

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Brenda Ivelisse for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education presented on March 17, 2015.

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Abstract approved:

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Community colleges have become a practical educational option for undocumented students seeking an associate degree; thus reflecting the community college's very mission and purpose by providing access and affordability for these students. Specifically, undocumented Latino students are known to select community colleges due to their low tuition cost, proximity to their home, ease of access, etc. (Hernandez et al., 2010). This research study focused on undocumented Latino students for, as a leading scholar notes, "undocumented Latino students in higher education represent a resilient, determined, and inspirational group of high achievers who persevere and serve as a model for success" (Contreras, 2009, p. 610). The purpose of this study was to explore, through their own voices, the community college experiences of undocumented Latino students in Oregon. The Pew Hispanic Center found approximately 22% of the estimated 150,000 undocumented residents of Oregon stand to benefit from the DREAM Act (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

A qualitative methodology was used in this study that provided a philosophical approach that allowed for meaning to emerge from the data. A Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) perspective was used to frame this study. By approaching this research through the lens of LatCrit theory, the factors affecting marginalized undocumented students were highlighted.

Working from a social justice perspective, the researcher's goal was to provide information that may be useful to individual study participants, other undocumented students, and to the institutions that enroll these students. This study aimed to provide a means for addressing a social justice matter, the education of undocumented community college Latinos. It emphasizes the complex experiences and identities of Latinos, including language rights, immigration, citizenship, ethnicity, and gender (González & Portillos, 2007; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Martinez, 1994).

The intent of this study was not make far-reaching generalizations applicable to all community college undocumented Latino students, but to find themes that could support some of their experiences better that ultimately could lead to completion of an associate's degree. The study found that eight themes emerged as a result of the data analysis:

1. Support from Family and Community
2. Overcoming Obstacles
3. Cultural Informant
4. Finding Place: Formal and Informal Networks
5. Involvement
6. Barriers that Intersect
7. Identity as Undocumented
8. Resiliency

This study attempted to define academic success of the eight participants by identifying the practices and support systems community colleges are using to help undocumented Latino students navigate their systems. Because of the focus on the lived experiences of undocumented Latino students, a qualitative approach referred to as *testimonios* was utilized for addressing the

research questions, thus a platform for the voices of this marginalized population to expand the understanding of those who would hear them was created. This study revealed the conclusions that emerged from the *testimonios* as well as give recommendations for practice and further research. The study found that family support, creating community, understanding practitioners' roles, and having hope and resiliency aided in the persistence and retention of the participants.

Freire (1970) stated in order to liberate and change the conditions in which individuals live, they must be empowered to do so. These eight participants narratives are a testament to what occurs to individuals if given the space to be empowered and change their conditions. The *testimonios* revealed their lived experiences as they completed an associate's degree. Their *testimonios* challenged the narrative that undocumented people are a burden to society. Their voices challenge the dominant narrative that undocumented people do not have a voice.

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Voices to be Heard: Narrative Research of Undocumented Latino Students
in Oregon Community Colleges

by
Brenda Ivelisse

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Brenda Ivelisse, Author

DEDICATION

Para Abuela, con todo mi corazon.

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CHAPTER 1

FOCUS AND SIGNIFICANCE

“What happens to a dream deferred?”

-1951 Langston Hughes, “Harlem”

Unauthorized immigration has become a highly debated and controversial topic in the United States. People engaging in the dialogue about immigration reveal different dimensions of the topic. It is a multi-faceted topic because it touches on varied values and vulnerabilities that a person has, be they of a law-abiding citizen concerned about the wellbeing of their community, a social services worker unsure of their role in aiding or reporting an undocumented person, or a loved one facing the turmoil brought on by the threat of arrest or deportation due to their own undocumented status. For those who have any shadow of doubt about their own or a loved one’s legal status, the topic of immigration has hit home; it is knocking on their door.

Whether immigrant families are documented or undocumented (do or do not have the status to reside legally in the United States), the attitudes and regulations related to immigration still have the potential to negatively impact them. There are an estimated 11.7 million undocumented immigrants living across the country (Passel, Cohn & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2012). Inevitably, some of these immigrants will enter the higher education system of the United States. Roughly 1.7 million undocumented immigrants are students (Passel & Lopez, 2012). Some sources estimate that 65,000 are estimated to graduate from high school each year and about 13,000 of those who graduate enter institutions of higher education (Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2010).

Nationally, Latinos make up 77% of all undocumented immigrants in the United States and 56% of undocumented students who graduate each year (Drachman, 2006; Gonzales, 2007).

Community colleges often serve as a gateway to higher education for such students because of their relatively open access, fewer admissions regulations and lower cost than four year universities (Biswas, 2005; Gonzales, 2009), thus research is needed that addressed the unique experiences and opportunities found by Latino undocumented students at community colleges. Researching the factors that led this population of students to not simply attend, but complete, an associate degree would indicate successful strategies that community colleges could employ to increase degree attainment for marginalized students such as those with undocumented status within their institutions. Based on the growing number of undocumented students in the United States educational system, it is critical to understand how institutions of higher learning retain and graduate these college students (Muñoz, 2013).

Undocumented students are people who do not have the required legal permission or status to be in the United States. They may have entered the country without authorization, often at an unmonitored point of entry. This could have happened with or without their knowledge, depending on the student's age at the time they entered the country. It is also possible that an undocumented student once had legal status but has overstayed their visitor's visa. Studies have shown that a majority of undocumented students, especially those who have gone through the K-12 system, consider the United States to be home (Barato, 2009; College Spark, 2010; Gonzales, 2009; W. Pérez, 2010). Some have lived here for many years and do not have memories of their country of origin. Additionally, returning to their country of origin would be challenging due to language, culture and societal systems that are unfamiliar to them. Many of these students are acculturated to the United States' educational system and are not easily identifiable. In other words, they blend in, making the notion of clearly identifying undocumented students unrealistic. Undocumented students are class presidents, athletes, honor roll students, and aspiring teachers

and doctors (W. Pérez, 2010b). Price (2010) notes, “Many undocumented students have lived in the United States practically their entire lives, but they have fewer rights than visiting international students” (p. 2).

In the landmark 1982 decision *Plyler v. Doe* (457 U.S. 202) the Supreme Court ruling declared undocumented students have a right to education at the K-12 level, but there is no consensus on whether that right extends into higher education (W. Pérez, 2010b). *Plyler v. Doe* (457 U.S. 202) allowed undocumented students to receive legal access to students K-12; the court stated “The illegal alien of today may well be the legal alien of tomorrow, and that, without an education, these undocumented children, already disadvantaged as a result of poverty, lack of English-speaking ability, and undeniable racial prejudices...will become permanently locked into the lowest socio-economic class” (1982). Some states, such as Indiana and Colorado, allow them to enroll as international students, ineligible for in-state tuition; while other states, such as California and Texas, allow undocumented students to have in-state tuition and financial aid (Joaquin, 2014).

As the debate continues on immigration and the rights of undocumented students, institutions of higher learning are seeing an increase in the number of undocumented individuals seeking an education, especially at the community college level. The low cost and proximity to home allows undocumented students to access a quality and affordable education (Barato, 2009; Biswas, 2005; W. Pérez, 2010). In-state tuition, which would allow undocumented students to access the same rate as an in-state resident, would alleviate much of the burden that undocumented students face in accessing higher education. The high cost of international student rates, which can be up to three times as much as an in-state resident, is a real hurdle for undocumented students who plan to attend a four-year institution. In addition, since these

students may not qualify for federal or state financial aid (except in a few states, such as California and Texas), eligibility for in-state tuition does not guarantee that students will be able to afford the cost (Martinez, 2012). Such are the financial challenges that sometimes drive undocumented students to community colleges, where tuition rates are lower than at a four-year university. In addition, future trends suggest that the occupations most in demand will require an associate's degree or above, thus the need exists to educate undocumented Latino students.

It is a challenge to determine the exact number of undocumented students being served because they infrequently reveal their status for fear of deportation or other legal consequences, although an estimated 7,000-13,000 undocumented students will access higher education in any given year (Barato, 2009; Biswas, 2005; Martinez, 2012; Passel, 2005). No federal law to date requires institutions of higher learning to engage in immigration enforcement actions based on assumptions about a student's legal status, nor is there a law requiring students to prove citizenship in order to access institutions of higher education in the United States (Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009; Gonzales, 2009).

For admissions purposes, it is critical to understand that undocumented students are not international students. International students must present student visa applications to immigration authorities prior to enrollment as well as register in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Undocumented students do not have those requirements. Undocumented students do not have the types of forms needed to render them subject to immigration regulations for higher education (Seattle University, 2011). Furthermore, according to Seattle University's School of Law (2011) many studies indicate that the federal government recognizes the importance of access to higher education regardless of legal immigration status. They find the most relevant provision is indicated in the Illegal Immigration Reform and

Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, which does not bar any undocumented student access to higher education; it only requires that any state status that provides undocumented students eligibility for post-secondary education benefits must also provide the same opportunity for similarly situated U.S. citizens, regardless of residence. The definition of “post-secondary education benefits” varies from state to state. Thus, the issue of in-state tuition for undocumented students is continuously debated.

Undocumented students are predominantly enrolling at the nation’s community colleges. As a result of their long history of educating traditionally excluded working-class and racial minority groups, community colleges are known as the “people’s college” (Pérez, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortez, 2007). They have created a pipeline for Latinos to access a college education. Considering the unstable and faulty higher education system that is available for many Latinos, it is no wonder that an increase in their enrollment has been noted at the community college level. Currently, Latinos comprise 16% of the population of all community college students (Núñez, Johnelle, & Hernandez, 2011). Additionally, Latinos make up the majority of unauthorized immigrants that are enrolled in institutions of higher education (Passel & Cohn, 2009).

Community colleges’ affordability, accessible locations, open door admissions policies, flexibility in coursework and enrollment, along with the perception that they are institutions for the people, make them seem much more welcoming to undocumented students (Cortes, 2008; Gonzales, 2007; Jauregui, Slate, & Brown, 2008; Núñez et al., 2011; Osegura, Flores, & Burciaga, 2010). Nationally, Latino immigrants have chosen the community college system as the most viable option to pursue their educational endeavors (Dozier, 2001; Núñez et al., 2011), especially for undocumented students. The reality is ineligibility for in-state tuition as well as

federal and state financial aid is a major barrier that undocumented students face when deciding to attend institutions of higher education in the U.S., which makes community college a more practical and accessible option for these students.

As they become more comfortable, some undocumented students may identify themselves to faculty and student development professionals, sharing their struggle to find a place that will provide support for them. By sharing their stories, an increased awareness of undocumented students in higher education institutions has taken place. It has also challenged the myths surrounding who undocumented students are. Many undocumented students have begun to emerge from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Their stories vary as to why and how they entered institutions of higher learning.

Studies show undocumented students have long existed in our institutions of higher education; yet community colleges have the opportunity to create an environment that empowers students to reveal their immigration status to faculty and student affairs practitioners (Rincon, 2010). With the increased knowledge of undocumented students within colleges and universities comes the responsibility of these institutions to have a clear understanding of who these students are and a willingness to challenge existing misconceptions. Institutions of higher education should examine how to best serve undocumented students, who are often plagued with limited resources. We must also begin the courageous conversations about what happens to these students once they graduate from the institutions. The stage is set for these conversations as undocumented students are protected under the fundamental rights to privacy. All federal and state privacy laws apply to undocumented students, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects the privacy of student records at all educational institutions, including colleges and universities (Seattle University, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to tell the stories of undocumented Latino students who have completed an associate degree through Oregon's community colleges, thus providing context and validity for their experiences. Their stories were recorded with their own voice using a narrative inquiry methodology, specifically *testimonios*, a culturally relevant methodology. The study was relevant and necessary for the following reasons: (a) a large and growing number of undocumented Latino students are accessing community college, (b) community colleges represent a gateway for undocumented students seeking access to higher education, and (c) it provides a means for providing more context to a social justice matter-education for undocumented students. Specifically, the experience of undocumented students in Oregon community colleges represents an area in which very limited current research exists. The topic merited further study. It is critical to give a platform and voice to this marginalized group of students who have challenges that are unique due to their legal status in the United States. Mendez (2007) notes, for example,

Latinos constitute 18.3 percent of the traditional college aged population; yet make up only 11 percent of total enrollment. Additionally, Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the nation (p. 1).

According to the Immigration Policy Center (2010), the Latino population in Oregon has risen from 4.0% in 1990 to 11% in 2008, a significant rise in the population. Researchers estimate that, "by 2017, nearly one-third of Oregon's k-12 students will be Latino" (Patrick-Knox, 2011, p. 1). Due to the explosive growth Oregon has already seen and is going to continue experiencing, examination of the experiences of Latino undocumented students merits further study. Immigration has knocked at the door of higher education. It is overdue for student affairs

practitioners, faculty, administrators and scholars to look critically at the lived experiences of the undocumented students we are serving and will continue to serve.

Undocumented individuals do not have legal authority to work or live in the communities they have built; because they may have entered the United States unauthorized or overstayed limits on their visas. Still, institutions of higher education need to recognize that undocumented students are participants in everyday campus life; they eat in campus cafeterias, get involved in leadership opportunities, and do research in the library (Gildersleeve, Rumann, & Mondragon, 2010). As they are a part of the campus community, it is critical to write about their experiences in order to advocate for them, particularly in cases when they cannot fully speak for themselves for fear of legal consequences. These students need a voice and effective advocacy, not only within the institutions they attend, but also at the state and federal level so that policies that impact them might be examined. Their voices and stories need to be taken into consideration when policies are created and implemented.

This study aimed to shed light on the experiences of these students within the context of Oregon community colleges. Latino students are a particularly relevant group to study, as their immigration has impacted the United States on various levels, ranging from economic to the political. Furthermore, Latinos are the fastest growing immigrant population in the Pacific Northwest (Patrick-Knox, 2011). Undocumented Latino students have the right to be heard and valued within institutions of higher education, for thousands of undocumented college students have attended and graduated from those same institutions that have opened doors to them across the nation. These students' experiences have received very little scholarly attention. Their experiences, after they have completed a two-year college degree, have not been researched; this study could potentially influence state and federal policies that directly impact undocumented

students (Rincon, 2008). State financial aid is an example of an issue that may be reconsidered, opened, or expanded as a result of further research, where it is currently closed or restricted to undocumented students.

Research Problem & Question

In addition to facing the difficulties that confront many first generation college students, such as having low income and/or a limited understanding of the higher education system (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010), undocumented students face unique challenges that their peers with legal status do not. From limited employment opportunities to restricted social services resources to the inability to legally drive to school, these students have distinct disadvantages that their peers do not have (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010; Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Furthermore, undocumented students do not have access to federal or state financial aid, loans, or programs that are funded with federal monies, such as the Federal TRiO Programs (TRiO). Federally funded programs, such as TRiO, are tailored to support low-income, first generation college students, but undocumented students cannot access its resources while their peers of legal status can.

College Spark (2010) notes five barriers that undocumented students face in higher education: financial insufficiency, lack of support before high school graduation, parental opposition, feelings of isolation, and lack of support after high school graduation. Gonzales (2007) states there is a great risk of losing a generation of students who have the potential to impact their communities in a positive manner. It is unfortunate that even when these students make the decision to attend college, their choices of institutions may be limited because of financial constraints. Such dynamics fuel the increasing number of undocumented students looking to community colleges to meet their educational needs, but the infrastructure to support these students does not exist (Barato, 2009; Gonzales, 2007; Pérez et al., 2009; Price, 2010).

Once these students attend a community college, they can be some of the neediest students in college because most are not eligible to legally work or receive most financial aid (Price, 2010). Some researchers believe that institutions of higher education have created a broken educational pipeline for undocumented students (Gonzales, 2009; Rincon, 2010). These students can legally attend most public colleges; yet, they are limited in the degrees they may pursue due to their legal status. For example, they cannot earn degrees that require a state license (i.e. nursing and teaching) due to lacking the documentation, such as work permits and social security numbers.

While the exact number of undocumented, college-eligible students in the Pacific Northwest is unknown, further research into this population in this region illuminated the struggles brought on by the education system as well as the strategies these individuals used to overcome obstacles and achieve success in the education realm. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates 150,000 undocumented people live in Oregon or about 5.4% of the state's population (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Studies indicate that undocumented students are entering and will continue to enter higher education. Conservative estimates report that, nationally, 5 to 10 percent of undocumented students are eligible to attend an institution of higher education, and 17% of undocumented people are under the age of 18 (National Immigration Law Center, 2009; Passel, 2005). An exact calculation of the number of undocumented students who are college eligible and/or are attending Oregon institutions of higher learning is difficult to obtain since institutions do not track undocumented students. Nationally, the estimates range from several hundred to several thousand undocumented students that would be eligible to attend a college or university in states that have attempted to pass or passed in-state tuition bills (National Immigration Law Center, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to tell the stories of undocumented Latino students who had completed an associate degree through Oregon's community colleges. In order to thoroughly address the purpose of this study, the following key questions framed the review of the existing literature, as well as the research design: (a) Why do undocumented Latino students attend a community college? (b) What factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students? and (c) What have been the lived experiences of these students during their time at a community college? These questions were relevant because in spite of the substantial hurdles that undocumented students face such as ineligibility for state or federal financial aid and little access to scholarships, these students earned a two-year associates degree. Furthermore, these questions explored – from the perspective of the students – how students navigated the community college context and how cultural, family, economic and immigration experiences helped shaped how they experienced and completed college.

Their experience as undocumented students in community colleges is critical in addressing how institutions of higher learning can adjust their policies and advocate for undocumented students at the state level. Little research exists that focuses on the Pacific Northwest, specifically the state of Oregon; thus, this study contributed to new knowledge to the topic in a specific region of the United States. Furthermore, no research exists in regard to the factors that have led undocumented students to successfully complete a college degree in this region, specifically a two-year associate degree. Researching the factors that have led this population of students to complete an associate degree would also indicate successful strategies that community colleges can employ to increase other degree and/or certificate attainment for marginalized students within their institutions. The significance and further rationale for this study is addressed in the following section.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant for several key reasons. Although undocumented Latino students have been studied in the past, that research has focused primarily on four-year institutions. More specifically, a large and growing number of undocumented Latino students are accessing community college, and community college represents a gateway for undocumented students seeking access to higher education. It has also been limited to certain states and geographic regions, such as Texas and California or the Southwest, which have had historically larger Latino populations. It is critical to examine the role of the community colleges further, as they are the most likely destination for undocumented students (as established by the previously mentioned research), therefore more understanding of their experiences would help community colleges be more effective in helping these students succeed.

This study may provide different aspects and/or implications of these trends. There is a growing Latino population in Oregon. As this participant-researcher heard the lived experiences of undocumented Latino Oregon community college students, results could be informative to various stakeholders – ranging from faculty, staff, and administrators of community colleges to community leaders and the students themselves. These questions are important because they could contribute to new scholarly knowledge and give insight on how community colleges can better serve these students. The following section supports this research study by discussing the current focus of the research that exists about undocumented students in institutions of higher education in the United States.

Limited attention has been given to (degree-completing) undocumented students.

Access and retention of undocumented students has been the focus of prior research because historically undocumented students have had difficulties in these areas in higher education.

Undocumented students enrolled in and attending institutions of higher learning have been studied intensively in the past two decades with numerous researchers focusing their studies on the access and retention of these students (Abrego, 2006; Biswas, 2005; Cortes, 2008; Gonzales, 2007, 2009; Pérez et al., 2010). Research on undocumented students in higher education, however, mainly focuses on states with major immigrant populations; included in the list of states with this makeup are California, South Carolina, Texas, Florida and Arizona (Gonzales, 2009; Muñoz, 2008; Pérez et al., 2010; Pérez-Huber & Malagon, 2007; Rincon, 2010). Still, exploration of strategies employed in other states, like access to in-state tuition and state financial aid, will be utilized as needed.

According to Price (2010), “Many undocumented students proclaim a sense of loyalty and indebtedness to the United States higher education system, although this system has afforded them fewer opportunities than are available to most other students” (p. 2). Additionally, the migration experience is one that fundamentally reshapes undocumented immigrants’ lives, and the rich experiences they bring also impact the classrooms in which these students learn (Pérez et al., 2010). Thus, the relevancy and impact of undocumented students’ status in the American educational system exists.

Despite the depth of literature on access and retention, limited research exists investigating the experiences of undocumented students who have completed their associate degrees at a community college. Most research has focused on access and retention of undocumented students in four-year institutions (Barato, 2009). Estimates based on the national statistics about undocumented students in the Kindergarten through 12th grade system, as well as the participant-researchers’ experience helping students, suggests that it is likely that hundreds of undocumented students graduate from Oregon high schools and enter the Oregon community

college system. The educational trials and triumphs of such students need to be heard and understood if the key to degree completion is to be found. Upon deepening and organizing the data on the experiences of undocumented students at Oregon community colleges, this research has the potential to inform state education policies such as state financial aid availability to undocumented students. It is critical to develop our understanding of undocumented students in the context of higher education, for these individuals are caught in a unique web where federal, state, and local policies may not always coincide (Gildersleeve et al., 2010).

Focus is needed on the community college. Community colleges are in a crucial and critical position; they serve the purpose of educating the surrounding, local community. Biswas (2005) notes that “Community college systems typically serve as the first point of entry into post-secondary education for many of the of the nation’s underserved and low-income population” (p. 1). The case is no different for undocumented students. Community colleges serve as an accessible entry to higher education for many immigrants and their children. They provide access to the education, skills training, and English-language proficiency acquisition that are crucial for immigrants to successfully integrate into and contribute to their communities (Wisell, 2010). As an increasing number of undocumented students enroll in community colleges in Oregon, it is critical for research to address what happens to undocumented students after graduation. Do these students obtain jobs and follow their desired careers? Most of the research on undocumented students focuses on the challenges that these youth face in accessing and persisting in four-year colleges and universities (Abrego, 2006; Cortes, 2008; Flores & Horn, 2009; Pérez-Huber & Malagon, 2007). This research study focused on the experiences in community colleges because these institutions are a central educational pipeline for undocumented students across the United States.

Research supports that undocumented students tend to enroll at community colleges rather than in four-year colleges and universities; yet a number of scholars argue that community colleges do not support Latino students' aspirations to transfer to four-year institutions (Pérez-Huber & Malagon, 2007; Wisell, 2010). This study could lead to a higher and more effective level of advocacy for these marginalized immigrant students, especially in the areas where community colleges have been found deficient. By recording these students' experiences, institutions ranging from the local community college to the bodies that govern the state's higher education system could be enlightened or held accountable for the current conditions undocumented students are facing. At the same time, these institutions can be given the opportunity to inform their policy and practice to ensure undocumented students' future success. What happens to undocumented students after community college is a question fraught with both political and economic significance.

Theoretical Lens

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) is a theoretical lens that draws from a critical social science approach. This study used this theory as a framework. The theory emerged out of the need to address issues that were more particular than race/ethnicity, as in the case of Latinos (Villalpando, 2003, p. 42). It expands critical social science scholarship by addressing how racism intersects with other types of subordination, including sexism, imperialism, and language oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993). It emphasizes the complex experiences and identities of Latinos, including language rights, immigration, citizenship, ethnicity, gender, phenotype, culture and cultural preservation, identity, and sexuality (González & Portillos, 2007; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Martinez, 1994). It also explores the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

This study aligned well with the definition of LatCrit, as it aimed to study the intersection of college students, Latinos and immigration status.

Some undocumented students have been a marginalized people who have survived and thrived in societies that have resisted embracing them or have refused them opportunities to serve, live and work in the communities they have known (Gonzales, 2009). The main purpose of critical social science is to empower individuals so they themselves may be liberated and change their conditions (Freire, 1970). Critical social science is a useful lens through which to view situations where fundamental inequalities in power, including status and resources, exist (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011).

The LatCrit theoretical framework within this study considered the intersection of race and other issues such as immigration status and language, which undocumented Latino students negotiated in their educational careers. Historically, the U.S. immigration law has been used as a tool to legally exclude and marginalize immigrants and people of color (Pérez-Huber, 2010). LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinos by addressing issues often overlooked by other perspectives. Such issues include immigration status, language, ethnicity, culture, identity, and phenotype. It gives researchers a more focused lens to examine the experiences of Latino students and their respective communities.

By approaching the research through the lens of a critical social scientist, specifically Latino Critical theory, the factors affecting marginalized undocumented students were highlighted. Working from a social justice perspective, the participant-researcher's primary goal in conducting the study was to provide information that may be useful to individual study participants, other undocumented students, and to the institutions that enroll these students.

Summary

Research supports that undocumented students tend to enroll at community colleges rather than in four-year institutions (Gonzales, 2007; P. Pérez, 2010). Many undocumented students have entered and exited through their doors, marking the start and completion of their degrees at a community college. Most scholarly research has focused on undocumented students accessing and being retained at four-year institutions, despite the fact that their experiences are known to be different from their peers at those institutions. This study addressed the gap in the literature while providing a scholarly platform for what the experiences of undocumented community college students have been.

A substantial number of undocumented students have entered the educational pipeline, yet little is known about their experiences at the community college level. Thus, the purpose of this study was to tell the stories of undocumented Latino students who have completed an associate degree through Oregon's community colleges, thus providing context and validity for their experiences. It provided a scholarly platform to hear the voices of undocumented Latino students at community colleges in Oregon in order to glean strategies and factors that lead to student success.

Community colleges can begin the dialogue that examines the issues that undocumented students face in the workforce. The outcomes of this dialogue could transform students' lives and enhance the nation's social and economic security. Researchers argue that allowing undocumented students to pursue an education through the U.S. higher education system and to have an opportunity to legally work within the United States would benefit all and impact the economy in a positive manner (Gonzales, 2009; W. Pérez, 2010). Focusing specifically on their post-secondary experiences could contribute to research that could ultimately facilitate such an

outcome. Price (2010) argues, “If we are successful in creating these open and supportive environments, it is not just our undocumented students who will benefit. Our institutions stand to benefit greatly as well” (p. 3). Scholars, such as Gonzales (2007), note that community colleges stand as the epicenter of the educational advancement of undocumented students and are one of the most crucial links to the local labor markets in which these populations will enter either formally or informally. The evident deficiency in the scholarly research pertaining to undocumented students who have completed a two-year college degree and the experiences they had throughout that journey ensured the validation, relevance, and need of this study.

The local community college has been serving as an accessible entry to higher education for many undocumented students. Hundreds of undocumented students graduate from high schools and enter the community college system each year, a phenomenon that merited further study. As the immigrant population grows in the Pacific Northwest, so will the issue of undocumented students in community colleges. In addition, added purpose was found in this qualitative research study in its promotion of social justice. By shedding light on the conditions of a specific group of people who often live in the shadows, individuals may consider their roles in perpetuating the society and systems that may be oppressing individuals who are enriching our lives or contributing to our communities. Using *testimonios*, the study examined the experiences of undocumented students at community colleges during and after their educational journey. Assisting undocumented students is truly a question of human dignity, equality, equity, and civil rights with implications for society as a whole (Gildersleeve et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2009). By addressing the reality that undocumented students face while they have earned a degree from a community college, this study could assist in reviewing the larger policies impacting these students in a manner that is relevant and transformative.

As the opening quote of this section states, “What happens to a dream deferred?”

Keeping in mind that this question was posed by a brilliant individual who also faced marginalization and battled the shadows of oppression – what happens when these students are refused their dreams or the opportunity to reach their full potential? How can community colleges become partners with these students instead of allowing themselves to be counted amongst history’s long line of perpetrators in the fight for equity? Community colleges cannot lose sight of the opportunity for undocumented students to earn an associate degree along with all the possibilities that are granted with an educated and equitable community.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of this study was to capture the personal stories and experiences, in their own voices, of undocumented Latino students who attended an Oregon community college. The purpose of this study was to tell the stories of undocumented Latino students who have completed an associate degree through Oregon's community colleges, thus providing context and validity to their experience. The research questions that guided this study were: a) Why do undocumented Latino students attend a community college? (b) What factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students? and (c) What have been the lived experiences of these students during their time at a community college?

This chapter examined the literature about undocumented Latino students in higher education and demonstrated the need for a study that explored the experiences of such students within the context of a community college. Prompting the literature review was the fact that the experiences of undocumented Latino community college students had not been fully explored in a manner that addresses the inequities of a broken immigration system that exists in the United States today. This national, political issue of immigration undoubtedly intersects the current higher education system, as evidenced by the presence of our undocumented students in our schools. Specifically, Latinos make up 77% of undocumented people in the United States (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2011), leading to their significant numbers in the undocumented student population.

The literature review was divided into three major sections, each focusing on and contributing towards the intention of the study: (a) governing federal and state policies on educating undocumented students; (b) higher education experiences of undocumented Latino

students; and (c) experience of undocumented Latino students in community colleges. In addition to an in-depth review of the literature in these areas, contributions and connections to the literature to the research study were highlighted.

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of undocumented students in community college, the literature review explored the major research studies that were relevant to them and were intertwined with their experiences within institutions of higher education across the United States. Following is the description of the approach to the literature review, with major themes within the literature identified, as well as definitions of key words and concepts that are critical to understanding the literature.

After laying the groundwork for the review, the findings within the three sections of literature were detailed and summarized. The literature review began with an overview of policies that govern undocumented students in higher education. An overview of such policies had been designated the first major section in order to give the reader a historical framework for the research study.

Approach to the Literature Review

During the initial steps, the participant-researcher conducted searches and found relevant articles primarily within the ERIC, EBSCO Host, Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar and Dissertation Abstracts databases. Initial searches using the keywords “community college” and “undocumented students” were not successful because of the limited research that currently exists; using alternate keywords (such as “illegal students,” “higher education,” and “completion”) was also not successful. Once relevant articles and journal articles were narrowed down and noted, the participant-researcher scanned the references of a given work to record additional authors and journals to research. The participant-researcher then searched the original

articles and journals from which the databases yielded their results. Once that avenue was exhausted, focus shifted to finding books that were also cited in relevant articles and journals. Articles and books were identified as relevant if they addressed issues of completion of a higher education degree (whether at a two- or four-year institution of higher education) among undocumented students. An emphasis was placed on literature published within the last 12 years within the United States, in order to establish relevancy with the current national context.

Due to the nature of the research topic, only two articles were found that were older than 10 years; their relevance was limited. Thus, articles older than 10 years were excluded. An effort was made to identify primary research studies, including quantitative and qualitative design, as well as articles in peer-reviewed journals.

These articles proved useful in three ways because they provided: (a) further citations to related studies; (b) a larger pool of researcher names for follow-up; and (c) relevant keywords for further research. Once the same researchers and studies were repeatedly identified using the various avenues outlined, the participant-researcher was able to determine that she had exhausted the relevant scholarly research currently available. Once the participant-researcher reached this point, she categorized the sources of information by themes.

Emerging Themes

An initial literature search yielded themes ranging from access of undocumented students to the academic resiliency of undocumented students within institutions of higher education. Three major areas of focus stem from the literature search: (a) governing federal and state policies on educating undocumented students; (b) higher education experiences of undocumented Latino students at four-year universities and colleges; and (c) experiences of undocumented Latino students in community colleges. These themes lead to several research questions: Why

do undocumented Latino students attend a community college? and What factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students? This line of questioning, along with patterns found within the literature, pointed to an overarching research question: What have been the lived experiences of these students during their time at a community college?

Definition of Terms and Concepts

The following section of the literature review defined the following key terms and concepts, which were used within the research study: undocumented students and completion. Also, terms that were used to describe undocumented students in the literature, alien and illegal immigrant, were addressed. It is important to note that literature interchanges the terms “undocumented,” “alien,” and “illegal” when describing these students. The participant-researcher made a conscious choice not to use “alien” or “illegal” in the study, for those words are politically charged and create a rhetoric that is degrading and ill-willed. It is the participant-researcher’s assertion that no human being is illegal, so by using these terms it would be difficult to represent or give voice to a marginalized population.

The terms “alien” and “illegal” are also misleading. “Alien” implies that someone is non-human, while “illegal” reinforces a criminal stereotype, which is an ethical and moral error. According to the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (2006), under current federal law, it is not a crime to be in the United States without proper documentation; rather it is a civil violation. Recently, states such as Arizona have made it a criminal violation; the Obama Administration in the courts challenged this move, although the case was not won since it did not challenge it on the basis of racial discrimination (Guttentag, 2012). At any rate, there is no single, agreed upon definition to describe foreign-born, non-citizens who reside within the

United States. The following section defines the terms that are predominantly used in current scholarly sources and are referenced in the study.

Alien. According to the United States Code, Title 8 (Cornell University Law School, 2011) an alien is “any person not a citizen or national of the United States.”

Completion. For the purpose of this study, completion is referred to as earning a degree from a two-year institution of higher education.

Illegal immigrant. No legal definition exists for this term, although sources generally use this term to refer to non-citizens who entered the United States without government permission or stayed beyond the termination date of a visa.

Latino. The name used to refer to persons residing in the United States whose ancestries are from Latin American countries in the Western Hemisphere. This term is more inclusive than Hispanic. It includes people from Latin America (e.g., Peru, Argentina, Puerto Rico, and Guatemala) who do not necessarily speak Spanish (e.g., Portuguese, etc.). This definition includes the universal terms for both male and female, it can also be used to specifically address males (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2011), Latinos are a native or inhabitant of Latin America or a person of Latin-American origin living in the United States. In this study, Latino were referred to both male and female gender. When referring specifically to females, then the participant-researcher used Latina.

Undocumented person. An undocumented person is a foreign national who: (a) entered the United States without inspection or with fraudulent documents; or (b) entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status and remained in the United States without authorization (Dozier, 2001). According to Hoefer, Rytina, and Campbell (2007), “undocumented” or “unauthorized” are equivalent descriptors that refer to individuals who do

not have federal government-issued documents that show they can legally visit, work, or live in the United States.

Overview of Sections

Most college-bound undocumented students have lived in the United States for much of their lives; they have been brought to the U.S. by their parents at a young age, learned English and think of themselves as American. According to Passel and Lopez (2012), there are an estimated 1.7 million undocumented students who fall into this category. Many attended elementary, middle, and high school in this country and have excelled academically in high school and want to pursue a college education. They currently lack a way to become legal residents or citizens in the United States.

The section on state and federal educational policies impacting undocumented students summarized the history of such legislation within the United States, including how they affect access and tuition rates. A study was highlighted in which the local support of Latino immigrants in a particular state served as the determining factor for whether undocumented students were welcomed into the institution of higher education. The relationship and interactions between federal and state policies shaping the educational opportunities available for undocumented students were difficult to interpret since, many times, the policies conflict (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Additionally, the fact that state laws vary greatly make it an almost impossible task for students to navigate successfully; yet many undocumented students still graduate from institutions of higher learning (Gonzalez, 2009; W. Pérez, 2010).

The section addressing experiences of undocumented Latino students in higher education illustrated how undocumented students on college campuses are caught in a system that is unclear about how it can or cannot support them. Thousands of undocumented students graduate

from high schools in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011), many aspiring to enter a college or university. One study noted that one in twenty undocumented high school seniors attend college (Protopsaltis, 2005). As they seek to continue their education, many face barriers and risks that are unique to them, and these are in addition to the usual sacrifices an aspiring college graduate often makes. Not only does their immigration status limit what financial resources they can access, but many of these students do not reveal their status due to fear of deportation, discrimination, and alienation within institutions (Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2009). These students are left restricted from the traditional college success story, since many are not employable due to their legal status after graduation. Furthermore, they cannot gain legal employment in the areas in which they have degrees and/or certificates. Essentially, undocumented students are legally excluded from the workforce. If they find work, most are paid at or below minimum wage, thus adding to and perpetuating the low-wage immigrant workforce (Capps, Fix, Passel, Ost, & Pérez-Lopez, 2003).

The third section on undocumented Latino students in community colleges focused on studies detailing the experiences of Latinos in this setting; most of the studies that focused on undocumented Latino students in community college stemmed from California and Texas. Community colleges are at a critical position in the community; they serve the purpose of providing education to community members. As the number of undocumented students who access community colleges across the United States increases significantly due to open-access policies and affordability, it is crucial for research to address where undocumented students end up after graduation as well as the factors that influence their success (Barato, 2009; Flores & Horn, 2009). The studies reviewed in that section of the literature review attest to the importance of further focused studies of undocumented Latino students in community colleges.

Governing Federal and State Policies of Educating Undocumented Students

The first step in developing a keen understanding of undocumented students and their journey in higher education is to comprehend the legal context, both state and federal, through which these students wade. This legal context holds the key to explaining why undocumented students have a distinct disadvantage compared to their documented peers in institutions of higher education. They may face similar struggles, such as being first generation or low-income students; but they do not have access to the same opportunities. Examples of such opportunities include the availability of state or federal financial aid as well as the option to legally work in order to pay for their education (Gildersleeve et al., 2010). Career development research (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008) regards college internships as a means to higher levels of employability; but for undocumented students, this may be an opportunity that is unattainable, furthermore “the notion of employability is substantially complex because of their immigration status” (Muñoz, 2013, p. 10); thus, the inability to obtain a college internship, which could hinder the opportunity for undocumented students to gain valuable work experience. Other economic and social resources are also often limited, except in cases of emergencies (e.g. emergency medical care). Additionally, undocumented students do not have the same protection under the law as their documented peers. For example, they are not provided access to an attorney if the Department of Homeland Security detains them.

Gildersleeve, Rumann and Mondragón (2010) assert that immigration has largely been considered within the purview of the federal government, while education has been the domain of the state governments; an exception would be federal student loans. In terms of how state and federal laws have trickled down to educational institutions, the institutional policies that support established laws have been left to individual schools or the individual state system of education.

When federal immigration policies begin to transect the educational systems existing in a given state, confusion can occur. The lack of clarity is often rooted in the fact that immigration and education issues have only intersected in the legal context in relatively few cases. Historically, institutions of higher education have received little direction regarding the rights of undocumented students. Thus, higher education institutions are left dependent on state and/or institutional policies as guides for how educational opportunities are to be provided for these populations (Oseguera et al., 2010). The following is an overview of relevant immigration court rulings that many institutions of higher education and states attempt to draw upon to determine their own policies in regards to undocumented students.

Before 1982, many states had begun creating barriers for undocumented children attempting to attend public school. Still, in 1982 the Supreme Court case of *Plyer vs. Doe* granted undocumented students access to public education in the K-12 system (Plyer v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202, 1982; Rincon, 2008; Yates, 2004). The Supreme Court ruled that undocumented students must be provided access to a public education; it was this landmark decision that made K-12 education a right for undocumented students. The Court noted that educating children, regardless of their legal status, was essential for creating individuals who could function and contribute to the United States (W. Pérez, 2009). According to Feder (2010), the ruling means such students are covered under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which provides that no state shall “deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Unfortunately, the 1982 landmark decision did not include the right for undocumented students to access higher education. This has led to various states differing in laws and policies that bar undocumented students’ access to higher education. For example states, such as South

Carolina, have recently implemented a law that makes it a crime for undocumented students to attend any public institution of higher education within the state (Gildersleeve et al., 2010).

Despite such laws, an estimated 13,000 undocumented students between the ages of 18 and 24 have enrolled in public and private institutions of higher education each year in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

In-state tuition. One of the biggest challenges that undocumented students have had in attending institutions of higher education is the high cost of tuition, as many undocumented students are charged international or out-of-state tuition rates. Several states have begun to address this obstacle by allowing undocumented students to access in-state tuition. According to Gildersleeve, Rumann, and Mondragon (2010) the primary case that directly addressed whether undocumented students could be offered in-state tuition was the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Toll v. Moreno*. The Supreme Court found that in-state tuition did not have to be limited to U.S. citizens and legal residents (Burdman, 2005). Still, most states continue to charge undocumented students out-of-state tuition even when the student has resided in the state for years. This presents a major hurdle, seeing as out-of-state tuition can be three times the cost of in-state tuition.

Most undocumented students come from lower-income families and cannot afford the high cost of out-of-state tuition. Some states have begun to offer in-state tuition for undocumented students in order to ease the burden; others have taken it a step further and have made undocumented students eligible for state financial aid and state grants. As of June 2014, seventeen states have policies that allow students who have attended and graduated from in-state high schools to qualify for in-state tuition regardless of their immigration status (Joaquin, 2014). On April 4, 2013, HB 2787 was signed in Oregon granting in-state tuition to undocumented

college students, who have graduated from an Oregon high school and lived in the state for at least 3 years (Your, 2013); becoming the thirteenth state to allow in-state tuition for undocumented students. The bill is similar to other in-state tuition bills across the United States. By meeting certain residency requirements and signing an affidavit that the student will seek legal status, undocumented students can pay in-state tuition.

Three of the seventeen states, California, New Mexico and Texas, also allow undocumented students to receive state financial aid. Still, while undocumented immigrants in these states are allowed to attend college at in-state tuition rates, they are still not able to work due to their undocumented status even if they earn a college degree (W. Pérez, 2009; Gildersleeve et al., 2010).

Díaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners (2010) note that four states (Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, and Indiana) ban undocumented students from receiving in-state tuition, while two states (Alabama and South Carolina) ban undocumented students from even attending community colleges. North Carolina allows undocumented students to enroll in their community college system, but students have to pay out-of-state tuition. To complicate this complex web of state laws further, there are other governing bodies adding another layer of regulation. For example, Rhode Island's Board of Governors for Higher Education, not the state, allows undocumented to pay in-state tuition; while Georgia's State Board of Regents placed a ban on admission of undocumented students.

According to Gildersleeve, Rumann, and Mondragon (2010), two federal laws most often cited concerning undocumented students' access to higher education are: (a) the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) and (b) the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). Section 505 of

the IIRIRA indicates that an “alien” who is not lawfully present in the United States is not eligible for any post-secondary education benefit on the basis of residency unless a citizen of the United States is eligible for the same benefit, regardless of whether the citizen is a resident. PRWORA further states that an unqualified “alien” is not eligible for any federal public benefit, including post-secondary education or any other benefit in which payment or other assistance is provided.

Yet, “these statutes do not prevent institutions from enrolling or admitting an undocumented immigrant student” (Ruge & Iza, 2005, p. 263). It is up to the state to interpret the intent of the law, so no uniform set of standards for undocumented students’ admission and access to higher education exists; lack of uniformity is the norm. Furthermore, no federal mandate exists that requires states or institutions of higher education to either report undocumented students to the Department of Homeland Security or refuse admission to these students (Gildersleeve et al., 2010).

Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. Due to the increase of undocumented students enrolling in institutions of higher education and the challenges these students face, Congress introduced a bill known as the Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act in 2001. The DREAM Act sought to provide a path towards citizenship for undocumented students who have been living in the United States before the age of 16, have graduated from a U.S. high school, and have lived in the U.S. continuously for at least five years. If passed, the bill would have granted undocumented students who meet these requirements an opportunity to apply for conditional status, which would grant them up to 6 years of legal residence. During this period, the students would be required to attend college for two years or serve in the military for at least two years. Once the

students meet these requirements, they would be granted permanent residency (W. Pérez, 2009; Yates, 2004). To date, the DREAM Act has passed the Senate but not the House of Representatives. Since its first introduction, modified versions of the bill have been reintroduced in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011. For more than a decade the DREAM Act has failed passing five times. The DREAM Act was also incorporated into comprehensive immigration reform bills in 2006 and 2007, which failed to pass both times (Díaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2010; Immigration Policy Center, 2010). As of 2013, a form of the DREAM Act has been incorporated into the latest attempt for a comprehensive immigration reform bill, H.R. 15, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act.

If the DREAM Act were to pass, the community college system would see a dramatic increase in undocumented students enrolling as these individuals seek to meet the requirements of the bill. Regardless of the passage of the DREAM Act, undocumented students are increasingly enrolling in institutions of higher education. As many as 13,000 undocumented students are likely to matriculate into higher education institutions, and many are likely to enroll in community colleges across the United States (Passel & Lopez, 2012). Thus, a research study that depicts the experiences of undocumented students at community colleges could provide valuable information that increases the institution's effectiveness and enhances these students' educational experiences.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). On June 14, 2012 President Barack Obama signed a memo, referred to as “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)”, calling for a temporary relief from deportation for certain undocumented people who came to the United States as children. According to Olivas (2012), on August 15, 2012 – if certain requirements are met – these individuals can apply for a temporary work visa. Some of the

requirements include being under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012 and having come to the United States before reaching their 16th birthday. This memo was directed to the thousands of young undocumented students that had been staging rallies and protests for over two years prior to the memo. The Department of Homeland Security states, “Deferred action is a discretionary determination to defer removal action of an individual as an act of prosecutorial discretion” (Homeland Security, 2012). This program “provides relief from deportation for eligible unauthorized immigrants who are ages 30 and under and arrived in the U.S before age 16” (Passel & Lopez, 2012). Although this provides some relief for these students, the memo does not allow access to federal financial aid. Additionally, some states (e.g. Arizona) still ban students that qualify for DACA from accessing higher education. According to the Pew Hispanic Center (Passel & Lopez, 2012) there are 1.7 million unauthorized immigrants ages thirty and under who eligible for Deferred Action; 950,000 would be immediately eligible while 770,000 would be eligible in the future.

Community colleges are at the center of the various state policies involving undocumented students. They are the institutions most likely to enroll Latino students, including those with uncertain citizenship status (Gonzales, 2007; W. Pérez, 2010; Strayhorn, 2007). According to Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga (2010), the two groups who are most likely to enter higher education by first attending community college are Latinos and immigrants. Two demographic forces determine this assertion: (1) the growth of the Latino population making them the nation’s largest minority and the largest national origin group of all United States immigrants, and (2) the dispersion of Latino immigrants to locations that historically have not witnessed an influx of this group (Card & Lewis, 2007; Massey & Capoferro, 2008).

Furthermore, seven out of eight college-bound undocumented students attend two-year colleges (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007).

In a study conducted by Flores and Oseguera (2009) researchers studied the local community support for immigrants in California and North Carolina, and linked these findings to the degree to which the given state's institutional and state policies afforded opportunities for undocumented students. They used individual-level data from the American Community Survey (ACS), which is available to the public from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples (IPUMS). They also used the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and system-wide post-secondary data in California and North Carolina. The IPUMS data was used to establish the demographic context and enrollment trends of Latino and Latino immigrant students over time as the newest local tenants of these states' community colleges. The ACS was a nationwide annual survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau, which provided data from 2000 to 2007 for geographic areas with a population of 65,000 or more. It used a series of monthly samples that were representative at the state level to measure how communities across the United States were changing demographically over time. Data from the IPEDS were used to provide enrollment trends for Latinos and non-resident aliens attending public two-year colleges in California and North Carolina.

Flores and Oseguera (2009) found that the provision of educational opportunity, particularly for undocumented immigrants, was influenced by federal and state law as well as by the demographic palatability of a new group. California was legally obligated to adhere to state legislative mandates that left little room for local or institutional interpretation of an individual's right to certain educational benefits. Meanwhile, North Carolina's mandates had come from a

state legal actor whose interpretations were singular and may be open to reinterpretation upon a change in office and in some cases, public response to these decisions. The North Carolina case was particularly infused with local character in that the state's primary legal officer left the issue of the admission of undocumented immigrants up to individual institutions and then, subsequently, issued a change to this decision after some negative public reaction to this decision (Lee, Frishberg, Shkodriani, Freeman, Maginnis & Bob 2009). Finally, the researchers found that the transfer of state higher education decisions to local institutions, compounded by the sudden "integration" of new cultural traditions and groups into established communities are factors determining post-secondary educational access for undocumented students, particularly at the community college level. The central issue was how each state frames the issue of undocumented students' access to their community college system and how associated admissions and tuition policies were constructed, thus this determined the policies surrounding undocumented students for those states.

In summary, several critical cases have helped shape the conversation surrounding the legality of undocumented students accessing institutions of higher education. The governing federal immigration laws are unclear about the policies states may enact in the education of undocumented students. There is growing support for federal legislation, with a "path to citizenship" as well as more states, like Oregon, providing access to in-state tuition. Yet there is no current federal legislation created to date that directs states in their treatment of undocumented students. What is clear is the fact that undocumented students are accessing our community colleges, despite inconsistent and conflicting policies found throughout the United States (Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi & Wikerson, 2010). These students are caught in a tangled web of state and institutional policies that may hinder their educational development.

Although the odds are stacked against them, undocumented students still access and achieve within higher education institutions. The following section highlights the experiences that these students have had.

Higher Education Experiences of Undocumented Latino Students

Within the past decade, numerous research studies have been conducted focusing on access and retention of undocumented students in higher education; yet, not until a few years ago have studies emerged on the lived experiences of undocumented students within those institutions, both public and private (Madera et al., 2008; Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2009; Pérez et al., 2010). Undocumented students may have achieved success as it is conventionally defined, but the nature of their experience differs greatly from other degree completers due to the unique challenges they face. Yet a significant gap exists within scholarly research in understanding the experiences these students have had within institutions of higher education, particularly within community colleges. The need for further investigation was highlighted by the fact that these students are at a higher risk of not completing (Contreras, 2009). Without access to federal or state financial aid (except in a few states that have made allowance for it) and with limited on campus resources, these students still succeeded. Their stories can provide lessons for institutions to learn what can be done to support marginalized students.

The history of undocumented students in higher education is one that has been shaped by complex federal immigration laws and the personal decisions of individuals who (or whose parents/guardians) make the decision of overstaying an immigration visa or entering the United States unlawfully, not at a port of entry. In light of the consequences, this is a decision that some find difficult, while others may consider it as an obvious or better choice due to circumstances in their home countries (i.e. extreme poverty, violence, persecution, etc.). Immigrants come to the

United States for various reasons; many are seeking opportunities for their families. When it comes to undocumented students in higher education, many researchers cite the fact that these students' parents make a decision for which the student has not had the ability to come willfully or with the full understanding of the legal ramifications (Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2007; Pérez, et al., 2009; Rincon, 2008). Still, it is necessary to have a clear grasp of the multifaceted and complex relationships the United States has had with many immigrants' home countries before faulting or judging parents; the dynamics of these U.S. and Latin American relations may contribute, if not force, these people to make the decision to uproot their families in order to pursue safety, education, and economic opportunities (Rincon, 2008).

Within three decades, the growth of the foreign-born population in the United States has tripled from less than 10 million in 1971 to 31 million in 2000, with an estimated increase to 40 million by 2010-2012 (Fix & Passel, 2003). This increase led to a demographic shift that has made itself evident in various forms, ranging from news stories covered in the local media to the presence and participation of such individuals within classrooms at the local community college. With the influx of the foreign-born population comes a rise in undocumented immigrants, all of which points to a continuing, dramatic demographic shift. As many as 500,000 to 800,000 undocumented immigrants a year were estimated to have entered the United States in the late 1990s; an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants resided in the United States during that time (Fix & Passel, 2003).

Several thousand of these undocumented immigrants have varied driving forces behind their entering the U.S., forces which include failed U.S. immigration policies and economic factors (Gonzalez, 2001). Many immigrants left extreme poverty or violence in order to seek

opportunities in the United States; these appear to be circumstances that have rarely addressed in the literature that exists about undocumented students (Gildersleeve et al., 2010).

Scholarly research depicting the experiences of undocumented students in higher education had been limited to a few studies. The most relevant studies had emerged in the past decade, focusing on the access and retention of undocumented students in higher education. One of the leading researchers, William Pérez, focused his work primarily on the experiences of undocumented students attending college. In a 2009 study, Pérez and his colleagues examined the academic resilience of undocumented Latino students. The study hypothesized that, due to legal and social marginalization, undocumented students were at high risk of academic failure. The results from regression and cluster analyses ($N = 110$) indicated that undocumented students who have high levels of personal and environmental protective factors (e.g. supportive parents and participation in school activities) reported higher levels of academic success than did students sharing similar risk factors and lower levels of personal and environmental protective factors. Examples of the risk factors the undocumented students' overcame included low parental education and high employment hours during school. Furthermore, the study found that the participants reported high levels of community service and volunteering.

The study used three main indicators of academic success: 1) grade point average, 2) number of academic awards, and 3) number of academically rigorous, honors, and AP classes. One hundred and ten undocumented Latino students from high schools, community colleges, and universities participated in the study. Significant findings of the study were that, as a group, college-eligible undocumented students demonstrated academic achievement, high leadership participation, and civic engagement above that of their U.S. citizen counterparts. Over 90% reported volunteer and community service participation, and 95% participated in extracurricular

activities. The study also found that undocumented students exhibited high levels of psychological resilience, perseverance, and optimism. The study ended with a plea for the government to recognize the civic and academic dedication of undocumented students.

That research was one of the first major studies that focused on undocumented Latino students and their experiences. The approach used in the study was expanded to use qualitative methods in order to draw richer data relating to undocumented students' personal experiences for this study. Interviews and the stories they provided could help inform further studies. The accomplishments and the great potential of undocumented students highlighted a need for further exploration and development of our collective knowledge of undocumented students within institutions of higher education.

Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2009) stressed the importance of parent and peer networks as well as extracurricular activities in the higher education academic success of undocumented students in California. Specifically, Pérez et al. (2009) argued that supportive relationships with friends and parents, along with school engagement, facilitated educational success. For those students most at-risk, access to resources helped buffer them from adversity (Pérez et al., 2009). Pérez's work yielded one of the first major studies focusing on undocumented Latino students and their experiences. The results begged the question of how such information may have or may impact undocumented students within institutions of higher education.

Another study highlighting the educational experiences of Latino undocumented students focused on a public, Hispanic-serving institution in California, (Pérez & Rodríguez, 2012). Hispanic-serving institutions are those that enroll more than 25% Latinos. The study explored the familial and institutional factors promoting educational opportunities through 15 semi-

structured interviews. The exploratory, qualitative study found several themes, ranging from “non-traditional” forms of encouragement to familial factors such as listening and understanding, to goal setting and motivation. A key finding in the study was that institutional support factors were mixed in regards to effectively facilitating the college-going process. The study utilized social capital theory, which emphasized the relationship between students, families, teachers and the community in supporting and motivating students towards academic success.

Using a social capital lens, the study captured network influences and agents on the college-going experiences of undocumented Latino students. The protocol developed for the interviews intended to capture the social capital influences within families and educational institutions, in order to increase the number of Latino students pursuing higher education. The study provided a greater understanding of the role and nature of family and institutional factors in the educational experiences of undocumented Latino college students, specifically in California. It did highlight a key difference between family and institutional support, one being more informal versus formal.

A practical recommendation was for the college information shared with students to also be shared with their families, especially siblings as findings indicate students were encouraged to attend college if a sibling was attending or had attended an institution of higher education (Pérez & Rodríguez, 2012). Additionally, institutions should develop programs that incorporate research and models of Latino populations into their curriculum and pedagogy. This scholarly work aimed to give a more holistic understanding of the Latino undocumented college student plight as well as highlighted the need for further study of this population. Pérez and Rodríguez (2012) asserted the need for further exploration although their research did not focus on the

community college experience, which is where most undocumented Latino students enter higher education.

In another qualitative study, Contreras (2009) examined the role of in-state tuition laws in facilitating higher education for undocumented Latino students in the state of Washington. Researchers used semi-structured, in-depth interviews focused on the experiences and challenges Latino students faced as they accessed higher education. The study acquired data from various types of post-secondary institutions, including a Research 1 institution, a regional comprehensive four-year institution, and six community colleges. The research focused on how in-state tuition provided easier access to undocumented Latino students but did little to address these students' lived experiences, which this study addressed in an in-depth manner.

Contreras (2009) focused on the role of legal status in the higher educational experiences of undocumented Latino students as well as differences emerging between the types of institutions these students attended in Washington. The Washington State in-state tuition law, or HB 1079, makes undocumented students who have lived in the state at least three years and have graduated from a Washington high school eligible to pay in-state tuition rates. These stipulations are similar to other states' in-state tuition eligibility requirements for undocumented students. Results underscored critical themes that marked the educational experiences of these students, which included: constant fear, financial difficulty, a hostile campus climate, resiliency, and the hope to give back to their communities. The study underscored critical themes that marked the educational experiences of these students including, constant fear, financial difficulty, a hostile campus climate, resiliency, and the hope to give back to their communities. Additionally, Contreras found that across institutions, although the degree varied by institutional type, there appeared to be a general lack of knowledge of HB 1079. Those most apt to be knowledgeable

about HB 1079 were of Latino background or were a part of the institution's diversity office personnel. One key finding regarding community colleges was that the students who attended the community college were less aware of campus resources and offices; a general lack of connection to the institution was noted. Consequently, the study emphasized the importance of institutions providing professional development opportunities for staff to learn about the challenges undocumented students face.

In a quantitative case study, Flores and Horn (2009) looked at the persistence rates of Latino undocumented students eligible for in-state tuition and the policies that stemmed from it. The findings provided a solid foundation for understanding how persistent rates intersect with in-state tuition. The study focused on a quantitative analysis of the persistence behavior of in-state tuition eligible students at a large, selective public university in Texas- which was the first state in the U.S. to provide in-state tuition that benefited undocumented students. The results were that in-state eligible undocumented Latino students remained in college at rates similar to those of their Latino peers who were U.S. citizens and legal residents.

Flores and Horn (2009) noted that while their findings were limited, they shed light on the role of in-state tuition assistance in facilitating persistence rates among undocumented students. Furthermore they offer, "While we document the academic role, the social forces that impact the college student, especially as defined by organizational, psychological, and sociological frameworks, remain unexamined with current data" (p. 71). Thus, the influences attributed to social networks and institutional agents would not have been captured in that study. Another significant limitation was the fact that the study used a cohort from 2004. As more states have adopted in-state tuition policies, there was merit to further study this population of students. Finally, the study urged federal intervention through immigration reform in order to

increase a return of the investment that states are making in educating undocumented students.

Pérez-Huber and Malagon (2007), examined the experiences of Latino undocumented students in several California public institutions using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) as a framework. This theory was also utilized in framing this research study. By using a Latina/o Critical Race Theory framework the study exposed the multiple levels of oppression undocumented students experience, which include those rooted in race, class, gender, language, and immigration status. The study highlighted the critical factors that affect the ability of Latino college students to successfully transition throughout higher education. For example, Latino students wanting to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution were not be able to due to the lack of transfer culture existing at the community college in which participants were attending. Other critical factors included the understanding the role of family, campus climate, specifically institutional neglect, role modeling and mentorship, and financial aid. As with similar studies regarding undocumented Latino students, recommendations ranged from improving the campus climate by understanding and advocating for undocumented students to creating a taskforce specifically for the retention of undocumented students along with providing some form of financial support. Each of theses studies revealed that undocumented students, more so than other students, have had to carefully navigate the college system.

In summary, the history of undocumented Latino students within higher education has been rich. This section illustrated the context in which these students come to institutions of higher learning as well as the unfolding state of these students within higher education. Undocumented students' access to K-12 education has been debated and administrated through various court rulings, ultimately reaching the Supreme Court's 1982 decision. Since then, an increased number of undocumented students have accessed institutions of higher education,

despite the fact that their legal presence within these institutions continues to be debated. This collection of literature addressed undocumented students' history thus they demonstrated the juxtaposition between these students' undeniable increase in numbers and the fragmented approaches attempted to regulate or restrict their role in society.

Several studies pointed to the importance of practitioners in higher education having an understanding of the struggles of undocumented students. The same or similar studies advocated supporting the familial networks in order to ensure the success of these students. Less research, however, investigated the manners in which these players (such as families and practitioners) could assist undocumented Latino students. This study aimed to delve into those very issues by calling on undocumented students to enlighten educational institutions through their experiences.

Pérez (2010) asserted his findings, which have focused on the higher education endeavors of undocumented students, "will inspire more focused research that will ultimately improve practice" (p. 24). Pérez and Rodriguez (2012) stressed the importance of focusing these studies on Latino students, for they remain an understudied population. They add that Latino undocumented students continue to be targets of misconceptions and stereotypes often resulting in exposure to ineffective educational, prevention, and intervention programs that are culturally insensitive. Thus, this study was centered on the experiences of undocumented Latino students who have attained an associate degree from an Oregon community college.

Undocumented Latino Students in Community Colleges

According to Núñez, Johnelle, and Hernandez (2011), "Latino college students tend to begin their post-secondary education in community colleges" (p. 19). Community colleges have served as accessible entry points to higher education for many immigrants and their children (Barato, 2009; Longerbean, Sedlacek, Alatorre, 2004; Wisell, 2010), specifically Latino students

(Gutierrez, Castañeda, & Kastinas, 2002). They have provided access to the education, skills training, and English language proficiency classes necessary for immigrants to successfully integrate into and contribute to their communities (Wisell, 2010). Community colleges have been considered “the most local of higher education institutions in the United States” (Flores and Oseguera, 2009, p. 63). Diaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) found seven out of eight college bound undocumented students attended two-year colleges due to the increasing costs of higher education.

Community colleges are in a unique position, as they serve the purpose of providing education for local, community members. As the number of undocumented students who access community colleges across the United States increases significantly because of affordability and open-access policies, it was essential for research to address where undocumented students end up after graduation and what factors influence their success (Barato, 2009; Flores & Horn, 2009). Historically, community colleges have served as the educational gateway for millions of immigrants; however, researchers had not examined how community college institutions serve such highly motivated individuals who have been socially excluded due to their legal status (Dozier, 2001).

Few studies have addressed the experiences of undocumented students in the community college setting. Dozier (2001) conducted research comparing the achievement of documented F1 international students and undocumented students in an urban community college in New York; this was one of the first studies to specifically address undocumented students in the community college. The study found that the F1 international students were better prepared and graduated at higher rates than the undocumented students. The undocumented students who were educated in the U.S. needed remediation at high levels; 68% needed remedial reading coursework, 75%

needed remediation in writing, and 64% required remediation in math. Forty-eight percent of undocumented students were likely to shift between full and part-time coursework. The mean grade point average for the undocumented students was 2.43, with only 2% of undocumented students receiving academic honors.

Additionally, Dozier (2001) found undocumented students feared being deported and expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation. The study recommended developing support structures that address the needs of undocumented students within the community college system. Dozier (2001) further emphasized the need for confidentiality, taking into account these students' immigration status and the difficulties that they face. Dozier's study was based, in part, on her earlier research from 1992. Her earlier work explored the emotional concerns of undocumented students, which were fear of deportation, loneliness and depression. All of these stressors were also found in the 2001 study.

Although Dozier's work was one of the few studies that specifically addressed undocumented students attending community college, it is limited in its scope. It focused on students enrolled in an urban community college in New York, where policies and practices in higher education differed from Oregon. In contrast, this study focused on community colleges in Oregon. Furthermore, the Dozier study did not focus exclusively on the undocumented students' experiences but created a comparison group to F1 international students. Most F1 International students have not had similar educational or lived experiences as undocumented students. Undocumented students face high levels of stress, social marginalization, and discrimination due to their legal status, much of which the F1 international students do not face (Pérez et al., 2010). The study was also missing the voices of the undocumented students themselves; thus pointing to the need and value of this study.

In other research relevant to undocumented students in community colleges, Cortes (2008) examined the educational and socio-emotional experiences of highly talented and motivated undocumented Latino community college students. The participant-researcher primarily collected data on students attending southern California post-secondary institutions. The study sought to determine how undocumented Latino students coped with the socio-emotional and academic challenges resulting from their legal status. Some of the themes the study found were good relationships with professors, difficulty of balancing work with school and institutional challenges. The results indicated that the undocumented Latino college students experienced additional layers of social, emotional, and academic challenges when compared to their documented peers. It also noted that these students were more likely to experience social rejection, distress, and anxiety. One significant finding was the low levels of reported stress and discrimination.

One of the study's limitations was that its focused on southern California, which differed in the population makeup and political dynamics found in the Pacific Northwest. Furthermore, the study did not address the retention or completion of these undocumented students in the institutions they attended. It also failed to examine their experiences following completion. Finally, it did not give voice to the students who participated, as it relied on quantitative analyses only. All of these factors supported the significance of this research study.

Jauregui, Slate, and Brown (2008) examined the undocumented student population in Texas community colleges. Texas was recognized as a state with a large population of undocumented students. In 2001, it passed a bill allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition and permitting them to be recipients of state financial aid. The data from the research indicated steady yearly increases in the number of undocumented students and in their

percentage of the total student enrollment. The study aimed to research the relationships between undocumented student enrollment, college size, and overall Latino student enrollment. Some of the implications were that when the institutions were larger and the number of Latino students making up the institution's population was higher, undocumented students were more likely to attend.

In a later study, Jauregui and Slate (2009) explored how three Texas community colleges' institutional dynamics impacted undocumented students' access, retention, and educational achievements. It was an exploratory case study, which addressed several themes: institutional policies, institutional commitment, and awareness of undocumented students needs. The study had some limitations because of the volatile political nature surrounding the issue of undocumented students. In fact, one community college the researchers had reached out to declined to participate due to the nature of the study. The study also focused on the professionals serving undocumented students, with one undocumented student participating. This study's main focus was on understanding the perceived roles and responsibilities of the community colleges in educating undocumented students. One of the limitations of the findings was that, as a case study, application of the results was most relevant to community colleges in Texas. Still, a key finding was that community college personnel interviewed did not see these students as needing additional services or support programs. This highlighted a disconnect from the barriers undocumented students face, since studies have shown that immigrants do have higher success rates with programs that support them (Gray & Vernez, 1996). The study ended with a call for further research featuring the voices of undocumented students.

Finally, a three-year study by Castro-Salazar and Bagley (2010) was found, which did focus on the stories of undocumented students, using critical race theory (CRT) for its

framework. This study was particularly relevant because critical race theory was used to provide support for the experiences of undocumented students. It aligned with the rhetorical framework the participant-researcher used in this study about undocumented students in Oregon community colleges.

Castro-Salazar and Bagley acknowledged counter-stories and learned from the counter-life-histories of undocumented college graduates of Mexican origin as they navigated historical, socioeconomic, political, as well as cultural boundaries, barriers, and contexts. The research was grounded in the experiences, voices and perspectives of six individuals who graduated from a community college in Arizona. CRT served as an interpretive approach to both situate and challenge historically decontextualized and one-dimensional explanations of Mexican-American underachievement. The study also adopted a life history methodology to engage comprehensively with the perceptions of the interviewees. The researchers stated the importance of comprehending the migration, evolution, and challenges the people of Mexican origin in the United States have experienced; furthermore, this was achieved by recognizing this population as an internally colonized community.

Barrera (1976) defined the concept of internal colonialism as “a relationship of domination and subordination which are defined along ethnic and/or racial lines when the relationship is established or maintained to serve the interests of all or part of the dominant group” (p. 3). The researchers asserted that not only did internal colonialism include direct discriminatory actions but also institutionalized racism, “through institutionalized racism, people and organizations carry out biased practices that are not necessarily intended to be racist, but are discriminatory in their effects” (p. 24). Consequently, in order to succeed, sections of the communities of color have been faced with experiencing high levels of poverty and low levels of

educational participation and achievement, all whilst being encouraged to reject their discursively positioned 'inferior' culture, language, and identity (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). According to researchers, the educational failure of students of Mexican origin occurs in the context of a myriad of racialized socioeconomic, cultural, and political challenges; they range from limited educational strategies to learn English to barriers due to immigration status.

According to Castro-Salazar and Bagley (2010), the sociopolitical climate of the post-September 11th era appears to have been intensified in forms of xenophobia and racism. It has been distinguished by a pronounced anti-immigrant racism disproportionately directed against Mexicans, and disguised under the layers of national security and cultural preservation. Furthermore, undocumented people are excluded from public services like healthcare and housing; they are subject to exploitation and cultural marginalization, living in fear of being deported and being separated from their families.

Using critical race theory, the researchers were able to challenge the existing social order in different ways. They exposed how racism continually benefits the privileged classes to the detriment of people of color by using storytelling. Storytelling legitimizes and supports the voices of racial minorities, incorporating their knowledge into the critiques of the dominant social order. Narratives, like the ones revealed through this research, helps the oppressed create their own shared memory and history, which can be used as a source of strength as they work within a system dominated by a narrative excluding or minimizing their existence.

According to the study, the flexibility and responsiveness of educational institutions were important factors in the educational achievement of undocumented students. The study aimed to challenge the beliefs the majority has about who belongs and can succeed in the United States. These are notions, which demand further investigation, as institutions cannot be used as

instruments of oppression, perpetuating the marginalization of entire populations or generations of students.

Summary

These studies highlighted how undocumented college students have been historically and systematically positioned as subordinates within the U.S. higher education context. Current scholarly research focused on the access and retention of undocumented students in specific states, such as California and Texas; yet undocumented students have lived across the United States. Community colleges are also known as gateway institutions for undocumented students accessing higher education; moreover, a large number of Latino undocumented students attend community college (Contreras, 2009; Gonzales, 2007; Nores, 2010; Pérez et al., 2009; Szelényi & Chang, 2002). Thus, a critical area to research was undocumented community college students, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. In Oregon, according to the Immigration Policy Center (2010), the Latino population increased to 11% in 2010 from 4.0% in 1990. Research needed to focus on Latino undocumented students in the Pacific Northwest, as many scholars have also noted the increase of Latinos entering college (Mendez, 2007; Gonzalez, 2010; Patrick-Knox, 2011; W. Pérez, 2010).

Undocumented students with degrees are a section of society that may not be living up to their potential. According to Barato (2009), most undocumented community college students have lived in the United States most of their lives, are mostly assimilated to American culture, have attended grammar and/or secondary schools in the United States, work while attending community college, and are low on the socioeconomic scale. The Supreme Court has mandated that undocumented students have access to public education until high school; yet the same court has not created a pathway for students to continue learning within institutions of higher

education (W. Pérez, 2009). Although immigration policies still fall in the realm of federal regulation, whether or not undocumented students are offered an opportunity to access their institutions of higher education has now become a state issue. As each state differs in its attitude towards undocumented persons as well as its interpretation of current federal law, specific examination of the experiences of Latino undocumented students in Oregon merited further study.

The literature review highlighted the major research pertaining to undocumented students in higher education. It showcased what is readily available through current research, such as the data focusing on the access and retention of undocumented students in higher education. The literature review also revealed existing gaps, such as the need for a study depicting the experiences of undocumented students who have earned a degree from a community college in Oregon. Finally, the literature review identified the main scholarly research and analysis methods that have been conducted in regards to undocumented students. These studies guided the focus and design of the research study, which centered on the lived experiences of undocumented students who have obtained success through degree completion at a community college.

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore, through their own voices, the community college experiences of undocumented Latino students in Oregon. This study was an attempt to define pathways towards academic success by identifying the practices and support systems community colleges are using to help undocumented Latino students navigate their systems. Because of the focus on the lived experiences of undocumented Latino students, a qualitative approach referred to as *testimonios* was used for addressing the research question. Creswell (2008) describes qualitative research as that which seeks to explore “a social or human problem” through the words and perspectives of the informants. Furthermore, qualitative studies lend themselves to an interpretive view of “social reality [which] can only be understood by understanding the subjective meanings of individuals” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 86). The participant-researcher wanted to provide a platform for the voices of this marginalized population so as to expand the understanding of those who would hear them. Creswell (2002) writes, “when people tell stories to researchers, they feel listened to, and their information brings researchers closer to the actual practice of education” (p. 520).

This chapter provided a description of the components comprising this study. It was designed to address: (a) the philosophical approach for this study; (b) the methodology of the study and its rationale; (c) key concepts of narrative research, its underlying assumptions, along with strengths and limitations; (d) a personal disclosure; and (e) a description of the study procedures (i.e., site selection and study participants, strategies for protection of human subjects).

Community colleges have become a practical educational option for undocumented students seeking an associate degree; thus reflecting the community college's very mission and purpose by providing access and affordability for these students. Specifically, undocumented Latino students are known to select community colleges due to their low tuition cost, proximity to their home, ease of access, etc. (Hernandez et al., 2010). This research study focused on undocumented Latino students for, as a leading scholar notes, "undocumented Latino students in higher education represent a resilient, determined, and inspirational group of high achievers who persevere and serve as a model for success" (Contreras, 2009, p. 610). Furthermore, Pérez-Huber (2010) illustrated how immigration nativist discourse has shaped our policies and practices within other contexts, specifically higher education. Undocumented immigrants have been historically and systematically positioned as subordinates within the U.S. context. An inquiry into their experiences in higher education and the manner in which they obtained success could translate into change within institutions of higher education, particularly the community colleges serving such marginalized student population.

The reality is many undocumented students are attending Oregon community colleges. The more critical point being that there is a strong likelihood that the number of undocumented students in community college will increase as more states permit access to state supported higher education and in-state tuition rates. The Pew Hispanic Center is a national nonpartisan public opinion research center, which studies attitudes toward politics, the press and public policy issues. It had found approximately 22% of the estimated 150,000 undocumented residents of Oregon stood to benefit from the DREAM Act (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Based on these statistics, it was certain undocumented students are entering the Oregon University system. House Bill 2787 of Oregon, allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition within Oregon

universities and colleges. The Bill was supported by all seven major public university presidents within the state, as well as the Oregon State Board of Higher Education (Zheng, 2013; Oregon University System, 2013). The support of these entities confirmed the fact that there was and is a growing number of these students that are being admitted and served within the institutions of higher education in Oregon.

Undocumented students are not only entering the system of higher education in the state of Oregon; they are graduating and earning degrees and certificates (Oregon University System, 2013). This research study focused on the experiences of such undocumented Latino students who had earned a two-year associate degree from an Oregon community college, because their experiences and stories had not been extensively explored or heard. Research showed most undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are from Latin American countries, México in particular (Passel, 2011), thus the need was to focus on Latino students. According to Pérez-Huber (2010), “the historical and continued efforts of U.S. foreign policy to ensure Mexican economic dependence on the United States suggests economic conditions, specifically in México will continue to leave many Mexican citizens with no choice but to immigrate. This means, until the U.S. enacts comprehensive immigration reform that offers the U.S. undocumented population with a path to citizenship, the number of undocumented Latina/o students will continue to grow” (p. 78).

There has been a limited but growing body of research on the experiences of undocumented Latino students in the U.S., which has developed within the past ten years (Barato, 2009; Castro-Salazar, & Bagley, 2007; Contreras, 2009; Cortes, 2008; Diaz-Strong et al., 2010; Flores & Horn, 2009; Gonzales, 2007; Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi & Wikerson, 2010; Jauregui, Slate & Brown, 2008; Núñez, Johnelle & Hernandez, 2011; Pérez, 2009; Pérez

Huber & Malagón, 2007; Rincón, 2010). Still, scholarly research on undocumented students has primarily focused on the experiences of undocumented students at four-year public universities and in states such as California and Texas (Flores & Horn, 2009; Muñoz, 2013; Pérez, 2010). They have focused on the access and retention of undocumented students within these institutions. Limited research focuses on the community college experience (Biswas, 2005; Pérez-Huber & Malagon, 2007). Breadth and depth are generally lacking in the scholarly research investigating undocumented students in higher education; specifically, there is a pressing need for research exploring students who have graduated from a community college. In order to maintain a focus in the specified area, the following three guiding questions framed the research design of this study:

- 1) Why do undocumented Latino students attend a community college?
- 2) What factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students?
- 3) What have been the lived experiences of these students during their time at a community college?

These questions explored, from the perspective of the students, how students navigated the higher education context and how culture, family, prior schooling, and their immigration experiences helped to shape how they experienced community college.

The type of research that most benefited a study of this nature and addressed the above questions was a qualitative study. The purpose of qualitative research is, simply put, to explore issues, understand a phenomena, and answer questions. Qualitative research seeks out the “why” through the analysis of information (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative research is used to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviors, value systems, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A qualitative methodology was essential for this study as it provided a philosophical approach that allows for experience, meaning, and context.

Qualitative research, which is a naturalistic and descriptive method, is primarily interested in gathering information about people and the meaning people derive from their life experiences (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2008) noted that qualitative research has characteristics that are exploratory and understanding oriented. The data collection is done in an emerging form; it is reflective and biased (Creswell, 2008). The data that qualitative researchers analyze is inductive; in other words, the theories emerge from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Furthermore, Berg (2009) notes, “In qualitative research the relationship between researcher and subject is frequently an ongoing and evolving one” (p. 71).

This study aligned itself well with the basic core of qualitative research because of its reliance on meaning and context. Merriam (2009) states “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Therefore, to allow for depth and richness in the responses to the research questions, the study collected data through the use of *testimonios*. In using *testimonios*, a qualitative method, as the methodology for this study, a message was given to those whose stories were highlighted: their stories are important and may in some way lead to meaning making.

Focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analysis, and ethnography are among the many approaches that are used by qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2008). In this case, interviews were the primary source of data collection. Other approaches were considered for this study; however, the great advantage of narrative storytelling is revealing a distinct voice that has not been heard and using interviews were a relevant method (Beverley, 2004) .

Philosophical Approach: Critical Social Science

The purpose of this section was to present the philosophical approaches utilized for this study, which included critical social science infused with a critical theorist perspective. This section also included a description of and rationale for the research epistemology that informed this study and its relation to the research topic, problem, and question. Research epistemology addressed the research worldview of the participant-researcher. Finally, the participant-researcher revealed a personal disclosure.

The research worldview the participant-researcher embraced is critical approach within social science; its basic premise being to liberate from oppression, empower, and create social change (Freire, 1970). Specifically, this framework upholds the ontology that racism and social injustice exist. Freire (1970) introduced the concept of critical consciousness and also reaffirmed the importance of involving all, not just the researcher, in critical research. He proposed this was possible by having participants join in the process of investigation, examination, criticism, and reinvestigation. Neuman (2003) notes the “critical researcher questions social situations and places them in a larger, macro-level historical context” (p. 83). Additionally, Neuman (2003) states the reasons for research from a critical perspective are to smash myths and empower people to change society radically. Delving into the historical roots of critical social science provided an even clearer understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of this study.

Critical social science is traced to Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). It has close ties to critical theory first developed by the Frankfurt School in Germany in the 1930s. A concern of the Frankfurt School was to articulate a view of theory for which the central task would be to emancipate people from the positivist “domination of thought.” This emancipation could be achieved through the people’s own understandings and actions also

labeled “critical theory” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The purpose of critical social science is to change the world. It entails the “critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves” (Neuman, 2003, p. 81). Thus, in this study, by going beyond the “surface illusions” of who undocumented Latino students are and what their experiences are in higher education, practitioners in higher education are empowered to explore the support systems in place for those who would be successful within the community college setting.

Tierney (1993) defined critical theory as “an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation” (p. 4). Neuman also notes, “Other forms fail to deal with the meanings of real people and their capacity to feel and think. They ignore social context, [rendering them] anti-humanist” (p. 81). For this reason, he adds, critical science views present society as one particular state within an ongoing process. Hence, this study was designed with the expectation of change. Undocumented student revealing injustices and inequities could inform higher education in their process of transformation.

Another attribute of critical social science is that it is action oriented, “knowledge grows by an ongoing process of eroding ignorance and enlarging insights through action” (Neuman, 2003, p. 85). It is dissatisfied with the current state of social conditions and seeks to create, influence dramatic change and improvements. Fay (1987) notes, “Critical researchers conduct research to critique and transform social relations. [They seek] to explain a social order in such a way that the explanation becomes itself the catalyst, which leads to the transformation of this social order” (p. 27). Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) state,

Critical research can be best understood in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name “critical” must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label “political” and unafraid to consummate a relationship with an emancipatory consciousness (p. 140).

This study aimed to create change in the community college system that would be beneficial to the success of undocumented students, thus changing the status quo. Additionally the study sought to empower undocumented Latino students who have been silenced due to their immigration status. Their narratives disassembled the social constructs surrounding what it means to be Latino, undocumented and a community college student. Critical social science also embraces the belief that history is filled with social inequities and has represented only privileged perspectives. This historical reality highlights the need to rewrite history from the perspectives of underprivileged people. Their voices and stories should be told, as they will create a realistic rich history, influencing our future as a nation.

There are several strengths and limitations to critical social science theory. Some of the limitations as identified by Solórzano and Yosso (2001) are: (a) findings are not generalizable to the overall outsider population because stories over-emphasize perspectives unique to the author, (b) storytelling is not academically rigorous because it lacks clarity and analysis, and (c) “storytelling distorts the truth” (p. 489). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) add that storytelling can “teach little unless supplemented with analysis and commentary; conversations must include statistics, case authority, and doctrinal analysis lest their colleagues reject their work as non-rigorous” (p. 489). A few of the strengths include the ability to uncover myths, reveal hidden truths, and help people to change the world for themselves (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue that the “value of storytelling in qualitative research is that it can be used to demonstrate how the same phenomenon can be told in different and multiple ways

depending on the storytellers” (p. 417). Furthermore, Delgado and Stephantic (2001) note:

[O]ur social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather we construct it with words, stories, and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we hope to contribute to a better and fairer world (p. 105).

This study aimed to challenge the myths created about undocumented Latino students.

Latino Critical Theory

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) is a theoretical lens that draws from a critical social science approach. It emerged out of the need to address issues that were more particular than race/ethnicity, as in the case of Latinos (Villalpando, 2003, p. 42). LatCrit expands critical social science scholarship by addressing how racism intersects with other types of subordination, including sexism, imperialism, and language oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993). LatCrit draws from civil rights literature, Chicano Studies, and critical race theory in order to develop an understanding of Latino historical oppression. It emphasizes the complex experiences and identities of Latinos, including language rights, immigration, citizenship, ethnicity, gender, phenotype, culture and cultural preservation, identity, and sexuality (González & Portillos, 2007; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Martinez, 1994). It also explores the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This study aligns well with the definition of LatCrit, as it aims to study the intersection of college students, Latinos and immigration status.

According to Villalpando (2003) there are five basic tenets in LatCrit theory, the first focusing on race and racism. Race and racism are seen as embedded in the structures, discourses, and policies guiding the daily practices of college campuses. The second tenet of LatCrit involves contesting dominant ideology, challenging the notion that “universities are race

neutral, color blind, merit based, and equal opportunity institutions” (p. 43). The third tenet is the focus on social justice, where social justice is recognized as a struggle to eradicate oppression based on race, gender, language, generation status, sexual preference, and class (Matsuda, 1996; Villalpando, 2003). The fourth tenet is legitimizing the experiential knowledge of people of color, as it is essential for understanding racial inequality. Furthermore, the application of a LatCrit theory framework requires the Latino undocumented student experiential knowledge be treated as a resource, rather than a deficit (Villalpando, 2003). The last tenet is the focus on the historical context of policies as well as research on how they impact students of color (Delgado, 1984; Villalpando, 2003). LatCrit operates on these foundational five tenets, four of which are particularly noteworthy for their relationship and transferability to a social justice framework.

First, LatCrit and social justice frameworks both take the analysis of institutional racism and sexism seriously (Bell, 2010; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Bell, 2010). The difference between a LatCrit and a social justice framework is that the former is particularly interested in the analysis of institutionalized injustices, while the latter is more concerned with raising group consciousness about injustices and promoting advocacy to challenge them (Hays, Arredondo, Gladding, & Toporek, 2010). Still, both rely on storytelling to value and promote the knowledge of marginalized groups (Bell, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). LatCrit has been useful because it has shed light on societal injustice and inequity encountered by Latinos nationwide, particularly by institutions such as education and criminal justice (Johnson & Martínez, 2000; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Additionally, it is conceived as an anti-subordination and anti-essentialist project attempting to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (LatCrit Primer, 1999). It is a theory

illuminating Latinos' multidimensional identities and unveiling the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression.

According to Delgado (2002) the critique of LatCrit theorists is that they relentlessly replace traditional scholarship with personal stories, which hardly represent common experiences. The rise of stories makes it impossible for others to debate. Delgado (2002) elaborated that critics do not acknowledge how “Eurocentrism has become the dominant mind-set that directly affects the mainstream stories told about race. Because Eurocentrism and White privilege appear to be the norm, many people continue to believe that education in the United States is a meritocratic, unbiased, and fair process” (p. 121). Delgado (2002) argued that some individuals may find it difficult to accept the notion that a critical raced-gendered epistemology is important to educational research and practice; the stories, beliefs, and perspectives regarding race and gender in the United States often ignore the stories, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences of people of color in general and women of color in particular. It is important to note that a critical raced epistemology does not lie between objectivity and subjectivity. Rather, it sees all stories as subjective and the production of knowledge as situated. Delgado (2002) summarized this concept through his remark,

Working from within a critical raced epistemology does not mean that one is interested in replacing an old body of knowledge that purports to be the truth with an alternative body of knowledge that claims to be the truth. It does mean that one acknowledges and respects other ways of knowing and understanding, particularly the stories and narratives of those who have experienced and responded to different forms of oppression. This has not been the case in education, where for too long, family cultural narratives have not been considered a legitimate part of research or practice. Many researchers have begun to demonstrate how the cultural resources and funds of knowledge such as myths, folktales, *dichos*, *consejos*, kitchen talk, autobiographical stories, and pedagogies of the home are indeed educational strengths and strategies found in communities of color (p. 120).

LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinos by addressing issues often overlooked by other perspectives. Such issues include immigration status, language, ethnicity, culture, identity, and phenotype. It gives researchers a more focused lens to examine the experiences of Latino students and their respective communities. According to Bernal (2002), Valdes, McCristal, and Harris (2005), LatCrit affords a lens with which to examine and interpret these participants' perceived invisibility associated with their heritage. It encourages the condemning of social injustices while inspiring Latinos to exercise their voice and "tell their stories" (Carter, 2008).

Undocumented students have been a marginalized people who have survived and thrived in societies that have resisted embracing them or have refused them opportunities to serve, live, and work in the communities they have known. The main purpose of critical social science is to empower individuals so they themselves may be liberated and change their conditions (Freire, 1970). Critical social science is a useful lens through which to view situations where fundamental inequalities in power, including status and resources, exist (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). The LatCrit theoretical framework within this study considered the intersection of race and other issues such as immigration status and language, which undocumented Latino students negotiate in their educational careers.

Historically, the U.S. immigration law has been used as a tool to legally exclude and marginalize immigrants and people of color (Pérez-Huber, 2010). The Mexican repatriation and deportation programs that began in the 1930s and Japanese Internment in the 1940s are examples of government-regulated laws established to exclude Asian and Mexican immigrants, but also U.S. born Asian Americans and Latinos who were perceived to be immigrants (Pérez-Huber, 2010). Pérez-Huber (2010) asserts the United States continues to exclude Latinos who are

perceived to be undocumented.

For LatCrit scholars, storytelling or narratives serve several important methodological functions and benefit the person of color in a number of ways. First, it allows the participant to reflect on his or her lived experience. Second, storytelling allows the marginalized participant to speak or make public his or her story within (although not limited to) a particular arena, in this case the community college. Third, storytelling or counter-storytelling also subverts the dominant story or the reality that is socially constructed by Whites (Delgado, 1995). Finally, storytelling can be transformative and empowering. Sharing one's stories with others raises the individual's consciousness of common experiences and opens up the possibility for social action. Still, people of color are not the sole beneficiaries of the storytelling research method.

For researchers and educators, studying the experiences of marginalized undocumented Latino students is especially critical. By looking to the marginal (and often misunderstood) sociocultural dynamics in the lives of undocumented Latino students, one can gain a deeper understanding of how they are oppressed and work against inequitable social conditions. By approaching this research through the lens of a critical social scientist, specifically Latino Critical theory, the factors affecting marginalized undocumented students were highlighted. Working from a social justice perspective, the participant-researcher's primary goal in conducting this study was to provide information that may be useful to individual study participants, other undocumented students, and to the institutions that enroll these students.

According to Neuman (2003), the criteria for truth exists in critical social science. Using this critical theory lens to research undocumented Latino students provided a method to give context to a student experience that were not fully understood or addressed within higher education. This study utilized *testimonios* or storytelling as a means to support the voices of

undocumented Latino students. Their experiential knowledge was incorporated into the critiques of the dominant social order, thus inciting reflection and mutual learning from their narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Comstock (1982), “all men and women are potentially active agents in the construction of their social world and personal lives: that they can be the subjects, rather than the objects, of socio-historical processes” (p. 371). By telling their story, undocumented Latino students become educational change agents by raising awareness about their condition within the community college. This study created a space for this marginalized student population to give voice to their unique experiences within higher education, specifically community colleges in Oregon.

Personal Disclosure

As noted in the introduction to the literature review and the case for significance, critical social science theory reflects my worldview and my desire to conduct research on behalf of undocumented community college students. My philosophical approach provides a framework for this research focused on the experiences of undocumented community college students who have earned an associate’s degree from Oregon. I come from a long line of educators from Puerto Rico, whose legacy is that of advocacy for the students they served. My family instilled in me the need to fight against injustice, serve the community, and value education. I have truly embraced what it means to be a critical theorist, to research, advocate and give voice to people who are marginalized by systems of oppression that exists in institutions of higher education (Solórzano, Torres & Villalpando, 1998).

I became interested in issues concerning undocumented students when I began to work at a local community college and was faced with the stories of undocumented students who did not know how to navigate the community college system. I had never been exposed to the unique

challenges and barriers these students face. Thus, my commitment to advocate for undocumented students within higher education was lit and still continues as I pursue a doctorate degree.

Biases. This section will have a beginning description of biases that have been identified related to the research topic area, problem and question selected for this study. The potential impact of these biases will also be addressed. Neuman (2003) notes, “All social research necessarily begins with a value or a moral point of view. For critical social science, being objective is not being value free. “Objectivity means a non-distorted, true picture of reality” (p. 86). Furthermore Harding (1991) adds about critical social science that, “it challenges the belief that science must be protected from politics. It argues that some politics – the politics for emancipatory social change – can increase the objectivity of science” (p. 88). The topic of undocumented Latino students in the educational pipeline of higher education is an area of which I am truly passionate about, both as an educator and personally. Immigration status involves issues of legality and is thoroughly political. With that understanding, many biases existed and exist for me.

I wanted to give a platform for undocumented Latino students to share their experiences in higher education, a scholarly platform; I believe they deserve a chance to lead successful lives in the United States. These are students who I am close to as a professional, educating them in my classes, advising and mentoring them throughout the community. They are “generation 1.5” students enrolled in institutions of higher education I work at or have worked with. “They are not first-generation immigrants because they did not choose to migrate, but neither do they belong to the second generation because they were born and spent part of their childhood outside of the United States. In a sense they straddle two worlds” (Gonzales, 2009, p. 7). I have a sense of

urgency to alleviate the inequities that I believe exist within our institutions of higher education that serve undocumented students.

As a critical social science participant-researcher, there is a core understanding that the participant-researcher will have biases; although the goal is to limit any biases that may keep the participant-researcher from delivering the participants' authentic voice. By being cautious and aware of my biases as a participant-researcher, I was careful of the conclusions that were drawn from the study as well as the means utilized to make them. I also presented the research to peers to review for any biases that would hinder the study. I incorporated member checking as part of the data analysis; this process will be further elaborated in the section to follow.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted, life is composed of narrative fragments "enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities" (p. 17). Storytelling has been an integral piece of my life story, as I come from a long line of storytellers that thrive by teaching life lessons through stories that were repeated over and over until it became a thread in my own life's quilt. Finally, Stage and Manning (2003) observe, "that it may be difficult to separate the researcher's values from what he or she sees in the research context. Advocacy can result in research findings [that are] more closely aligned with the needs of the respondents" (p. 22).

Method and Rationale

The purpose of this section was to present a description of the research method and study procedures (i.e. site selection and study participants, data collection procedures, strategies to ensure soundness of data, and strategies for protection of human subjects) for this study. The study used a narrative inquiry method, specifically *testimonios* as its methodology. "Our species

thinks in metaphors and learns through stories” (Bateson, 1994, p. 11). The following section highlights briefly the overarching methodology, narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

Storytelling has been a permanent fixture in mankind’s history. Indigenous cultures have used storytelling to recount their people’s history, to teach lessons about life, to pass on traditions (Gondara, 2005). Narrative inquiry is the examination of the human experience through storytelling. Yet narrative inquiry is beyond simple storytelling; it examines the experiences, as told to the researcher, through the personal and social context in which they existed. It also places those experiences within the context of time and their connection to others involved in the experience. In other words, narrative inquiry is examining a story, or an experience, in a holistic manner.

Specifically, this method seeks to place the human experiences told to the participant-researcher within the social contexts present at the time of the experience, at the time of the retelling, and now. Narrative inquiry also has tensions that exist as stories are retold to the participant-researcher, for the storyteller inadvertently reflects on the experiences differently as they age. Van Manen (1990) writes about the uniqueness and temporal nature of lived human experience and the importance of reflection upon the experience in order to derive meaning from it. He remarks that lived experience “can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past presence” (p. 36). The following section reviews the major characteristics of narrative inquiry, highlighting the major contributors to the research method.

Method Characteristics

Two major contributors to narrative inquiry are D. J. Clandinin and F. M. Connelly (2000), whose work has also helped define the characteristics existing within the method. These

authors credit John Dewey for the basis of their approach to narrative inquiry; for he believed that examining experience is the key to education. Dewey also believed people are individuals in need of being understood from a perspective recognizing the social context in which they exist. This notion was critical as this research was further developed, for the participant-researcher used the lens of critical theorist with a research method of narrative inquiry. Both of these methods sought and seek understanding of the human experience within the various contexts that exist. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that Dewey believed in the notion of continuity: experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to think in a detailed manner and examine the continuity of individuals' lives. The authors argue, "narrative can be both phenomena under study and a method of study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4). This method allows for truly rich content, as the participants have the ability to describe their experiences and how they have been shaped by them. Thus, the philosophical LatCrit criticalist approach, addressed in the previous section, was truly embraced because the method seeks to give voice to people's experiences, specifically marginalized people. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to understand why people behave the way they do by creating a space for people to share their experiences. Clandinin and Connelly also highlight another major contributor, Mary Catherine Bateson. Bateson's (1994) *Peripheral Visions* added "tentativeness" in narrative inquiry. In other words, what a researcher writes is always open to revision.

There are other contributors helping inform and shape narrative inquiry. Some of the major contributors, as noted by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), are Donald Polkinghorne's (1998) *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* and Norman Denzin's (1997) *Interpretive Ethnography*. All these authors assisted in shaping, defining, and naming the process of

narrative inquiry. Furthermore, they bind it in the inquiry process. In order for narrative inquiry to be valued as a research method, leading authors have framed the method by a three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative inquiry's purpose is to "produce an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives or organizations meaningful" (p. 161). His aim was make connections between events in the lives of participants in a manner that seemed causal; and he was able to frame those connections through narrative inquiry. He describes two forms of narrative inquiry: descriptive and explanatory. These forms emphasize the need to look at an experience within the various contexts it exists in, from social to political, etc. One could consider Polkinghorne one of the earliest contributors in shaping the definition of narrative inquiry as it is known and utilized today.

So the question begged to be asked, why narrative? We understand the world narratively, we tell stories, talk about our experiences to make meaning of what occurred; thus, there is merit in studying people's experiences through narratives. It is a rich, descriptive method of representing and understanding the human experience. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, "In effect, narrative thinking is part of the phenomenon of narrative. It might be said that narrative method is a part or aspect of narrative phenomena. Thus, narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences" (p. 18).

Temporality. A key concept within narrative inquiry is "temporality" or the idea that experience is time-based. The authors find life is experienced on a continuum and embedded within a larger narrative of social science inquiry. Additionally, they contend that daily experiences are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative. The bottom line is

narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience; it is collaboration between the researcher and participants over time in which context makes and is the difference.

Examining the context of the participants in terms of the systems of oppression existing in society marries the critical theorist with narrative inquiry. For example, for the purposes of this study, research was conducted on institutions of higher education. This method allowed the participant-researcher to not only to give voice to the experiences of marginalized people during a specific context through the use of narrative inquiry, but it also to understand and research the context in which these experiences occurred. Thus, the lived experiences of undocumented students in the context of the community college of today could be explored thoroughly by narrative inquiry.

Narrative beginnings. It is critical to acknowledge the centrality of the researcher's own experience in narrative inquiry, which is referred to as narrative beginnings. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) frame narrative inquiry using the three dimensional inquiry space, meaning that the telling of stories from the past frame present standpoints, moving back and forth from the personal to the social context, and situating it all in place or the current situation. Understanding and applying this framework allows the participant-researcher to deal with questions of who we are in the field and who we are in the written texts of their field experience. Narrative researchers must make themselves aware of as many narratives layered in their inquiry space as possible. They image narrative intersections where these contexts intersect; for example where the undocumented community college students' stories intersect with the institutional story.

Narrative researchers have to anticipate possible narrative threads emerging. Brooks and Clark (2001) describe the advantages of using the narrative process to understand transformative learning, "Narrative provides a way to connect the past, present, and future. Our stories may

include plots, themes, protagonists, denouements, and foreshadowing of the future” (p. 2).

Brooks and Clark (2001) demonstrate how the personal narrative of the self is informed through “our past and the past of our family, ancestors, community, nation, and world” (p. 2).

Criteria for Truth

A few key aspects of the research process are negotiating relationships, negotiating purpose, negotiating transitions, and negotiating ways to be useful (Merriam, 2009). Negotiating relationships is ongoing throughout the research. Negotiating transitions is done when moving from collecting the research data in the field (i.e. the interview) to research text. Simply put, narrative inquiry is about making meaning of experience. A part of the process is to address biases present in the participant-researcher. What is understood in narrative inquiry is that narratives are relational. The participant-researcher must become fully involved, must “fall in love” with their participants, yet be able to step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live. Some of the difficulties the narrative researcher faces include beginning to feel the loss of objectivity and the need to rely on field texts to help clarify position.

To decrease the degree to which the exchange between the participant-researcher and research participant leads to confusion and/or poor information, a culturally appropriate in-depth narrative style named *testimonios* was proposed and utilized in this study. Such a narrative style acknowledges that there are various respectful ways or behavioral protocols of person-to-person interaction the researcher and participants enter into as storytelling occurs (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) explain that storytelling should be considered as both a method of telling a story and a tool for analyzing the data. *Testimonios* was utilized within the framework of Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) philosophical approach. *Testimonios* is

considered a method of telling the stories of those whose experiences are often not told, and as a tool for analyzing and challenging “the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475). The following section will give an in-depth review of *testimonios* as a culturally relevant methodology when researching undocumented Latino students.

Testimonios

Testimonio is a research strategy initially utilized in Latin American literature as a method to document the experiences of oppressed people during times of war. It is traced to Cuba in the immediate years of the revolution and then manifested again in Bolivia before it became nearly a Central American genre (Gugelberger, 1996, p. 5). *Testimonio* arose in response to political, economic, military, and gender oppression in Latin America (Warner, 1993; Zimmerman, 1991). According to both Warner (1993) and Zimmerman (1991), *testimonio* did not begin as a research method but has evolved as a means by which the goals of social justice could be incorporated into “scholarly research.” Thus, *testimonio* is also referred to as “resistance literature” and “resistance research” as it has become the voice of resistance in response to political, economic, and gender oppression (Harlow, 1987). *Testimonio* is deeply rooted in raising critical consciousness, what Freire (1973) referred to as conscientizacão; it focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world. Critical consciousness also means taking action against the oppressive elements that are illuminated by that understanding.

While there is no universal definition of *testimonio*, it has been generally used as a strategy to denounce injustices experienced by marginalized groups (Booker, 2002). There are two definitions that are frequently cited when defining and describing *testimonios*. The first emphasizes the urgency of communicating oppression found in the first person narrative:

By *testimonio* I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also a real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or a significant life experience. *Testimonio* may include, but is not subsumed under: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novela-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or 'factographic literature.' The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on (Beverley, 1989, p. 12-13).

Beverly (2004) used multiple theoretical perspectives including postcolonial, subaltern, feminist and Marxist theories. He further elaborated his definition of *testimonio* as, "The word *testimonio* in Spanish carries the connotation of an act of truth telling in a religious or legal sense—*dar testimonio* means to testify, to bear truthful witness" (p. 3). The second definition by Yúdice (1991) defined *testimonio* as:

...an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history (p. 17).

Similar to Beverley (1989), Yúdice (1991) defined *testimonio* as a first-person narrative told by an individual who wants to speak out against oppression by setting the "official record straight." These two definitions, and those of other scholars who use *testimonio* as a culturally relevant methodology, recognize the power of narrative in understanding the experiences of oppressed communities (Beverley, 2004; Booker, 2002; Brabeck, 2001; Burciaga, 2007; Cruz, 2006; Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983; Gutiérrez, 2008; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Yúdice, 1991). Both Beverley (2004) and Yúdice (1991) defined *testimonio* as a function of "collective memory," transcending a single experience and connecting to a larger group struggle.

Black (2002) noted care should be taken to not assume that all *testimonios* are the same.

Testimonios are unified through the practice of bearing witness to their lived experiences; each *testimonio* comes with its own unique cultural nuances because they each emerge from different cultural groups within different Latin American countries (Black, 2002). Black (2002) added a notion of *testimonio* which was not elaborated in the previous definitions: its call for improving the circumstances of future generations, for most *testimonios* are “forward looking in that they envision a transformed society” (Gugelberger & Kearney, 1991, p. 9).

Warner (1993) noted there are two forms of *testimonio*: (a) monophonic, which involves a single voice speaking for, or representing, a shared experience of oppression; and (b) polyphonic, which presents multiple voices of a shared experience. This study used a polyphonic form; in other words, it aimed to present the voices of several undocumented Latino students speaking of a shared experience within the context of the community college in Oregon.

In alignment with the first definition of *testimonio* by Beverly (1989), *testimonios* are often seen as a voice from the margins or from the subaltern, a political approach that elicits solidarity from the reader. Thus, in bridging individuals with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalization is re-centered to elicit social change. In essence, this study was a call to action, for *testimonios* differ from other qualitative, in-depth interviewing; it is intentional and political (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012).

Testimonios challenge objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression or resistance, such as that of undocumented Latino students who often feel alone and silenced by their immigration status (Gonzalez, 2007). *Testimonios* result in new understandings about how marginalized communities can build solidarity and respond to and resist dominant culture, laws, and policies perpetuating inequality, such as immigration status. Brabeck (2001) noted that *testimonio*

possessed the traits that can “heal the individual and society through producing complicity and solidarity.” Brabeck continued by adding, “in regaining agency and power, the speaker of testimony redefines reality and promotes a new, accurate understanding of objective conditions through the use of her/his own standards of legitimacy. Responsibility for injustice is placed on the shoulders of those to whom it belongs, alleviating the guilt and shame of the speaker” (p. 3). The issue of who is telling the accurate and truthful “official story” (p. 3) is discounted and “the speaker re-appropriates for self and community the moral standards and social order taken away by repression. The speaker breaks not only her/his silence, but also speaks the voices of those silenced through death and fear” (Brabeck, 2001, p. 4). Brabeck finally described *testimonios* as a “verbal journey of one’s life experiences with attention to injustices one has suffered and the effect these injustices have had on one’s life” (p. 3).

Key Concepts and Assumptions of Methodology

The assumptions of *testimonio* closely resemble those of critical social science. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) noted, “an inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor” (p. 291). The power of *testimonio* is in that transformative endeavor. Similarly, critical social science seeks to name the injustice and confront it in its societal context, therefore becoming “transformative” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). According to Zimmerman (1991), *testimonio* provide access to unknown and poorly understood situations. It has become a valid form of research methodology and has gained respect from notable scholars such as Beverley (1989, 2004), Gugelberger (1996), Tierney (2000), and Yúdice (1991).

Simply put, *testimonio* not only seeks to name an injustice but confront it. The act of speaking and being heard results in a transformation and gives power back to the teller through

the voice of the story being told (Gondara, 2005). According to Tierney (2000), *testimonio* is told “with the intent to motivate and help improve the social conditions of the testifier and of future generations. Moreover it is both a form of representation and a cultural practice, similar to other forces of social change” (p. 540). When listening to the story of an individual, one learns about the conditions of many. When others read the *testimonio*, it becomes a tool that has the potential to connect people across class, gender and social positions, building solidarity between both those familiar and unfamiliar with the experiences of the *testimonio*; in this case the experiences are those of undocumented Latino students.

The critical elements of *testimonio* identified by scholars in various fields are similar to some of the elements of a LatCrit framework. *Testimonio* and LatCrit both validate and center the experiential knowledge of people of color, recognize the power of collective memory and knowledge, and are guided by the larger goals of transformation and empowerment for communities of color (Pérez-Huber, 2010). According to Pérez-Huber (2009) there is overlap between the elements constituting the LatCrit framework and *testimonio*, such as: (a) revealing injustices caused by oppression. In the case of this study, *testimonio* describes the injustices undocumented Latino community college students face as a result of oppression, while the LatCrit lens helps expose the structural conditions, which cause oppression in Latino communities. Another commonality is (b) the aim of challenging dominant Eurocentric ideologies; implicit in the use of *testimonio* and a LatCrit framework is a direct challenge to the apartheid of knowledge that exists in academia. Still another is (c) validating experiential knowledge; similar to LatCrit, the process of *testimonio* builds from the lived experiences of people of color to document and theorize oppression. Another shared trait is the (d) acknowledgment of the power of human collectivity; *testimonio* and LatCrit acknowledge the

emancipatory elements of revealing oppression through lived experiences, which are rooted in the histories and memories of a larger community. And finally, (e) *testimonios*, as much as LatCrit, have a commitment to racial and social justice; revealing oppression moves people of color toward dismantling and transforming oppressive conditions to end injustice.

Strengths and Limitations of Methodology

The strength of using *testimonios* as the methodology for this study was not only its alignment with LatCrit, but also its call to action. Bernal and Villalpando (2002) explain how, historically, there have been clear racial divisions between dominant Eurocentric epistemologies guiding mainstream academic research and other ways of knowing, whereas others are unacknowledged and pushed to the margins of the academy. They argue that Eurocentric epistemological perspectives have shaped academic research perpetuating dominant ideologies rooted in white superiority; these ideologies subjugate research that challenges, counters, or disrupts the mainstream. Additionally, Pérez-Huber (2009) notes scholarship drawing from epistemological, theoretical, and methodological perspectives honoring sources of knowledge existing outside of the academy and within communities of color is devalued, delegitimized, and marginalized. She further elaborates that the scientific method, as scholars understand it, should be abolished or devalued (Pérez-Huber, 2009). Nevertheless, it is critical participant-researchers be aware of the epistemological underpinnings of the ways research is conducted in the process of developing new forms of knowledge (Harding, 1991). Therefore, using *testimonio* as a methodology in research serves to counter traditional Eurocentric epistemologies embedded within and perpetuated by notions of white supremacy (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). As Delgado Bernal and Villalpando further explained, dominant beliefs in what constitutes valid research legitimize a Eurocentric epistemological perspective while simultaneously

delegitimizing knowledge and belief systems of those who do not share the same perspective.

Thus, it is important to bring in methods that challenge that notion.

Still, there are three major critiques surrounding *testimonio*. The first revolves around issues of representation (Scholz, 2007). It is nearly impossible to verify if the accounts conveyed by the research participants are, in fact, their own experiences. Critics state *testimonios* rely exclusively on personal and collective experiences; some have argued that *testimonio* is too value-laden and unscientific (Scholz, 2007). To counter this critique, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue that qualitative research is in a historical “moment of discovery and rediscovery” in which notions of objectivity must be rejected and traditional theories, epistemologies, and methodologies that once guided the qualitative field must be challenged. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) further state, “the search for grand narratives is being replaced by more local, small scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations” (p. 29). Telling a story helps individuals understand topics that they may need to process in order to understand (McEwan & Egan, 1995). There is power in telling stories, for some ethnic communities accustomed to these forms of oral traditions (such as Latinos) narrative research can be a natural and authentic form of inquiry and discovery (Scholz, 2007).

The very strength of storytelling leads back to the concern surrounding the authenticity of *testimonios*. Qualitative researchers refer to this concern of participants possibly responding in a dishonest or untruthful way to the researcher as “reactivity” (Creswell, 1998). The distorting of data can occur in any research study; but it is something to be especially mindful of in the use of *testimonios*, where emphasis is placed on self-reported information from participants. The triangulation of data and member checking are techniques that can be deployed to ensure good data are collected (Creswell, 2008). Narrative methods, such as *testimonios*, are not meant to be

objective or quantitative approaches – therein removing the possibility of statistical validity or reliability. Nevertheless, terms such as trustworthiness and authenticity factor into the thinking of such a study, and Polkinghorne (1988) suggests these ideas can be found in supportable observations. He also writes that rules of logic contribute to “sound” findings. An acute awareness of logical myths and how to avoid them guided this study. In addition, this study did not attempt to define “truth” in a universal sense but rather in a personal sense for the participants. After all, one person’s “truth” does not define another person’s “truth” (Riessman, 1993). What is more important to this study was the trustworthiness of the data collected. Hence, member checking and questions for clarification were used to help define personal truths as they pertain to the individual participants.

The second critique of *testimonios* stems from the appropriateness of one person being the representative voice of a group, in other words representing the other. *Testimonios* are narrative representations of lived experiences, which are susceptible to inaccurate inferences because meaning can be contextual and not universal. But narrative methods, such as *testimonios*, are not intended to generalize a large population; it should be made clear that narrative analysis is subjective and interpretive, not objective or absolute (Beverly, 2000; Riessman, 1993). As the definition of *testimonio* suggests, the reader is expected to take the *testimonio* at face value as a true account because the discourse emerges from lived experiences, both individual and collective. This study focused on a collection of individual *testimonios*, seeking a common thread among them in order to construct general inferences about them.

On the other hand, traditional research has found its basis in quantitative statistical analysis that is defined as objective and generalizable while adhering to a rigid structure (Creswell, 2008). Creswell points out that qualitative research is general and broad; it collects

information for a relatively small number of participants; it tends to be thematic in nature, which indicates that it is open to wide interpretations. Its researchers may take a more subjective approach; and finally, its structure can be flexible. Qualitative research is intended for a more holistic study of the individual; concepts like trustworthiness and believability depend on the ethical approach and meticulously structured data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009), which was intended in this study.

The final critique of *testimonios* is that some scholars have questioned the relationship between the participants and the “academic interlocutors” involved in recording, transcribing, translating, and publishing the *testimonios* (Pérez-Huber, 2007). The critiques building this contention revolve around issues of authorship and representation. Although it is important that scholars use standards from which to build knowledge claims, these contentions may be alleviated when an understanding of *testimonios* is rhetorically and culturally framed. Within this approach, the participants work closely with the participant-researcher to bring attention to their community’s experiences. With this act, the participant becomes the holder of knowledge, thereby disrupting traditional academic ideals of who might be considered a producer of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998). According to Delgado Bernal (1998), a critical element of a *testimonio* is the incorporation of participants into the data analysis process. In doing so, the undocumented Latino students who participated in this study transcended the traditional role of “subject” to co-creators of knowledge, collectively analyzing the data.

In fact, Creswell (2002) writes that qualitative researchers are “not objective, authoritative, politically neutral observers standing outside and above the text... [they] are historically positioned and locally situated as an all-too-human observer of the human condition” (p. 49). Creswell (2008) suggests a set of techniques for establishing trustworthiness in

qualitative research: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, thick descriptions and external audits. Furthermore, he suggests, “qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study” (Creswell, 2008, p. 203). Thus, this study utilized the prescribed techniques, such as thick description, and member checking. Finally, as Merriam (2009) stated, “I believe that research focused on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives” (p. 1). The goal of this study was to collect and analyze data that is trustworthy, credible, and believable while remaining dedicated to justly serving undocumented Latino students by improving the practice of community college practitioners.

Data Collection

The study sought data from the *testimonios* based on the lived experiences of undocumented Latino students who have completed an associate degree from a community college in Oregon. This study’s purpose was to provide undocumented Latino students an opportunity to tell their stories while illuminating some of the ways in which they have navigated community college in Oregon. Qualitative research methods propose (Neuman, 2000) selecting sample or population size based on purposive information lending itself to learning about social processes in socially specific contexts, rather than considerations of a statistical nature requiring larger representative samples resulting in generalizations. Thus, a limited number of participants were proposed.

Site and Participant Selection

The site selected for this research was from three urban public community colleges in Oregon. Participants were selected from students who self-identified as having been

undocumented at some point in their community college experience. The criteria for the study were self identified undocumented Latino community college students who were over 18 years old. The recruitment process for this study was threefold. First, potential participants were recruited by the posting of a research informational and recruitment flyer at various locations where students gather at community colleges, from the cafeteria to various resource centers (i.e. Multicultural Centers) as well as community organizations serving undocumented people.

Second, the participant-researcher had proposed to make presentations at local community organizations working with the Latino community. Yet saturation was reached within the first two weeks of recruitment, thus the second method was not used. At those presentations, the participant-researcher was to outline the study, its purpose, participant eligibility, benefits, and possible risks. The informational and recruitment flyer would be handed out with a summary of the study, steps taken to ensure confidentiality and protection of participants, as well as research contact information.

Finally, the research informational and recruitment flyer were sent to colleagues identified at various community colleges who may have worked with undocumented students. In other words, key actors were asked to identify other critical players involved in the process at stake (Rincon, 2008). In order to protect participants and to increase the autonomy of those that participated, the study focused on three community colleges within the a urban setting in Oregon. Due to the large enrollment of students in these community colleges, specifically Latino students, the ability to identify any of the participants was minimized.

All information provided to the potential participants (informational and recruitment flyer, consent form) was approved by Oregon State University's Institutional Research Board (IRB). During the initial contact potential participants make, the participant-researcher verified

that they meet the four study criteria: 1) Must be 18 or older, 2) self identify as being undocumented at some point in their community college experience, 3) self identify as Latino, and 4) earned an associates degree from a community college.

Steps were taken to minimize the risk of violating a participant's privacy and were articulated in the recruitment section of the protocol. The participant-researcher provided information to potential participants and encouraged them to pass it on to others who maybe interested or eligible. The information provided to enrolled subjects, in this particular research project, letters of explanation were submitted to the Oregon State University's Institutional Research Board. Interested prospective participants could then contact the participant-researcher for more information and possible inclusion. Unlike a snowball sample, where each participant will be asked to suggest other persons for inclusion in the research (Creswell, 2008), this study asked participants to identify sites in which the informational and recruitment flyer could be posted so others who may be interested in sharing their stories may have the opportunity to do so. Participants were also given the recruitment flyer to give potential participants. In order to protect participants and potential participants, the participant-researcher did not ask any individual about who referred the prospective participant to the study.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques were in-depth interviews with Latino participants that self identify as haven been undocumented students during their enrollment in any of the three major community colleges in Oregon's largest urban area. The numbers of participants were based on the concept of saturation. A minimum of six participants would assure diversity based on age, major, gender, etc.; although at the end of the study eight participants were included in the data. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were focused on several themes: family,

culture, prior schooling, immigration, and college experiences. These themes were identified by the use of the Pérez-Huber (2009) study, which provided a framework on building trust and rapport with Latino participants. Furthermore, as Pérez-Huber (2007) noted, *testimonios* are rhetorically and culturally framed- thus using a method which allowed the participants to be prompted versus a framework which would not allow a fluid “conversation” would be in contrast to the theory and literature that informed the development of the interview questions and protocol (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

The participant-researcher asked questions concerning the participants’ legal status, but not until after they revealed their status during the course of the interview process. The participant-researcher recognized each individual participant had had a unique experience, but at a certain point some themes began to be reinforced. Initially a participant pool range of six to twelve would have met the requirement for saturation.

The concept of saturation ensures there is enough in-depth time spent with each participant. This study mandates the development of rapport, trust, and willingness from the participants to provide information that added depth and breadth to the study (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Creswell (2008) suggests a set of techniques for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, clarifying participant-researcher bias, member checks, thick descriptions and external audits. Rapport was established with the participants by sharing with the participants the participant-researchers background in immigration rights activism, teaching in higher education and passion to support undocumented students’ success.

The participants were recruited by the use of an informational flyer noting the study details, noting its purpose, and steps taken to ensure confidentiality and protection of

participates. The flyers were posted in three urban community colleges in Oregon, in areas that are frequented by Latino students such as various resource centers i.e. Women's Resource Center, Multicultural Center, etc.

Personal interviews with open-ended questions were used as the primary method of data collection. To best meet the intent of a LatCrit approach, the participant-researcher conducted interviews with undocumented Latino students. Seidman (2006) states that the purpose of interviewing is not to evaluate a set of prescribed questions or test a hypothesis, but rather to follow an interest in the lived experiences of people and the meaning they generate from that experience. Furthermore, Seidman (2006) provides suggestions for interviewing subjects: listen more, talk less; follow up on what the participant says (for clarification); ask to hear more about events and interpretations; explore, don't probe; avoid leading questions; ask open-ended questions; don't interrupt; ask participant to tell stories; avoid reinforcing participant responses; keep participant focused and ask for concrete details; and tolerate silence. The goal of this study was to allow for a sharing of experiences, while only asking for more details and clarification when necessary. An audio recording of the interviews was transcribed in order to capture what is being said. Interviews were at locations that were comfortable for the participant, with minimal to no interruptions. For this particular study, the key informants were students from three urban public community colleges in Oregon.

The structures of the interviews were semi-formal, consistent with the literature of testimonios. The interviews began with an introduction of the participant-researcher and purpose of the study, the nature of their experience in a community college in Oregon. The participant-researcher started with a fact-checking question, such as "It is my understanding that you completed a degree from a community college, what was it in?" Prompting questions followed

such as, “Could you describe your earliest experience at the community college? What were some experiences that occurred that supported your persistence at the community college? Are there other things that are important for me to understand about your experience at the community college?” The goal of the interview was to have 10 prompting questions that would guide the interview (Appendix A), with five questions related to demographic data and family background to establish familiarity with the participants. The same interview questions were used throughout all eight interviews. There were ten interview questions that prompted follow up questions as needed. There were five demographic questions that set the interview stage and assisted the participant-researcher in gathering background information on each of the participants. The participants seemed comfortable in answering the first questions and were able to do so in about five to seven minutes. The response length for each of the following interview questions varied depending on how much each participant wanted to elaborate. Table 1 outlines the interview questions with the themes for each set of questions.

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Interview Questions</u>
<i>Demographic Data & Family Background</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is my understanding that you completed an associate’s degree in from a community college in Oregon, what was it in? • How do you identify? • Age • Birthplace • Please tell me about your family
<i>Undocumented Experience</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When did you arrive in the U.S.? How old? 2. How long have you known about your undocumented status?
<i>College Experience</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Tell me about your pathway to college. 4. Describe yourself as a college student. 5. What were some experiences that

	<p>occurred that supported your persistence at the community college?</p> <p>6. What were some experiences that occurred that did not support your persistence at the community college?</p> <p>7. Describe what it meant to have been an undocumented Latino/a community college student.</p> <p>8. Did knowing your documentation status cause you to change or rethink your goals?</p> <p>9. What have you done after your graduation?</p> <p>10. Are there other things that are important for me to understand about your experience at the community college?</p>
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Research Organization by Themes, Table 1

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was maintained by documenting the stories as they were spoken, in the form they came out. To edit would not support the use of *testimonio*. The participants were informed that their stories would be recorded and documented in this fashion. This was done for both the purposes of accuracy to the methodological style as well as integrity to the story and its narrator. Several things were done to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. After transcribing all interviews, the participant-researcher shared the transcripts with the participants, asking them to check for accuracy of content and authenticity of voice.

Participants worked with the participant-researcher on the data review by way of member checking, meaning participants were able to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy and clarity. Through member checking, participants had direct control over what data was included and excluded. This interview process was consistent with the tenets of Critical Race Theory and LatCrit, which encourages dialogue, reciprocity, and equality (Pérez-Huber, 2009). When

possible, the participant-researcher used the exact words of the participants to present themes and key findings.

Data Analysis

For this narrative research study, a method of formal constant comparative data analysis was implemented. Narratives provide a rich framework that gives voice to participants of the study. The constant comparative method allows the participant-researcher to look for emerging themes from which to detail the observations and interviews (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The narratives were obtained from the data transcribed from the audio-recordings used.

Data was coded to identify overriding themes and emerging patterns. Potential themes were drawn from the data collection phase of the study. After data was transcribed, themes were noted using the Open Coding method. Data was analyzed line by line until codes and themes were repeated. Strauss and Corbin (1998) elaborate its importance, “Doing line-by-line coding through which categories, their properties, and relationships emerge automatically takes us beyond description and puts us into a conceptual mode of analysis” (p. 66). A copy of the transcripts was made available to each of the participants to verify their accuracy and authenticity. The following chapter has further details of how analysis took place for this study.

Protection of Participants

Due to the nature of interviews and the topic in this study, the participant-researcher needed to ensure protection of the participants within the study. The participant-researcher completed the Oregon State University’s Institutional Research Board (IRB) course on Human Subjects. This initial course provided a general overview of the protection of human subjects within research settings. In addition to completing this course, the participant-researcher followed the

appropriate guidelines set by OSU when the time comes to submit an IRB proposal. The participants were all adults who were only considered for participation if they enter into the study voluntarily and autonomously. Furthermore, the information they provided will be used exclusively for the purpose of the study. This study followed a code of ethics utilizing four strategies outlined by Christians (2005): (a) provide informed consent offering voluntary participation and full information about the study and its intentions; (b) avoid deception and never assume there is information that must be kept from participants; (c) honor privacy and confidentiality by never revealing the identities of the participants and by using pseudonyms for study identifications; and (d) ensure accuracy by never fabricating or embellishing findings within the study.

Some scholars have provided further specifications about the research involving immigration (Lahman, Mendoza, Rodriguez, & Schwartz, 2011). Undocumented participants have been described as vulnerable and in need of protection when researched. Lahman et al. (2011) challenge the notion of citizenship, the legal right to reside in a country; furthermore stating it is fraught with stereotypes and polarization. Citizenship is an abstraction, an agreed upon construction to aide persons in organizing themselves into decision-making bodies. For those who have United States citizenship privilege, citizenship is an accepted part of daily life, rendering it challenging to remember citizenship is not “real.” It is imperative to note that being a noncitizen or undocumented individual does not mean one is a nonperson. Much of the rhetoric around undocumented citizens allows for the erasure of a person’s basic humanity (Lahman et al., 2011). Lahman et al. (2011) note, “There is a marked tendency for legal immigration to be romanticized and illegal immigration vilified. From a romantic notion, consider the verbiage that surrounds legal immigration: land of milk and honey; streets paved

with gold; melting pot; unlimited possibilities; pulled up by my own bootstraps; and the American dream” (p. 305). Perhaps these ideologies get romanticized since they are wrapped in the idea that all one has to do is have the right combination of attitude, integrity, talent, and the willingness to work hard to succeed (McNamee & Miller, 2004).

Lahman et al. (2011) contend undocumented participants are capable, competent, yet vulnerable simultaneously. Some researchers have used the Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics (CRRRE) model: confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms to protect anonymity, and unsigned consent forms are methods to protect undocumented participants (Lahman et al., 2011). Lahman et al. note that methodological discussion is plentiful regarding vulnerable participants, as well as who may be referred to as sensitive, hard-to-reach, or hidden populations (Adler & Adler, 2001; Liamputtong, 2007). It is important to note that someone who is vulnerable in one context might be powerful in another; for example, an undocumented person may be a leader in their family and when returning to their own country will no longer be undocumented. Still, this is a sensitive topic, particularly in the midst of the United States’ debate about immigration status and reform.

The participant-researcher used the eight strands of the Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics (CRRRE) model as a method to protect undocumented participants. The eight tenets of Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics (CRRRE) model are: (1) the use of culturally responsive relational reflexive ethics; (2) sociocultural consciousness; (3) developing an affirming attitude toward research participants from culturally diverse backgrounds; (4) acquiring the commitment and skills to act as agents of change through research; (5) understanding constructivist and critical foundations of culturally responsive research; (6) learning about participants and their communities; (7) employing a reflexivity throughout the

research process; and finally (8) commitment to seek the good through research (Lahman et al., 2011). In a practical sense, applying the CRRRE model means being aware of the power issues undocumented participants may be conscious of while they are speaking with a researcher. That is, the participants are in the United States trying to exist below the radar of the government, and therefore the researcher needs to be thoughtful with the information they choose to share and the way they present themselves. While there are ethical considerations that exist, the researcher's belief is that through the authentic interactions and the co-creation of the study and data presented, the process was ethical and meaningful for the participants (Schwartz, 2009).

Birman (2006) described undocumented participants as bringing “unique challenges” (p. 157) to research and cites the need for anonymity as one of these challenges. The participant-researcher collected data directly from participants; thus data was not anonymous entirely. As a form of protection, pseudonyms for the participants were used in this particular study. Furthermore, the participant-researcher also created a composite of persons in the findings. “This method of presentation [composites and pseudonyms] does not reveal the identities of study participants but allows a closer look at patterns and nuances of beliefs and behavior” (Odendahl & Shaw, 2001, p. 313). Rossman and Rallis (1998) elaborate on this type of writing indicating “every act and thought are drawn from real [participants]” and the composite character “seems typical and real” (p. 201).

Besides the use of the CRRRE model as well as composites and pseudonyms in this study, the participant-researcher read to the participants a consent form with no signature line, as approved by the participant-researcher's institution's IRB. The participant-researcher requested the use of oral consent, allowing the participants to be more comfortably informed of their rights; an issue that this posed was that participants would not have study-related information to take

with them. In order to overcome this challenge, the participant-researcher developed an informative flyer with topic and data-collection methods and contact information of the participant-researcher for participants to take with them; many of the participants did decide to take the information with them. Finally the participant-researcher used process consent, where the participant-researcher checked with participants through the entire study to see if participants remained comfortable still being a part of it (Lahman, Geist, Rodriguez, Graglia, & DeRoche, 2010).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to give voice to a population that has largely been unexplored in academia. It examined the experiences of undocumented Latino students at community colleges in Oregon. The social critical perspective of this study influenced the method selection for the study. An explanation of the participant-researcher's method, criteria for truth, site selection, data needs, research ethics, and data analysis was presented in the above section. The discussion of the method was presented from the social critical perspective from which the study was conducted. The desire to tell one's story reflects a need for many people. Parker Palmer (1997) addresses this need in *The Courage to Teach* when he states, "If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard" (p. 151). The untold stories of undocumented students within the context of the community college are important and relevant because they exist and because they belong to real people. Marginalized people, who have been repeatedly unrecognized within institutions of higher education in the United States, deserve and need to be heard.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter included a reintroduction of the research questions, an outline of the data collection process, a general overview of the participants, a summary of each of the study participants, and a review of the findings based on the data collected. The themes were developed from the data collected from the interviews with each of the participants: self identified undocumented, Latinos who earned an associate's degree from an Oregon community college. A narrative inquiry research design, specifically *testimonios* was used in this qualitative study to reveal the lived experiences of these students. Their stories reveal how they overcame various barriers in pursuit of their educational goals. The findings were organized into eight theme areas, which emerged from their *testimonios*:

1. Support from Family and Community
2. Overcoming Obstacles
3. Cultural Informants
4. Finding Place: Informal and Formal Networks
5. Involvement
6. Resiliency
7. Identity as Undocumented
8. Barriers that Intersect

The following research questions originally framed the interview: (a) How do cultural, family, economic class and immigration experience influence college persistence among Latino undocumented students? (b) What factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students? and (c) What have been the lived experiences of these students during their time at a community college? After reviewing the data, the participant-researcher found that the first research question should be rephrased to better capture the themes emerging from the data analysis. The rephrasing of the first research question was done upon data analysis and

further reflection by the participant-researcher. The participant-researcher found that the first two research questions were essentially the same, thus after consultation with the major professor a revision was made to the those questions. The factors associated with the college persistence of the Latino undocumented students interviewed were based on cultural, family, economic class and immigration experience. Thus, the rephrasing of the first research question became why did this population of students, undocumented Latinos, attend community college? In other words, why do undocumented Latino students pursue a community college degree- specifically an associate's degree?

The research questions develop a framework for the interview questions; the interviews were conducted and subsequently themes began to emerge. The same interview questions were used throughout all eight interviews. The rephrasing of the first research question was done upon data analysis and reflection. All the themes illustrate the complex experiences of undocumented Latino community college students. The themes were examined and highlighted through the use of *testimonios*. The participant-researcher chose specific participants' *testimonios* and direct quotes to illustrate each theme.

Throughout the interview process, participants were encouraged to engage in a meaningful dialogue, known as counter storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Thus the interviews were semi-structured. The participants' engaging in the interviews challenged the belief that undocumented Latino students do not have a voice. They also challenged the notion of the negative stereotypes that exist of Latinos in the United States, thus using counter storytelling to "make public what many already know but have not spoken out loud" (Fernández, 2002, p. 60). During the interviews, participants shared personal experiences that challenged the narrative that is largely known regarding Latinos in higher education- low completion rates and

lack of family involvement in the educational process (Torres-Capeles, 2012).

The chapter, shaped from interview data and presented thematically, begins with the *testimonio* of each participant's community college journey. The *testimonios* start with a family history that impacted their immigrant and educational experiences and end with the participant's sense of identifying as an undocumented Latino community college student. Each *testimonio* is presented as a description of the participant's experiences of success in an Oregon community college, which includes details about how family, undocumented identity, and encounters with the institution impacted those experiences. The voices of the participants are the critical part of the *testimonios*. Participants were invited to tell their educational stories and to expand on how their identity as an undocumented Latino community college student impacted their experiences. The exploration of the institutional, community as well as family support and challenges that influenced academic success for these eight undocumented Latinos could assist community college leaders and practitioners in understanding ways in which similar support could be reproduced and the challenges could be overcome. An intended outcome of this study is to influence instructional and student support practices in order to expand opportunities of success for undocumented community college Latino students.

Coding

The following section is an overview of the coding of the data collected and the process in which themes emerged from them. Data were derived from one-on-one semi structured in-depth interviews. Eight interviews were conducted in all. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes, the average interview being 45 minutes. Participants self identified as being Latino and at one point in their community college experience having been undocumented. Many of the participants now have some form of deportation relief due to Deferred Action for Childhood

Arrivals (DACA), a temporary deportation relief program implemented by President Obama in June of 2012, explained in detail in Chapter 3.

Data saturation appeared to be reached by the eighth interview, with a diverse mix of ethnic background, gender, age and experience in the United States. A ninth interview was initiated, but the participant did not meet the qualifications of having earned an associate's degree, being six credits short of degree completion. Once the participant-researcher realized the participant did not meet minimum qualifications, the interview was immediately stopped. The participant was notified that they did not qualify, but that any information obtained would still be held in confidentiality and held to the same standards as outlined by the participant-researcher and Oregon State University's IRB.

Each of the participants provided verbal consent, without the need to sign any documentation, since the participant-researcher had obtained a waiver for signed consent from the participant-researcher's university. Each participant was also given the opportunity to take with them a flyer that explained the study in length; all of the participants took the flyer without additional questions or concerns. Each participant was encouraged to inform others of the study and provide the flyer for them to contact the participant-researcher. Many of the participants did, and this is how most of the participants became aware of the research.

Each of the interviews was transcribed and coded individually for emerging themes, using initial and focused coding strategies (Charmaz, 2006). The initial individual codes were then reviewed and compared to each of the participants to identify larger themes that connected each of the *testimonios*. This process is known as inductive coding, which is developed by the researcher as they directly examine the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Coding provided a manner of organizing, sorting, interpreting and analyzing data for meaning and importance. Buch and Staller (2007) state that the act of coding refers to the process of assigning a word or description of what is happening in the data. Coding can summarize or condense data; it does not simply reduce it. The participant-researcher took the following steps to identify themes: read each transcript, coded each *testimonio* to allow themes to emerge, re-read transcripts, narrowed the codes further, grouped codes into larger categories and later analyzed them into themes; finally quotes were identified that supported these broader themes. The participant-researcher's aim was to understand the lived experiences of the participants by reading the transcripts several times and analyzing their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

The participants were contacted via phone to ask whether they wanted to review the transcripts. All eight participants confirmed they wanted to review the transcripts and provided contact information so as to receive their transcript. The *testimonios* were sent by email to each participant for review, to correct inaccuracies and to assess them for authenticity. Each participant confirmed the transcripts were accurate and did not request changes. This was an important part of this research study in order to establish trustworthiness and member checking. The participant-researcher acknowledges that each of the participants' experiences was unique. The *testimonios* were analyzed in order to capture and find common themes in their stories. Trustworthiness was maintained by documenting the *testimonios* as they were spoken; to edit would not support *testimonio* style. The participants were informed that their stories were being recorded and documented in this fashion. This was done for both the purposes of ensuring accuracy to methodological style and securing the integrity of each *testimonio*. Their *testimonio* stands as a witness to systems of oppression that exist within institutions of higher education, a

critical element of the method of using a LatCrit lens to analyze the data collected. Their accurateness is critical. All participants responded indicating that the transcripts were accurate.

Attempts were made to conduct the study in a culturally appropriate manner. Throughout the interviews, some Spanish was used; where it was used the participant-researcher noted a translation of what the word meant as closely as possible to the meaning the participant was trying to get across, keeping in mind that some words cannot be fully translated to convey the true or complete meaning from Spanish to English. The translated words are noted in brackets in the *testimonios*. Participants were able to review the transcribed and translated transcriptions of their interviews.

Finally, the interviews were analyzed utilizing the theoretical framework of LatCrit to understand the impact of various intersections of race, classism, immigration status and language in society. It highlights the importance of voice and provides an oppositional voice to the dominant narrative in mainstream United States culture regarding the experience of undocumented Latino peoples. Using a LatCrit lens reveals often-unseen structures of oppression (Malagón, Pérez Huber, & Velez, 2009).

Overview of Students

A total of eight participants were interviewed for this study, each of whom met the following qualifications: a) must be at least 18 years old, b) self identify as Latino, c) self identify as having been undocumented at some point in their community college experience, and d) have earned an associate's degree from an Oregon community college. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, they were given pseudonyms. Any individually identifiable data that could disclose the participants' identity was removed and replaced by generic data in the students' *testimonios*. If specific names were given, those names were

removed and substituted with a line indicating a name was mentioned.

Participants attended one of three urban, public community colleges in Oregon. Many of the participants also completed and/or are attending four-year institutions in the state of Oregon. For the purpose of this study the two-year institutions are referred to by the pseudonym *Local Community College*, regardless of which of the three the participants attended in order to protect them further. Four-year institutions are also referred to by a single pseudonym, *West Coast University*.

Recruitment for participants took place in June of 2014. Local organizations and individuals serving undocumented Latinos were contacted to assist in identifying interested participants. Individuals who contacted the participant-researcher for additional information were encouraged to give the recruitment flyer to possible participants. Participants contacted the participant-researcher and were asked initial screening questions to assess their eligibility. Once that initial screening was completed, the interviews were scheduled in a confidential location selected by the participant. Each participant was asked to give additional flyers to others who might be interested in participating. Many of the participants did so, and so saturation was reached within a few weeks of initial contact with the local organizations and individuals serving and supporting undocumented Latinos.

The interviews were conducted between late June and early July 2014 at various locations of the participants', which ranged from local parks and coffee shops to a private conference room at a local community college. All interviews took place in the late afternoons, evenings and weekends to accommodate participants' schedules. The participants were assured confidentiality and were told that a pseudonym would be used to further ensure confidentiality.

The eight students include two men and six women between the ages of 21 and 29.

Seven of the eight participants were born in México; the eighth lived in México for a significant amount of time during their youth. The seven participants came from various states and regions within México and each have a different *testimonio* on how and why they came to the United States. The majority of the participants being of Mexican descent did not surprise the participant-researcher since the majority of undocumented people in the U.S. are from Mexico (Castro-Salazar & Bagley. 2010). The following section is a detailed *testimonio* of each participant's journey organized in five sections: family story, academic path, aids in persistence, challenges and opportunities, and identity as undocumented. Their *testimonios* are witness to a resiliency that is hard to ignore.

Paco's *Testimonio*

Twenty-four year old Paco has a smile that lights his face as he enters the conference room in which the interview took place. The participant-researcher reviews the verbal consent form and explains the purpose of the research, to ensure confidentiality and protect the participants. Once the formalities are completed, the interview begins. Paco earned an Associate of Science as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree; he majored in Criminal Justice and minored in Farsi. He was accepted to the University of Tehran in Iran to study International Affairs, but delayed his acceptance due to his residency status. Paco has a unique visa status, a U-visa, which is a visa that gives temporary residence status for holders. The U-visa limits the ability for those with this status to travel outside of the United States. U-visas are issued to immigrants who have been victims of certain serious crimes; as a young child Paco was in the foster system due to an abusive stepmother. He was able to be issued this visa during his community college experience due to the support of various student affairs practitioners at the community college he attended. Since his graduate studies were delayed, he decided to apply

and was accepted to a competitive national internship program for Latinos in Washington, D.C.

His aspirations are to eventually work for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Dark haired Paco, born in Michoacán, México- has an easy laugh. As he explains, he comes from a big family of nine brothers and sisters. He is the eldest of them all, raised by his single father. He explains his parents married early but later divorced. His single father had some decisions to make, Paco elaborated:

They both come from really different backgrounds. I think my mom had some education, and my dad had like a second grade education. Basically my dad was born in kind of like a village. There is no running water, electricity. Maybe now there is, but when he was born there was nothing. And he had—his family was huge as well. There's a lot of poverty because of—it's too big. My grandma and grandpa couldn't sustain everything. So my dad decided to move to the city—to Uruapan because there was better economic opportunities, at least that's what he thought. So he did that, met my mom. They got married. My dad was like seventeen. And my mom was like a year younger. So they got married at a really young age. Then I was born. Then a sister was born and then a brother was born. And around 1993 my dad decided to immigrate to the United States because other relative of his—my aunt, his sister, was already here and my dad didn't have too many choices there, in Michoacán. So it was either join the cops there, which were corrupt. You know, you can't really go into the police force unless you have an education. My dad didn't, but they gave him that choice. So there was a lot of corruption. Or join the other side, which were the cartels.

Paco recounted how he crossed the border twice into the United States, once at three years old and later at ten years old,

I don't remember how my dad actually crossed us. It was just us three. Well, once when I was a child and then—again, it goes back to the year 2000. It was when the power—the whole world was supposed to go dark. Yeah, it was just kind of funny. But I was ten years old so I didn't care. My younger brother and I were sent to Mexico to go visit my grandma. And he was five, born here, a U.S. citizen. He was born in *Local Hospital*. I thought I was born there, by the way, because everybody was born there. All my little brothers were born there. And so we went down and [little brother] had an aunt from his mom's side, 'cause of my step mom. And uh—she used to go back and forth to Mexico and I guess never had any issues so—my dad was fine with me going with them to Mexico. On the way back we were told that I was to tell them where I lived, what school I went to, and that was it. No, like, I didn't have to lie or anything to cross back. And later I found out that she had a son that was about my age, born in my month and almost the same day—so-- So this was before 9/11 so you don't have to have a passport even if

you're underage. Now you have to, you know. So we were kind of—that one I do remember—we were coming back and the immigration officer asked me where I lived. And I said, “*Local City, Oregon.*” He was like, “Where do you go to school?” I said, “*Local Elementary School*—“ you know. He was like, “Okay.” And that’s it. Nothing happened. And so that was the second time I went to Mexico.

As a young adult Paco had to deal with issues that peers who are documented do not have to deal with:

In terms of education, I mean there’s a lot of other hard things that I’ve had to do because my dad was deported. He doesn’t have a criminal background but, I mean, you can still get deported. So I was in charge of all my younger brothers. All of them. That was the hardest part. When I was sixteen my brother he is like five years younger than me so he was like eleven. And there was another brother, he was the one that was always giving us headaches. Anyway, we had to figure out the funds to hire a lawyer for him. Our relatives were here in the area, and we were in Yakima Valley by ourselves. He was being held. We got a phone call, and he was like, “Don’t worry about it.” But obviously we worried. I had my driver’s permit and we went out to look for an attorney, the three of us. I remember my brother was like, “Yeah, you’re short, you’re gonna get pulled over.” [Laughter] He’s a smart kid but he had a big mouth. He was like, “As soon as we get pulled over, I’m running.” [Laughter] And so, thank God, we didn’t get pulled over. But we definitely had some scary moments. We hired an attorney; this attorney obviously saw the situation. We were by ourselves, and my dad was in Tacoma [immigrant detention center]. She did everything she could. But there was only so much she could do; there was a fifteen thousand dollar bail. I think that that was a lot of money. So we somehow sold more willow to his customers, my dad’s customers. We knew all my dad’s customers. We were like, “Okay, yeah, we can do something.” Obviously they [his brothers] were kids, so I tried to make it like this was a game because I didn’t want to worry them either. They knew though. These guys were not dumb. So we loaded up a truck full of willow that my dad had left on the farm. And we went and we sold it. We ended up getting fifteen thousand dollars from all of my dad’s customers. And they knew as well. I told them, “My dad is in Tacoma, so we need the money.” And they were like, “Okay.” And so we got the money. I finally called my uncle—my uncle here in Oregon because I was freaking out. I was like, “How am I supposed to carry around fifteen thousand dollars with me? I’m gonna get kidnapped or something.” So they came and they helped me out with the process. We went to some lady in the Seattle area, we paid her the fifteen, and she went and bailed him out. So anyway, my dad was stuck in Mexico for a couple of years, but by that time my dad’s family stepped in. My aunt stepped in, and she knew a little bit more about what was going on. Now we were back in the area. And so while I was at *Local Community College*, my dad had finally made it through again—through the border.

As with many of the participants, Paco did not know his status of being undocumented until he reached high school:

It was sen—no, junior—almost senior year of high school, I think. It was in the summer because counselors-- all my friends, they wanted to apply for college and so did I. And so that's exactly when I started asking for more paperwork-- for certificate. Then I saw I was from Mexico. I honestly did never see my birth certificate before that. I've never seen a birth certificate before.

His father attempted to protect him but eventually Paco put together the pieces, specifically Paco recounts when he asked for a social security card because he wanted to work at a local dry cleaner and needed to provide one:

My dad gave me a social security number. He had it ready for me. [Laughter] I was like, "Hey, they're asking for..." "Oh, I have one for you." [Laughter] Anyway, yeah, but that was at age sixteen. So a little bit—almost—yeah, no questions were asked. I mean it was a small business. So I gave them my driver's license and the social security I remember my dad gave me. And when they asked me—I remember the application—that I just said U.S. citizen 'cause that's—yeah-- no other documents were asked. But, going back to when it really hit was that instant when all the applications came back and they were like well your social security— Actually, what happened was I put in the social security number of the dry cleaners. Obviously it wasn't real so before I turned them in my dad was like, "I don't know if you should do that because actually it's fake. I made it up. I had one made for you because otherwise you weren't gonna be able to work at the dry cleaners." And so everything made sense to me. My aunt's a manager at the dry cleaners. I puzzled things together. I was like "Oh, okay. But I didn't get in trouble there because there's someone there." There was a connection there. My dad—here's the interesting part—he never made a big deal out of it. Like, "You're undocumented or illegal."

Paco recounted his journey into higher education. Although Paco's father was formally uneducated, Paco could see he valued education:

So I think—where we started with—where my family started—because that really has a lot to do with pathway to college. So my dad, you know, he's uneducated and ((since)) he didn't go to school till second grade. My real mom—I actually still don't—I haven't seen her since two thousand or maybe two thousand two. I can't remember very well. But she might have had an education, but there's really no connection there. So the only person that was there to push us—my dad's main goal was for all of us to go to school.

Paco elaborated on the real push towards higher education from his father:

And um—I would say that my pathway to my education started with his push-- myself and my younger brother just watching him struggle through his like—uneducated status--speaking to Americans. Like he didn't speak English, so you know, he was like, "This is why you gotta go to school to study because then—. He would say, "Don't be dumb like me." Even though we knew he was very smart. He came here and did all that without help, essentially.

Paco explained his path to higher education as full of ups and downs. What aided him was a cultural informant, someone who guided his steps forward and introduced him to areas that he was unsure he could navigate:

I went to *Local High School*, I think it's good to mention that because that's the community where I grew up, but—and I actually had to tell the counselor there that I was undocumented. That, right there, was probably the hardest thing I've done. So that was the hardest thing I've had to do in terms of education because first of all, this lady—definitely—I trusted her in the sense that she was always supportive with school. I mean I actually done okay, pretty well with school. I was always involved, even at the high school level with clubs and groups: mock trial teams. I think that helped a lot that this lady was able to see this. And she—actually when I told her, she wasn't—I didn't see any reaction or any negative reaction. She was—maybe she had ran into this before. She knew exactly what to do. She then referred me to someone else and then I was referred to a leadership program at *Local Community College*. Which led me to go to *Local Community College*. That was the first time that I've actually stepped into a college, honestly.

Paco described what supported his persistence at the community college: an informal network of other undocumented Latino students, which assisted him in making connections. This is a theme that emerged throughout the interviews. It is further elaborated on in Chapter 5. Paco described this informal network:

When I went through *College Leadership Program* [CLP], and I saw all these other opportunities. Also, I would say that the biggest one was when I met other undocumented students, to be honest with you. That was pretty good, pretty motivating—that I'm not the only one that is fighting the battle. There's other students, and they also are in the same boat as me. Nothing is guaranteed for them either.

Paco, being a first generation college student, had his struggles. In particular, his undocumented status created a shadow over his future:

When I was driving to Yakima to, you know—I had three hours to think. That was always in my mind, like, “Okay, what’s the next step?” Because at this point I was already in too deep, and I can’t call it quits and I can’t fail. Plus, my other brothers were watching every move that I—and my dad was obviously paying attention. And he’s always been really supportive. And then there was a couple of years when my aunt had her own family issues, but when she came back she was a really huge hit or support. She was like, “Okay, let’s do this.” Always trying to offer money, obviously because she knew a college student needed money. She has two daughters, basically my sisters. And in the beginning we were raised together, and I had to make sure they knew college was an option. They were always watching and criticizing. [Laughter] So that’s another encouraging aspect because even if I wasn’t documented, they are. And they get it.

His undocumented status created doubt for him and his future:

There was a couple of times, while I was volunteering and getting involved and encouraging other students to graduate and go to college—other Latino students. I was actually kind of questioning myself. I was actually questioning, “Shoot, what am I gonna do after I am done here? What am I gonna do to get the next degree, which is the bachelors degree?” Because I was worried about that. I knew that there were other steps that I had to do.

When asked how he would describe his identity as an undocumented community college student,

Paco illustrated how insecure his undocumented status made him:

Honestly now that I consider myself not undocumented I feel a little safer than when I was. I thought about this. Honestly, I would describe myself, when I was undocumented community college student, just as insecure. I was an insecure college student. At least some students when they do well, they know they can go the next step. They can get a job. They can get a career. The first two years of *Local Community College*, there was no security for me. There was no job security, no degree security, no four-year degree security. So the security, I would say. At that time, if there was something to [define] Latino college students, it would say insecurity on my forehead. [Laughter].

Hilda’s *Testimonio*

Twenty-three year old, Hilda has the confident glance of a full-grown, mature adult.

Hilda confidently walks in to the conference room where the interview took place. She picks a chair and eases in, chatting away like she has done interviews before -- which she has. A local

immigrant rights activist, Hilda has participated in various radio and television interviews

regarding her status as an undocumented college student. As of this interview, Hilda is a DACA

recipient, which grants her access to the temporary relief deportation program President Obama signed into effect June of 2012.

As Hilda settles in, the participant-researcher reviews the verbal consent form and explains what the purpose is, to ensure confidentiality and to protect them. Once the formalities are completed, the interview begins. Hilda earned an Associate of Arts Transfer degree and is completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in criminal justice with a minor in women's studies. Hilda currently is an employee of the state of Oregon, working with juveniles who are incarcerated. Having a workers permit due to DACA allows her to have this job. Her aspirations are to attend a private local law school and someday become an attorney.

Pierced-lip Hilda was born in Distrito Federal (México City), México. She is one of three children, the only female. She lives with her two brothers, mother and father in the same household. Hilda and her family arrived in to the United States when she was 15, with a tourist visa, which they later overstayed. Her father had first come to the United States looking for a safe place for their family due to a conflict with the local police that lead to constant harassment for their family. Hilda elaborated on this decision:

I thought that we were living okay, but there was this situation with the drug cartels. It was really bad. Then—los militares [the military], they were outside of my house constantly, and it was just getting bad. It was getting really bad. And my dad left. My dad came to the U.S., came to Oregon because we had a situation with one of my family members. And then—we had a visa, a tourist visa, so we would always go back and forth, back and forth. Actually the weekends we would spend in Texas; just shopping, you know, and going out to eat and stuff. So my dad said, “Well I’m gonna go to Oregon and figure this out with one of the family members.” And he did, and he was here for like six months. And he said he was gonna come back, but he didn’t. So what happened is that one day—because my mom, we all slept with my mom on the same bed—and I heard that she was on the phone. It was like midnight, and she was on the phone and she was talking to my dad. And she was telling her—telling him that she had—she was like, “I got the plane tickets. Everything is okay. Now we’re gonna start selling everything—“Blah, blah, blah. And then—she didn’t want to tell us. She told us that we were gonna come and visit my family and that’s it. Yeah, so she said that we were just visiting. But

she was selling everything. She knew that we were gonna come and stay here, but she didn't want to tell us. So she was doing everything behind our backs. So when we realized that, we were really upset. Our house, we just locked it with everything inside. Because we didn't have to sell furniture and stuff. And now I get phone calls saying, "Hey, your house-- people have broken into your house. There's nothing in the house." So, for us, we don't have a house because people are living in the house, actually.

Having arrived at age 15, Hilda struggled with various barriers, including language and her undocumented status. Hilda explained:

It was the worst time of my life because I was so depressed because I didn't know the language. I always wanted to go to school, but then my advisors always said that I would have to go back to Mexico to get a visa.

She got through high school without aspiring to attend college, but it was her mother who really pushed her to consider applying after talking to someone at *Local Community College*:

[Mom] she started talking to people at *Local Community College*. So then, I guess one of the ESL professors said that, "Just bring your daughter and talk to this one person here who speaks Spanish." Hilda's mom brought her daughter to *Local Community College* and sought information without fear, Hilda explains: And he was working right here in the front, I guess. And my mom was like, "Do you speak Spanish?" And he's like, "Yeah." And then my mom started, like, she was like a little kid asking so many questions. "So my daughter wants to go to school—wants to go to college. This is the situation, we don't have papers, by the way—" and blah, blah, blah—"She doesn't know English. She's so nervous." And then _____ is like, "Oh. Don't worry, don't worry. Come to the multicultural center and then you—have you heard about the College Leadership Program [CLP] class?" I'm like, "No." "Okay, well first you—" He sold the class.

Hilda's entry into local community college might have begun by a push from her mother, but it was Hilda's involvement that secured it through the financial support she earned. A key to her persistence is described below:

Leadership programs, definitely. I don't know. I don't know—I mean one of the things because I—they provided a scholarship or a stipend. That's one of the reasons.

Like Paco, Hilda struggled throughout her community college experience, mostly surrounding her status as an undocumented student and in panning for her future:

Because when you're undocumented, you don't know—you have no control of your life, over your future. You don't have no control because even if you have, let's say a bachelors, but you're not documented, "What are you gonna do? Like where can you work?" I mean being undocumented. That was one of the biggest things. I mean because there were so many opportunities, and you couldn't because of your status.

Yet Hilda still sought opportunities while attending *Local Community College*; she explained why:

Plus, you have this need of doing more than others because you don't know if—it's kind of like dying. You don't know when you're gonna die, sort of thing. You don't know, so you got take advantage of everything, right? So you don't know if—kind of like your life is limited, so you have to take advantage of everything because you don't know if you're going to have that opportunity again. Because you don't know what's going to happen to you.

Hilda, elaborated on the intersection of her immigration status and identity:

Actually, as an undocumented female of color. That's actually one of my strongest identities. Because I feel like, no matter what, I mean right now I have my DACA but still I feel that I'm undocumented, and I feel that that's really strong. That's something that's inside of me because of all of-- everything I have gone through. So I really feel that I'm not only una mujer [a woman], but I'm an undocumented mujer [woman].

Anna Lisa's *Testimonio*

Twenty-eight year old wide-eyed Anna Lisa enters the conference room without hesitation. She aspires to be a nurse. She is currently working at a call center and is now applying to various nursing programs throughout the state. Going into round three of applying to nursing programs, Anna Lisa's determination shines throughout the interview. Born in Michoacán, México, she originally came to Oregon through Utah, where her family settled when they first came to the United States. Like Hilda, Anna Lisa is a DACA recipient. Anna Lisa earned an Associate of Science Transfer degree from *Local Community College*. She is a middle child, having three brothers and two sisters.

Out of all of the participants, Anna Lisa was the one who attempted to cross into the United States the most, having crossed and been deported six times. She finally was able to

cross at the age of 10, on the seventh try by crossing a barbwire fence. She described one of the failed attempts to cross:

And then once they—they thought that it was easier if we just went through this small tunnel, go underneath it. We did have to crawl. It was probably from where we're sitting down to that building [approximately 60 feet]. So we had to crawl in that small tunnel and across from there, it was gonna be a huge parking space. And I think it was for a K-Mart, if I'm not mistaken. It was for a K-Mart store. So we were supposed to meet the guy that was to bring us to my dad there. And then we did; we ended up making it to the store, but always my mom, she was the last one with the baby. So she-- one of the border patrols, they saw her. They saw her going, walking into the store. And we were pretending we were shopping. The tunnel would get to the parking lot of K-Mart [Laughter] and so we were there, and we were pretending to be shopping. And this one I won't forget—well, none of them. So I remember I got Chips Ahoy and a bag of Doritos. My mom got some diapers, and then the border patrol came to us. And he's like, "We need to take you guys with us." And we're like, "Por que? [Why]" And so my mom, that day, she only had to pay for the diapers because the border patrol, they actually bought me my cookies and the Dorito bags that I had. And they took us out. And then the last time, when we were actually able to cross, it was during daylight. And it was the same girl that had been with us the night before and twice we got caught with her. And it was funny because it was always the same border patrol. And when we were ready—we thought you had to give fake names, so you don't tell them your real name. You have to give them a fake name. So when we got caught, they would already say, "Oh, that's the _____ family!" [Laughter]. Like, we were just barely getting ready with our new names but they're like, "That's the _____ family!" And then I'm like, "Okay, yeah, we're still the _____."

She elaborated on that experience and realizing she was undocumented:

And the last day, it was during daylight. They really didn't know what to do with us anymore. My mom was so ready to give up. And she just wanted to go back. Then my dad, he kept telling her, "No, just try one more time. Just one more time." I was really excited. I really wanted to come. I wrote a letter—because my dad came here in ninety-six and so I wrote him a letter after a few months that he had been living here. And I told him like, "It's almost time for our school break." I'm like, "Why can't you just take us on vacation, so that we can at least see what it's like. Then you can—we just have to stay there for a week. We can always come back and continue with our life here." Because I didn't know. Back then, I didn't know. And even to the day that I left, I didn't know. Until how we're crossing and then I'm like, "Yeah, this is not normal." Like, to be—to get caught and then sent back. Get caught again and then sent back. I'm like, "No, this is not normal," so yes, I knew for a while.

Anna Lisa finally made it to the United States. She and her family settled in Utah. She commented on struggling to learn the language:

So in my ESOL I had to take going to the Spanish classes. And that's how I learned English, by going to the Spanish classes. I would help the students with their Spanish; they would help me with my English. So I—I picked it up really fast. Within six months I could understand the language, but because kids kept making fun of me I wouldn't speak the language. So it was hard for me to speak the language.

With a unique twist, Anna Lisa explained how she came to Oregon to pursue higher education.

She got encouraged both by her family and teachers:

My parents, they would encourage me to continue my education. My brother, he said—my oldest brother, he would encourage me to continue my education. And he even told me, and this was my senior year; he told me, "If you get a certificate—to go to college and you get the scholarship that your teacher talked about," he's like, "I'll buy you the car because you're gonna need a car." My English teacher, she was the one who kept telling me, "With your grades, you could get a full scholarship for any university of your choice."

Her family and strangers kept encouraging her:

I was living with an aunt—she didn't have time to go to a conference, so I ended up going. And the teacher there was like, "So how old are you?" And I was like, "Eighteen." "Where are you going to school?" "I'm like, "Nowhere, I already graduated." And, "Why aren't you going to school?" I'm like, "Um, I just moved." "Where from?" So I started telling her, so she gave me a name and a number to call *Local Community College*. She's like, "You need to go. And I have faith in you." I don't even remember that teacher's name.

Even with the push from her family and teachers, she did not begin community college because of her undocumented status until a co-worker continued to encourage her and shared his story.

Anna Lisa described this pivotal moment:

And then he told me, "So what do you do?" I'm like, "I work." "What else do you do?" Like, "I just work. What do you mean?" "Well, what do you like to do?" I'm like, "I like to read." And he's actually the one that started telling me, "Well, I go to college." But then I thought, "Well, he's legal so it's normal for him." Then he told me his story. I'm like, "No way! And you're going to college?" He's like, "Yeah." And so we started talking. I ended up leaving that job, but we still kept the friendship.

Anna Lisa continued describing how her co-worker encouraged her to finally enroll at *Local*

Community College:

“I want you to meet someone.” I’m like, “Oh-- Okay.” He’s like, “How about if we go to the school tomorrow, sign you up so that you can start taking classes and then I’m like, “Tomorrow?” He’s like, “Yeah, what’s wrong?” I’m like, “I don’t know. I was thinking maybe like—” He’s like, “If we don’t do it tomorrow, we’re never gonna do it.” He’s like, “And this is for you and your future.” And so I’m like, “Okay.” So I kind of did felt a little like a little pressure there, but after—we had a friendship for almost two years already. He already knew like what I wanted, what I liked. He knew how much I loved school and how I wanted to get educated. So we did. We came to *Local Community College*, and then I met _____. So we signed up. Then he started telling me about CLP, and then from there it’s like—landed here and never left until not too long ago.

Anna Lisa got encouragement throughout her time at *Local Community College*; she described how her immediate family’s continued support motivated her to continue despite mixed messages from her extended family:

Like my parents were always so supportive. So I was living with my parents and I wasn’t paying them rent. Then my aunt, she would always tell me, “Why aren’t you paying your parents rent? You should be helping them out with rent.” Like, “I don’t even know why you’re going to school.” Like, “Why are you going to school anyways? You probably going to end up with a degree that you’re not even gonna to be able to work. So what’s the point?” And all those things, they would get to me now and then. And they would—they put you down because I’m like, “Yeah, what’s gonna happen once I’m done? Am I going to be able to get a job or is it just going to be a degree on the wall?” And so I would question myself a lot. And one day I remember I talked to my mom, and then I was telling her about it. And then she started crying. And then she told me, “You know how much I wish that I was able to give you money for college?” She’s like, “I see how you have to work so hard in order to pay for your school.” And she’s like, “And then I’m not able to do anything for you? Don’t listen to your aunt. I want you to go to school. I want you to get educated.” And that was my—I think that pushed me.

As those before her, Anna Lisa had challenges and opportunities due to her immigration status.

Anna Lisa expanded on this while describing the time she applied to a leadership program on campus:

And when I applied, _____ didn’t know that I was undocumented. And so when she offered me the position, she called me and I jumped. I was so excited because, I’m like, I didn’t think I was gonna make it after all the students who had applied. Like, “Me,

making it? No.” And so she tells me, but this is a paid position. And then I’m like, “Oh.” It’s like, my stomach went all the way to the floor. That’s when I told her. And then she’s like, “Let me give you a call back.” And then I was really disappointed by then because I thought, “She already told me that she already offered the positions that she had for stipends to someone else. Then, no, it’s not gonna happen.” But then, even though I was disappointed, I knew that I was still gonna come and take classes. But then, that was—I think—that was what kept me, being enrolled in the leadership programs. That was what kept me here because it would build me as a person. She told me that she couldn’t do the eight hundred dollars that the position was for, but that she was able to do seven hundred and fifty. She’s like, “Will you take it?” I’m like, “Yes!” [Laughter] So I did, and that was the beginning of getting involved within the community. And that was how I got involved with the community, and that’s why I still like to be involved with the community.

Finally, Anna Lisa’s identity as an undocumented Latina community college student cast doubt on her future:

When you get the feeling that—say, “I’m just going to give up,” especially after you withdraw from a class because you’re getting a D. And then your teacher tells you, “Well, why did you withdrew too late?” Then you’re like, “Well I was getting a bad grade.” And then she tells you that she also had a bad grade in college. So you’re like, “Oh. So it’s not just me.”

This chapter elaborated on how immigration status made its undeniable imprint on the participant’s *testimonios*.

Rebeca’s *Testimonio*

Twenty-two year old Rebeca’s bubbly personality is immediately apparent as she enters the conference room. She has an easy smile when the interview begins. Born in Distrito Federal (Mexico City), México Rebeca aspires to work with at-risk youth, specifically middle school age. She is currently attending *West Coast University*, having earned an Associate of Art Transfer degree from *Local Community College*. She is majoring in criminal justice with a minor in psychology. Like previous participants, Rebeca is a DACA recipient.

Rebeca has a small family; she is living in the United States with both her parents and her little sister. She came to the United States at age four, her family seeking more opportunities for

a future that México could not offer. Her crossing was uneventful as she laid sleeping in her aunt's arms when they reached the border check point in Tijuana. The border guard simply waved her family through without incident.

Rebeca did not find out her undocumented status until she, as any other teenager would, wanted to get her driver's license:

My mom told me, and the only reason why she told me was because I wanted to get my license. I was seventeen, and she kept insisting for me not to get it. "You don't need it. I can drive you." So one day I was like, "Well I need my social security number." And she started crying. She told me that I wasn't born here and that I was born in Mexico. Apparently I just went through the line.

When asked how she felt, Rebeca responded:

Horrible. I felt like I didn't know who I was. Everything that I had planned suddenly kind of dropped. It was like a new beginning. And it started when there was this class in my high school where they help you get financial aid, start applying for all these colleges, and they ask you for your social security. And I didn't know it. And I remember that week I was like, "Oh, I don't know it. Maybe I should go look into it." Then, I don't remember how it happened, I think my counselor knew because she was like, "Oh, it's okay, don't worry about it. You don't need it." And I was only a junior. I wasn't a senior. I was just taking that class. So they were like, "Oh, you don't need it. We'll worry about it next year." So then my senior year I was like, "Oh wow, I don't have social security. I can't apply to all these places." I felt dumb because I was like, "Well, what am I going to do now?"

As Rebeca wraps her mind around her discovered status, she describes how her future plans changed:

I wanted to go to UCLA, and I wanted to go to a four-year college and have that experience as a college student. I was going to volunteer. Like I had planned to go into the county and experience things that way, but I couldn't because you need a background check. And you've got to do all these things. And it was just hard because I remember at my high school they had no knowledge of what to do with a person who is undocumented. I don't remember the name of the class, but I told my teacher my senior year. I hadn't told anyone that this was going on. And it sucked because she was like, "Oh, I don't know what to do with someone in your situation. Let me figure it out." And so they talked to my counselor, and they were like, "I don't know what to do either; let me figure it out." That just felt like if they don't know what they're doing, what am I going

to do? You know? So it sucked. Then I actually came to *Local Community College*, and kind of got hope.

Like some of the previous participants she was unsure of her next steps. She encountered challenges entering the community college. She elaborated on two differing experiences:

I was involved in this program called Opportunity Knocks. I think it was in the last half of my senior year, and so I just kept coming here. I had no plan; I had no idea what I was going to do. I didn't know if I was just going to get an associate's. I knew that in my mind, I was like, "This is all I can do." My counselor actually told me, "You're not going to graduate. You're not going to go to college."

Then I took a career class, and that kind of helped. Then I met with _____, and I was telling him. I opened up, and I was like, "Hey, I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know what I'm doing here." And then he told me about CLP. I talked to _____ when I started coming here. He was very helpful, and he was trying to help figure out ways to give me all these resources so I would I know. That's how I got into CLP. It's just like all these—I went from not knowing to figuring my way out.

She found support at *Local Community College*, yet her identity of being undocumented was a difficult struggle:

To myself it was one of the toughest things. To my family it was the greatest accomplishment, just getting me here. Now, when I graduated it was like—I'm going to start crying—it was such a crazy feeling. Especially when you grow up thinking you have everything you need. Before I knew I was undocumented, I was like "Oh, it's okay. I'll just apply for financial aid. It's all right." And I didn't think of how hard it would be if you didn't have those options. And so it was really hard. I constantly doubted myself.

She further elaborated,

Sometimes thinking—like when you hear negative things over and over, you start to believe them. So when you hear how statistically there's not many Latinos who go to college, and for whatever the reason is, people put it together as, "Oh because they're not smart enough or they want to stay dumb or whatever." I believed that, and so when I was in a class and I was the only Latina I was like, "Well, maybe it's because I am dumb. Maybe I shouldn't be here." But it meant a lot to me just to be at *Local Community College* and to have people, to have all these programs to keep pushing me to finish.

Laura's Testimonio

Twenty-one year old Laura and the participant-researcher meet at a local coffee shop. Laura has a huge grin as she selects where she wants to conduct the interview. She is curious about the study and states she is excited to participate. Having earned an Associate of Science, Laura plans to be a physician assistant. She is currently attending *West Coast University*, majoring in biochemistry and microbiology.

Born in Puebla, Mexico, Laura is courageously transparent on why her single mother and sister came to the United States. Her abusive, wealthy father left their mother and did not want to support his daughters. At 10 years old, Laura found herself crossing into the United States. Much like Anna Lisa, she did so pretending to sleep in a car. The decision to come to the United States was not easy for her mother because her community stigmatized divorced women. Laura explained:

So he was really wealthy in Mexico, but he was a very violent man. My mother tried to keep up with him, but it was hard for her. Even though my grandma always said that women don't get divorces, it was hard for her living in that situation. And we got to see a lot of things that I don't think kids should see. So my mother made the decision to leave him and get a divorce. We were always pushed aside because we didn't have a dad. It was awful! So she said, "I want to try to get a visa to go to the U.S. and try to get an education. Do something." But because she didn't have any property, she was not married, she couldn't get a visa. My grandma was really harsh to her because she got a divorce, so it was really difficult for her to live in that situation. We lived like in a really small town, really tiny, like in a rancho; so they didn't even let my sister and I go to the elementary school there because my mom was the only divorcee. And since it was a really Catholic town, they said, "We don't want you here." Basically, they kicked us out of the school. Basically, she tried to get the visa for like six months, and it was so difficult. She was going crazy over it, and money was so tight that she was like, "Screw it. I'm leaving." My grandma threw a big fit about it. She was like, "What?! You're a female! How are you going to go?" But my mom just packed her bags and came because money was so tight for her. So my grandpa brought us to the border, and then my mom contracted a lady to cross us over with her children's visas. So we were basically dressing up like—we got dressed up as American kids. We got our hair trimmed and everything. They told us that we couldn't speak. We had to pretend that we were sleeping, and we crossed.

Her path to higher education, specifically the community college, was not an easy one for Laura

to choose. She struggled with understanding how her status of being undocumented and her aspirations to becoming a doctor merged:

I was a teenager, and I was mad at the world. I felt so mad because throughout my high school years I tried to get really good grades, I was really active, I got involved in a lot of clubs and a lot leadership things, but once I was ready to graduate, they were like, "Sorry. You are not documented." I even had a counselor tell me, "Go back to Mexico and get a visa."

Her mother tried to support her, but did not understand the system of education in the United States:

And then when she knew I was undocumented and how hard it was for her- my mother's the type of person that when something is really hard, she drops it. She's like, "Ah, too hard. I shouldn't even do it." So at times she was very discouraging. She was like, "Just stop doing that. Get a good job or build your own business. Don't do it." I remember one time she really pissed me off because she said, "You're too pretty to be in school. Just get married!" And I was like, "Mother. We're not repeating the same history that our family has been repeating for so many decades. I'm done with that."

Fighting the stereotypes and expectations her mother had for her, Laura was determined to attend college. Laura described how she negotiated with her mother:

It was an interesting story. I got accepted to a state university, and they gave me a couple of scholarships. It was about eight grand, but that didn't even cover anything. My mom was like, "You know, honey, I love you, but I'm a single mom. I can't help you." She's like, "If you want school, I'm going to support you with housing and food; but with everything else, you're on your own." So I got really desperate because I didn't know what I would do. I met with _____ and _____, and I remember she told me something about _____, so I tried to make connections. I started asking about *Local Community College*. I stopped being afraid, and I was like, "I'm just going to tell people that I'm undocumented. I'm going to go around and ask people how I can get into college."

Laura finally went to *Local Community College* by becoming involved and staying determined to attend:

She was like, "Don't say that! Don't say that!" But I was like, "I don't like being scared. I need to go to college! And if I keep being scared, I'm not going to get anywhere." And one counselor told me about CLP. Yes, I applied to all of that. I got desperate because nobody would call me back. I was like, "Oh my God, I'm not going to go to college. I'm scared!" But meanwhile I applied in admissions. I went in to test. I was like, "Okay,

even if I can't go full time, I want to start doing one class at a time." So I started working cleaning houses because my mom has a house cleaning business. So that's what I did. I worked the whole summer, like twelve-hour shifts. And I saved, saved, saved, saved. When fall came around, I chose one class and I went. Then _____ called me in the summer about CLP, and I was like, "Yes! One step in, many to go." That's how I got into college.

Some of the struggles she had were directly relating to her status. Laura explained how difficult it was to come to class:

Also, not being able to drive, it was really difficult. Because I was working, I didn't get out until five-thirty. Then I would have to shower and take a bus to school, so I would never make it in time for class at six. So not being able to drive, it was just insane. I took a period of time out to get my license.

Although Laura is also a DACA recipient, this temporary program provides relief from deportation for only two years at a time. Laura explained how her future goal of being a physician assistant intersects with being undocumented:

Because I feel like sometimes the fear of being undocumented always limited me. I knew I could be something. I had been getting good really grades in bio and anatomy and all of that, so I was like why a nurse? My passion is to help people and all of that, why not a doctor? I was like, "I don't want to be a nurse, so I'm going to be a Physician's Assistant." I think about hard workers, really hard workers, dedicated women who don't give up. They just don't give up. Don't step in their way. I never gave up.

Jose's Testimonio

Jose's dark brown eyes scan the white sheet of paper that lists the interview questions before they are asked. With a broad smile he shows his curiosity on what is going to be asked. Jose identifies himself as an indigenous Chicano of Mayan decent. Twenty-nine year old Jose dreams of becoming of Chicano/Latino college instructor. He has earned an Associate of Art focused on business. His employer provided scholarship support for him to complete his education. He is currently majoring in business and minoring in public affairs at *West Coast University*.

Jose prefers to interview outside in the middle of a courtyard at a local community college. Born in Yucatan, Mexico, Jose arrived to the United States at age 14. He came to work in the factories with his family, education not being something he thought was an option at that time. Unlike previous participants, Jose did not have a traditional route to his K-12 education. Jose described how he finished high school by first attending *Local Community College*:

High school became an option when I came to *Local Community College*, when I came to the ESL program because I wanted to speak English. My family, none of them speaks English. We were going to the stores, like McDonald's or the mall, and we couldn't ask for what we wanted. We couldn't communicate and find our resources, so I got tired of that. So I told my father—actually my brother said, “One day one of us will speak English really well.” And this white man who was my brother's boss said, “You guys should go to *Local Community College*. I will help you go to *Local Community College*.” And he registered us here at *Local Community College*. I came here for two years or a year and a half.

Jose eventually attended high school and become involved in student leadership programs:

So when I was a junior in high school, I got involved in so much stuff. I was in Latino groups. I was in tons of leadership stuff. When I would find things I would be like, “Oh there is something else for me over here!” [Laughter] I just discovered that college was the next step. I was so lucky I went to the high school that I went to because I got tons of help and support from my teacher. You know, when I finished high school I got twenty thousand dollars to continue school.

Before attending *Local Community College*, Jose noted he struggled with his family getting to understand the value of education:

They don't believe in education. They think hard work is the only way. The only way to do it was by fighting them first. Before anything, before even starting your education, your education starts at home. You have to change the way of thinking at home, you know? The fight for you to be successful in your education is just a fight in your family. You have to totally say what you want. If your family supports you going to school, that's awesome; but if your family doesn't, it's horrible. Just horrible because you have to fight them.

He looks off to the distance as he explains how he decided to continue with his education at *Local Community College*:

To be honest, today I feel like I have lost my family, my blood family because I think different than them. My family now is my friends around me; people who believe the same way I do, who I grew up with here. My opinions don't match with my brother or father. And as I get more educated, the farther I get from them. Even though I still love them, but their opinions are totally different. Their minds are set to go back to Mexico. My mind is to stay here because my family is going to grow up here.

Jose elaborated on what assisted his persistence to continue at *Local Community College*:

My involvement in where I was; I was pretty involved in the school. My community. I got more involved with the—I didn't lose the contact that I had. I still meet with the people that I know out there, with the organizations for human rights, immigration reform, tons of stuff. And I knew if I didn't get my associate's, if I didn't go higher than that, I would do the job that everybody does and I don't want to do that. I don't want to be cleaning and housekeeping. I don't want to be a dishwasher. I don't want to work at McDonald's. I wanted to do something totally different, and the only way for me to do that was to get my education. The way I learned that was all the involvement I had, all my leadership roles

Unlike the previous participants, Jose does not have the documentation to work or live in the United States. Although he would qualify for DACA, he has established a long work history with his current employer under a social security number that is not his. Jose and his partner have a newborn baby; his decision to not address the immigration status with his current employer is one solely based on his family. He would lose the opportunity to work and continue his education. Instead, Jose was determined to make his current immigration status work for him:

I just want to run the system, you know. I have to find a way to be successful. Me han corrido de muchos trabajos que me han gustado, por el seguro social. [They have fired me from many jobs that I have really liked due to the social security number.] Pero como le dogo, yo no tengo miedo. [But like I said, I am not afraid.] Aquí esto, voy a trabajar, y doy con todas las ganas. [I am here, I am going to work, and I will do the best I can.] Muchos me han corrido, demasiados. [Many have fired me, too many.] Pero no por ser mal trabajador, pero por los requisitos, no tengo los documentos. [Not because I am a bad worker, but because of the requirements, I don't have the documents.] Para mi significa mucho trabajo. It means a lot of work. It means you have to have the courage. Tienes que tener valor para enfrentar lo que venga. [You need to have the courage to face what comes.] Para mí, significa mucho el trabajar. [For me, it's important to work.]

Alicia's Testimonio

Dark haired, twenty-one year old Alicia comes from a big family, four sisters and three brothers. She is the eldest, modeling the way for her siblings. Born in Michoacán, Mexico, Alicia came to the United States at six years old. Similar to two other participants, she crossed at Tijuana in a car. She was asked to memorize an English sentence in case her family was stopped; they were simply waved through without incident.

Alicia earned an Associate of Arts Transfer degree and plans to attend a private university in Oregon. She aspires to become a chemist, and so she is majoring in chemistry. Determined to attend the elite private university, Alicia has established an individual development account (IDA) supported by the state of Oregon to assist in paying for what her twenty-two thousand in yearly scholarships will not cover.

Alicia became pregnant at an early age and did not consider how her undocumented status would affect her new family. Alicia elaborated:

Probably like freshman or sophomore year, mainly sophomore year. Well, I was pregnant, and so I was like, “Okay, I need to get healthcare with prenatal care and everything.” Then there were things I couldn’t do or get help with because I was undocumented. My parents would tell me little things here and there, but I didn’t really pay attention to them. Until I had to grow up and be like, “Okay. I’m going to do this on my own. Oh, I see what you guys meant now.” Most of my prenatal care I had to do at *Local Hospital* because they are low income health care providers. I think because both my husband and I were still in school and were students they helped me with most of my prenatal; so I think that was great. Basically, that’s all I really needed. Then for food I applied for food stamps when she was born because I couldn’t get any benefits; but I could with her. So I thought, “Okay, at least it will help with her.”

Still, Alicia was determined to attend college, and with support from her teachers and family she did:

Well, I always talked a lot to all my teachers. I was always a pretty good student because my parents would always tell me, “You have to go to school. Look at us. We didn’t get an education, and this is how hard we’re working” and everything. So they would always be like, “Do well in school. Échale ganas. [Stay determined.]” My parents were supportive, but they had no how to get there because they never went to college.

Alicia elaborated on how she ended up at *Local Community College* by self-advocating:

I noticed I started doing that I high school, like freshman year. I went to Local High School freshman year, and then I went to *Another Local High School* that same year because we moved so I had to change schools. But I remember that was the first time that I thought, “Oh, I’m actually advocating for myself.” I think I did it before, but I didn’t really realize it or notice it until one of the teachers pointed it out. I remember I was taking English at Local High, like literacy or that stuff you take in high school. Then when I went to Another High I was placed in ESL, like English as Second Language, where they were learning more like verbs, nouns, and that kind of stuff. I was in that class for a couple of days, and I was just like, “Oh my gosh, this is so easy. Why am I doing this? I was studying *The Odyssey* in Local.” You know? I was like, “I feel like this is the wrong class for me,” so I went to talk to somebody in counseling or advising. I was like, “I don’t know why I’m taking this class.” Then there was this lady, her name was _____. I still remember her. She’s like, “You’re a really great advocate for yourself.” That when I realized. I was like, “Yeah, I guess.”

Using her self-advocacy skills, she found a path to *Local Community College*:

I really didn’t think about college freshman year. Like I knew I was going to go to college, but I didn’t really sit with it and think about it. I think it was when I got pregnant that I was like, “Okay, I really have to start thinking about my future.” Also, because I talked to my counselor and told her I was pregnant. I asked her what I could do so I could get by and graduate on time. She was very helpful, and I kind of built a connection with her. She helped me a lot. I remember junior and senior year she was like, “Go, look, these are some scholarships specifically for undocumented students.” She knew my situation and everything, so if I had time to do it I would apply for them. Then she would be like, “This is what you have to do to get to college.” So I was like, “Okay.” I think because of her I knew a lot. I had like a guide for what I needed to do to go to college.

As she got settled at *Local Community College*, she struggled to overcome the barriers that her undocumented status placed in front of her, mostly self-doubt:

I think I might have just had some people help me and tell me “you can do it” kind of thing because I remember sometimes I would feel kind of down. Like, “Wow, I can’t do this because I’m undocumented” or something like that, you know? Or I’d think, “This is so hard” kind of stuff; but I’m like, “Well, I’m just going to keep going. You can do it.” If you have an education, no one can take that away from you. At some point, you never know what can happen.

Alicia was determined to continue and sought opportunities to complete her Associate degree:

Well, I don’t really think about it. I know when I do think about it is mainly when things

come up that I think sound really cool, an opportunity for me to do; and then I can't do it because I'm undocumented. That's when it really hits me. I'm just like, "There will be something else that maybe I can do." I was just like, "It's an opportunity. I'll just take it."

Today Alicia is a DACA recipient preparing herself to attend a private university. She had earned a scholarship to continue following her dreams of becoming a chemist. She described the relief DACA has given way to below:

But I do think that, because you mentioned DACA, I do think that in a way that makes me feel more comfortable. I didn't really think about it before or anything. Like, "Oh, I'm undocumented." But with DACA I feel more secure, like I'm not going to get deported at any time. For some that happens.

Isabella's *Testimonio*

A local artist, twenty-two year old Isabella gives a shy smile as the participant-researcher and her meet at a local coffee shop. She is known in the Latino community for her beautiful paintings. Isabella earned an Associate of Art Transfer degree, majoring in art and minoring in computer science. Her dream is to work for Pixar as a graphic designer.

Born in El Salvador, raised in Mexico and Guatemala, Isabella states she knows what it is to be a migrant. She came to the United States at age 11, two months after September 11th. Her *testimonio* of crossing the Sonora desert in Arizona for two days is what United States mainstream media tends to mention when talking about undocumented peoples. Isabella elaborated on her crossing and the reason her mother brought her to the United States:

Then my mom she—the reason why they move is because my mom and my dad divorced and my mom needed time to settle down. Yeah, I was. I remember--I like to not remember [the crossing]. I remember the first day my mom was always joking, "Mija, we're going to Disneyland" or we're going somewhere, just to ease the stress. I remember we used to sleep in—we had some plastic—you know those things they put for camping? Tarps. We got to sleep there for a day. It was—I was scared because I could hear, literally, every animal noise. I was scared of serpents, I was scared of anything—they told me about snakes, everything. I couldn't even sleep at night. We had to walk at night. It was horrible. I remember, literally, it was like walking in pure darkness. The

worst part is if there were serpents, we couldn't even see them. [The border patrol showed up.] We were about—because the coyote—I think somebody saw us. He was like “we need to leave right now.” The bad thing—it's so funny because since then I've had problems with my legs. I walked too much. I was so tired that when my mom woke me up to run, “leave, leave right now” [she said], I couldn't move my legs. I was really worried. The coyote actually carried me out. It was a chaotic moment for me. I realized that it was actually a blessing at the end because now every time I look back—I'm just like, I'm just complaining about this and years ago I did something even—you know? It was thanksgiving when I crossed. I'm just so thankful that I'm here and I'm so glad I had my mom. I came on the 25th of November. I still remember that day because I was like what is this turkey? It was the first time I came for thanksgiving. I've never eaten so much turkey in my life. In El Salvador, it's like a miracle, because in El Salvador you don't even eat meat. That's part of the reason I became a vegetarian too. I never liked meat. I never got used to eating it in my country. It was expensive to get in my country.

Isabella describes how a teacher in high school took an interest in her and encouraged her to continue her education:

It had to be my junior year. It was another obstacle in my life. My mom got pregnant. My step-dad, not my dad who he lives in Mexico, my step-dad he broke his back. He works in construction. He was laid off for six months. I was in high school. I was like whoa I got to be the head, I got to be the head of my household now. I had to find a job. I had to—I remember since junior year in high school I started working full time and going to school at night. I remember my art instructor. I got to see her now at *West Coast University* because she used to teach there. She was so honored when I went to her class because she even told the whole class “this is a miracle she's here.” I remember one time I was so angry I told her “you know what, there's no future for me. I just better drop out now. I'm going to drop out.” And she said, you know what, I don't care. I don't care about your story, I don't care what you do, you're not going to tell me this. You're not going to. You're not going to give up on me. And if I have to literally get you from your ears and bring you here, I'm going to do that. She was such a determined woman. My senior year she did that for me. She was like, oh you know what, you have a really strong portfolio. I love your artwork. I actually applied for you, she filled out everything for me, for Ford [scholarship]---I got five scholarships in total.

Even with a full scholarship, Isabella faced challenges due to her immigration status. She decided to attend *Local Community College* after guidance from one of her instructors. Isabella describes that decision to attend *Local Community College*:

Actually I got a full ride to WCU. I got the—the *Local City Arts Commission*. It's so funny, I saw the mayor of the *Local City* like two weeks ago and he still remembers me. He brought—I was at the banquet. He gave the certificates and he really loved my

artwork. And he still remembers four years later. I got the *Local Community Arts Commission*. I got one of *Local Community School District's* scholarships. I competed against basically all of local school districts nominees. I got others, Cesar Chavez Leadership Conference scholarship. I got another one, I forgot which ones, I actually got six. I counted four because they were the bigger ones and then my full-ride to *West Coast University*. Other universities were offering me scholarships too but that's when I realized even though I was undocumented, even though I had good grades, one of the state universities was like, unfortunately because you're undocumented we cannot accept your application but if you—They thought it was an easy process. They said maybe if you ask your parents, maybe a year from now you can become legalized. I'm like, It doesn't take a year, hello. I've been here for most of my life and I'm still here. I really got upset. I just tried to... *West Coast University* they were okay about it but I felt that—because they were giving me a full-ride but—because my teacher was also guiding me. She said, you can always go back to *West Coast University* but what I'm telling you is that if you go to a community college you don't have to pay your two years. It would be cheaper. And then *West Coast University* actually offered to transfer some of that money to *Local Community College* so I could go back later.

After her decision to attend *Local Community College* was solidified, Isabella sought community to support her. She did this by becoming involved:

I remember I was really shy. I used to just not show my artwork. I was really shy. Once day she [another undocumented student] was looking at me and I was drawing something in the back cafeteria. I remember her and ____ looked at me and were like huh, who are you? And then I introduced myself. They asked, "Are you interested in joining a club?" I [responded], I don't know if I have time because I'm working at stuff.

She decided to get involved regardless of her work schedule:

And so I let it for a month, I let it soak in. And then the next month, they said you know if you join we'll cover your tuition, part of your tuition and books. We love your artwork so we want you to be our design person for club. And that's where I met ____ and _____. Because then _____ was like oh my goodness you should join a leadership program on campus. I was like well I don't know if I'm a leader. I was just doubting myself. And then _____, one of the first things she told me was don't doubt myself. She said I had a clear talent and that I just need to believe in it. Until this day, I still thank her a lot because she helped me a lot.

As with the previous participants, Isabella had many challenges due to her undocumented status.

Below Isabella expands on a particular incident:

There was a point when I was at *Local Community College* where I felt I was out of my energy to continue but then I remember the next day _____ talked to me. I remember two

weeks before I got my permit I lost my job at *Good Food* because they found out I was undocumented. For me it was- because I worked there since my junior year in high school, I felt it was so crushing. [I thought to myself], Oh my goodness, what am I going to do? I don't know if my permit is going to come back. I was just crying. ____ had just gotten out of a meeting, she was like I don't care if I'm in a meeting or two meeting, I don't care, I need to make sure you're okay because she saw me crying. And a lot of people, my friends, they were concerned about it. They called and talked to me. I remember she took me to this place in the local area to eat frozen yogurt and I was crying still [laughing]. I was like, What am I going to do? She said don't worry at least you know your permit [DACA permit] is coming. And then my permit came two weeks later and then I was like what. I always think things happen for a reason because even though I would have been at that job I would have had to quit that job because I couldn't switch it. It would have happened anyway. For me that moment was a little bit, kinda of like chaotic, because I didn't physically have the permit. I was still helping my parents but thank goodness, thanks to you guys again. That's why I like to go all the time to *Local Community College*.

Though she is a current DACA recipient, Isabella eloquently explains what being undocumented meant to her:

Undocumented for me meant that--before it meant an obstacle. Actually, it was like a shadow. Like everyone describes you're just not who you really--it's like a fear that you're always going to be found or whatever. But now, I feel like it [has] become so much of a strength. And not only [for] me, I've seen it through a lot of people. ____ for example. It has become for us like an emblem. A symbol that us, even though we are undocumented, and we're Latinos--because lots of Latinos have a lot of like--because we're a minority as well. We have a lot of obstacles. Even though we are the largest minority in the US, academically speaking we're the minority but I know things are going to change. It's through us that we have that; we have that tool to change that. I feel for us, it's not a responsibility. It's a privilege for us to change this now. For me as an undocumented, I was before, I felt like--now looking back I'm like "wow, I'm glad." I'm not saying it was--I'm glad that I got through that. Now my experience can help other students that maybe have the same problems. Or maybe they're a little bit lost. They can see that even though we were undocumented, we still did it. I'm not saying there's no excuse. Actually there's no excuse to not go to school, nowadays. For me it's more of--now it's just sharing my story for others to go that same path, go even beyond that. The same with my brother--My brother was born--so funny, everything comes along thanksgiving. He was born on thanksgiving of 2009 and I was like, wow, this is such a blessing.

Each of the *testimonios* highlighted how their family migrated to the U.S., their academic path, what aided in their persistence at the community college, what challenges and opportunities they

faced, and finally how they came to terms with their undocumented status. The following section will look at what themes emerged from their narratives, going into depth about the challenges, opportunities and what aided these students in ultimately reaching their goal of earning an Associate degree.

Data Analysis

The themes emerged by interpreting the participants' *testimonios*, making observations, and creating in-depth profiles from the participants' responses. The major themes that emerged from the interviews were categorized by how many times a thread of information or code appeared in each of the interviews. The codes were then grouped into common ideas. Each theme was examined and supported by direct quotes from participants' *testimonios*.

Only salient examples gathered from the collected data, however, were used to illustrate the eight themes. LatCrit was used as a lens to examine the students' *testimonios* and understand their experiences as undocumented Latinos who earned an Associate degree from an Oregon community college (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005). In order to guide the reader and bring focus to the key findings in the study, the following table shows emergent themes organized by the research questions. Table 2 shows a preview of data organization.

<u>Research Questions</u>	<u>Themes</u>
(a) Why do undocumented Latino students attend a community college?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support from Family and Community 2. Overcoming Obstacles 3. Having a Cultural Informant
(b) What factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Finding place: Formal and Informal Networks 5. Involvement
(c) What have been the lived experiences of these students during their time at a	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Barriers that Intersect 7. Identity as Undocumented

community college?	8. Resiliency
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Data Organization by Emergent Themes, Table 2

Research Question One

Why do undocumented Latino students attend a community college? With limited career options as an undocumented immigrant, why do undocumented Latino students attend a community college? What drives them to consider a higher education degree? Community colleges are gateway institutions for Latinos, specifically undocumented Latinos due to their open access and low tuition rates (Gonzalez, 2009). Yet with limited employment prospects, each of these participants decided to attend a community college and pursue an Associate degree.

Family and Community Support. The theme of *family and community support* emerged most clearly in response to the first question, which asked what their pathway to community college was. Alicia described how her family supported her when asked about her pathway to college:

They were supportive with words. They would tell me, “Go to school. Go to school.” So I always had that idea that I needed to go to school from them; but they didn’t understand how much effort you have to put into things and how much time it takes. I remember I would stay up super late—and I was the oldest so I had more responsibilities, I think that is probably why I had more responsibilities. So I remember I would stay up late to finish homework and stuff because during the day I would be helping my mom with chores and all these little things. She was very supportive with me going to school, but I felt like it was hard for her to understand what it took to keep going. I would help with chores, but I think it was because I was the oldest I had a lot more responsibilities. For the most part, idea-wise, I feel like they were supportive.

Alicia continued to share how her mother encouraged her towards getting an education beyond high school, “So I feel like I also got that [encouragement] from home as well because my mom is really good at that.”

One participant, Paco, described how community college was not his first option- but his only option:

I wanted to go there at first because that's the only college I had seen. So when I applied, I had applied to *West Coast University*, I think _____, and—oh, _____ because I wanted to go to duck school in the beginning. And obviously those didn't work out because of the social security. Like I just—when I found out [undocumented status] I was kind of worried that the social security would be a huge problem. I didn't wanna make it worse 'cause my dad was already getting deported and I didn't wanna get deported. So I didn't wanna turn in any false documents. Though I did see some friends that did because that's the only choice they had. They put in a social security number. It seemed to work out for them, but I didn't want to risk it.

Overcoming Obstacles. The second theme of *overcoming obstacles* emerged from the data in response to the question regarding experiences that occurred that did not support their persistence at the community college. As participants shared the obstacles that many of them faced, they indicated that it was not only their undocumented status that was a obstacle- but being a first generation college student (meaning the first in their family to attend college) was also a challenge. Hilda described how she attempted to navigate being the first in college from her family and responsibilities at home when asked what did not support her persistence at the community college:

They're so proud and they said—I guess they make it easy for us because they don't ask us for anything. They don't, kind of like—no ponen como restricciones [they don't put restrictions on us]. They don't stop us from doing anything. They support us a lot, meaning like we don't really have many responsibilities at home, kind of thing, because it used to be really different when I started college. When I started college, my dad would ask me—well, he knew that I was working full time and then coming to school and then I was doing leadership and he would require me to do certain dirty—like, cleaning the kitchen, doing the dishes, all that stuff before the end of the day. So I would have to get home and my day would end around midnight or so because I had to do homework. Then work and school and all that stuff. I had a lot going on. And my dad was really, really strict, really strict about it. Until one day that I said, “I can't. I just can't do it because it's really stressful. It's either I do one thing or the other.” And then one day we just sat down, “Hey, I guess I'm doing a lot. I know that I'm not giving you money, I mean, to kind of help with the house. But I'm not asking you for anything at the same time so—I'm trying my best.” And then, after that, I think he understood.

Paco recalled his conversation with his father regarding college and the difficulty of financing it without the ability to apply for financial aid:

He was like, “Okay well I’m sure there are other ways to go to some college, or something.” Even if we have to pay—you know, you’ll figure it out. Well, when I—you know, because my dad had told me to, like, figure it out. He’s like, “Figure it out. I don’t know the system. I don’t know what to do, to be honest.” That was the first time I heard him say, “I don’t know what to do here.” Because everything else, you know, whether it was for money or for—anything. Like we moved from the _____ area, which is, like, I would call it a town-city to, like, some farm town in Yakima Valley, you know. I hated it there. It was just cows. That’s all you would talk to: cows. [Laughter] So he always knew in that aspect, but when it came to education, he didn’t.

Paco elaborated on how his father supported him:

So when I figured it out, I considered myself a college student when I finally took the placement tests at *Local Community College*. I think that’s when I was like, “Oh, okay.” And they were like, “Yeah, you can start registering and...” After going through College Leadership Program [CLP] and seeing the whole process- that’s the other thing, I didn’t know the whole process either. Nobody in my family had gone to college before, not even cousins or anything. They all dropped out of high school, so this was the first time somebody, you know—and my whole family was supportive. They knew that it was kind of—some people would say, “You know that’s a long shot, you know, because what are you gonna do when you do have a degree? You know, you still can’t work.” But, for some reason, even though my dad didn’t know, he thought he knew the education part was gonna help me even if I had the degree and couldn’t work. Somehow he thought it was all gonna be fine later. So I don’t know, I still have to push him more and ask him about that. Like, you know, [and ask him] “Why didn’t you stop me from going?” ‘Cause you know I’ve heard from colleagues of mine who have said, “My parents told me not to go because what am I gonna do after? After I get my degree I’m not gonna get a job.” Honestly, I want to know why.

Anna Lisa described how she received misinformation as she attempted to enter college:

I wanted to enroll in school because I wanted to do something-- get a career even if it was a short career, something. And then he mentioned, “Well, you can only go into—because of your situation—you can only take ESL classes.” I’m like, “ESL classes?!” I’m like, “I already know English. I don’t need ESL classes.” “Well that’s the only thing you can do before taking other classes.” Hung up the phone; never called anybody again.

Cultural Informants. The third theme of *cultural informants* emerged from the data in response to the question about experiences that occurred which supported their persistence at the

community college. Many of the participants shared how a cultural informant, someone who guided them as they entered the community college, supported their entry. Alicia explains how a high school counselor enrolled her in a mentorship program that helped her understand how college worked, “when I was in my senior year of high school I was an CLP mentee because of my counselor. She had told me about it.” Anna Lisa also shares how one person made a difference, “This person, an individual, who helped me figure things out.”

Jose was also introduced to a program that supported his entry into the community college, “yes, and from there I met _____, and she was the one who pretty much who gave me all the information. I went to the MAP Program.” The MAP program, supported by *Local Community College*, helps people learn English and earn a high school diploma, plus get tuition waivers to enroll at the community college.

Research Question Two

What factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students? In order to address this research question, the participants responded to the direct question of: what were some experiences that occurred that supported your persistence at the community college? The follow up question was: what were some experiences that occurred that did not support your persistence at the community college? The participants’ response times varied for each of the interview questions.

Finding Place: Informal and Formal Networks. These participants, regardless of their immigration status entered the community college system and succeeded. They all earned an associate degree and many completed or are enrolled towards their bachelor’s degrees. So what factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students? As they entered the community college, all the participants found a formal or informal network that

supported their persistence. Hence, the theme of *finding place: informal and formal networks* emerged as participants elaborated on what supported their persistence at the community college.

A connecting theme that linked each of the participants was that they created an informal network of *other* undocumented Latinos students, through which they advocated for their rights. These formal and informal networks helped guide the participants throughout their community college experience. Paco shared how he formed his formal and informal network of support and how it impacted his persistence:

I was involved with immigrant rights because then I kept reading a lot about other immigrants and how they made it through and how they were also discriminated against. It was kind of like they had to be discriminated against so that their [next] generation wouldn't be as bad. So that was something—if I could make it through my education, maybe people will shut up. That doesn't—I mean I got the education, but people still comment. The counselor—or the coordinator—at the Multicultural Center was very encouraging, definitely. There was always a lot of talk about the issues of undocumented students and immigration. I was involved in that, advocating for immigrant rights and advocating for tuition equity. So with that advocacy—it actually encouraged me to say, “Okay, I have to get out of here. I have to do something.”

Hilda highlighted how having a community led to her to champion advocacy in her life:

I'm set, I feel. But I feel that that—that's not the right thing to do. I feel like that would be selfish because there's—there have been so many people that have helped me, and I feel that I got to give back. Not to those people, but to other people; to continue this, to kind of support other people. So I focus on deportations, even though no one in my family has gone through a deportation. So I focused on that because I felt that that was something no one really wanted to talk about. And—and it was like deportation, and then you're done. And I felt that that was not the end. I became a stronger activist, really doing more hands-on actions, a lot of small civil disobediences here and there. Because I felt that that was like—it gets to a point where you can't really take it no more. You got to do something. You got to stand up and fight back, pretty much. One, what people told me would be like, “No, I mean like go to school because you never know what's gonna happen. Things are gonna change. Things are gonna change. And eventually you'll get papers.” That's how it is. I mean, you know, “That's what's gonna happen.” And then what I believed in was that—is that things are gonna change—things re not gonna change, but we got to make the change. We got to make that happen. So I continued because I knew that I was, kind of like, I was gonna fight for myself, kind of thing. I continued because I said, “At the end of the day, I know that I'll be okay, and I know that something is gonna happen because I know I'm gonna make it happen.” So the difference

with what people told me was just “continue and wait”, and I was thinking like “continue and fight at the same time”, kind of thing.

Anna Lisa also shared how she financed school through her informal network:

My first year, it was one class at a time because it was coming out of my pocket. And the second year—oh and then I actually became a CLP student. I actually went, and I had to talk to my boss. I said, “You know, there’s this class that I’m really interested about, and so I need to take this period of time off.” I thought the CLP was going to be it, and then she brought me, and she’s like, “You need to fill out this application.” It was for another leadership program. And I’m like, “Oh.” That was going to complicate it for me because work outside of school. But then I thought, “This is more important.” And then I thought that what I learn here is gonna make it—it’s gonna make me more—how would I say? Vale más que el trabajo afuera [It’s worth more than working outside]. La educacion—trabajar aquí para la escuela y lo que voy aprender me va servir por vida a que un trabajo afuera [Education, it’s better to work in school then outside, I am going to learn how to serve others than a job outside of school]. I think for me, I would have given up sooner if it wouldn’t have been for me trying out for the leadership program, who gave me seven hundred and fifty dollars. And I was like, “Yay! Seven hundred and fifty dollars: I could take two classes now.” So my first year I started taking one class. My second year I started taking two classes. My third year I was able to get more and more money, so I was able to take more and more classes; but then I realized that it was harder because I was working outside of school, working for the school, with all these programs, and then on top of that taking classes. But at the end of the day, it felt so good. And the job that I was doing here, being able to go out into my community, educate people on certain issues that affected that community, it felt really good to do that. It felt that it was worth everything that I was doing here.

Rebeca simply shared what the networks she created meant to her, “it meant a lot to me just to be here and to have people, to have all these programs to keep pushing me to finish.” While Laura elaborates on the informal network she found:

A lot of people that—in high school I never knew anyone who was as open as I was about being undocumented, so when I got to *Local Community College* and I met all of them, I felt like they were just like me. They were not afraid, and they wanted to go to school. They were undocumented, and they were doing it. I always said in my mind, “If they can do it, I can do it. I’m going to follow what they did. I’m going to ask them how they did it, and I’m going to go and go and go.” And that’s what I’ve been doing. Since CLP I asked them, “How did you do it?” And they would be like, “Well, I have two jobs,” or “Apply here or apply there.” They would tell me how to do it, and I learned from that. And I kept going.

Jose also shared a similar experience:

I was doing more of the Latino Union. I was the one who helped coordinate, being the leader who found everything. I didn't even know what to do when I started. I just wanted to be creative and find resources; and I knew the resources were there because I was told by several advisors or friends, "You do this, you'll be able to find that." And of course that was the way to be successful in school. You find more connections.

Alicia clearly remembers how her network supported her:

I remember I was an CLP mentee, and one of the mentors was like, "Oh, there are these positions." So I went to the Multicultural Center. I really had no idea what it was all about. So I met ____; I think she had some grad student teaching her class as an intern or something because it wasn't her all the time. There was another student too; so I met _____. I would see _____ a couple of times. Then _____ was like, "You should apply to be an advocate." And I was like, "Okay, what does that entail?" She told me, and then she was applying too; so it was kind of cool. So I applied, and I really didn't think I was going to get the position or anything. I was just like, "Okay, I'll apply just to make myself feel better." [Laughter] I ended up getting it, so I was like, "Oh my gosh. That's so cool." So I was there last year. Then I was going to be here for another year, which was this past year that just passed. I was like, "Oh, might as well apply again" because I really liked working there.

Involvement. A predominant theme that repeated itself throughout the interviews was participants' involvement in campus based leadership programs. The theme of *involvement* thus emerged from the participants' further elaboration on what led them to persist with their education. Paco shared about how involvement supported his persistence at the community college:

I still had that thing, where my dad said "figure it out" in my head, so I was like trying to figure out. So I got really involved with College Leadership Program [CLP], which was a leadership program. I helped mentor high school students—to get out of high school and go into college. So, in my head, while I was doing that I was like, "So how am I giving these students the advice to get out of high school and go to college if I can't even do it?" So I was like, "Okay." So I got really involved. Then I found out there were other options, like working at the Multicultural Center, stipends—I had to pay for it somehow. And I knew my dad could only sustain it for so long-- or at least that's what I thought. I knew he was only gonna be able to pay for so much. I mean there's a lot of, I mean, there's nine of us, brothers and sisters. So what kept me going was that involvement. There was a lot of encouragement.

Paco elaborated further on his involvement at *Local Community College* and how he continued to be involved at *West Coast University*:

I was still involved in student government, and I got involved in other clubs. I knew that was the best way—they were key motivators. Even when I transferred to *West Coast University* and I was starting to see the end of the tunnel, it was still kind of dark because it was still kind of iffy [about] the jobs. I got involved with student government, which is their student government. I got accepted to that. They gave me another stipend. Just the fact that I was able to keep paying—because every year they just seemed to get more expensive. I would say, I guess this is pretty important, I would say that the fact that I was super involved at *Local Community College* and had that community and support—I think that is one of the biggest reasons, aside from my family—that is one of the biggest reasons why I made it through *Local Community College*, through community college.

Hilda explained the importance of involvement and its connection to retention:

I felt like I belonged somewhere because I didn't have that feeling, even at—because then I joined a church group. I didn't even feel that I belonged there. So here in school I felt that I was part of something. I was part of a place, a group, of a family. And that really helped a lot. I don't—I don't know. I don't think I'll fit in—I'll be—I wouldn't have continued. It's important for people to know that for undocumented—or just Latinos, it's just the most important part for us is not just going to class but it's what's after class. Or that experience—that it's not only, like, going to class because I think if I were just going to class and home—I think at one point I'd be like, "Screw this. I'm not doing this anymore." But then I have these other extra things. Then I said, "Well I'll still do this class or this program or this activity," which still keeps me in school. And at the end, I'll go to class, kind of thing. That retention piece; it's really important.

Anna Lisa also shared a similar experience by being involved on campus. She began with sharing how she almost missed her appointment for the leadership program she applied to:

So I ended up coming. I think I rescheduled for another day, and then—never told anyone what happened or why I missed my interview—and because I didn't want it to sound like an excuse. That's me. If I don't make it, then it's because I'm making an excuse. I'm always gonna try to be there, unless something bad happens. But then I'm never gonna make things sound that it's an excuse. But I made it! That was a life changing thing for me. CLP helped me to, kind of like, loosen up myself, and open my mind to a whole new world, that it was so unknown to me. Many times I did feel like, "Why am I doing this?" But it's all the people that I met here; and them supporting me, giving me that support to continue my education. And then providing me with resources. So that's why the community here was one of the things that kept me going. And then my own personal goals. And then trying to prove people wrong all the time.

Rebeca reflected on her involvement:

I think that kept pushing me to keep going to school. Feeling a part of the school. I was in CLP; I was helping out in the Multicultural Center. I feel like sometimes, as a Latina, I know when I stepped back from the situation and I looked, I wasn't really involved in so many things in high school. So when I came to community college, I was like, "Oh, great. Everybody kind of comes to school and leaves." And so being involved and all of these things that I had no idea I didn't even know about, like CLP until someone told me about it. Being involved just pushed me to keep—feel part of the school and stay here. Getting to know certain people that work in the school and not just by, "Hey, I know you, you girl." There's a name. I was like okay, people believe in me. Maybe I should believe in myself. So those are my resources that I had here that kept me going. Even when I was in a writing class and I was struggling big time. They have the writing center and being comfortable with the people who were in there helping me. I guess just the people; they were just so welcoming.

Laura echoed Rebeca's thoughts on involvement and the value of staying involved, even when she stopped out of school:

I think that seeing other people. Like once I got CLP I got to meet other people. Even though I was not in school, with CLP, I always kept active. We had to do volunteering activities, so if anything came up, I would always show up. And I remember a lot of people, they would always tell me, "Don't drop it. Don't drop it. Don't drop it." So I had a lot of people push me to not give up.

Alicia elaborated on how being involved on campus allowed her to feel connected:

It was good. It kind of—I don't know how to explain it—feel like I knew a couple of more people on campus. Then it kind of got me out of my comfort zone sometimes because I used to be a super, super quiet person. I wouldn't talk to people, and I wouldn't get out there or anything. I think that kind of was a little step to being more social. I think working as a leadership advocate really helped me. I worked there a second year this year. I don't know, you get to really know more things around campus when you work at *Local Community College*. I just think that it really helped me see things from a different lens. I feel like I already thought that way but didn't apply it to my life. I think that would be it.

Finally Isabella shared her involvement and how it connected her to other students across the state:

That same summer, before it ended, she asked me, are you interested in joining student government? She said, "Don't worry, I'll teach you." And then that totally changed my life because that year I met _____ for the first time. I felt like I was doing something

really brave. I'm not saying I wasn't doing something great before, but something great for my community. I met a lot of folks from other community colleges.

Each of the participants shared how their formal and informal networks as well as their connections on campus through being involved in student leadership programs supported their persistence. Yet a deeper exploration of what their lived experiences were like while they attended a community college is necessary. For these students did not have an easy transition. There were many obstacles that existed for them and that intersected with their identity as an undocumented Latino community college student. The following section explores this concept further.

Research Question Three

What have been the lived experiences of these students during their time at a community college? In order to address this research question, the participants responded to four interview prompts: (a) Describe what it meant to have been an undocumented Latino/a community college student. (b) Did knowing your documentation status cause you to change or rethink your goals? (c) What have you done after your graduation? and (d) Are there other things that are important for me to understand about your experience at the community college? The participants' response times varied for each of the interview questions for they spoke more in response to the questions asked.

Intersecting Barriers. The theme of *barriers that intersect* emerged as participants responded to what it meant to have been an undocumented Latino/a community college student, This reality often led to rethinking academic goals because each of the participants were first generation college students (navigating the community college system with layered barriers that exist exclusively for first generation students) while at the same time their legal status left them

without access to opportunities like financial aid. Paco had a difficult time understanding how the community college system worked initially:

I think I started late at CLP. I think I missed some—I think I missed the first [class]—I don't remember, honestly. I did—I know—I think I started late because there was a lot of issues. I wasn't sure of what I was doing. A lot of my friends were in the same spot. They just started working, so I was kind of on my own trying to figure that out.

Hilda was nervous about applying to college due to her command of English, “I remember being nervous about speaking the language. That was my worst fear, not speaking the language.” Like many immigrants, Hilda felt not knowing English would limit her ability to succeed. She describes it by commenting, “I mean, when you are learning a new language, you're translating everything in your head and sometimes it gets frustrating. So as a student—I was not a good student.” Jose simply shares, “Life here is not the same if you don't speak English.” He took several years of English classes in high school and at the community college to overcome that barrier. Many of the participants shared how they worked while attending school and the difficulties of balancing the two. Paco remembered:

So at the same time while I was going to *Local Community College* that was another thing I had to do. I always went to Yakima every weekend. People, all my peers, they thought I was just gonna go visit my dad. Actually, I think a couple of times my dad wasn't even there. He was still crossing [the border]. But what I was doing was going to go load up the trucks so I could take them to Seattle and then come back. I didn't do anything on the weekends in regards to school. So it was just during the week that I would do everything I could do. So honestly I would have to say that I'm really saddened when I look at my GPA. Honestly, it's almost impossible to have a full course [load] and have a job. Like I don't know how some students do it. It really did hurt my GPA. And, you know, that ever goes away unless you retake the classes. And so at that time, and so at that time the only A's I got were from CLP. [Laughter] Actually, I always turned in those assignments, I think.

Hilda also came from a working class background; she described how she struggled through college:

So that was really difficult; that was really difficult for me to be a student, a college student. Plus, I was working. Damn, I was working from nine—no four to midnight. And then I was making four-fifty, four hundred and fifty dollars a month at a Mexican place. And they were not—I didn't even have a schedule. I didn't know when my payments were. I just kind of knew that I was gonna make money and that money was gonna help me to make payments. That all I cared about. I never cared about, "Okay, am I gonna have money to have clothes or anything?" Because I even remember when I came to—for a year I ate dollar burgers, burgers at McDonald's, or—actually, it was Carl's Junior. And I went to seven-eleven and would get a one dollar Doritos and then a soda. Two, three dollars that I would spend every day. Every day. And when I didn't have three dollars, I would just get like the burger, without the combo. [Laughter] Yeah, so I didn't care about any of the other expenses, just my school. Just get that done. And just for my brothers, mainly, because I wanted my brothers to not go through what I was going through. I mean, right now that we're young we have to—it always goes back to giving back to my parents, always goes back to that. So it's like, "Okay, we got to work," because we never ask anything to our parents, nothing—books, tuition, gas, food, nothing. We got to figure it out how to do it because my parents make, you know, minimum wage. I think it's enough for the bill. I mean, we don't ask them for anything, but we don't pay the bills. We pay one or two bills, but not really. They actually—they pay for all the main bills, housing and all that stuff. They don't give us money, but they don't ask us for anything—so it's kind of—I don't know. It's a really weird dynamic that I never thought we were gonna go through that.

She also shared how her father did not understand what it meant to attend college. Although supportive, his expectations were not realistic:

Like I said, my dad did not understand what was going on. And until this day, he's like, "So when you graduated—" he thinks I'll have a job. Because he thinks that after you graduate, you like automatically, like boom! You get a good job. He still doesn't get it. So that was one of the things—that he didn't get what I was doing, and he thought that going to school was just like, kind of like going to high school. You just go and come back. And I said, like, "No because you go to school, and actually your classes doesn't mean anything. Actually the work starts after your class is done."

Rebeca also came from a working class background and shares how she struggled managing community college being a first generation student, she was not sure what courses she needed to take:

It must have been a term because the first term I took all these random classes. And that didn't help at all because I was like, "Oh, I'm going to take all these classes."

Anna Lisa felt the pressure to succeed because the cost of each of the courses she took were coming out of pocket:

After getting good grades, getting a low grade was just devastating because it's my money. I was paying for that class. And I would get frustrated, but then I would still move forward because by then—I came here with a goal. That was to get a certificate as a bilingual, just so that I could get a job interpreting people and get paid for it. But once I was here, I'm like, "No. I don't just want to do that." I'm like, "Mostly what I want to do is go and translate at hospitals for people." Like, I've seen how it's frustrating sometimes being the interpreter and then the nurse or doctor not understanding and that communication part of it. How about if I'm the one who's providing the service? And then with the language- you get two in one! So that's when I decided I want to be a nurse. And then I made it my goal, and it's still my goal.

Laura, also from a working class background, shared how she was not able to just be a typical college student due to having to work:

I was never able to just be a college student. I had to think of so many things. Like I remember winter term I only take CLP because I wasn't able to take anything else. And that, for me, was really hard because I wanted to be in school so much. And something that got me really upset was when students were like, "Oh yeah, I'm failing this class." And I was like, "What are you doing?! You're getting your school paid for and you're failing?!" Like I saw a lot of my friends—not a lot of my friends who are undocumented—but others who would just go to class and then say, "Okay, I'm going home. My whole afternoon is free." I'm like, "How nice would that be!" [Laughter] Going home and just doing homework and just worrying about that. But I had to worry about bills. I had to help my mother work on the weekends cleaning houses, and then I had a younger sibling. I had to go home and pick him up from school. Sometimes I didn't have enough money to pay for my transportation, my clothes, my cell phone, and other expenses. So there was a lot that that I wasn't able to afford. So I was like, "This is not working. How can I combine things?"

Laura also struggled with her mother understanding what it meant to be a college student. Being a first generation college student was a barrier for her. Laura recounted:

She would put a lot of barriers. She would be like, "You have to clean the house!" I remember like when I was taking anatomy, and all those hard classes and I didn't know how to study for them. I would need the whole weekend to study for them, but she would be like, "No, no, no. You can't leave to study until me limpies la casa [you clean the house]." Or "We have this party to go to. Or "You have to go to church." So she started putting barriers on me. So one day, I broke down. I was in tears because I was failing. I was not failing, but I was not getting good grades. So I sat her down, and I was like, "I

know I've been your support for so many years," because I've always been her babysitter, her cook, helping her at home and cleaning the house. I used to clean my whole house by myself. At that point I was like, "I'm done. This is a family, and I feel like I'm all of you guys' slave. You guys need to pull your part because I'm not going to do this anymore. And I'm not going to drop college, so either you kick me out or you work with me."

Alicia also found financing college a struggle:

I think the main thing that made it more difficult was money, paying for college and books. I mean, I got through it but if I didn't really worry so much about it, it would have been a little bit easier. Sometimes it was a stressor.

Identity as Undocumented. The theme of *identity as undocumented* emerged most clearly in response to the question about what it meant to have been an undocumented Latino/a community college student. One of the overt barriers that existed for each of the participants was their identity as an undocumented Latino community college student. The participant-researcher found that identity carried a mix of emotions- from doubts to pride. Paco expanded on his identity in response to the question of identifying as an undocumented Latino community college student:

There was a couple of times, while I was volunteering and getting involved and encouraging other students to graduate and go to college—other Latino students. I was actually kind of questioning myself. I was actually questioning, "Shoot, what am I gonna do after I am done here? What am I gonna do to get the next degree, which is the bachelors degree?" Because I was worried about that. I knew that there were other steps that I had to do. There's no light to be seen if you're undocumented, in terms of a career—unless you go back to your country, which you don't know. I would say anyone who is documented, they have a guarantee that they will get the degree. Someone who is undocumented, they may have a guarantee, but not really. I mean, you're still undocumented, you're still an immigrant without documents

Hilda also explained what it is like to be undocumented and the emotions she felt, "I mean being undocumented. That was one of the biggest things. I mean because there were so many opportunities, and you couldn't because of your status." Some of the participants felt they could

share their undocumented status, but Rebeca struggled with sharing it. She felt she had to challenge what society thought of her:

I don't know if I'm afraid of the rejection or I don't know. My thing of not telling people I'm undocumented is because they see how I want something in life and how I'm going after it. And I don't want people to be like—if you can look up to me, if I'm still in school, like I have people looking up to me. And if I was to tell them that I'm undocumented and something were to happen, I don't want it to be an excuse or them to think less of me. Until I accomplish something. Then I could let them see I did it; so they have no excuse not to do it. With my mentee I was frank and honest. I was like, "I'm undocumented here. I'm still going to school." Like hearing it, "Undocumented people are so bad. They just bring bad things to the United States or whatever." It sucked! I'm trying really hard to graduate. Why can't all these other people see? But it felt really good knowing that we're proving them wrong. We're not bad people. We're here to make changes and help our community.

She developed doubts of whether she should continue in school because of her status. Today, even as she pursues her bachelor's degree she was full of doubt:

In the beginning, just when I was starting I didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't know where I was going to go, so that by itself. I thought, "I could be making money instead of wasting money going to school." I'm going to be honest with you. Sometimes I'm like, "Maybe I should find a better job and stick to that and maybe someday I'll come back" because I don't have what I have here. Like sometimes I'm like, "Maybe I should come back to *Local Community College* and keep taking some classes and whatever," but I just focus on school and what I want to do. I keep in my mind that I finished here, and I need to finish there, regardless of how long it takes or how sucky it feels at times to be there

Laura simply shared, "I knew it was always something that I shouldn't mention to anyone, but I didn't know how much trouble it was going to bring me." Yet she became an outspoken activist in college, questioning administrators regarding equity with undocumented students:

Sometimes when I sat in those meetings I was like, "Why are we not thinking about the students who are undocumented?" I feel like it was so hard, especially at a community college where we are so diverse. A lot of people are going through a lot of things. I feel like community college really helps all of the students, but sometimes we also put barriers for them like raising tuition. It's just crazy.

Hilda finally shared what it felt like being undocumented before she found a community that supported her:

At the beginning I was really—I felt less. I felt that I was not—I wasn't good enough, and everything that I did was not good enough. So the little things that you have control over and that you have in your present right here, you take advantage of those.

Resiliency. The theme of *resiliency* emerged most clearly in response to the final interview question, for which participants shared what they believed was important for the participant-researcher to understand about their experience at the community college. With all the barriers that existed- from language to working full or part time- each of the participants still succeeded. Each of them earned an associate degree at an Oregon community college. Anna Lisa was frank about how she kept motivated during her community college experience, by reflecting on her high school experience:

It was always about proving teachers wrong and make them see that I'm just not one of the normal students, Hispanic students that they see. That they just come; they slack off on classes and they're just getting the grades that they need to graduate and that's it. And some of them, after their junior year, they don't even make it to graduation." I'm like, "I got to prove them wrong. I got to make them see that we are hard workers, that we are smart."

Anna Lisa wanted to prove her teachers wrong, yet doubted herself, "it felt frightful at times. At times it felt like I would question myself a lot. And I guess a lot has to do with people questioning me." Her doubt was so strong that she stopped out of the community college for a year to focus on entering nursing school; she was four credits shy of completing an associate degree. Anna Lisa explained why she returned to complete:

A lot of people here on the campus, so I was getting even more support than in the beginning. And so by then they all kept telling me, "Just take your public speaking class so you can get your degree, and then continue." I'm like, "No! Because it's my money." I'm like, "Why am I going to go and spend on a class that is not required for what I want to do." I'm like, "I see it as a waste of time and money." And so my stubbornness kept me— At that time it was really that because I was really close to finishing my pre-reqs

for nursing. And then I wanted to focus in those classes. So taking that class would take away money for another class that I really needed for my pre-reqs. And so I was limited on money, and I needed to know how to spend it. And so a year, no public speaking. Then I finally decided, “You know what? I need to feel that I am accomplishing something because I’ve been coming to school for four years, and I don’t see anything. And then I’m starting to feel frustrated. I feel like I’m just taking classes, nothing’s happening. And so I decided to take the public speaking class.

Alicia shared how she advocated for herself:

I think most of the teachers that I took in the science department were really helpful. They just make you feel really comfortable. You can talk to them when you really need help. So I was like, “Okay.” And sometimes, like this past year I really struggled with some of my science classes, and so I just went and talked to my teacher.

Additionally, she also encouraged other undocumented students to continue in school with simply asking them, “You’re still going to go to school, right?”

Jose recognized how hard he has worked:

It doesn’t matter what I study or what area I prepare myself in; but what matters is what I do and how I do it, no matter what my degree may be. I can be proud of myself. I work hard.

But so did his father, who did not support his educational pursuits at first due to the systems of oppression that exists and limited his own access to education. Not having been educated, his father lacked the framework necessary to support his son. When discussing what his family had to say about his accomplishments Jose stated:

They are proud of me. My father is really happy and very proud because I can get a good job. I don’t have to work hard to make the amount of money that my brothers make. I don’t have to have two jobs to make the amount they make. With only one job I can make what they make. My father is really very proud of me, my mom too. But the thing is that they all went back to Mexico.

Laura explained how she began with a small goal in her mind that lead to her aspirations of being a nurse:

I just wanted to just get my associate’s. When I started at *Local Community College* and people were pushing me, I was like, “Okay, I’m going to get an associate in something,

and that's something." You know? When I reached my associate, that was just last year because I changed my degree, I was like "I'm smart!" I talked to myself. I was like, "I'm kind of smart. My professors tell me I'm good at school. Why not be a nurse?" So I kept going.

Laura, summed up her resiliency in four words, "I never gave up." While Rebeca shared what motivated her was being a role model for her sister and others:

When I got into CLP, that's when I knew what I wanted to do because being a mentor—like one of my mentees was in the same boat I was [being undocumented]. I keep in my mind that I finished here, and I need to finish there, regardless of how long it takes or how sucky it feels at times to be there. I have my little sister looking up to me, and she's in the same boat I am. And she comes here now. I feel like I'm making it easier on her because I know what to do here. I know, "Oh, you need help with a certain course? Talk to so and so. Go here, go there." And so I'm making it really easy on her, and she appreciates that. So if I figure my way out to *West Coast University*, I'll be able to help her when she gets there. That's my biggest motivation, helping my sister and helping others in her position that are clueless and are afraid to ask other people.

Hilda also found strength by being a role model for her brothers:

My two brothers, one of them goes to *West Coast University* and the other is going to start *Local Community College* in the fall. He got a full ride to *West Coast University*, plus another scholarship. We both applied, but he got in and I didn't. But it is—I think it's the best thing ever because to me, I was kind of set. I knew how to do it. I knew how to deal with all the stress, and he was new because he came right after school. He went to *West Coast University*, straight to *West Coast University*. Even though I wanted him to come to *Local Community College*, because of the scholarship he just went straight to *West Coast University*. And I think it was the best. It was the best deal because I only had one more year, and he had the full four years. Plus, I was used to working and going to school. I was used to that lifestyle, and he was not.

As many of the other participants, Rebeca was driven to succeed. She shared how her multiple identities intersected:

So being Latina, period, and being in community college, that was an accomplishment. And being undocumented and Latina being here, that was one of the biggest accomplishments that I've ever had. It was like when you're a little girl and then you ride a bike. "Oh I learned how to ride a bike!" Like when you see a child's face light up, that's how it felt to me. And then knowing that I graduated and knowing that I'm at *West Coast University*. That's a whole other level of excitement and motivation in myself because I know if I could do it here, I know I could do it anywhere. Regardless of how many people doubted me, how many people told me, "Oh you can't do it or it's going to

be ten times harder.” Yeah, it’s going to be hard, but everything is hard in life. It was a struggle financially. It was a struggle emotionally.

Paco shared how he held on to hope by focusing on the future:

There’s a couple of people who were telling me, “Okay, you have to think about the next step.” There were like, “You’ve got to think about the next step. Don’t worry about the status. We’ll figure it out. We’ll make this work. It’s always there; we’ll figure it out.” And so that was like the second year; that was kind of what helped erase the insecurity. That helped banish it. These people, the Multicultural Center lady just kept telling me, “We’ll figure out the next step.” So second year I was like, “Okay. I have to figure things out on my own.” It wasn’t just the Multicultural Center lady. I had to do things on my own as well. What I did was I sat down and was like, “Okay, what is it that I will have, that regardless of my immigration background, what is it that I can achieve that they’ll really want me for?” The thing is when you hear, “We will figure it out” it means there’s hope. And hope is really strong. Even now that I’m documented, I still have barriers-- I can’t leave the U.S. So even now, now that think and I’ve thought about this, I can’t go to the Middle East and get my masters—that’s my education. It’s still a barrier even now that I’m documented. I still hear that phrase, “We will figure it out.” That phrase was always hope, and the funny part is we always did figure it out. I mean, that part is done— So we will figure it out—that’s something I’m going to tell my kids: we’ll figure it out. [Laughter]

This chapter presented the research findings from interviews with eight study participants, all of whom were undocumented Latinos who attended community college in Oregon and earned an associate degree. The chapter began with each participant’s *testimonio*. Specifically, each *testimonio* is a detailed narrative of each student’s journey organized in themes described in Chapter 3.

This chapter provided an overview and analysis that included a reintroduction of the research questions, an outline of the data collection process, a general overview of the participants, a summary of each of the participants in the study, and a review of the findings based on the data collected. Eight major themes were identified and were supported by the participant’s *testimonios*. The themes were developed from the data collected from the interviews with participants; each of who are self identified undocumented, Latinos who earned an associate

degree from a community college in Oregon. The analysis and findings of the study illuminated the importance of: (a) support from family and community; (b) overcoming obstacles; (c) having a cultural informant; (d) informal and formal networks; (e) involvement; (f) resiliency; (g) identity as undocumented; and (h) barriers that intersect.

Summary

The themes that emerged were identified through exploring the codes that developed from the transcripts. The participant-researcher coded the transcripts twice, allowing the themes to begin to emerge in an organic manner. The analysis and findings were developed from investigating the three research questions through semi-structured interviews, which culminated into the eight themes. The research questions that ultimately framed the interviews and this study were: (a) Why do undocumented Latino students attend community college? (b) What factors are associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students? and (c) What have been the lived experiences of these students during their time at a community college?

In summary, the eight themes developed, as a result of the data description and analysis were: (a) support from family and community; (b) overcoming obstacles; (c) having a cultural informant; (d) informal and formal networks; (e) involvement; (f) resiliency; (g) identity as undocumented; and (h) barriers that intersect. The goal of the first research question was to understand why undocumented Latino students attend a community college. Three themes supported that research question: support from family and community; overcoming obstacles; and having a cultural informant. The second research question aimed to understand what factors were associated with the college persistence of Latino undocumented students. Two themes supported this research question; the first was finding place: informal and formal networks and the other was involvement. Finally, the third research question aimed to explore what the lived

experiences of these students were during their time at a community college. Three themes emerged that supported the final research question- resiliency, identity as undocumented and barriers that intersect.

This chapter revealed the findings based on the data description and analysis. A fuller discussion of the findings in relation to the three research questions is present in the final chapter, which offers implications for practice and for further research on undocumented Latino community college students as well as for supporting their persistence towards completion. Paco, Hilda, Rebeca, Laura, Alicia, Jose, Isabella and Anna Lisa had similar as well as vastly different experiences throughout their community college experience. Their experiences illustrate the challenges many undocumented community college Latinos face and provide insight on the factors that foster their success. The following chapter provides an analysis of the findings, the participant-researcher's conclusion, and recommendations for further practice in order to expand opportunities for the success of undocumented Latino community college students.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The Plyler v. Doe (457 U.S. 202) ruling allowed undocumented students to receive legal access to K-12 education systems; the court stated “The illegal alien of today may well be the legal alien of tomorrow, and that, without an education, these undocumented children, already disadvantaged as a result of poverty, lack of English-speaking ability, and undeniable racial prejudices...will become permanently locked into the lowest socio-economic class” (1982). It was unclear if higher education was also included in this statement, thus making higher education accessibility for this population a state decision. The court stated that without education, undocumented students could face being locked into poverty for a lifetime. This study reveals the lived experiences of eight undocumented Latinos who have earned an associate degree at an Oregon community college. By continuing their education these students are attempting to overcome the lifelong threat of being held to a low socio-economic status, which the Supreme Court predicted in 1982 for those who discontinued their schooling.

Limited attention has been given to undocumented students who have completed a college degree, for most scholarly research has been on access and retention. This study’s purpose is to tell the stories of undocumented Latino students who have completed an associate degree at an Oregon community college, thus providing context and validity for their experiences. Its aim is to further explore strategies that could increase degree attainment for undocumented students in community college, specifically Latinos. Latinos, after all, are slated to increase by 73% in college enrollment across the nation within the next decade (Mendez, 2007). In this study participants shared how they are breaking barriers, challenging myths and stereotypes about Latino community college students.

Each of the eight participants aspired to give back to the community and to become a working professional. They all varied in how and why they entered the United States but also which community colleges they attended. This study provided context and validity to their experiences at the community college, through their own words, using a narrative inquiry method- *testimonios*. The reader learned about Paco and Laura's student activism, Anna Lisa and Alicia's struggle to attend college as life set each of them on a non-traditional path. The reader also could feel the relief of Rebecca, Hilda and Isabella when they obtained approval for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA); and finally, the reader could sense the determination in Jose, who is not DACA eligible, but who wants to further his education for himself and his small family. These students challenge the stereotypes about undocumented college students. Many of the participants indicated they completed or were in process of completing a bachelor's degree. As Gonzalez (2007) stated, the United States is at risk of losing a generation of students who could make a positive impact in our communities. These students' positive attributes confirm they are part of the generation that is at risk.

These students face unique challenges their peers do not- from the inability to drive to school legally as Laura describes to the limited employment opportunities that Anna Lisa and Hilda faced to Alicia's harsh reality of not being able to access social services as a teenage mother. Daily they face the barriers for their immigration status. Even for those who are DACA recipients, the tentative status does not provide complete relief because it is revocable by any president elect of the United States. The following section discusses conclusions drawn from a data analysis conducted using the students' stories of struggle and success.

Family Support

The data analysis reveals that support from participants' families was essential for them to enroll and earn an associate degree at an Oregon community college. Family support is especially important for undocumented students to even consider, let alone plan, for entry into post-secondary education. Paco described how his father supported him, "My dad was like, 'Okay well I'm sure there are other ways to go to some college, or something. Even if we have to pay—you know, you'll figure it out.' " Paco's father had faith his son would find a path for obtaining his education and he would support him financially in any way possible.

The initial review of literature for this study, discussed in Chapter 2, showed family support for undocumented students meant a higher level of academic resiliency. Pérez (2009) conducted a study in which he examined the academic resiliency of undocumented Latino students. The study indicated that undocumented students who have high levels of personal and environmental protective factors (e.g. supportive parents and participation in school activities) reported higher levels of academic success than did students sharing similar risk factors and lower levels of personal and environmental protective factors. This study's findings support the same conclusion Pérez (2009) made. Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2009) also stressed the importance of parent involvement in the higher education academic success of undocumented students in California. Specifically, Pérez et al. (2009) argued that supportive relationships with friends and parents, along with school engagement, facilitated educational success.

The findings of this study confirm the importance of family support for these participants. Besides being undocumented, their experiences were also shaped by their being first generation students, meaning they were the first to attend a college in their families. Because of this identity, participants had to navigate a complex reality. The family and participant had to

creatively construct what family support would look like in their unique situations. For instance, Hilda had a difficult time expressing herself in English. It was her mother who advocated for her initially as she began at a local community college. Since her mother had begun taking classes before her, Hilda was able to benefit from a fellow family member's attempts to be the first to receive a college education. Though her mother had not received a degree and had little time in college, her English was better and she was there to encourage Hilda to continue her studies. In Paco's case, he revealed how his father supported him through words of encouragement:

Because my dad had told me to, like, figure it out. He's like, 'Figure it out. I don't know the system. I don't know what to do, to be honest.' That was the first time I heard him say, 'I don't know what to do here.' Because everything else, you know, whether it was for money or for—anything. Like we moved from the _____ area, which is, like, I would call it a town-city to, like, some farm town in Yakima Valley, you know. I hated it there. It was just cows. That's all you would talk to: cows. [Laughter] So he always knew in that aspect, but when it came to education, he didn't.

The participants' families supported them pursuing a college degree; nevertheless they were unclear or limited in how to support them. Paco illustrated how his father supported and encouraged him to attend college, yet was unfamiliar with the system:

My dad's main goal was for all of us to go to school. He doesn't know anything about the structure. He doesn't know that there's preschool, elementary school—He doesn't care. He doesn't know about college—or university—or PhDs or any of that. Now that I went through it, he's like, "Oh, okay. So you're done graduating?" [Laughter] 'Cause I graduated a few times- like high school, *Local Community College*, and *West Coast University*.

Some of the families supported their student with financial support, others with words of encouragement, and still others simply removed family expectations on their student as a means of support. In fact, in Chapter 4 a number of the female participants described how adjusting family expectations was a significant help to them. Hilda highlights her struggle to receive this support from her family:

When I started college, my dad would ask me—well, he knew that I was working full time and then coming to school and then I was doing leadership and he would require me to do certain dirty—like, cleaning the kitchen, doing the dishes, all that stuff before the end of the day. So I would have to get home and my day would end around midnight or so because I had to do homework. Then work and school and all that stuff. I had a lot going on. And my dad was really, really strict, really strict about it. Until one day that I said, ‘I can’t. I just can’t do it because it’s really stressful. It’s either I do one thing or the other.’ And then one day we just sat down, ‘Hey, I guess I’m doing a lot. I know that I’m not giving you money, I mean, to kind of help with the house. But I’m not asking you for anything at the same time so—I’m trying my best.’ And then, after that, I think he understood.

It was observed from the data that many times family support did not naturally mesh with family expectations. These participants did not initially understand the system, as they were first generation students. Some had to learn, with great difficulty, how to balance their real need to provide support in the form of income for their family with their need to dedicate adequate time and energy towards school. Each of the participants balanced working part or full time while enrolled at the community college. They all worked in order to fulfill their family responsibilities or to alleviate their family’s burdens. Hilda and Anna Lisa worked at night jobs while attending school full time. Paco traveled three hours each way to Yakima Valley twice a month to support his father’s small farm business. Laura cleaned houses with her mother to make ends meet. Each of the students spoke about understanding the need to support their families. Pérez (2009) specifically wrote about the risk factors undocumented students’ overcome, including high employment hours during college attendance. This study confirms Pérez’s findings; such a risk factor exists and continues for undocumented students. Additionally, this study reveals how the participants had to balance their financial burdens with family responsibilities. Students needed to negotiate with their loved ones to redefine what family support would look like.

Jose was the participant that did not have initial family support until he completed his associate degree. The initial lack of family support or in reality lack of understanding of the US educational system as well as their own lack of exposure to education, for many of his family members did not complete an education background beyond sixth grade, nonetheless created a rift between Jose and his family, which is still vivid today. He instead found support from community members, such as high school teachers and student affairs professionals at the community college, who assisted him in finding a path to college. His family, who initially did not support him, is supportive today although they initially struggled to understand the day-to-day struggle of Jose faced in and out of the classroom as he pursued his education.

Studies by Gonzalez (2009) and College Spark (2010) indicate the need for family support from entry to completion of a higher education degree. The literature review in Chapter 2 reviewed the importance of family support for undocumented students' success in entering and pursuing a degree from an institution of higher learning. What the studies did not indicate was the fact that the support could come from non-family members. In this study the support from either family members or educational professionals who took interest in the success of these participants was critical. Without the support, each of the participants believed they would not have considered going or actually would have attended community college. Each of the participants were encouraged and pushed by their families to pursue a higher education, even if it meant removing family obligations to allow the participants to do their homework. The seemingly simple efforts each family and close professional made provided the support participants needed as they attempted to earn a college degree.

Creating Community

There is a need to foster a community in support of the retention of undocumented Latino students. The literature review in Chapter 2 describes the difficult realities of undocumented Latino students and refers to the need of a support network within the college setting for such students (Contreras, 2009; Flores & Oseguera, 2009; Gonzalez, 2007). Similarly, the data analysis of this study affirms that finding and creating community was instrumental to the participants' college success. Unlike the previously mentioned studies, however, this study indicates how students created or found these supportive networks.

For example, a key finding in this study is that each of the participants found and created a supportive community by connecting with people familiar with college processes and/or becoming involved in student leadership programs at the community college they attended. In addition to the personal support from family, students expressed the need to communicate and collaborate with individuals who had in depth of knowledge of higher education. In personal, professional, and academic circles, participants found people who could shed light on many of the unknown or unclear steps in their path towards college. Participants drew insights, inspiration, and information from these networks or communities they were forming; for this reason, they emerged as critical factors in the participants' persistence towards college.

Each of the participants described barriers they had to overcome in order to attend a community college. The barriers ranged from their immigration status to language ability. Anna Lisa expressed plainly how the lack of a strong command of the English language was a barrier for her, "I felt that I wasn't able to express who I really was because of that." As each of the participants described the barriers, they also indicated how they were able to continue on a pathway to college. Many of the participants spoke about a cultural informant, someone who helped them understand how to navigate community college. These cultural informants were

critical for the participants. Hilda and Anna Lisa both had a strong cultural informant who brought them to the institution. Hilda explained that her mother, who was also attending college but had a stronger command of English, provided much needed guidance in the process. To her surprise, Anna Lisa found a coworker served as her cultural informant. The cultural informants could have been formal or informal, but what was more important was the availability and encouragement of someone these participants could connect with to ask questions regarding community college.

Networks were also created when the participants found other undocumented students who were, as they coined it, in the “same situation.” The “same situation” meant that they were also an undocumented community college student. Anna Lisa illustrated this:

And then he told me, “So what do you do?” I’m like, “I work.” “What else do you do?” Like, “I just work. What do you mean?” “Well, what do you like to do?” I’m like, “I like to read.” And he’s actually the one that started telling me, “Well, I go to college.” But then I thought, “Well, he’s legal so it’s normal for him.” Then he told me his story. I’m like, “No way! And you’re going to college?” He’s like, “Yeah.” And so we started talking. I ended up leaving that job, but we still kept the friendship.

Another example of a participant who found inspiration from someone in their same situation was Paco, who during the interview reflected on how he remembered other undocumented students when he felt like giving up:

...when I met other undocumented students, to be honest with you. That was pretty good, pretty motivating—that I’m not the only one that is fighting the battle. There’s other students, and they also are in the same boat as me. Nothing is guaranteed for them either.

Being able to see a peer, who was also an undocumented community college student, encouraged participants to continue with their own education. In turn, many of the participants reached out to other undocumented students to reassure them that higher education was obtainable. This created an informal, underground network and community of support that

assisted participants in their persistence. Isabella explained how this informal network of support assisted her with the funding to pay the fee DACA requires. She shared:

I remember that day, that year, that's where we got our DACAs. Just two years ago. And _____ was on fire. She did a dinner to support us. We did a car wash. We call each other the 17 disciples because we help all other students. Now we're helping more students thanks to _____. She contacted a lawyer to help all of us. It was a really, 2012 was a really, how do I say it? It was a changing year for all of us.

Strong family and community support, unshakable encouragement, cultural informants coupled with a community that understood the context participants lived in were key factors supporting the persistence and ultimate retention of the participants. Various studies (Contreras, 2009; Flores & Oseguera, 2009; Gonzalez, 2007) in the literature review in Chapter 2 described the experiences of undocumented Latino college students, yet they did not indicate how the students created or found these supportive networks that lead to persistence and completion, which this study did. The community found and created by the participants was crucial for the success of these participants. It differed from family support in a critical manner- it was created by the students for the students.

Understanding Practitioners' Roles

Student affairs practitioners played a critical role in the persistence, retention and completion of the participants in this study. Many of these informal and formal networks, which participants indicated led to their success, began with their involvement in student leadership programs at the community college. The data analysis revealed how student leadership programs created the space for supportive networks to flourish and that these very communities were what ultimately promoted the completion of an associate degree for the participants. Many of the participants found a community on campus where their status as an undocumented person was not a negative stigma. Research indicates how practitioners can support undocumented students;

Gamboa (2009) outlines some of the steps practitioners in Arizona can take to support undocumented college students. This study revealed some additional steps practitioners can take to support undocumented Latino students.

The participants describe how the student leadership programs did specific programming around undocumented people. This tailored support empowered many of the participants to become active in finding resources at their institutions for other undocumented students. Hilda highlighted the importance of leadership programs when asked about what supported her persistence at the community college:

Leadership programs, definitely. I don't know. I don't know—I mean one of the things because I—they provided a scholarship or a stipend. That's one of the reasons. Another one is just because you felt like—I felt like I belonged somewhere. Because I didn't have that feeling, even at—because then I joined a church group. I didn't even feel that I belonged there. So here in school I felt that I was part of something. I was part of a place, a group, of a family. And that really helped a lot. I don't—I don't know. I don't think I'll fit in—I'll be—I wouldn't have continued.

The student leadership program not only provided financial assistance but a physical space to gather and a unique community to support students like Hilda. Some of the participants financed their entire associate degree by participating in such programs; while others participated in short term student leadership programs. Anna Lisa revealed how the persistence of a leadership program coordinator encouraged her to participate:

So I ended up coming. I think I rescheduled for another day, and then—never told _____ what happened or why I missed my interview—and because I didn't want it to sound like an excuse. That's me. If I don't make it, then it's because I'm making an excuse. I'm always gonna try to be there, unless something bad happens. But then I'm never gonna make things sound that it's an excuse. But I made it! That was a life changing thing for me. LLI helped me to, kind of like, loosen up myself, and open my mind to a whole new world, that it was so unknown to me.

Whether the participation in these programs was short or long term, it was clear these programs were essential. The participants' *testimonios* highlighted how their involvement in the

student leadership programs financially and emotionally supported their persistence. The initial literature review for this study, discussed in Chapter 2, recognized that colleges want to support undocumented students in accessing higher education (Gonzalez 2007, 2009; Pérez, 2010b; Rincon 2010). In 2007 the College Board published a resource guide, which indicated how institutions could increase the participation and success of Latino students. Missing from this guide and others like it are recommendations focused specifically on the support of undocumented Latino students, which this study emphasized.

Many of the community college support mechanisms that exist for marginalized students are explicit. Programs for first generation and low-income students, such as TRiO, are explicit. What this study found, however, was that many undocumented students are much less than explicit. They may not reveal their immigration status to potential allies, such as staff and faculty on campus who could support them in navigating the community college system. As indicated by the *testimonios* the need exists for programs that explicitly support undocumented students. Pérez et al. (2009) note that for those students most at-risk, access to resources help buffer them from adversity, thus the importance of practitioners in the success of undocumented students.

Practitioners are key in having these programs available for the undocumented community college student. Many of the participants learned of the programs through word of mouth from friends and not from the campus community, having campus staff well informed of the options students have would add to the number of undocumented students being helped. Without their advocacy, colleges may not be aware of the barriers in existence for undocumented students or of the need of such programs. Thus, it is important for practitioners to serve as allies and bring this population within the community college out of the shadows. Some institutions

have already started this work by creating a formal network and programs which specifically aim to serve undocumented students. This concept is further explored in the implications for practice section. Paco illustrated the importance of support from the community he created:

I would say, I guess this is pretty important, I would say that the fact that I was super involved at the *Local Community College* and had that community and support—I think that is one of the biggest reasons, aside from my family—that is one of the biggest reasons why I made it through the *Local Community College*, through community college. So what kept me going was that involvement. There was a lot of encouragement.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 describes how community colleges have supported some undocumented students' access (Gonzalez, 2009). Although support was indicated, the implementation of support was not done in a similar manner from institution to institution across the nation. While the data in this study may provide general perspective on the support undocumented Latino college students receive, this study was also able to disaggregate specific themes from the interviews with participants. Their stories and voices may affirm strategies already in place in a given institution and may provide insight into additional approaches beyond what was found in the literature.

Hope and Resiliency

Possessing hope and resiliency is key for undocumented students seeking to complete their college aspirations. All of the participants were aware of how their immigration status stood as a barrier to continuing their education. They each struggled with what it would mean to obtain a college degree; the critical question being, what then? What would happen to them once they completed their associate degrees? Paco expands on this, "Most of the time I didn't have time to stop and think about how my degree might be worthless. I didn't have time for that." Paco refused to believe that his hard work was useless. Rebeca struggled with what the future entailed. She constantly questioned herself and was unsure of how her enrollment in college

would benefit her. There were terms in which she would simply enroll in one class just to try and stay motivated. Anna Lisa also had a similar journey, taking one class at a time as she figured out the question of what would come next. In addition, Anna Lisa, Hilda, and Laura revealed how they struggled to understand the English language and how it created a barrier for them as they entered community college. Through careful analysis of the data, a theme emerged which could account for the students' ability to persist and overcome such daunting obstacles—resiliency and hope.

Merriam (2009) states, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). The *testimonios* reflected the educational experiences of the participants at the intersections of oppression. Their experiences illuminated the layered and complex meanings of immigration status, class and language. Each of the participants revealed how their immigration status created various hurdles as they attempted to earn an associate degree from an Oregon community college, yet time and again they pressed forward. The participants gave themselves and took hold of varied opportunities by seeking allies and other undocumented students to support them on their journey. Anna Lisa shares how those networks supported her as she questioned how her immigration status could affect her future. It was at this time that DACA provided an opportunity:

I did many times because I just kept thinking of, well, am I even going to be able to get approved for school? And, oh my God, now I forgot. I think it was two years ago that they actually approved that undocumented students were able to be accepted for nursing school. Oh my God, I cried! I cried out of joy because I'm like, “Yes!” Before I kept thinking to myself that I was doing all of this and maybe my aunt was right because it was going to be all for nothing. I'm like, and now here it is to prove everyone wrong. I like to prove people wrong, I guess. [Laughter]

The participants each held hope that their hard work would somehow prove worthwhile. They had family support, they found community within their school, and the community college supported them with programs promoting retention. Still, without hope, without believing that what they were doing would matter, these participants would not have continued. They had to be willing to continue and even gamble on a positive outcome in times of uncertainty. Paco shared the difficulty of holding onto hope in his situation.

There was a couple of times, while I was volunteering and getting involved and encouraging other students to graduate and go to college—other Latino students. I was actually kind of questioning myself. I was actually questioning, ‘Shoot, what am I gonna do after I am done here? What am I gonna do to get the next degree, which is the bachelors degree?’ Because I was worried about that. I knew that there were other steps that I had to do. There’s no light to be seen if you’re undocumented, in terms of a career—unless you go back to your country, which you don’t know.

Yet Paco held on to hope by continuing his education despite all the unfavorable circumstances and unanswered questions.

Each of the participants revealed how they held on to hope that the education system would support them to reach their aspirations of earning a college degree. Muñoz’s (2013) findings on motivators for undocumented Mexican women in higher education aligned with the findings in this study: both uncover a need to hold on to hope. Findings in this study differed slightly only in context, as the data relayed experiences specific to undocumented Latino community college students in Oregon. Findings were generally consistent with the literature review in the difficulties undocumented students face (Abrego 2006; Pérez, 2009; Pérez-Huber & Malagon, 2007). This study, however, was able to do was narrow down the experiences of these students to a setting where the number of undocumented Latino college students will continue to be on the rise – community colleges. Given the findings of this study, the next section describes what institutions can do to support undocumented students.

Implications for Practice

Participants' experience revealed the need for advocacy, not only within the institutions they attend but also at the state and federal level; policies impacting them during their time at a community college must be examined in consideration of them. Their voices and stories should inform policies as they are created and implemented. In using *testimonios*, a message was given to those whose stories were highlighted: their experiences are important and will in some way lead to meaning making. This study used a polyphonic form (Black, 2002); in other words, it aimed to present the voices of several undocumented Latino students speaking of a shared experience within the context of the community college in Oregon.

A step towards effective advocacy can begin with a comprehensive study of best practices when it comes to working with this population. A coalition of student affairs practitioners, administrators, and faculty across the nation can be brought together to better understand undocumented students' experiences in higher education. Such a move could translate into change within institutions of higher education, particularly the community colleges serving such a marginalized student population. There is a need to expand what this study found as being in support of undocumented students. This study aimed to create effective change in the community college system so as to promote the success of undocumented students. A shift in perspective of and approach towards these students would change the status quo. Additionally, the need exists to engage other institutions of higher education as partners to support undocumented students.

The purpose of critical social science is to change the world. It entails the "critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves"

(Neuman, 2003, p. 81). Thus, by going beyond the “surface illusions” of who undocumented Latino students are and what their experiences are in higher education, through this study practitioners in higher education are empowered to explore the support systems in place for those who would be successful within the community college setting.

One recommendation this study yields in support of real and positive change is expanding the physical and programmatic spaces that provide support for undocumented students at the community college. Community colleges need to start or continue to expand on providing leadership opportunities for these students. As the *testimonios* revealed, they were key in ensuring the participants’ persistence at the community colleges they attended. Rebeca elaborated with advice she has for community colleges seeking to support undocumented students:

Just that I know there will be some people who rather not say anything and, even if they want to be part of things but have questions they rather not ask. Which you can kind of identify people who look confused or look nervous, especially on those first days. I remember _____. So our last term here or something and we literally sat and people watched. There were so many people who look confused or so many people who were like super happy to be here because all their friends are here. You can just tell and like all of these programs are helping people feel a part of school, which makes them feel better when they come here so that they finish.

The expansion and support for DACA is needed. The LatCrit theoretical perspective used in this study contains five basic tenets. One of the tenets focuses on social justice, where social justice is recognized as a struggle to eradicate oppression based on race, gender, language, generation status, sexual preference, and class (Matsuda, 1996; Villalpando, 2003). The participants who were recipients of DACA were clear regarding how the program supported them and encouraged them to persist with their education. Hilda shared the power of the

program when she explained how her educational and career goals shifted once she learned about DACA:

The day that I graduated; that day [DACA] was announced. The introduction was announced, so I was like, “_____ this! Yes! I’m not doing [Laughter]—I’m not doing the inspirational speaker. Skip that!” Because I always wanted to be a lawyer, so I said—because I always wanted to be a lawyer—because a lot of my community members go through the system. So I said, “I want to learn that. I want to know more about criminal justice.” So I did criminal justice. I changed a lot. And I was so happy to be able to say, “Yes, I’m finally gonna get to study what I want to study.”

Alicia shared what being a DACA recipient provided for her:

But I do think that, because you mentioned DACA, I do think that in a way that makes me feel more comfortable. I didn’t really think about it before or anything. Like, “Oh, I’m undocumented.” But with DACA I feel more secure, like I’m not going to get deported at any time. For some that happens.

Expanding in-state tuition for undocumented students is critical. Each of the participants shared how important it was for tuition to be affordable and that it was a key reason for why they attended a community college. Currently there is a concern that undocumented students who attend a community college in Oregon may not be able to meet one of the requirements stipulated in bill HB2787, which grants in-state tuition for undocumented students (R. Wagner, personal communication, October 29, 2014). The requirement provoking concern is to attend a university within three years of graduating from an Oregon community college; community college attendance alone would not meet that requirement. Oregon community colleges and universities are in a position to change that potential barrier for undocumented students hoping to pay in-state tuition. The state can also provide in state financial aid for undocumented students as a means for these students to finance their education; other states such as Texas, Washington and New Mexico provide this option (Gonzalez, 2011).

It is imperative for community colleges to examine and address the policies or practices they hold that exist as barriers for undocumented students. Without examining these policies and practices community colleges are doing a disservice to this population and the communities that stand to benefit from their success. Community colleges often serve as a gateway to higher education for such students because of their relatively open access, fewer admissions regulations and lower cost than four year universities (Biswas, 2005; Gonzales, 2009); thus it is critical to look internally at what community colleges are doing to support the students that are drawn to them.

Finally, community colleges could partner with four-year institutions in researching the factors that lead this population of students to complete an associate degree and transfer to a four-year institution. Careful attention to this critical transition would indicate successful strategies community colleges could employ to increase degree attainment for marginalized students within their institutions, such as those with undocumented status. For example, institutions of higher education in the state could train their front line staff, such as admissions and advising personnel, on how to support undocumented students. Such efforts could make all the difference because many times they provide the entryway into the college and its resources. Institutions of higher learning could also train all their faculty and staff regarding issues of undocumented students at their institutions as well as in their community. Having informed workers increases the likelihood that the campus will be receptive to undocumented students and that its everyday decision-making will be made with consideration of this population. Furthermore, increasing informing college staff prevents miscommunication and discouragement of undocumented students because some of the participants actually faced that- such as Laura who was actually told she couldn't attend college.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research has revealed that undocumented students enroll at community colleges rather than in four-year institutions (Gonzales, 2007; P. Pérez, 2010). The local community college has been serving as an accessible entry to higher education for many undocumented students. Hundreds of undocumented students graduate from high schools and enter the community college system each year in Oregon and across the nation. As the immigrant population grows in the Pacific Northwest, so will the issue of undocumented students in community colleges.

The purpose of this study was to create a scholarly platform for undocumented Latino community college students to reveal, through their own voices, their experience with the issues they face. It focused on a collection of individual *testimonios*, seeking a common thread among them in order to construct basic inferences about their experiences at the community college level. This study utilized the following techniques: thick description, member checking, and clarifying participant-researcher bias to establish trustworthiness. Merriam (2009) stated, “I believe that research focused on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives” (p. 1). Merriam is not without reason, for participants who overcome many barriers to successfully earn an associate degree reveal that there are practices institutions of higher education and student affairs practitioners can do to support their persistence and completion. Thus the community college has a pivotal place for further research on this population.

Implications for the direction and focus of this research are made clear when considering what is missing from the current body of research. This study reveals a gap in the literature, and it helps to close it by highlighting the experiences of undocumented community college students. There is a need for further examination of those experiences, not only in Oregon but across the

Pacific Northwest, because there are best practices in support of undocumented students to be uncovered. Further research is needed on other ethnic groups besides Latinos who are undocumented. Although Latinos are a large majority of undocumented people (Barato, 2009), the experiences of other ethnic groups are just as critical to study. Further exploration of Latino ethnic sub-groups is also needed, since many of the participants originated from Mexico. Focusing specifically on these groups' post-secondary experiences will contribute to research that can ultimately facilitate best practices for all marginalized students.

Additionally, further research is needed examining issues that undocumented students face in the workforce. The outcomes of this dialogue could transform students' lives and enhance the nation's social and economic security. All of the participants of DACA revealed their fear of what would happen once it expired. If it does, further research regarding the impact of DACA could assist in informing national perception of how programs like these support undocumented peoples and benefit communities. Thus, a recommendation for further research would be to examine the issues undocumented students face as they enter the workforce, including whether they are able to obtain licensure to become a nurse or teacher, etc.

Self-Reflection

My journey towards understanding the plight of undocumented Latino students began with my work at a multicultural student center at a community college in Oregon. During my first year I had student after student enter my office and reveal their "situation", a situation they felt needed to be a secret. They were not sure if I was an ally at first, yet a point came when they divulged what I believed they felt was a barrier to furthering their education. Many of the students I met cried as they revealed this secret they had recently learned or had known for years. My heart went out to them. I knew the community college I worked at and I were in a position

to assist them. So my journey towards social justice began. I came to understand that their stories, their *testimonios*, began way before they sat in a chair in my office. It began somewhere else, and I was curious to know how and why.

I also came to view it as an amazing feat that these students would find an institution which could support their success. Many of the students were holding on to a desire, a hope and a dream. This study has reinforced that those three things can produce a life-changing journey for these students. Many of the participants indicated they completed or were in process of completing a bachelor's degree. After all I've seen in my years of working with such inspirational students, my own desire, hope, and dream has become to continue creating pathways, whether through research or other means, to support the academic and personal success of undocumented community college students.

As I reflect on this study, I recognize the strength of using *testimonios* as the methodology because it comes with a call to action. In this study, this call to action is two fold. To start, there is a call for undocumented students to seek others in the same "situation" so as to create informal and formal networks supporting their persistence and success of those with similar struggles. There is also a call to action for community colleges to engage and support undocumented students on a variety of levels. As the opening quote of this section stated, "What happens to a dream deferred?" Community colleges cannot lose sight of the opportunity for undocumented students to earn an associate degree, along with all the possibilities that are granted with an educated community. As Paco stated:

Despite a lot of negatives—I mean regardless of all the anti-immigrant barriers you run into, Oregon and the U.S. still gave me the opportunity of an education, regardless. I still got my education from Oregon, which was the main reason my dad came to the states, was to give his kids an education. I got it here; I didn't get it in Mexico.

This educated community of undocumented community colleges, as illustrated in this study, will give back to society in multiple ways.

Community colleges are in a position to break cycles of inequity that have existed for too long for this marginalized population. I challenge community colleges in Oregon and across the nation to support undocumented students. Institutions can do so by implementing the practices and facilitating the conditions the participants have attested as being impactful in their persistence and completion. Simply put, community colleges and student affairs practitioners should not allow these students' "dreams to be deferred" because they are in a position to cultivate success for undocumented students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Data & Family Background

- It is my understanding that you completed an associate's degree in from a community college in Oregon, what was it in?
- How do you identify?
- Age
- Birthplace
- Please tell me about your family.

Undocumented Experience

1. When did you arrive in the U.S.? How old?
2. How long have you known about your undocumented status?

College Experience

3. Tell me about your pathway to college.
4. Describe yourself as a college student.
5. What were some experiences that occurred that supported your persistence at the community college?
6. What were some experiences that occurred that did not support your persistence at the community college?
7. Describe what it meant to have been an undocumented Latino/a community college student.
8. Did knowing your documentation status cause you to change or rethink your goals?
9. What have you done after your graduation?

10. Are there other things that are important for me to understand about your experience at the community college?

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT TOOL



Project Title:

SEEKING PARTICIPANTS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

Voices to be Heard: Narrative Research of Undocumented Latino Students in Oregon Community Colleges

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sam Stern, OSU College of Education
Co-Investigator(s): Brenda Ivelisse, Graduate Student, OSU College of Education

*The purpose of this research study is to examine the experiences of
Latinos who were undocumented during their time at a community
college in Oregon and earned an associate's degree.*

Seeking to interview self-identified Latinos who have:

- Earned an associate's degree from an
Oregon Community College;
- while attending were **undocumented;**
- and are **at least 18 years old.**

Participation in this study involves:

- A time commitment of 1 hour in person interview
- A possible 20 minute follow-up interview

Please note: Researchers will keep the information confidential to the extent possible

If you meet the criteria listed above for this research,
we would like to invite you to participate.

Please contact me, Brenda Ivelisse, at (503) 567-9185 or by email at
maldonab@onid.orst.edu to participate in this research study.

APPENDIX C

VERBAL CONSENT FORM

**VERBAL CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY**

Project Title: **Voices to be Heard: Narrative Research of Undocumented Latino Students in Oregon Community Colleges**

Principal Investigator: **Dr. Sam Stern, OSU College of Education**

Co-Investigator(s): **Brenda Ivelisse, Graduate Student, OSU College of Education**

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY:

You are being invited to take part in a research study designed to examine the experiences of Latinos who were undocumented during their time at a community college in Oregon and earned an associate's degree. Your experiences and perspectives as a participant in the project are being sought. The study will provide insight and understanding the experiences of undocumented Latino community college students. The results of this study will be published as a doctoral dissertation and may be used for other publications and presentations. The results may also be used as a basis for further research on this topic.

This topic is being studied because there are a large and growing number of undocumented Latino students entering their post secondary education through a community college; previous studies have focused on four year institutions and certain states. There is a significant lack of understanding of the experiences of undocumented students in institutions of higher education. This research seeks to provide successful strategies to increase degree completion for marginalized students. This study will specifically be focused on the experiences of undocumented Latino Oregon community college graduates.

PURPOSE OF THIS FORM:

This verbal consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be a part of this study or not. You may take a copy of this form as a reference to the information verbally shared with you, to be clear you do not have to take this form in order to provide you with another layer of confidentiality.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for approximately 90 minutes. This will involve a private interview of approximately 60 minutes with the researcher describing your experiences during your community college experience. Your interview will be audio recorded. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, please decline participation in this study. The researcher will transcribe the audio and analyze it for themes. You may be contacted via telephone for one follow-up interview to clarify information or the researchers understanding. This potentially could take the form of a second meeting, or simply a over the telephone follow-up.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

There is minimal risk to you if you participate in this study, there is a chance the researchers may accidentally disclose your information. Your name will not be used in the study. The researcher will identify you by a pseudonym. Actual participants' names and institutional affiliations will be known only to the researchers. Pseudonyms will be given to each participant and the names of institutions, locations, and organizations directly linked to participants will be changed. Individual responses will be known only to the researchers and not to other participants or individuals. The audio recordings and transcribed notes will be kept on a password-protected computer, not accessible to anyone other than the student researcher and the principal investigator. Most results will be grouped together in aggregate form to safeguard your identity, however we may use direct quotes. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your institution likewise will not be identified in the research report, but described in general unidentifiable descriptive terms.

Finally there maybe risk of emotional distress or discomfort related to the content of the interview questions; you will be given a list of local psychological referral resources.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You may not directly benefit from this study. You may benefit from reflecting on your own experience of this period of time at an Oregon community college and learning of the experiences of other students that identify themselves as undocumented Latinos during their community college experience after the report is completed. It is anticipated that the results of this study will inform readers of what your experience was like for you and provide them with potential insight as to how to improve the community college experience for other marginalized students.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Final reporting will be provided to you, in summary or aggregate form, rather than in terms of individual responses. Participants will be identified on audio recording by their pseudonym. Audio recordings will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist whose professional ethics require confidentiality. The transcriptionist will never hear the name of participants.

If the results of this project are published, your identity will not be made public.

DO I HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

You are free to skip any question you are asked. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers will not keep information collected about you and this information will be destroyed and not included in the study reports.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

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

Dr. Sam Stern at (541) 737-3626 or by email at sam.stern@oregonstate.edu or

Brenda Ivelisse at (503) 567-9185 or by email at maldonab@onid.orst.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

No signature is required; your verbal consent indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You may receive a copy of this form, if you so indicate.

APPENDIX D

LIST OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Psychological Referral Resources for local metro Portland Area

The following is a list of free or low-cost counseling services available within the metropolitan Portland Area.

Counseling Services

PSU Community Counseling Center – 615 SW Harrison, Portland, OR 97201- 503-725-4620

Lifeworks NW – Adult Counseling Services – Multiple Sites – 503-645-9010/888-645-1666

(Toll Free)

Pacific University Iris Clinic - 222 SE Eighth Avenue, Suite 232, Hillsboro, OR- 503-352-7333

Good Samaritan Ministries – Faith-based Counseling – Beaverton, OR – 503-648-9565

NAMI of Washington County – Groups & Advocacy – Aloha, OR – 503-356-6835

Open Door – Homeless, housing, mental health counseling – Hillsboro, OR – 503-640-6268

Youth Contact – Bilingual Services – alcohol, drugs, dependence issues – Hillsboro, OR – 503-640-4222

Essential Health Clinic - 266 W. Main, MS 68, Hillsboro, OR, 97123- (503) 846-4919

Bridge City Counseling -712 SE Hawthorne Blvd, Suite 100, Portland, OR 97214- 503-877-2486

George Fox University Individual & Family Matters- 12570 SW 69th Ave. Portland, OR 97223- 503-554-6060

Oregon SafeNet - 1-800-SAFENET (1-800-723-3638)- Callers will receive guidance on accessing services and meeting eligibility guidelines.
