

Truth is on the Side of the Oppressed: Systems of Oppression Affecting BIPOC Youth

Special Series: Dismantling Systems of Racism and Oppression during Adolescence

Everyday Acts of Resistance: Mexican, Undocumented Immigrant Children
and Adolescents Navigating Oppression With Mentor Support

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Study aims were to examine oppression in education among Mexican immigrant youth with undocumented status and how mentors and other adults helped them resist oppression. Qualitative, narrative one-on-one interviews were conducted with 17 Mexican immigrant young adults with undocumented or DACA status in the U.S. Participants provided retrospective accounts from childhood through older adolescence. Analyses revealed critical junctures in which participants experienced oppression: (1) developmental milestones and school events, (2) college application process, (3) unforeseen life events, and (4) incidents of racial discrimination. Mentors and other adults helped participants to resist oppression through advocacy, social capital efforts, role modeling, and emotional, instrumental, and financial support. This study fills gaps in the literature on mentoring and immigrant youth who are undocumented.

Key words: adolescents – education – Latinx/Latino – mentoring – mexican – oppression – undocumented immigrants

Approximately 1,120,000 children under 18 years of age were living undocumented in the United States (U.S.) in 2018; they did not have citizenship, permanent-resident status, refugee status, or any other temporary status provided by the U.S. government for long-term residence or work (Baker, 2021). Further, more than 693,850 immigrant young people in 2018 were active recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), providing limited legal protections (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018). Immigrant students who are

undocumented engage in everyday forms of resistance, which are covert, sometimes invisible, practices that often go unrecognized but undermine power (Rosales & Langhout, 2020), and are context dependent. We argue that the very act of navigating the educational system as a student who is undocumented is a form of everyday resistance because of the explicit ways in which they are oppressed in their education. Further, from elementary school to higher education, immigrant students who are undocumented need supportive others to help them navigate the educational system and resist oppressive barriers. Mentoring is one potential avenue for supporting undocumented students to resist oppression within educational systems. This study is a ret-

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rospective account of the various ways that Mexican immigrant children and adolescents who are undocumented experience oppression in their education as well as how natural mentors help them resist these oppressive barriers along the way.

There are detrimental consequences of undocumented status on child and adolescent development. Children who are undocumented have more negative mental health and educational outcomes, even after controlling for ethnicity and socioeconomic status, compared to their legally authorized peers (Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Further, children who are undocumented are likely to live in poverty, have parents who work in poor working conditions, and live in households where parents have trouble paying rent and affording food, which are associated with negative academic and behavioral problems (Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Many of these children grow up in the United States and participate in the educational system, given their right to public K-12 education, and some pursue higher education even though they face structural barriers.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Suárez-Orozco et al.'s' (2018) *Integrative Risk and Resilience Model for Understanding Immigrant-Origin Children and Youth*, which combines an ecological approach to risk and resilience to comprehensively understand the adaptation of this population, taking into account development, psychological adjustment, and acculturation/enculturation. This model considers various levels of contexts that impact the development of immigrant-origin children and adolescents, including global forces that influence migration, the social and political contexts of reception (e.g., attitudes toward immigrants), microsystems, and individual characteristics and resources (e.g., social positionality, coping with traumatic events and deportation). The focus of the current research is on the microsystems component of their model, which Suárez-Orozco et al. (2018) describe as the proximal interactions taking place within neighborhoods, families, and schools that shape the development of adolescents who are undocumented. We examine mentoring relationships as the proximal interactions and resources that undocumented students draw upon to help them engage in everyday acts of resistance (Rosales & Langhout, 2020) against the oppressive barriers that they experience throughout their education. Through the integrative risk and resilience model, we consider retrospective reports of complex conditions that Mexican immigrant students who are undocumented

encounter throughout their development in childhood and adolescence, acknowledging both the risks they face and their strength and resources.

Oppression Within the Educational System for Immigrant Students Who are Undocumented

In line with Suárez-Orozco et al.'s model (2018), we examine the systems of oppression that Mexican children and adolescents who are undocumented experience within the sociopolitical context of reception in the United States broadly and within their education specifically. Oppression is "a state of asymmetric power relations characterized by domination, subordination, and resistance, whereby the controlling person or group exercises its power by processes of political exclusion and violence and by psychological dynamics of deprecation" (Prilleltensky, 2003, p. 195). Mexican immigrant children and adolescents who are undocumented are excluded from many developmental contexts because of their status. Undocumented families cannot access federal or state programs, which serve as a safety net in the United States, including access to public housing, physical or mental health care (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare), social security, and supplemental nutrition assistance (SNAP; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Immigrants who are undocumented are further excluded from society by being denied access to formal employment, voting, and obtaining a driver's license (with the exception of 16 states that allow undocumented immigrants to obtain one). Even students who obtain DACA status experience systemic oppression because they are excluded from many of the same state and federal social support and educational programs as undocumented children and adolescents (Gámez et al., 2017). Another form of systemic oppression is that undocumented children and adolescents live with the constant fear that they and/or a family member who is also undocumented will be deported at any time (Capps et al., 2007).

Within the school context, Mexican immigrant children and adolescents who are undocumented experience oppression in various ways. The landmark supreme court case, *Plyler v. Doe*, guaranteed access to K-12 public education regardless of legal status (Olivas, 2010); however, Mexican undocumented immigrant students still experience institutional and interpersonal oppression in public schools. For example, a sample of majority Mexican immigrant parents (96%; $n = 52$) reported that their children experience institutional and interpersonal discrimination at school from their teachers and peers (e.g., prohibited from speaking Spanish in

school, Latinx students treated as scapegoats, experienced physical and verbal abuse; Ayón & Philbin, 2017). Still, approximately 98,000 undocumented immigrants receive a high school diploma each year (Zong & Batalova, 2019) often not knowing what to do after graduating given the limited educational and employment options available to them. Furthermore, people who eventually qualify for DACA spend most, if not all, of their educational trajectory as undocumented because DACA is unavailable before age 16 (USCIS, 2021). Therefore, DACA students live through significant educational experiences as undocumented students and spend the majority of their formative years navigating the barriers associated with being undocumented in the United States.

The systemic oppression of Mexican immigrant students who are undocumented continues into the college years (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). The U.S. government engages in the political exclusion of undocumented students by making them ineligible for federal financial aid for postsecondary education. Only about 5–10% of students who are undocumented pursue postsecondary education and even fewer graduate (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This is partially due to the disproportionate financial burden placed on them; even with increased options for scholarships and in-state resources, rising tuition is cost-prohibitive for many (Muñoz, 2016). Additionally, access is even more difficult because this population is unable to legally work, preventing them from earning a sufficient salary to pay for higher education. In college, Mexican students who are undocumented must navigate an educational system that was not built with them in mind. Traditional college resources do not fit the needs of immigrant students who are undocumented by failing to provide much-needed emotional and instrumental support and assistance with cultural adaptation (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013).

Role of Mentors in Immigrant Students' Education

Although children and adolescents who are undocumented experience systemic oppression in their education, various microsystems may serve as a resource or buffer the negative impact of oppression to promote their positive development (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). One such microsystem is their relationships with natural mentors and other adults, who may help them resist and navigate oppressive barriers in their education. A natural mentoring relationship is an organically formed

relationship between a young person and an older, more experienced nonparental adult in their social network who provides support and guidance (Zimmerman et al., 2005). Specifically, mentors may provide emotional and instrumental support and may serve as role models (Sterrett et al., 2011). Natural mentoring relationships are different from volunteer mentoring, in which an adult is assigned to work with a young person in a program to benefit the mentee around a particular goal (DuBois et al., 2011). Natural mentoring relationships tend to be more long-term than volunteer mentoring relationships (Zimmerman et al., 2005), and as such, children or adolescents who are undocumented may be more likely to confide in their natural mentors about their status compared to their volunteer mentors. Although not specifically on those who are undocumented, a meta-analysis of 30 natural mentoring studies revealed that the presence and quality of these relationships were associated with more positive socioemotional, academic, and vocational outcomes in children and adolescents (Van Dam et al., 2018). Despite growing research supporting the positive role of mentors in the academic success of children and adolescents, little is known about the role of mentors in the educational experiences of students who are undocumented.

Research on the role of natural mentors and caring adults in the lives of undocumented immigrant students shows their positive influence. One study examined the role of natural mentors in the education of undocumented students. A qualitative investigation of eight ethnically/racially diverse immigrant students, most of whom had DACA status, revealed that participants reported multiple institutional and community-based natural mentors who were integral in the college application process (Gámez et al., 2017). However, participants noted their persistence in finding these natural mentors because their institutions did not have formal programs or mechanisms to support immigrant students. Because mentors also did not have the necessary information, participants and their mentors had to learn together how to access resources for students who are undocumented (Gámez et al., 2017).

When undocumented students do not have natural mentors to help them in their education, they engage in “patchworking,” which refers to piecing together scattered resources across a wide social network (Enriquez, 2011). In a study of 54 Latinx, undocumented immigrant college students who reflected on their high school experiences revealed the emotional, informational, and financial support provided to them by peers, family members, and

teachers (Enriquez, 2011). When their high school teachers and school staff did not have the information about the unique needs of undocumented students in the college application process, participants relied on their peers (Enriquez, 2011). Some participants received emotional support from a core network that did not have the specialized knowledge and information about the college application process for undocumented students, which resulted in delaying college enrollment until they met someone who had the necessary information to access higher education (Enriquez, 2011). Other researchers have also examined the social support provided to students who are undocumented. An ethnographic study of Latinx young adults who were undocumented revealed the importance of trusted teachers or counselors in high school who provided emotional, instrumental, and financial support in navigating the college application process and accessing higher education (Gonzales, 2012). Similar findings were found in an investigation of male-identified Mexican students who were undocumented, but participants reported that community-based adults, compared to school-based adults, were more helpful to them in providing information about applying to college (De Leon, 2005). In sum, research reveals the importance of natural mentors and other supportive figures who help students who are undocumented or have DACA status, particularly during the college application process.

Current Study

This study examined the critical junctures in education in which Mexican immigrant students who are undocumented face oppression and the ways in which they resist oppression with the support from mentors and other adults. For the purposes of this study, critical junctures are significant events (or series of events) or moments in education. Our research questions were: (1) What are the critical junctures in education in which Mexican, immigrant students who are undocumented experience oppression? and (2) How do natural mentors and other adults support Mexican, undocumented immigrant students to overcome and resist oppression in their education?

METHOD

A narrative approach was used to interview participants about their subjective experiences, which

involves participants recounting an event or lived experiences in chronological order (Creswell et al., 2007). This approach allowed participants to use their own voice and provide details that they believed were important in telling their retrospective account about their education.

Participants

The sample was composed of older adolescents and young adults. Participants were 17 Mexican immigrants whose ages ranged from 18 to 27 years ($M = 22.06$). As shown in Table 1, over half the sample identified as female ($n = 9$) and the remaining identified as male ($n = 8$). Age of arrival to the United States ranged between 1 and 10 years ($M = 5.5$ years old). Participants' documentation status varied at the time of the interview; 12 were active DACA recipients, two had an expired DACA permit, one renewed their DACA application and was waiting for it to be processed, one was waiting for a first-time DACA application to be processed, and one had not applied for DACA at all. Participants' educational attainment were eighth grade ($n = 1$), high-school diploma ($n = 1$), some college ($n = 11$), a 4-year college degree ($n = 3$), and a masters degree ($n = 1$).

Sampling and recruitment. Participants were recruited in-person, via flyers, and email from two community-based organizations by the last author, who conducted recruitment presentations in English and Spanish at gatherings and meetings. The organizations served a predominantly low-income, Latinx immigrant neighborhood. The first organization was a faith-based nonprofit organization that provided a variety of social services to the community based on their current needs, such as a food pantry, tutoring, extra-curricular activities for children and teens, legal services, and parenting classes. The second organization was a nonprofit that provided educational support to high school students and first-generation college students in the community.

Latinx individuals were invited to be part of the study if they: (1) ranged between 16- and 30-years-old, (2) migrated to the United States prior to age 16, (3) were undocumented, and (4) had experiences in the U.S. education system. Individuals who were eligible and interested contacted the last author, which allowed participants who were comfortable disclosing their immigration status to seek information about the study and participate if they desired. Snowball sampling was also used, and participants who were initially enrolled were asked to share information about the study with other

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age of Arrival</i>	<i>Citizenship Status</i>	<i>Educational Attainment</i>
Carlos	21	M	1	DACA	Currently in college
Rosa	21	F	4 & 6	DACA (did not renew)	Currently in college
Cierra	19	F	6	DACA	Currently in college
Oscar	22	M	3	DACA	Currently in college
Jose	25	M	10	DACA	Bachelor's degree
Tania	23	F	4 & 9	DACA (will not renew)	Bachelor's degree and applying to law school
Frida	27	F	3	DACA	Master's degree
Abel	19	M	5	DACA	Some college
Agustin	25	M	5	DACA	Some college
Theresa	22	F	3	DACA	Associate's degree
Diego	25	M	9	DACA	Some college
Zulmira	20	F	8	DACA	Currently in college
Claudia	26	F	8	DACA expired	Bachelor's degree
Giselle	18	F	4	Undocumented (awaiting DACA response for 1st time)	High school degree
Cedahlia	23	F	6	DACA—renewed	Some college
Antonio	21	M	8	DACA—awaiting renewal	Currently in college
Jesus	18	M	3	Undocumented w/o DACA	Eighth grade

Note. M = Male, F = female; citizenship status is based on participants' status at the time of the interview; DACA = Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival.

individuals in their networks. Participants who had various educational attainment levels were purposely sampled to explore the diverse academic experiences of undocumented students. Finally, the last author continued recruiting participants until data saturation was achieved by taking note of preliminary themes that were emerging as interviews were conducted.

Context

The study took place in Chicago, Illinois, which has the second-largest Mexican immigrant population in the United States (Israel & Batalova, 2020). Illinois is considered an "inclusive state" for undocumented students (ULEAD Network, 2020) because it provides undocumented students in-state tuition for *some* public colleges and universities as well as private scholarships through the Illinois Dream Fund (The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, 2018). In 2019, the state passed an act that allowed undocumented students to be eligible for state financial aid for their postsecondary education (ULEAD Network, 2020). Study data were gathered in 2014–2015, and the first DACA applications were accepted by the U.S. government in August 2012. Therefore, most of what participants recalled in the interviews were their experiences as students who were

undocumented. This investigation is relevant to adolescence because participants provided detailed retrospective accounts of their education from elementary school through higher education.

Positionality. The authors include seven women and one man of varying ages. The first author identifies as Dominican, the second and third authors as Mexican, the fourth author as White, the fifth author as Dominican, the sixth author as Cuban, the seventh author as Biracial, and the last author as Mexican, Brazilian, and Palestinian. Seven of the authors are from families with recent immigration history, and the authors have varying immigration statuses. Some authors come from families in which at least one family member was undocumented. Most of the authors have worked or volunteered with immigrant, refugee, and/or Mexican/Mexican-American communities. The authors grew up in various parts of the United States (i.e., Chicagoland, New York City, Miami, and Southern California) with large populations of Latinx and immigrants. Throughout the coding process, the authors reflected on their backgrounds and identities and discussed how their identity impacted the interpretation of the data. The authors were aware of the various ways that they were privileged based on citizenship status, access to quality education or resources, or the

social support received to help them in their education. The last author developed the interview materials and collected the data as part of the larger study. He was a trusted member of the community because he grew up in the neighborhood, received services at the community organizations where the data were collected, volunteered there, and then eventually worked in one of the organizations. The first, seventh, and eighth authors conceptualized the current study, the first six authors coded the data, the last author provided feedback during the coding process, and the first seven authors wrote up and/or edited the results.

Data Collection Procedures

This study was part of a larger investigation conducted by the last author on the educational experiences of Latinx immigrant adolescents and young adults who are undocumented. The aims of that study were to explore the risk factors, assets, and resources in undocumented students' educational experiences as well as the roles and support that natural mentors provided in their education. The last author, a Latino male, conducted the one-on-one interviews at a location of participants' convenience and preference (e.g., their home, one of the community agencies from which participants were recruited, public library, university campus) and ranged from 50 to 128 min. Rather than signing a consent form, participants gave verbal consent to protect their identity as someone who is undocumented. Participants were interviewed in English, Spanish, or both and were provided a \$20 Target gift card after completing their interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and there were no follow-up interviews. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored in a secure server in password-protected files.

Interview Protocol

Based on a narrative approach (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000), the interview protocol had four phases. In the first phase, participants were introduced to the topic of interest and were asked to tell their stories about their education as undocumented students from arrival to the United States through the present moment, highlighting significant events. Second, participants narrated their stories without the interviewer interrupting. Third, after the participant finished narrating their story, the interviewer asked the participant clarifying questions about their story. Additionally, participants were asked to expand in certain areas relevant to the larger study's aims. To identify natural mentors,

participants were asked to reflect on the adults they discussed in their story and were asked:

Think about any of these adults who are not your parents or somebody who raised you, nor a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Are (were) any of these adults someone who you can count on to be there for you, who believed in you and cared about you deeply, inspired you to do your best, and really influenced the things you do and the choices you make?

If participants answered "yes," then they were asked about the ways these adults were supportive in their education, the nature of their relationship, and how they benefited in their education as a result of having the guidance and support from these adults. Other questions asked participants to further elaborate upon significant events in their stories about their immigration status and educational milestones (e.g., What challenges did you encounter in school? Which of these challenges were a result of being undocumented?). Lastly, the participants and interviewer engaged in small talk after the recorder was turned off. Information shared during the small talk was not recorded nor used in the analysis.

Data Analysis

An inductive, thematic analysis approach (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) was used to examine the oppression that Mexican immigrant students with undocumented status experience in their education as well as how mentors and supportive adults help these students overcome and resist oppression. Full transcripts were split among the first six authors. To become familiar with the data, each researcher read their assigned transcript(s) and wrote a 1- to 2-page summary of the interview. The researchers shared and discussed their summary with the rest of the team; they provided an overview of the participant, critical junctures in the participant's education, how mentors supported them, and offered ideas on emerging codes.

Using an inductive approach, the researchers met several times to discuss repeating ideas that appeared in the transcripts and develop emerging codes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). As patterns became more or less common, codes were refined, revised, and collapsed. After an initial draft of the codebook was developed, a random set of four pages from a transcript were assigned to each member to code individually. Then coders met as a team and discussed how each person coded the pages.

Discrepancies and similarities were discussed as a team and the codebook was revised during these meetings: new codes were added, code definitions were clarified and revised, or codes were combined (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). This process was repeated three times until the team found that there were few discrepancies in the coding. Afterward, the transcripts were coded in Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative analysis software, based on the revised codebook. This involved team members independently coding assigned transcripts and then discussing and resolving any questions about how to code text during the team meeting. The lead coder spot-checked the coded transcripts to ensure the consistent application of codes.

After all transcripts were coded on Dedoose, excerpts of coded text from the major themes were assigned to each team member to review for consistency and clarity of each code. Different codes were assigned to individual coders to confirm that the text accurately reflected the code and to make any final changes to the code. Minor discrepancies between the coded text and the codebook were discussed as a team and final changes were made to the codebook and applied to the coded text.

Trustworthiness. Consistent with the guidelines provided by Lincoln and Guba (1986), multiple steps were taken to enhance the credibility of findings, which is the extent to which the results reflect participant experiences. First, the last author was a long-time resident and actively engaged with the community where the participants were recruited, particularly at the community organizations. This allowed participants to feel more comfortable disclosing their experiences being undocumented in their interviews with the last author. Second, the last author asked colleagues to provide him feedback while conducting the interviews and analyzing the data to ensure that his biases were not influencing his interpretations of the data. Third, preliminary results were shared with five of the participants to confirm whether the findings were truly reflective of their experiences. Fourth, we worked to achieve the validity of the current findings using multiple researchers as coders and reflecting on our perspectives and biases. Having multiple coders enabled us to check the data across different researcher perspectives.

RESULTS

Below, we describe the critical junctures in education in which participants experienced systemic

and interpersonal oppression, and the various ways that mentors and other supportive adults helped participants to resist oppression are reported thereafter. Among participants with DACA status, their narratives did not always distinguish when they were undocumented or had DACA status as they recalled critical junctures in their educational trajectory. However, most of the educational experiences that they described took place before they had DACA status. Finally, after the themes are presented, we highlight one participant as an example of participants' educational journeys and how mentors helped them to resist oppression. This example was reflective of the sample's experiences, specifically highlighting that participants experience oppression at multiple points in their education and how mentors support them in each of these junctures.

Critical Junctures in Education & Oppression

Each participant reported multiple critical junctures in their education in which they experienced oppression, including (1) developmental milestones and school events, (2) the college application process, (3) unforeseen life events, and (4) incidents of racial discrimination. Each of these critical junctures took place within the microsystem of education and within the broader sociopolitical context of the United States and immigration policies. Though participants' personal experiences with these critical junctures varied, these four moments in participants' education shed light on the ways that they experience oppression due to their undocumented or DACA status.

Developmental milestones and school-events. The most common critical juncture participants experienced were developmental milestones and school events, which were experiences that mark a developmental or significant stage in school in which the participant's undocumented status threatened the milestone. Milestones and school events included school trips, internships or scholarship opportunities, the transition to high school, and obtaining a driver's license. Participants discussed these moments at various points in their education, with most reporting these milestones and events as early as middle school. Many participants reported a class trip to Washington, D.C. in eighth grade, which caused fear and concern when this opportunity was presented because they wondered whether they would be able to or should even travel on a plane because of their

undocumented status. Cierra¹, a 19-year-old woman who was brought to the United States at age 6 explained:

7th grade was hard, as well as 8th grade. That's the time I realized that I was undocumented because people were talking about going to a field trip, that we were going to in 8th grade, and some of my friends were also undocumented. So, there was that one time when I was thinking. I'm like, 'Okay. I'm gonna go to 8th grade this year,' and we had to go to another state. We went to Washington, D.C. for our field trip, and some of my friends were saying, 'Oh, we're not born here, so what happens if they stop us or something?'

Undocumented students reported fear and anxiety and questioned whether they can partake in typical school events that many of their classmates did not have to question. These experiences highlight the ways that undocumented students are potentially excluded from developmental milestones.

There were other milestones, such as scholarship and internship opportunities, in which students could not participate in or apply for because of their status. For example, Rosa, a 21-year-old woman, revealed that when she applied for a private high school scholarship, she came across a question asking for her social security number. She asked a scholarship administrator if she could use an alternative form of identification, and then was questioned about not having a social security number:

They tell you, 'You can't apply for this scholarship. We don't take people that don't have a social security.' I just started crying, because that's telling you, 'Hey, you don't have the right to have an education at that point.' To me, it was the point—the lowest point at that time. I came out of that building, and I was just crying, and crying, and crying.

Similar to other participants, Rosa was devastated because of this rejection and felt that the education system kept shutting her out.

For many participants, these milestones were the first time they considered or understood the

implications of their status, and the ways in which they will continue to experience systemic oppression in the future. They shared that this realization caused them to reflect on how their future may be more challenging because of their status. Zulmira, a 20-year-old woman, said, "There was a point where it dawned on me that I couldn't get a [driver's] license. I was like, "Oh, so that's what it means." It was kind of when I started freaking out." A few participants reported that this realization demoralized them, which led them to stop making an effort in high school. For example, Tania, a 23-year-old woman, described the impact of realizing she could not get a driver's license on her education:

Up to that point I was getting straight A's and honors classes, gifted classes. I think just finding out that I had all these limitations I started ditching school. I started hangin' out with the wrong people just because I felt like, well, I'm working this hard to get to a spot that I'm eventually never gonna be able to get to.

Unfortunately, participants' undocumented status threatened typical developmental milestones and school events in middle school and high school. Adolescents were excluded from participating in these typical, developmental experiences or they felt a sense of fear about doing so, which are forms of systemic oppression.

College application process. Participants also experienced systemic oppression during the college application process because of their undocumented status. The oppression that they experienced was their ineligibility for federal financial aid or in some cases not being able to enroll in college at all. This was a reminder of the implications of their status on their educational career. Some participants were surprised that all of their hard work and honors in high school would not necessarily pay off by earning a higher education. Tania shared:

I think it only got challenging until I reached my college level when I was trying to apply to college just because I never knew that it would be so challenging getting...financial aid or any type of assistance. I applied to several colleges. I was always in the honors classes. I took AP classes. I was one of the few in my high school that got a 5 on the

¹To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms are used.

[AP] calculus test. It was just things like that that kind of were weird to me that someone that wanted to receive an education was getting so many obstacles and limits.

Despite excelling academically and taking steps to become a competitive college applicant, Tania still faced barriers, such as having her scholarship taken away after disclosing her status to a financial aid counselor during the college application process. Some participants also reported that they were left on their own to figure out how to pay for college. For example, Claudia, a 26-year-old woman, stated:

I went to my counselors and I told them, 'I'm undocumented. I don't know what you all are talking about, FAFSA.' They pretty much told me that I didn't qualify for anything, and that there was nothing they can do because I was undocumented. Once again, I heard the same thing that I should probably go back to Mexico cuz I was a Mexican citizen, and trying to explain to me the education system or how funding was distributed.

Unfortunately, participants were sometimes discouraged from pursuing higher education during the college application process. The biggest obstacle was the lack of access to federal financial aid, which seriously limited students' college options and whether they should even consider going to college.

Unforeseen life events. Another critical juncture that participants reported was unforeseen life events that disrupted their education. Examples of these life events were a Federal Bureau of Investigation raid, a house fire and a flood, and changing residences multiple times in an academic year. The unforeseen life events, compounded with their undocumented status, disrupted participants' education in multiple ways, from impacting their mental health to stopping their education altogether. For example, Theresa, a 22-year-old woman, shared that her house burned down during college, destroying class materials and homework:

The following day when I went to one of my classes, I explained to my professor—it was around midterms already—what had happened, and he didn't understand the fact that I didn't have a book. I didn't have anything. He was, like, 'Well, you're gonna fail'...The

professor was just ready to fail me, just like that. That incident actually didn't give me any motive to do anything anymore. I dropped out right after that semester ended.

The lack of support from her professor combined with losing all of her school materials led her to drop out of college. Other students had to switch schools because of unforeseen life events. For example, Zulmira's family got evicted from their home during the school year when she was in third grade. Suddenly, within 2 weeks she and her family moved to the other side of the city to a new school:

We got evicted. My mom was pregnant. She was six months pregnant in the middle of the winter. Yeah. It was really bad. We had to find a house in two weeks cuz the police gave us two weeks to look for a house.

The financial foundation for many participants was weak with limited resources, and any unforeseen life events, like eviction or fire, further heightened the systemic oppression that students who are undocumented experience in their education.

Incidents of racial discrimination. Over half of the participants shared experiences of discrimination, due to their race/ethnicity or immigration status, in their education. Participants reported these incidents took place as early as elementary school and continued throughout their education when determining which high school to attend, during the college application process, and in their interactions with professors, classmates, or financial aid advisors in college. These incidents of discrimination served as a motivation for some participants, wanting to prove the perpetrator (e.g., teachers, college counselors, and college admissions directors) or others like them wrong. Diego, a 25-year-old man, shared that one of his first teachers in the United States, a forth-grade White female teacher, treated him differently because of his race:

She talked to me like I was not good in the head, I wasn't normal in the head, like I was crazy or like I was coming from Mars or something like that. She talked to me like that, but later on I realized that because of her talking to me like that, and because of her way of acting around me, I realized that now I'm—it helped me go to grammar school because indirectly I learned that there was so

many differences in how people view other people who are not the same race as they are. I guess you could say that that kinda helped me fit into this culture, and that's what helped me develop the rest of my life.

Another participant, Claudia, was discriminated against when applying to a private high school and asked to provide a social security number:

That's where I talked to this individual from that high school and told her, 'I don't have a social security number. What can I do?' She told me that I should go back to Mexico, that public education is for the U.S. citizens of the country. Then again, this was a private school. . . I really did not understand much of what she was trying to tell me. She was pretty much telling me that the government was supposed to help. . . the people from their country.

Racism and xenophobia were common experiences for participants who were made to feel like they do not belong in the United States and were not entitled to the same benefits, including education, as their peers.

How Mentors and Other Adults Help Students Who are Undocumented Resist Oppression

Participants reported the various ways that mentors and other adults supported them in resisting and navigating oppression in their education. Every participant reported multiple natural mentors, such as teachers, athletic coaches, religious figures, bosses, family members, and school counselors. Besides mentors, some participants reported other adults who helped them to resist oppression in their education, and as such, we report those examples. These mentoring relationships are conceptualized as a microsystem that serves as a resource to promote the positive development of participants (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Mentors and other adults supported participants via: (1) emotional support, (2) instrumental support, (3) role modeling, (4) advocacy, (5) social capital efforts, and (6) financial support.

Emotional support. Nearly all participants discussed receiving emotional support from a natural mentor or other adults. Emotional support refers to adults offering empathy, genuine concern, and/or encouragement. These adults also uplifted

them and validated their experiences and challenged and encouraged participants not to allow their immigration status to define what was possible for them. Participants reported mentors' efforts to ensure that the participants believed and had faith in their abilities, regardless of labels or obstacles.

Carlos, a 21-year-old man, who was brought to the United States as an infant, provided an example of emotional support. He retold an intimate conversation he had with a supportive adult, his musical ensemble teacher. Carlos called himself "illegal" and his teacher was quick to reframe and challenge these negative and racist views:

I remember, I told him, 'I'm illegal.' 'You're what?' 'I'm illegal. 'First of all, I never wanna hear you say that,' he told me. 'We're not illegal. We're not killing people. We're not robbing banks. We're not doing this and that. We're not doing anything that screams illegal. We're minding our own business, studying for a better life like any other American here. What you are is you're a bright student that just happens to be undocumented. You're a bright person before undocumented.'

Carlos' mentor helped him resist his internalized oppression about his undocumented status. Out of concern and care, his teacher communicated that undocumented status does not define Carlos as a person and that he is not a villain, but someone who is working hard to pursue a better life.

Participants highlighted the ways in which the encouragement they received from their mentors and other adults provided confidence in combating oppression and discrimination while pursuing an education. For example, Claudia's relationship with her mentor, a community college professor, empowered her to understand the oppressive structures she navigated after transferring to a 4-year institution:

She's pretty much the person who made me understand how this encounter with this specific teacher at [name of university] and dealing with the social science department was not my fault because throughout this whole time, I felt like I was the bad child of [name of university]. I felt like I was the black sheep of the institution. She pretty much. . . helped me understand that, no, this is systematic, and you're pretty much being the victim of all of this. She pretty much gave the

color to all this whiteness over here. [Laughter]

Due to the support provided by her community college professor, Claudia understood that her problems at the 4-year institution were not about her, but rather institutional.

Instrumental support. Many participants reported that their mentors and other adults provided instrumental support, which is the provision of tangible aid. For example, mentors helped with the college application process, paperwork and assignments, gave rides to interviews, or taught them English. Participants highlighted that this support compensated for the inequitable education system. For example, Rosa discussed difficulties she experienced in her schooling due to English being her second language. Classes that required extensive knowledge of the language as well as writing were particularly troublesome. A teacher realized she was having trouble and offered extensive suggestions and feedback to help Rosa become a better writer.

[My teacher] was like, 'You know what? Come during my office hours and we'll talk about the essays.' Because people were able to write like journalists by that time, and I was just struggling to make a sentence work. To advance my writing levels. He was, 'You know what? You've gotta read this article this way. Look at it from this perspective.' That's when I started improving, and improving.

Rosa's case demonstrates how mentors' provision of instrumental support helps to level the playing field for participants.

Abel, a 19-year-old man, expressed his confidence in beginning the college scholarship process due to the instrumental support he received from a high school teacher, his mentor:

Junior year, [my teacher] got me started on scholarships. She started giving me information, like what to expect from a scholarship application, what to expect from a college application. We started working on that..I was really confident applying to the school and to applying for this and applying for that.

Having a knowledgeable mentor to steer him through the process helped Abel to feel assured.

Mentors provided instrumental support to ensure that participants do not fall through the cracks as they resist oppressive barriers in school.

Role modeling. Role modeling encompassed looking up to and being inspired by their mentors and other important adults who overcame challenges and struggles in their lives. Through role modeling, these supportive adults offered participants a blueprint for how to resist challenges and oppression. Participants often identified with their mentors because they had a similar background. For example, Jose, a 25-year-old man, described how his seventh-grade teacher, a mentor, inspired him to pursue higher education. His teacher was previously undocumented and had a career as an engineer in Mexico. Jose said, "You have this amazing, prepared person who has been around the world, around Latin America who was teaching and found his vocation to be a teacher. Just the fact that [I'm] seeing examples..." Given that this teacher had a similar background as Jose, he was in awe of his accomplishments and expanded his view of what was possible. Participants were reminded that they can break glass ceilings, regardless of their status.

Some mentors who were role models shared other aspects of participants' backgrounds, such as gender, ethnicity, or being an immigrant. For example, Abel highlighted that his older brother's journey inspired him to apply to college, "my brother had actually made it in, and he was undocumented himself. You see it as, if he made it in, there's no reason why I couldn't make it. He would tell me, 'I set the bar, but you got to set it up higher.'" Role models helped participants to resist the dominant narrative that undocumented children and adolescents cannot excel in their education.

Advocacy. Another way that mentors and other adults helped participants to resist oppression in their education was through advocacy, which involved doing favors on participants' behalf, requesting resources, or utilizing their power. For example, Frida, a 27-year-old woman who immigrated to the United States at the age of 3, described how her sixth-grade science teacher advocated for her to be in a class that was more challenging and conducive to her learning:

On my first report card pickup, my parents met with her, and I recall this conversation. She said, 'You have to get her out of that

classroom. She's not being challenged. I can help you.' She encouraged my parents to see if I could get...switched into the gifted classroom. By seventh grade, I was in the gifted classroom, and that was a very different experience. I think they spent maybe ten minutes disciplining someone during the day instead of the entire day. I finally felt like, 'Wow! This is what being in school is about.' Really feeling like, 'Today I learned something' or 'I polished some skills,' as opposed to, "God. Someone got punished again, and again, and again."

Without her teacher's advocacy, Frida may have never been switched to a class that helped her to develop as a student and have a more positive experience.

Similarly, Jose described how staff at his university's financial aid office utilized their power to mitigate university inquiries about his immigration status:

I found out that there was this person who was helping me, a person in the administration. Really, really nice person. That was the support system I had once I was in college...I had the support through the office who manages the scholarship and also the scholarship manager. He's very understanding of the issue...The person on top of the scholarship manager was the one who was shielding me from any inquiries from the university. The scholarship manager always checked in with this person. They went back and forth on how to cover that.

Jose was initially unaware of the supportive adults, who advocated for him and protected him throughout his college career. Although they were not identified as mentors, these adults advocated for Jose with the intent to safeguard his financial aid. Without these adults, Jose's scholarships could have been taken away and affected his ability to persist through college.

Social capital efforts. Participants also reported that their mentors and other important adults increased their social capital by connecting them to resources, information, and opportunities. Mentors also leveraged the support of others who had information and resources. The majority of participants discussed these social capital efforts as taking place during the college application process.

Cierra's mentor, her high school teacher, invited a guest speaker to come to her school and facilitate a DACA workshop for undocumented students:

She understood my situation. She was also kind enough that—when my senior year...she was aware of the DACA, but she wanted us to give us more information, so she went a step forward, and she actually reached out for someone to come into school and set an appointment with us.

Other mentors and supportive adults used their social capital to give access to opportunities that typically were not available for students who are undocumented. For example, an instructor from a pre-college summer program sent Frida's resume to a colleague at a university for a research assistant position.

I took a summer course with him, and by the end of the summer he mentioned, 'By the way, I have one project that I'm starting if you're interested, but it can't be your internship because it won't cover all of your hours.' Then he sent my resume to one of his colleagues at [name of university], and that's how I was connected with him. I absolutely loved that experience.

Carlos also had a high school teacher, a mentor, forward him scholarship opportunities for undocumented students. "She was also the one that referred me to the scholarship. Really supportive. 'Hey, I think you can really benefit from this, based on what you tell me that you do in the neighborhood.'" All those kinds of support." Ultimately, these adults' attempts to connect students with resources was a form of resistance to the roadblocks and lack of opportunities for students who are undocumented.

Financial support. Some participants reported that their mentors and other adults even provided monetary support in the absence of resources for immigrant students who are undocumented. Adults who provided financial support believed they were investing in participants' futures and never expected participants to pay them back. Some mentors provided money to help pay for participants' college education. For example, Theresa, explained that one of her mentors paid for two semesters of college tuition. Theresa dropped out of college because of lack of financial aid; when

she obtained DACA status, she started working at a dental clinic and developed a mentoring relationship with a dentist who was also an immigrant:

A positive thing that came is one of the dentists actually—we had a conversation about why wasn't I in school. I told him money was an issue and I just didn't have the motivation. He said, 'What if money wasn't an issue? Would you go back?' I'm, like, sure. Why not? He offered to pay for my last two semesters. He encouraged me to go see a counselor and to do two semesters worth of schooling. He paid those two [terms].

Through her mentor's financial support, Theresa successfully finished her associate's degree, which she had not believed was possible. Other mentors provided financial support by paying for college application fees, providing money to help pay for private high school education, paying for extracurricular activities, and buying running shoes for a participant who was an athlete. All participants discussed finances as a major obstacle in pursuing a higher education and other K-12 education costs (e.g., extracurricular activities), which led adolescents to constantly worry about money. Mentors helped participants to resist the exclusionary acts of the U.S. government by undermining the system and filling in where society was lacking.

Patterns between critical junctures and mentor support

There was a pattern between mentors' social support and critical junctures. Specifically, before the college application process, the most frequent type of support that participants discussed receiving from their mentors was emotional support. This emotional support was critical when participants experienced fear, worry, and/or concerns about the implications of their undocumented status. As participants realized what was and was not possible to achieve as a Mexican immigrant with undocumented status (e.g., getting a driver's license and getting a secure job), they turned to the emotional support of an adult who could validate their feelings and concerns. Although participants mentioned other types of social support before the college application process, they more frequently reported the wide range of support they received from mentors during the college application process and while they were in college. They tended to frequently discuss social capital efforts,

instrumental support, and advocacy. Just providing emotional support was insufficient to resist oppression as adolescents and young adults faced new barriers and challenges that came with navigating college. For example, participants needed specific guidance and resources to access postsecondary institutions, scholarships, and other financial and social support.

Example of a participant's educational journey

To illustrate the various critical junctures that participants faced in their educational trajectory with the support of mentors and other supportive adults, we provide Cedahlia's narrative as an example (see Figure 1). She emigrated from Mexico to the United States at age six and was enrolled in a bilingual program at school. One of her middle school teachers was encouraging and supportive, which motivated her. On an eighth-grade field trip to Washington D.C., Cedahlia realized she needed official identification (ID), which caused her distress and to reveal her undocumented status to her teacher, who was a natural mentor. Her teacher provided instrumental (i.e., tells her to use her school ID) and emotional support during this anxiety-provoking situation.

Cedahlia was a star student in high school, and her teachers, who served as mentors, encouraged her (i.e., emotional support) to pursue college and apply to 4-year universities, although they were unaware of the barriers that she would encounter due to her status. She realized that she was ineligible for federal financial aid during the college application process. Because of her limited options and career interests, Cedahlia selected a university that offered a scholarship for a summer bridge program and the first full term in college, but she had no idea how she would pay for the rest of her education. Her parents, however, agreed to assist her financially after the first term. Before her second academic term began, Cedahlia's house was destroyed in a flood (i.e., unforeseen event), and her parents were no longer able to help her pay for college because they needed to use their savings to replace their belongings and fix their home. As a result, she dropped out of college after her first semester to help her family financially. A high school mentor reached out to Cedahlia and learned that she dropped out of college. This mentor used their social capital to help her get an administrative job with her undocumented status, which enabled Cedahlia to help her parents regain financial stability. The job also provided her access to a network

of support. A mentor at work informed her about a college scholarship that covered 75% of tuition and encouraged her to apply. Cedahlia applied and was awarded the scholarship. Because of the scholarship and her job, she went back to school. Then two terms before graduating from college, she lost her job and then dropped out of college because she could no longer afford school. Cedahlia hoped to find another job and return to school.

DISCUSSION

Guided by oppression and resistance frameworks (Prilleltensky, 2003) and the integrative risk and resilience model of the development of immigrant-origin children and adolescents (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), this study utilized retrospective reports to examine the critical junctures in which Mexican immigrant students who are undocumented experienced systemic and interpersonal oppression in their education and the ways that their mentors and other supportive adults helped them to resist and navigate oppression. A contribution of this study is that we examined varying points within participants' educational trajectory, from elementary school to college, in which they experienced oppression, rather than solely focusing on the college application process. Although most of the participants had DACA status at the time of the interview, the majority of their narratives reflected their educational experiences as students who were undocumented, and as such, findings shed light on the experiences of undocumented children and adolescents. Further, despite the growing research on natural mentors in young people's lives (Van Dam et al., 2018), this is one of the first investigations on mentoring and immigrant children and adolescents who are undocumented in the United States (Birman & Morland, 2014). Given the long-standing anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United States, particularly toward Mexican immigrants, it is essential that researchers examine the ways that mentors serve as a protective resource to promote the healthy development of Mexican immigrant children and adolescents who are undocumented and experience many forms of oppression.

Oppression in Education

The retrospective narratives revealed the various ways that Mexican immigrant students who are undocumented experience oppression throughout their education. Participants reported that they

were excluded from developmental milestones and school events (e.g., internships and driver's license), which is due to the political and social contexts of reception in the United States (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Moreover, when they were not excluded from a milestone, such as a field trip that required traveling out of state, the milestone caused fear and anxiety about whether they could participate and whether it was safe to do so. One of the ways that systemic oppression is manifested is by creating fear in people who are deliberately marginalized and excluded in society, which may result in a negative psychological adjustment in children and adolescents who are undocumented (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Unfortunately, participants also reported experiencing racial discrimination throughout their education, as early as elementary school, which is consistent with past literature (Ayón & Philbin, 2017). Participants were sometimes discriminated against not only by peers but often by teachers and other authority figures. Research shows the detrimental consequences of racial discrimination on developing children and adolescents and that discrimination from adults is particularly harmful in academic domains (Benner et al., 2018).

Considering that students with an undocumented status encounter more systemic oppression as they transition to adulthood (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011), it was not surprising that the college application process was one of the most discussed critical junctures among participants. This was true even for students who transitioned from undocumented to DACA status. Adolescents continued to face financial barriers because they did not qualify for federal financial aid, and often were ineligible to apply to certain private scholarships or to enroll in some institutions. Those who overcame barriers in the college application process continued to be oppressed in higher education via racial discrimination (e.g., being shamed for not having social security, being called "illegal") and continued having financial barriers, sometimes disrupting their education.

Unforeseen life events showed the vulnerability of immigrant students and their families because of their limited financial resources. Any unforeseen life event, such as a flood, eviction, or fire in one's home, can throw undocumented students off course in their education. As is typical in the education of immigrant children and adolescents who are undocumented (Gámez et al., 2017; Yoshikawa et al., 2016), some participants reported moving multiple times in elementary school and many

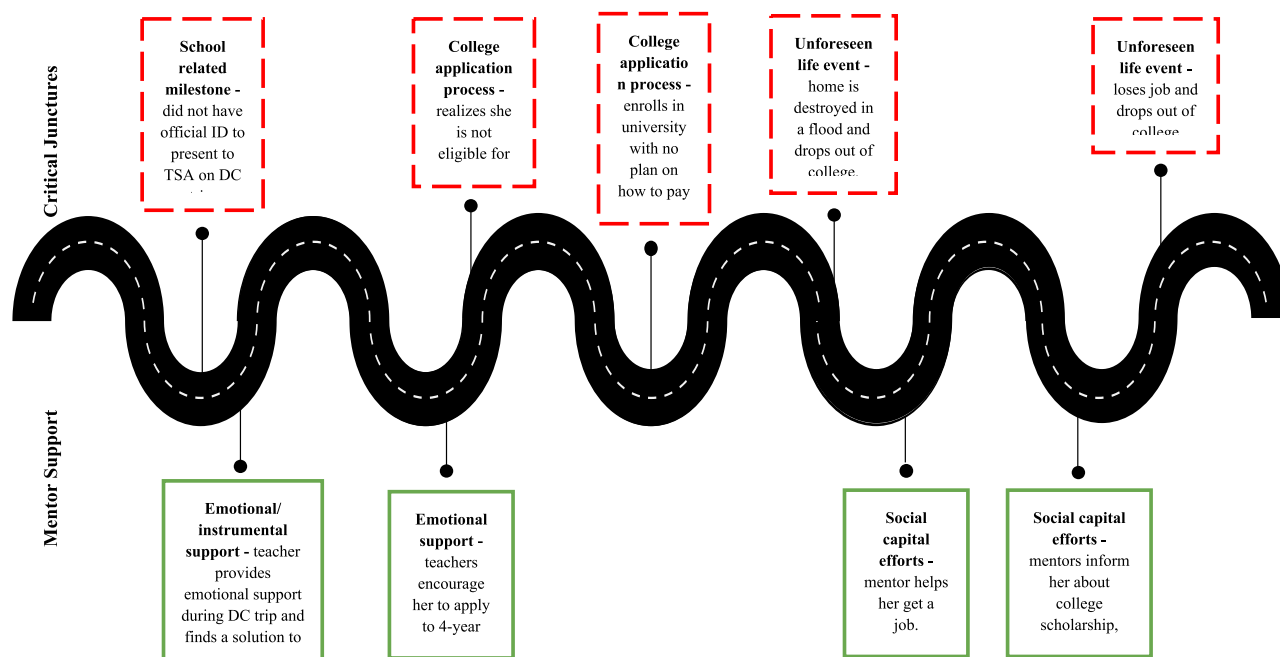


FIGURE 1 Case study of Cedahlia's educational journey illustrating critical junctures in which she faces oppression and how mentors help her to resist.

reported a “stop and go” experience in college (e.g., go to college for a semester and then leave school to work and save money to pay tuition in a future semester) or go from being a full- to part-time student because it is more affordable. Experiencing an unforeseen life event easily disrupted participants' education without the security of a safety net that would allow students to continue their education under unforeseen circumstances. Systems of oppression are designed to make it difficult for immigrant students who are undocumented to fully participate in education, and participants' experiences demonstrated this.

Role of Mentors

Participants' relationships with mentors served as a microsystem that protected them to promote their positive adaptation (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Together, participants and their mentors engaged in everyday forms of resistance to navigate oppression. Researchers and activists typically think of resistance as overt acts, such as protests, marches, or petitions. However, everyday acts of resistance are covert and may be invisible to others, while undermining power (Rosales & Langhout, 2020). Prilleltensky (2003) describes networks of support

for oppressed individuals as resistant acts that may lead to liberation. In this study, mentors helped children and adolescents to resist oppression through emotional support, instrumental support, role modeling, advocacy, social capital efforts, and financial support. Some of these forms of support, such as emotional and instrumental support, and role modeling, have been discussed in the mentoring literature (Sterrett et al., 2011), but within the context of immigrant students who are undocumented, these were resistant acts that helped to restore their humanity. Mentors and other supportive adults saw participants as whole individuals who had similar aspirations as their citizen and permanent resident counterparts. These adults validated participants and communicated that they too have meaningful contributions to make and have a right to fully participate in U.S. society. Mentors' support and validation may help to promote a sense of belonging among immigrant children and adolescents (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018).

A unique finding is a financial support that mentors provided, which is not usually discussed in either the natural or volunteer mentoring literature. Mentoring programs typically do not allow their volunteers to provide gifts or money to their mentees because of ethical considerations. Financial

support has emerged in natural mentoring research with adolescents in the foster care system or those who have aged out of foster care (e.g., Munson et al., 2010). Perhaps the financial needs of other mentee populations were not as salient as they are for participants in the current study and for adolescents in foster care. The provision of financial support was necessary for immigrant students who are excluded from receiving federal financial aid because of their immigration status but who are also from low-income families that are unable to pay for the exorbitant costs of a college education. Consistent with past research on social support and adolescents who are undocumented (Enriquez, 2011), some mentors generously stepped in by paying for participants' college tuition while others engaged in smaller financial acts, such as paying for college application fees. This financial support undermined the U.S. government's attempt to exclude immigrant adolescents who are undocumented or with DACA status by helping them to access and earn an education regardless.

Mentors' and other supportive adults' advocacy and efforts to promote adolescents' social capital helped participants to gain access to opportunities they would not have otherwise. A meta-analysis of youth mentoring programs revealed that the effectiveness of these programs increased when mentors took on an advocacy role (DuBois et al., 2011). For immigrant students who are undocumented or with DACA status, advocacy by mentors and other supportive adults is necessary because this population experiences discrimination from authority figures in a variety of educational settings and because other adults may be unaware of the rights of this population. For example, it took the advocacy of a natural mentor to inform a university staff member that not considering a participant's college application was unjust, which led them to review the participant's application and gain admission. Further, mentors used their power and social networks to place their mentees in the educational and career pipeline. They connected adolescents to individuals who provided internship opportunities, had information and resources about DACA, and offered employment opportunities where they would not be turned away due to their undocumented status. These efforts increased participants' social capital, particularly access to institutional agents, which are authority figures in institutional settings who had the knowledge and resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) to help them navigate educational and financial barriers. Similar to previous research (Gámez et al., 2017), some

participants reported that their mentors did not know how to navigate the oppressive barriers they experienced because of their undocumented status, but these adults were willing to work with the adolescents and also learn how to access available resources within and outside the U.S. education system.

Participants in this study engaged in "patchworking" (Enriquez, 2011) to access higher education. Enriquez (2011) described patchworking as a practice in which immigrant adolescents "piece together limited resources" (p. 480) from various adults to develop the necessary networks and social capital to meet their financial, emotional, and informational needs and persist in their education. Participants reported multiple natural mentors who helped them in their educational journey, from elementary school to college. Each of these individuals provided different kinds of support that were necessary to address oppressive barriers in their education, and they were available at different points in their education. For example, one mentor may provide emotional support when the immigrant student is scared and worried about having to provide identification or offer encouragement that the student's efforts are not in vain and to continue persisting in their education. Another mentor connects the adolescent to a financial aid counselor at a university to find a scholarship for the student to attend their school, while another mentor serves as a role model of a powerful Latina woman who has a leadership position and helps the young person to see what is possible for her in the future. However, researchers talk about "patchworking" as being uneven, haphazard, and unpredictable (Enriquez, 2011), and the patchworking in this study was no exception. These scattered resources were not always available at the same time, which is why sometimes participants had to take breaks from college when they did not have the financial resources to continue.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Implications

The results of this investigation should be understood within the study limitations. Most notably is that the participants reported their narratives retrospectively. This might have made it challenging for participants to remember the details of their educational trajectory, and some early critical junctures and mentor support in childhood may have been missed. This might also explain why the narratives were more detailed about the college application process and college experience in general

compared to earlier points in their education. The sample also consisted of many academically successful students who eventually got DACA status, and as such, the findings may not reflect the experiences of other immigrant students with undocumented status who are lower-achieving or do not qualify for or apply to DACA.

Further, given that study participants were Mexican immigrants who grew up in Chicago, the findings may not be reflective of immigrants from other countries or from other regions in the United States that might not be as friendly or safe for undocumented children, adolescents, and their families. Chicago is home to many immigrant communities and Latinx immigrant enclaves (Israel & Batalova, 2020) which may have provided a sense of community and social support for study participants. Despite the limitations, this study had important strengths, including the rich narrative approach that allowed participants to share their detailed stories without interruption, which generated detailed information about their educational trajectories, key moments, and supportive adults.

More research is needed on how mentors help immigrant students who are undocumented resist oppression at key moments in their education and in their childhood and adolescent development, particularly before the college application process, where there is limited research. It would also be beneficial to examine mentoring of immigrant students who are undocumented in other contexts (e.g., rural or suburban regions) or states that have more restrictive policies and laws toward people who are undocumented. Examining these other contexts may uncover different types of mentor support, resistance, and critical junctures for children and adolescents. Another direction for future research is to quantitatively and longitudinally examine the role of mentoring in the academic engagement of students of undocumented status during elementary through the college years. In-depth qualitative, longitudinal work is also needed with both children and adolescents and their mentors to uncover how students who are undocumented form natural mentoring relationships, how these relationships change over time, and other ways that mentors and students engage in everyday resistance throughout their educational trajectory. Finally, research is needed to unpack how receiving DACA status changes the types of resistance that mentors and students engage in and the ways that DACA adolescents experience oppression.

This study has implications for interventions and policy. Staff and volunteers in school- and

community-based settings should be trained on the needs of undocumented children and adolescents, how to support and advocate for them, and the resources that are available to students who are undocumented or have DACA status as they consider, access, and navigate higher education. Together, children and adolescents who are undocumented and their networks of adults and mentors engage in everyday resistance in educational institutions that were not created for these students to succeed, and in fact, attempt to shut them out. Immigrant students who are undocumented and those who obtain DACA status show their resilience in their development through childhood and adolescence despite oppressive barriers. However, U.S. policy changes are needed to provide clear pathways to citizenship to have full access to the opportunities available in U.S. society, which will allow these children and adolescents to thrive.

Conclusion

This investigation is a critical step in understanding the oppression experienced by Mexican students who are undocumented during critical junctures in education and the ways in which they resist this oppression with the support from mentors and other adults. Immigrant children and adolescents who are undocumented face systemic and interpersonal oppression beginning in elementary school and into their higher education. The support provided by mentors and other adults may evolve depending on the developmental needs of these students and contextual demands, but demonstrates a consistent force that enables students to resist oppression in their education. Although the study narratives show the resilience and resistance of this population, systemic and policy changes are needed to give all immigrant children and adolescents the same developmental opportunities as others in the United States.

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