personal benefits from participation in this study. However, your participation will give invaluable insight into the lived experiences of undocumented students.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You demographic data will be kept separate from the interview transcripts and other qualitative data. Only pseudonyms will be used and your name will not be included with any of the data. All data will be locked in the advisor's file cabinet. Results will be reported in a way that you cannot be identified.

One additional aspect of this study involves making audio recording of the interviews. This will help ensure accuracy as I analyze the information gathered. After the completion of each interview, I will transcribe the interview, double check the transcription against the recording, and destroy the audiotape. Transcriptions of the interview will then be emailed to you, and you will be allowed to make any further edits or retractions if desired. My advisor and I are the only people who will have access to the audiotapes. Anything you say to me, or have on record, will be completely confidential.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

If you decide to participate in this study, it is on a completely volunteer basis. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to participate. You can stop volunteering at any time during the study and keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. Likewise, you will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You have the option of skipping any question you do not feel comfortable answering. If you elect to withdraw from the research study before it ends, I may keep information already gathered and this information may be included in study reports, or you can elect to withdraw your information from this study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact:

Theresa Lyon 540-809-1438 lyonth@gvsu.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact:

Grand Valley State University Human Review Research Committee 616-331-3197

hrrc@gvsu.edu

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix IV

Participant Information Sheet

Pseudonym _____

Age_____

Race/Ethnicity_____

Sex_____

Sexual Orientation (optional) _____

Type of Institution (circle one)

Community College 4 Year- Public 4 Year- Private Other:_____

Major_____

Future Educational and/or Career Goals_____

Appendix V

HRRC Approval

This research protocol has been approved by the Human Research Review Committee at Grand Valley State University. File No.15-034-H