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Undocumented Young Adults Navigating Liminal Space to Carve Their Futures in The U.S.

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Undocumented Young Adults Navigating Liminal Space to Carve Their Futures in The U.S.

A DISSERTATION

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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Abstract

This qualitative interview study focuses on the challenges and barriers of 1.5 generations of undocumented young adults with their liminal status in carving their present and curating their future lives in the United States. The study focuses on how these 1.5 young emerging adults navigate their lives to pursue their life goals with the limitations attached to their impermanence status. The study used a qualitative in-depth, and constant comparative methodology to approach empirical findings. In addition, the life-course theory was utilized as a theoretical framework to study different milestones in the lives of these 1.5 undocumented young adults (Elder,1998). The findings suggest that these young adults have persevered and navigated the severe challenges of pursuing their dreams of higher education but see no hope for their future in the United States due to their liminal status. As a result, there are closed doors for careers and continuing higher education, along with unique challenges to foster romantic and social relationships.

Key words: 1.5 undocumented young adults, liminal status, life-course theory, future

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This dissertation would not have been possible without my research participants who volunteered for this study. I want to thank all my research participants, who are now my life-long friends and have supported me by sharing their stories with me. The study's result will address the liminality implications on these vulnerable undocumented young adults who need secure futures in this country.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation study to my late father, Syed Mehdi Ali Naqvi, whom I lost to COVID in 2020. My father wanted to see me finish this study and graduate with a Ph.D. He raised me as a strong and independent girl in a patriarchal society giving me all the freedom to think and make decisions about my life. I am today only because of his and my mother's confidence. The sudden loss of my father made me extremely focused on finishing this Ph.D., and I am sure he would be smiling wherever he is right now. Thank you, Dad!

I also dedicate this study to my participants, who trusted me with their stories. They are my research participants and have become my life-long friends. Thank you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I initially came to this country to pursue higher education because I believed the United States was a country where dreams were realized--a land of opportunities. I learned that in America, hard work through educational advancement (e.g., college degrees, graduate degrees, and eventually a doctorate) pays off and can be a means to socioeconomic mobility and improve the quality of one's life. Therefore, this motivated my pursuit of my Master's degree in the US. As an international student, I completed my Master's from Montclair State University, worked for a year in the public school system, and enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University, my alma matter. However, my journey in American higher education did not just teach me family science and human development, my degree program. It also opened my eyes to the inequities around higher education for certain marginalized groups like undocumented immigrant students. U*ndocumented immigrants* refer to individuals born in countries other than the U.S. who do not have access to admission to the US under the current laws and policies for long-term residency; they are neither permanent residents nor US citizens (Passel & Cohn, 2010). I had initially believed that immigrants who enrolled in these universities were granted the same freedoms and latitude in career options upon graduation, but I later learned that this was not entirely true. Undocumented immigrant college students did not have the same leverage and access as American citizens or even international students who have the advantage of having an opportunity to work legally off-campus after graduation. They also have the chance to extend their training period and even get their immigration status changed when employers are ready to sponsor them. I became interested in this disparity and eventually formulated my research topic, which revolves around undocumented immigrant

student populations referred to as the 1.5 generation by immigration scholars (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012: Gonzales, 2007; Rumbaut, 2004).

My interest mainly concerns youth brought to the United States at a young age with no consent and who have resided in the US since childhood, to these young adults who are currently in their undergraduate programs or community colleges and grew up in the United States. This may be the only country they are familiar with. Due to their undocumented status, they may have never had a chance to visit their countries of birth. This group is not monolithic and is diversified in color, age, gender, and ethnicity. From the onset, I was deeply interested in this group of young adults constantly spotlighted by the media as undocumented students striving for higher education. The more I read about this population, the more I realized that nothing is straightforward in the lives of these young adults who have come to the United States as children and live in legal limbo with uncertainties regarding the permanency of their immigration status. Drawing on the concept of "Liminal Legality" when discussing this population segment's struggles and challenges (Menjivar, 2006, p. 15), these students exist in a precarious situation where they see themselves as having an uncertain future in the country where they lived most of their lives. The concept of liminality refers to the in-between, tenuous spaces in which these undocumented immigrant students reside (Cebulko, 2014). When these students think about transitioning into their adult lives, the spectrum of this liminal legality comes into focus because they are citizens in some aspects of American society and undocumented immigrants in other elements. Therefore, the undocumented immigrant students' ambiguous space characterizes their status, which is neither here in the U.S. nor abroad in their origin countries (Patler, 2018).

I have chosen to research undocumented immigrant youth's perspectives and experiences in higher education as they prepare to join the workforce. To me, this population most acutely

encapsulates the complex liminal spaces that undocumented immigrant students inhabit. Due to the constraints of their immigration status, these students are deprived of becoming full members of American society. While their American citizen peers eagerly prepare for the workforce, these undocumented students face the existential dilemma of transitioning to complex adulthood beyond their academic lives. They enter a space where their degree may not afford them the same access and opportunities and where they might have circumscribed rights. For example, they might not have the chance to gain employment commensurate with their degree unless they have DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status, which must be renewed every two years. Even after graduation, these students still lack legal papers, which prevents them from working legally and choosing their jobs per their interests. These restrictions often place them at the receiving end of low-paying jobs, thus shaping their dire economic fate (Gilbert, 2014; Williams, 2016). Unfortunately, given the financial cost of college that the rewards of gainful employment cannot offset, some of these undocumented students might drop the idea of higher education even if they have access to in-state tuition (Flores, 2010). Therefore, many disincentives affect undocumented immigrant students, making it even more challenging for them to cultivate lives similar to their American peers. Although they may be culturally integrated, undocumented immigrants' legal status limits their inclusion in the job market. These restrictions, though, affect more than just their economic livelihoods--they also can change how these undocumented students think about their social and familial plans and contexts for the future after graduation. Instead of their educational trajectory shaping their adult lives like most of their American peers, their liminal status dictates much of their experiences post-university, often serving as the primary factor in their decisions about their adult lives (Abrego 2008).

Statement of the Problem

I explored these undocumented immigrant students' lives from their perspectives, thus ensuring legislators and policy-makers hear their voices. They have tried for years for politicians to encourage legislators to listen to them and take action. Nienhusser, Vega, and Saavedra Carquin (2016) have explained that undocumented students face micro-aggressions that perpetuate a specific mindset that creates an insensitive behavior toward them and invalidates their sufferings. These micro invalidations, though delivered unintentionally, are kinds of communications that nullify the thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences of undocumented immigrants instead of listening to them (Nienhusser et al., 2016, p. 20). They can share how their immigration status shapes their social, economic, and career trajectories. I am deeply interested in exploring how these undocumented immigrant college students envision their futures regarding their liminal status and decide their life goals. The research question guiding my study asks:

Q. How do 1.5 undocumented immigrant college students experience the liminal world they reside in and imagine their futures after university/college life?

I conducted a qualitative in-depth interview study to explore the lived experiences of 1.5 undocumented immigrant college students and how they perceive their future post-graduation from their colleges and universities. I recruited 12 participants primarily through social media platforms, and ten gave two interviews after detailed data analysis and patterns seen and constructed. The inclusion criteria were 1.5 undocumented and DACAmented students enrolled in colleges or universities across the U.S.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

My study examines how young undocumented emerging adults navigate their inclusion and exclusion lifestyle in their liminal status. Their illegal status has profound implications for career goals, friendship and intimate relationship patterns, expectations, aspirations, and desire to move beyond the liminal status and improve their social and economic mobility (Gonzales, 2011). Before understanding the legal perspective which governs the lives of these undocumented emerging adults, it is imminent to understand the concept of "emerging adulthood" and how it differs for this specific population in their legal context.

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a distinct period of life course characterized by change and experimentation in industrialized nations, typically between 18-25 for most young people (Arnett, 2000). However, not all young people between their late and mid-twenties experience the same period of exploration and experimentation, even in industrialized countries. Some of these young people lack resources, socioeconomic restraints, or other cultural contextual restrictions to experience the transition to semi-autonomy (Arnett, 2011). This brief period of late teens and early twenties is not just a transition period; it encompasses a different life-changing era that opens a new horizon of change and explores new ideas in this trajectory (Arnett et al., 2020). In the 70s decade, the median age to marry was 21 for women and 23 for men, which had risen to 28 for women and 29.9 for men by the end of the twentieth century (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2019).

Similarly, the age of childbirth showed the same pattern. The percentage of young Americans seeking higher education increased to 60% in the mid-1990s compared to 14% in the 1940s (Arnett & Taber, 1994; Bianchi & Spain, 1996). The same pattern has emerged in other

western countries (Noble, Cover, & Yanagishita, 1996). Since marriage and parenthood plans are postponed until the mid or late twenties, these changes have altered the developmental cycle for these people. It is no longer normative for this age group to settle down with more adult roles (Arnett, 1998).

On the contrary, these years have taken the shape of fluidity and transition for many young people in contemporary times (Rindfuss, 1991). Arnett et al. (2020) recently have referred to this period as "emerging adulthood," which is neither adolescent nor adulthood, focusing on the age range of 18-29. This period entails that these young adults have left their dependency of childhood and adolescence but have yet to take the full responsibilities of an adult that are considered normative for any adult, especially in any Western country, thus opening up numerous possibilities of exploration related to work, love, and world views. As Arnett et al. (2020) explains, emerging adulthood is when various directions remain possible. The opportunity for independent exploration is significantly more possible for most people than at any other given period of their lives, with nothing definite decided for upcoming futures. However, cultural, social, and economic contexts differ and limit the access and independence of many people to use this life period in the same way as many others can explore and experiment with their lives; therefore, this paradigm of emerging adulthood is only culturally and socially constructed and depends heavily on economic mobility. Schlegel and Barry (1991), in their study of 186 non-western adolescents, reported that adolescence is a universal life stage phenomenon, but the period between adolescence and adulthood only existed for 20% of the cultures. Their sample of participants' adulthood is signified with getting married and marriage in those samples between the ages of 16-18 for girls and 18-20 for boys. This early period of getting into the responsibility of marriage takes them to adolescence but not to emerging adulthood, where they can also explore different avenues of their lives.

Therefore, emerging adulthood is a universal period. Still, the leverage to postpone responsibilities and enter the normative rites of passage to more adulthood is only available in certain cultures, most likely in highly industrialized or post-industrialized countries. Such countries and cultures require more professional degrees, skills, and training to enter professional fields. That is why so many youths in their early twenties remain in colleges and universities to attain the level of proficiency required to enter their chosen fields (Arnett, 2000). Marriage and parenthood are typically postponed to complete higher education, which opens opportunities to experience various relationships before marriage and try different jobs to support a child eventually. Looking from the perspective of the U.S., members of the minority may have cultural practices that do not allow an extended period of emerging adulthood or no adulthood at all. Therefore, there is a need to study emerging adulthood for different cultures when immigration, social and economic contexts are entirely different for cultures that may not have the option of emerging adulthood even though they live in the U.S.

To understand this population and the challenges related to their liminal legality, it is warranted to look at the various laws and policies that have shaped their trajectories in the past. The specific complex ways their de facto legal status intervenes in the daily lives of this population also need to be seen from the lens of the legal landscape.

Background of the legal landscape for undocumented immigrant emerging adults

An estimated 11.3 million undocumented immigrants live in the U.S. (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2017). Around 5% to 10% of this undocumented population attend higher education institutions ("Resource Guide: Supporting Undocumented Youth," 2015). Exclusion from federal financial aid makes it extremely difficult for these students to finance their higher education (Gonzales & Ruszczyk, 2021). However, states have created policies regarding higher education

for these undocumented students (Trivette & English, 2017). The lack of standardized rules and policies at the state and federal level, coupled with the controversy affiliated with this population, has created confusion for the undocumented student population and the institutions of higher education (Pena, 2021). States like Texas, Washington, California, and New York have enacted legislation to support and provide in-state tuition for this population. However, states like Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia have created policies prohibiting undocumented students from accessing higher education (Soltis, 2015). Thus, undocumented students face institutional barriers that vary from state to state and barriers after graduation when they seek employment opportunities that match their earned degrees. If they are lucky enough to live in states that allow them in-state tuition or some state aid, they still must face the inevitable barriers to employment upon graduation (Duffy et al., 2016). These blocked pathways set the stage for the utmost dire situation these 12 million disenfranchised undocumented people face in the US and call for immediate exploration of how these young adults perceive their lives in the liminality of their status. The lack of legal status restraints career advancement and the trajectories of social and intimate relationships in this population that needs to be explored. The ambivalent and in-between legal status adversely influences undocumented youth's educational, career, and social aspirations (Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2014).

Plyler V. Doe

This landmark ruling of *Plyler V. Doe* changed the life-course for thousands of children brought to the United States by their parents with no consent of their own (Forenza, Rogers, & Lardier, 2017). More than thirty-five years ago, the Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children are entitled to equal protection under the 14th Amendment and should be regarded as "persons." As per the ruling, it was held that states would not discriminate against these

undocumented children based on their immigration status in the provision of public elementary and secondary education (Olivas 2005, 1986). However, this ruling did not allow these students to pursue college degrees after graduating from high school, as the decision did not include access to higher education. The major roadblocks in this journey are the ineligibility to access federal or state loans under the Higher Education Act of 1965, even if they get admission to their college choice (Kim and Dı´az, 2013). The Higher Education Act of 1965 was created to strengthen educational resources by providing financial assistance to universities and college students (Cervantes et al., 1972). This portended the complications of pursuing higher education for undocumented immigrant students. The uncertainty and temporary nature of the following policies and rules have penetrated the lives of the general undocumented immigrant population and undocumented youth. It also gave rise to the liminal space for this population that tends to show aftershocks in all aspects of their emerging adulthood. This sudden revelation about social, economic, and legal restrictions can create a sense of despair and hopelessness in achieving their higher education dreams (King & Punti, 2012). As a result, many students leave this pursuit, although others manage to complete their education (Raza et al., 2019).

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

In 2012, President Obama enacted an executive order called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) which means that it did not need to go through Congress and Senate (Gonzales & Bautista Chavez, 2014; Mun˜oz, 2013). This policy allowed undocumented students who arrived in the United States before the age of 16 temporary relief from deportation (two years and renewal) to live and work without fear (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). DACA was the first significant expansion of immigration reforms after 1986 (Hamilton et al., 2020). However, the downside of this policy was its lack of permanence and inability to provide the path to

citizenship to the eligible population and the fact that executive orders are as lasting as the administration is willing to support them (Roth, Park, & Grace, 2018). In addition, the temporary nature of the program prevented the recipients from drawing permanent solutions in terms of education and employability (Roth, 2018). Therefore, the liminal legality perspective still hangs on the heads of these undocumented students who have to get their DACA renewed every two years, but due to the temporary nature of the law, there is no legal binding whether this population will keep on getting their status renewed with the changing administration.

Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (Dream Act)

The DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) is the proposed federal legislation allowing undocumented students in higher education the right to federal and financial aid and a path to legal status and citizenship (Mahony, 2012). There are only 20 states which have mandated in-state resident benefits for undocumented students (National Conference of State Legislatures 2015; NILC 2014). Due to different state policies, community colleges and state universities are stepping up and offering undocumented students the chance to have access to state aid and in-state tuition to be able to achieve their dream of getting a higher education (Perez, 2014). However, in some states, such as South Carolina, many colleges still do not allow these students to enroll. Only DACA holders are granted this privilege but are considered international students (National Conference of State Legislatures 2015; NILC 2014). Although the benefits of the DREAM Act are huge, scholars have argued how granting citizenship to 1.5 undocumented youth benefits democracy, enriches civic education, and revitalizes the sense of citizenship for society (Gonzales, 2009).

Educational Resilience and Civic Engagement

Civic engagement and collective actions of many undocumented immigrant youths have played a pivotal role in paving the way for the new generation of undocumented youth to have a chance to attend college (Abrego, 2008). Due to the immense pressure from undocumented youth, the Dream Act was introduced, heard in, and voted on by the U.S. Congress in 2010 (Corrunker, 2012). Although the Dream Act failed to become law through this legislation process, Corrunker (2012) notes that undocumented students continued advocacy for immigration reforms and their civic engagement has made them more visible and less fearful of legal consequences like deportation. The recent study by Borjian (2018), after the elections in 2016, indicated that undocumented college youth had shown their commitment to pursuing their dreams despite the disappointing results of the previous election. Zimmerman (2016) has highlighted how undocumented youth have come out and declared their status through social media, live protests, and open meetings to share their struggles and experiences of illegality. They interacted with their fellow undocumented peers and constructed bonds of solidarity and collective engagement (de la Torre & Germano, 2014). Over time, the persistent efforts of these youth resulted in the creation of DREAMERer organizations and developed a platform to reclaim the voices of many undocumented students that helped humanize their experiences (Nicholls, 2013). These undocumented activist students began to identify themselves as "undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic" to empower themselves and resist the stigma of shame they had learned to associate themselves with due to their undocumented status (Seif, 2016). These youth-led social movements have raised awareness about their illegality and challenges due to their liminal status. Their political activism and collective actions have shown agency for all the undocumented, highlighting the issues with high-achieving students and

parents of American citizen children, low-wage workers, and even detained immigrants (Patler, 2018).

The constant protests and active engagement in front of public officials and media asking for a path to citizenship shows a new layer of struggle and uncertainty surrounding the lives of these young undocumented adults (Shears & Sullivan, New York Times, April 2021). Like their American peers, these emerging adults should have been thinking about how to plan their future. Instead, they are spending their time on protests and civic engagement to fight for the right to citizenship. However, this also shows agency between these undocumented youth's inclusion and exclusion domains. It shows how they construct their lives around fighting and raising their voices to validate their citizenship and legitimize their rights to higher aspirations in the US.

Studies have shown that undocumented students who engage in civic engagement despite the constant harsh reality of deportation or racialized discrimination tend to show hopefulness for their future (DeAngelo et al., 2016; Huber and Malagon, 2007). Despite the fear of revealing their and their families' status, they are still showing resilience and working under the umbrella of collective identity for systemic and academic change (Negro´n-Gonzales 2014). However, despite all the collective efforts of these undocumented youth, the situations due to their liminal space have not improved because the Dream Act, since it was presented in 2010, has failed to pass in Congress.

Liminal Citizenship

Concept of liminal status

Much research has been conducted on the 1.5 generation, the immigrants who migrated to the U.S. as children and are completely integrated into the U.S. culture due to their access to K-12 public education (Abrego, 2011). Much research has covered the 1.5-generation immigrants' assimilation into American society and the barriers arising from their undocumented status as connected to educational institutions. As a result of their inclusion, as they grow up in American culture and exclusion as they have no legal standing to work permanently, the 1.5 generation faces a unique set of social and economic barriers and walks a different path than adults who immigrate to the US legally (Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedio-Sanguineti, 2013). Up to a point, they live like their documented American counterparts, attending school and higher education institutions, taking part in all the other extracurricular activities, and often enjoying vibrant social lives. Still, at the same time, they encounter significant legal inconsistencies, as stated earlier (Autin et al., 2018). As children, these undocumented students are granted access to social citizenship at a point in their lives when legal status does not hold much importance (Nagel & Staeheli, 2004). The liminality emerges when these students are excluded in many spheres of their lives (Schwiertz, 2015). Suarez-Orozco et al. 2011 coined the term "liminal status" to define this ambiguous state of belonging and not belonging. Liminality is construed as "the transitional moment between spheres of belonging when social actors no longer belong to the group they are leaving behind and do not yet fully belong in their new social sphere" (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011, p. 444). Other researchers have explored the liminality of 1.5-generation immigrant students connected to denied rights (Roth, 2018). Undocumented students continuously live in a state of “neither here nor there” or “ambiguous belonging” that increases as they grow old (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011, p. 444). Despite their many years of growing up in the United States and having deep roots, these students are simultaneously

included and excluded and not allowed to belong to the US society completely (Abrego, 2008; Cebulko, 2014; Gonzales, 2007; Gurrola et al., 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Cecilia Menjívar (2006) has observed that this liminal status and uncertainty often persist indefinitely, never leading to permanent citizenship status or legal and formal integration. Menjivar (2006) explained "liminal legality" as the concept of growing up in a gray area with a sense of inclusion and exclusion in the social fabric of American society by undocumented immigrant students. The ambiguity of liminal legality is applied explicitly to 1.5 generation youth who do not have full rights but grew up in the USA and feel it is their home country (Roth, 2019). Menjivar's (2006, 2008) notion of liminal legality addresses the in-between state of undocumented emerging young adults that profoundly impacts their educational aspirations, desire to have stable careers, and full integration into the social network of their American peers. However, the "legal limbo" and the "permanent temporariness" exacerbate their marginal status and affect their lifetime goals, education, professional careers, and familial plans (Menjivar, 2008).

Awakening to illegality

It is not until the age of adolescence that these undocumented emerging adults fully realize their illegal status along with the transition to adulthood. This coincides with the startling realization that typical adult milestones encountered by their American peers may be closed off to them (Gonzales & Ruszczyk, 2021). Scholars have referred to 18-29 years as "emerging adulthood," marked by a transition to some responsibilities and time to make their own decisions (Arnett, 2020, p. 426). When their peers work on their college applications or look for after-school jobs, undocumented immigrant youth realize that these normative or traditional adult rites of passage are not open to them and that their undocumented status will hinder upward mobility. When stepping into adult spaces, these young adults bump against barriers and closed doors that

prevent them from participating in a range of normative coming-of-age markers (Katsiaficas et al., 2018). Undocumented immigrant students often must come to terms with this difference in their right to do normal adolescent activities, which their citizen peers have, like obtaining driver's licenses in some states and the right to vote (Gonzales, 2016; Jacobo & Ochoa, 2011). With these legal limitations and the exact restrictive boundaries in which their parents reside comes frustration and a sense of vulnerability (Gonzales et al., 2016). Among other things, the most common stressors in the lives of the 1.5 generation are lack of economic resources, undocumented and less integrated parents, stigmatization of undocumented populations in the media, and encountering xenophobia in their everyday lives (Cobb et al., 2017)**.**

There is a consensus in the scholarship that the general population's educational attainment is positively related to employment and upward economic mobility (Blau and Duncan 1967; Hout 2012; Tamborini, Kim, and Sakamoto 2015). However, for immigrants, educational attainment and employment opportunities depend on their legal status and vary for different legal statuses (Hall, Greenman, and Farkas 2010). For example, Gentsch and Massey (2011) found that before promulgating the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), greater educational attainment was directly correlated to higher employment and wage rates in Mexican immigrants. Research has shown that the partial legal status thwarts the economic plans of undocumented students and shapes their socioeconomic integration, producing contradictory lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion (Bean et al., 2015; Bergeron, 2014; Cebulko, 2014; Hallett, 2014; Menjıvar 2006). Although undocumented people are not legally allowed to live in the US, the contradictory laws and policies and mostly inconsistent enforcement practices have allowed these individuals to live and build up their lives here in the US (Abrego, 2006). Like their legal/local counterparts, most undocumented youth

internalize American societal values that equate educational attainment with economic stability and rewards (Abrego, 2010). Eventually, the reality dawns on them that despite their hard work and academic success, they are still barred from legally and permanently participating in the American economy (Abrego, 2008).

Implications of liminal status on achievement and completion of higher education

Given the current economic climate, higher education is especially critical for the future success of these undocumented immigrants. Although legal residents and American citizens, regardless of their academic performance, can attend college or even work legally, undocumented students struggle to make ends meet and end up disproportionately in community colleges (Abrego, 2006). Moreover, even when they are selected for their preferred colleges and can attend them, they are sometimes forced to drop out due to a lack of federal financial assistance (Kreisberg & Hsin, 2020). Given these structural barriers, it is no surprise that these undocumented immigrant students do menial jobs to contribute to their tuition and support their families.

Aramburo and Bhavsar (2013) argue that opportunities and advantages that American citizen students and legal residents take for granted include access to federal financial aid, studying or traveling abroad, or even having the right to employment. However, these opportunities are considered privileges for undocumented students as they require legal status in the United States to avail them, which undocumented students do not enjoy (Aramburo and Bhavsar, 2013). Furthermore, for American citizens going to college comes with various fears like whether they have made the right choice in selecting their school or anxiety of failing their first exam (Contreras, 2009). In addition to these worries, undocumented students constantly fear

that they or their family members may be deported from the country while pursuing their college degrees (Conger & Chellman, 2013). Because of the fear of deportation, undocumented students and their families do not provide complete personal information on college application forms (Contreras, 2009). The lack of required information on these forms makes it even more difficult to access financial aid for these undocumented students (Conger & Chellman, 2013).

Undocumented students face numerous forms of discrimination when pursuing their higher education. One example is that many scholarships and programs have a specific eligibility criterion for the students to be US citizens to receive them as they are government-funded programs and are only awarded to US citizens or legal residents locally (Enyioha, 2019).

Individual states have the authority to make decisions for undocumented students as to whether or not they will pay in-state or out-of-state tuition, along with the decision whether they will be eligible to access financial aid for post-secondary education or not (NCLS, 2015). This implies that undocumented students who live in the enabling states to fund their education along with their menial jobs (Nienhusser, 2013). Beyond the financial and legal strains, the notion of illegality permeates undocumented students' lives and identity formation (Muñoz, 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Undocumented status has profound implications throughout adulthood and negatively impacts all aspects of development in the emerging adulthood of these individuals (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Implications of liminal status on the attainment of careers

Preparing for a career matching their college education is a dream for all first-generation college students and their families. However, for undocumented students, career development and decision-making for their respective careers are limited by the same legal restraints that have

come to affiliate with their lives (Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010)**.** The underlying fact impacts the belief that they might never find employment to enable their chosen fields in which they completed their education. Even in the states where they pay in-state tuition and have better educational opportunities, the eventual desire to participate in the skilled workforce is threatened by their liminal status (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010)**.** The usual process to identify positions and employers begins in the final year of college coursework for documented students. Usually, this career-seeking process is lengthy but accessible for American citizens or legal resident students. They submit their applications, complete formal interviews, and provide proof of citizenship or work authorization to start their new positions (Gonzales, 2011). However, this normal career process for undocumented college students is fraught with stress and anxiety. Although undocumented students have the education, same skills, and passion, they have to encounter unique challenges in this job process. Their options to find work in their chosen field are limited due to their legal status restrictions (Roth, 2004). Even if they get employment that matches their educational background, the harsh reality is that the laws apply to them make it almost impossible for corporations and businesses to sponsor these young college graduates since they reside in the United States without legal documentation (Fields, 2005). The hardest part for these undocumented students is to provide permanent legal documentation showing authorization to let them work. The proper legal documents in the United States are to go through background checks, provide fingerprints, and show proof of legal residency, which these students lack (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012). Therefore, these young graduates are caught in the middle by being given the opportunity for education but no permanent chance to seek employment or retain it, making their professional careers come to an undesirable end (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010)**.**

Implications of liminal status on mixed-status families

These undocumented students have to deal with not just the legal restrictions and financial pressure; the constant fear of revealing their status and compromising the safety of their families are omnipresent struggles. While fear of getting deported is acute for undocumented immigrants, its adverse effects impact the lives of immigrants among a spectrum of immigrants with different immigration statuses. For example, Kalil et al. (2014) have argued that students with DACA status may stay concerned about their deportation due to the precarious future of the policy. However, the safety of their undocumented parents, siblings, friends, and family members remains their concern. In addition, the constant fear of deportation manifests as psychological distress for undocumented communities (Messing, Becerra, Ward-Lasher, and Androff, 2015).

The repercussion of legal laws is a growing concern for many mixed families living in the United States. Estimates have suggested that there are 16.6 million members of mixed families, meaning that at least one member is undocumented, and others are citizens or legal residents (Taylor et al., 2011). Of these, approximately 4.5 million are US-born citizen children, and they have at least one undocumented parent. These figures are doubling, and estimates have already predicted that eight percent of newborns have at least one undocumented parent (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Yet, despite these growing statistics, there is scant research on mixed families and their well-being.

Previous research has shown that parental immigration status profoundly affects their citizen children. This youth-foreign or American-born (in mixed families) grows up in impoverished households with limited resources (Gonzales, 2015). Growing up, such dire experiences are unique to undocumented children and youth and have substantial adverse effects

on physical and mental well-being and academic performance (Yoshikawa, 2011). Further, the status quo of these mixed families has long-term effects on the citizen children in terms of educational, economic, health, and civic outcomes as they reach adulthood (Brown et al., 2011).

As threats of deportation increase for undocumented family members, these mixed-status families constantly live in fear of being separated by borders, especially when the estimates have suggested that a quarter of the deportations consist of undocumented parents of citizen children (Wessler, 2012). Moreover, these trends suggest that they become transnational families struggling emotionally due to restrictive immigration policies (Abrego, 2014; Dreby, 2010; Montes, 2013).

The disadvantages of current immigration laws on the social aspect of the undocumented population are well-documented by some researchers (Cruz, 2010; Dreby, 2012, 2015; Dreby and Schmalzbauer, 2013; Schueths, 2014). The current immigration system puts immense pressure and aggravates the stress on undocumented immigrants and their mixed families (Dreby, 2015). Because of the fluidity of immigration laws, immigrants, especially those undocumented, take actions that can result in harmful outcomes like deportation or the inability to change their immigration status in the future (Ezer, 2006)**.** Although marriage to a US citizen is believed to solve the undocumented partner's immigration issues, the current immigration laws do not automatically allow the undocumented partner a clear path to legal citizenship due to some previous minor offense (Pila, 2016)**.** Even though these laws' apparent objective is based on family unity, many mixed families are trapped in the legal limbo of not moving forward to a path to legal status. This is because punitive measures are followed in promulgating these laws. These adverse effects are not confined to the parents in mixed-status families where one of the spouses is undocumented; it trickles down to these parents' U.S.-citizen children (Pila, 2016).

Mental stress due to liminality and impermanence

Given the many legal and immigration-related barriers they encounter, many undocumented students drop out of their college programs, enter the workforce early, and end up in low-service-sector jobs (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). Many of these youth stay in low-paying jobs and keep a low profile to avoid encounters with immigration officials or wait for their immigration status to change (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). Constantly hiding their legal status brings a sense of stigma and stress and becomes their second nature (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011, p. 453). These limitations come with staying away from driving or having a bank account, leaving them with limited options to make plans. Gonzales et al. (2013) found that these emerging adults feel trapped in society's low expectations and often have mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, and even suicidal ideations.

The daunting condition of illegality puts all undocumented immigrants in the precarious position of interminable liminality (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). The labyrinth of liminality undermines individual autonomy, the foundation of a civilized democratic society. A dawning experience of their legal status and its implications in the form of negative interactions; with enforcement officials, fear of deportation for self and family members, concerns about future work and relationships, and negative portrayal of immigrants in the media is a blow for the mental state of these emerging adults (Gonzales, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Additionally, they face barriers to accessing bank accounts and health benefits, creating another layer of stress for them (Willen, 2007). Qualitative research has indicated the linkage of these experiences with feelings of anger and hopelessness (Abrego, 2006, 2008; Gonzales, 2010). Due to these experiences, there is heightened anxiety and fear in immigrant communities (Gonzales, 2010).

Gaps in the literature

The legal and structural barriers hamper upward mobility in these youths' lives even when they graduate from colleges and universities. In their study, Lara and Nava (2018) highlighted that the critical factor shaping a student's decision to enroll in higher education is the blocked pathways to finding suitable employment. Unfortunately, not all of these undocumented students find jobs in their field of study post-graduation; many continue working in the same service sector as they did before their undergraduate degrees (Lara & Nava, 2018). In the current legal landscape, for all undocumented students, whether they are placed in higher education or not, there comes a time when doors cease to open for them, and they might run out of legal solutions. The literature talks about these harsh situations but does not say how these undocumented students behave and make different decisions when they hit the wall and redirect their original career goals and plans. Most of them return to the previous service sector or low-paying jobs that prevent them from contributing fully to the economy or their families to improve their socioeconomic status (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). These factors are a constant source of stress for undocumented immigrant students who also experience racism and discrimination attached to their legal status (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). The implications of these policies on their thinking and perceptions about their future need to be analyzed to understand how they see themselves in the future within their legal domain. Therefore, I see a gap in the existing literature regarding the lived experiences of this population post-graduation and how they envision their lives regarding their limited and liminal legal status. My study might give me an insight into how their lived experiences do not fully comport with their plans. This study aims to gain insight into the lives of these young adults who are reaching working age when the limitations of their status become too profound to them. Traditionally speaking, this is

when young adults decide to settle down, seek economic opportunities, and later think about their social aspects and relationships.

The complications that arise due to legal status and the liminal space these young adults reside in are not solely connected to the prospect of employment and economic mobility. Due to the continuous struggle with their liminal legality, these undocumented college students also redefine their identity consciously when interacting and socializing with their peers (Gonzales et al., 2013; Kamal & Killian, 2015). Despite growing scholarship on how liminal status impacts the general well-being of undocumented students, its effects on their social and romantic relationships have not been adequately explored in the literature. It is essential to understand that the normative courtship and dating practices most young adults in American society follow are probably different for undocumented emerging young adults due to their liminal status. The dating study of undocumented immigrants conducted by Pila (2016) showed that limited job opportunities that prevent upward economic mobility often make it difficult for these youth to engage in dating rituals and forge long-term relationships. In this study, male undocumented immigrant youth shared that their legal status creates obstacles in their social and romantic lives.

In contrast, undocumented female youth conveyed a wariness and feared that their relationships would end if their legal status became known to their romantic partners (Pila, 2016). Stacciarini et al. (2015) acknowledged that undocumented youth eschew social interactions or the development of relationships to avoid revealing their undocumented status. These studies, although edifying, focus on undocumented students' perception of their social and romantic lives in the present, but they do not project into the future. Not many known studies have explored how these undocumented young adults perceive their social, familial, and romantic prospects as they transition to adulthood after college.

Undocumented immigrant youth's liminal and uncertain status is not linear regarding typical young adult behavior that governs their peers' ordinary life course. As mentioned above, intimate and social relationships are probably differentially available to them. However, they do not think from this perspective due to their legal limbo, which does not allow them to make choices that their citizen peers make. While young adults with legal status have various life choices, undocumented immigrant youth have limited options in terms of work and love life due to their undocumented status. The current literature does not address how this situation plays out in forming relationships or families for this youth. In addition, due to the increasingly hostile tone of the previous government and the recent tussle between the new administration and Trump supporters in Congress, it is becoming improbable to have comprehensive immigration reforms shortly in solving their immigration issues.

Theoretical Framework

Historical and political forces impact the social trajectories of people and families, their education, career, and a social life that, in turn, shape the behavior and lines of development. Individuals have some agency at their discretion in selecting the paths they may choose, which may be their agency. However, these decisions are not made in a vacuum and depend mainly on the opportunities and challenges surrounding any particular person's social and economic spectrum (Elder, 1998). Before this approach, called a life-course framework, scholars explained human development in a two-pronged manner. First, a social relation approach was utilized to understand the impact of life events like marriage and family on individuals (Black et al., 2009). Secondly, a temporal method was used to understand long-term life implications (Giele & Elder, 1998). However, the complexities of lives were not fully understood through these two lenses, nor were they adequate to capture the interrelationships between social structures like family and

marriage and the subsequent impact of time, history, politics, and places on the lives of individuals. As mentioned earlier, research from these approaches culminated in life course theory in the second half of the century (Elder, 1996).

A fundamental principle of life course theory is that lives are experienced in a manner governed by age, social structures, and historical changes (Elder & Johnson, 2003). Life-course theory has five distinct characteristics: (a) time and place; (b) life-span development; (c) timing; (d) agency (e) linked lives (Black et al., 2009). I will use these distinct principles to examine and understand the diverse experiences of undocumented immigrant students regarding their education, career choices, and how they make decisions in keeping, maintaining, or forging their personal, familial, and social relationships. After a brief discussion on each of these principles, I will show the application of this theory in explaining the phenomenon of life decisions and envisioning the future of undocumented immigrant students in their liminal and precarious situations.

Time and Place

Human lives are determined by when and where in a socio-historical setting, making it one of the principal foundations of life course theory. The life course perspective focuses on the broader concept that contextual situations impact how lives play out across life (Treas & Gubernskaya, 2016). Based on historical distinctions, that brings the critical idea of cohorts and generations (Ryder, 1985). For example, immigrants who arrived before 1982 without legal status could legalize under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, a previous law; although they also did not have any clear or guaranteed pathway to citizenship, they benefitted from the timing of the act. Therefore, the incoming cohorts that arrived after the 1986 Act also

had no clear path, and the timing did not suit them (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). It also plays a great role where people land as an immigrant; if it is an immigrant-friendly state and a place where there is an ethnic enclave that is supportive, you can survive better as opposed to a state where immigration laws are harsher (Koball & Hartig, 2020). However, the marginalized status these immigrants experienced diminished their prospects and those of their US-born children (Massey & Pren, 2012)**.**

Lifespan development

The second fundamental principle of life course theory is that humans develop psychologically, socially, and biologically beyond childhood (Elder, 1998). New situations encountered in emerging adulthood will be shaped by earlier experiences encountered in childhood. For example, family immigration is a defining experience that has implications for the rest of the lives of those who migrated, especially those who came here without legal authorization. Undocumented children, when entering school, start their trajectories of school lives like most children. Schools are the primary grounds for early integration and assimilation for documented and undocumented immigrant children alike. The children of undocumented parents or undocumented themselves are cognitively, socially, and academically prepared to embark upon their adolescent lives as their documented counterparts are (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). They form their identities, plan for their prospects, and enter higher education institutions like most Americans.

Timing

Time refers to the chronological order of events in a person's life within a cultural and historical context. The implications of a political decision or an event can have significant

consequences due to the event's timing in the life course. Also, as mentioned above, many immigrants who came before the 1986 Act could get themselves documented and legal citizens as they benefitted from the timing of that Act. After that, undocumented immigrants' life trajectories have been immensely influenced by different acts and policies across several administrations in the US. For example, the DACA Act has provided temporary relief from deportation during the Obama administration for unauthorized immigrant children brought by their parents. However, some of those children could not benefit due to the age criteria in the Act at the program's initiation (Batalova et al., 2013)**.**

Agency

The principle of agency is based on the premise that humans do not accept pre-determined life events; instead, they make decisions to shape their lives. These decisions are impacted by temporal affiliations to the situations, making some decisions more critical than others (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). The life course principle of agency endorses that decision-making on the part of individuals is subject to opportunities and limitations. However, it also acknowledges that individuals have some agency in the paths they take or pave their way to. For example, the decision to immigrate is an agency for immigrants searching for better lives, which can set the stage for future choices.

Linked lives

The core principle of life course theory is that humans are linked to each other, live independently, and exhibit socio-historical influences (Marshall & Mueller, 2003). Linked lives are connected through a network of social relationships beyond formal connections like family. This can include friends, neighbors, and work colleagues who provide distinct social linkages

(Marshall & Mueller, p. 11). These social orientations shape how individuals perceive life events depending on how they integrate social norms, relationships, and institutions.

Trajectories, Transitions, and Turning points

In addition to the above principles, life course theory uses three key related concepts: trajectories, transitions, and turning points. These fundamental phenomena are commonly used to understand and describe human development. Trajectories provide a dynamic view of achievement and behavior over a sustained period of life. Transitions imply a change in state or place, such as when youth leave their parents' household. When there is a change in behaviors during the transition, it refers to a turning point. Trajectories and transitions are components of established pathways, developmental patterns, and their life course, and they change over time. For example, undocumented children entering public schools in the US and graduating from high school as their documented and American peers. Each transition, which encompasses specific roles and exit and entry into those roles, is embedded in trajectories and particular elements. Trajectories and transitions are usually associated with careers and work-life events. Career pathways refer to positions at a specific place, while career trajectories refer to achievements and behaviors coinciding with those achievements. Intimate relationships, marriage, and parenthood are also part of life course trajectories (Hill, 1970).

Developmental trajectories are vital parts of life course theory, especially when explored from the lens of changing dynamics of social trajectories. However, previous scholars have used their studies to understand developmental trajectories but have neglected the impact of social context (Elder & Shanahan, 2007). There is increasing attention on studying human behavior and its remarkable effects on developmental patterns. Using the approach of looking at the impact of

social context on the lives of undocumented emerging adults is the focus of my study, as it has been neglected previously.

The meaning of transition has everything to do with time concerning a trajectory. Early life transitions can have consequences in developmental trajectories, leading to subsequent transitions in the life course. For example, undocumented high school graduates realize they do not have the same rights as their American counterparts in getting higher education. This lack of choice can affect their future decision-making in accessing their school choice for higher education. These behavioral consequences can have cumulative disadvantages for other life course decisions in the future. The developmental implications of a transition depend on the transitional change in norms and cognitive expectations.

Life transitions into a completely different environment facilitate the life course process by representing a turning point in the trajectory of any individual. For example, military service, education completion, access to successful employment, and stable relationships are turning points and opportunities to integrate socially (Bouffard & Laub, 2004). The turning point concept lays the foundation of another significant element that applies to how individuals view and perceive their life trajectories. This concept encompasses the personal account of lived experiences of distinct individuals depending on their changing circumstances. The critical point is that the life course framework can facilitate my study to help understand channels of changing pathways, transitions, life patterns, and developmental trajectories of undocumented emerging youth.

Chapter 3: Introduction/Purpose/Justification of Research Methodology

My interest in selecting a qualitative research method stems from the ideas of Bogdan and Biklen (2003). They postulated that qualitative research occurs at "the intersection of social context and biography" and should be "holistic" (p. 9). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) underscored the Chicago School sociologists' research approach, which focused on seeing the world from the eyes of those seldom heard--- immigrants, criminals, vagrants, etc.

Drawing upon qualitative research philosophies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I am interested in exploring the experiences of 1.5-generation undocumented students enrolled in higher education institutions. Most of the research on undocumented immigrant students focuses on their challenges in pursuing higher education, like financial aid, support from institutional administration and campus environment, etc. Little is written on how these undocumented students see their prospects after graduating from their undergraduate programs due to their liminal legality of belonging and not belonging simultaneously in the U.S. Therefore. I sought to understand how these students experience their liminal worlds and imagine their futures after university. This study aims to add to the knowledge base about how undocumented immigrant students view their fate at the end of their undergraduate educational trajectory.

The research question I pose framing this qualitative study is:

Q. How do 1.5 undocumented immigrant college students experience the liminal world they reside in and imagine their futures after university/college life?

Research Methodology and Design

Considering this research purpose, I conducted a qualitative study based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 12 students. This qualitative research approach allows for the complexity and nuance of these undocumented immigrant students' lives to unfold naturally

through the stories they tell. The primary purpose was to access students' interpretations of their realities and how these inform their conceptions of their futures. The students' experiences pursuing higher education and their perception of how they construct their future can only be fully understood when their stories are heard from their perspective. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews provide a loose framework with room for the interviewee to expand or elaborate upon specific questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As mentioned, my research aims to draw meaning from interview data using an inductive approach (Thomas, 2003). The purpose is to generate an understanding of the complex nature of undocumented immigrant students' lives stuck in legal limbo yet still enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs, planning for their futures. Some of the terms which I have used throughout this dissertation are as follows with their definition:

1.5 Undocumented Students

1.5 undocumented students are foreign-born children who are brought to the United States before the age of 18 and are raised in the United States. They completed their high school education and are either enrolled in colleges/universities or have recently graduated.

The students who do not have DACA status have no legal authorization to work or are eligible for state financial aid available in some states to DACA students. Therefore, I have referred to those students as “Undocumented students” in this study.

DACAmented Students

. There are two categories of 1.5 undocumented students. Those who have DACA status and those who do not have DACA status This is the category of those undocumented students who have availed the DACA privilege and are authorized to legal work but have to keep their DACA status active by getting it renewed every two years.

Mixed-status Families

I have used this term in this study for families with undocumented family members; some are DACAmented, permanent residents, or citizens.

Participants and Sampling Method

The participants of this study are 1.5 undocumented immigrant students enrolled in higher education institutions (e.g., community colleges, public universities) currently in their junior or senior year or recently graduated. Undocumented immigrant students refer to children raised but not born in the U.S. brought to this country by their parents (Olivérez, 2006), as stated in the definition above. These youth, sometimes referred to as 1.5-generation immigrants, have lived most of their lives in the U.S. and are fully assimilated into American culture (San Jose State University, 2017).

I have chosen to work with upper-level and recently graduated 1.5-generation undocumented immigrant students because they begin planning their futures post-graduation at this stage. By recently graduated, I meant to recruit fresh graduates from their undergrad programs within one to a maximum of two years or even those with a Master's degree. There is uncertainty concerning the future of this group, as many of the students do not have permanent work permits or a path to citizenship. Family life and decisions around relationships and future goals are also marked by uncertainty due to the impermanence of immigration status, making life decisions more complicated. It is thus essential to focus on this time in their educational career. Although I intended to recruit an equal number of male and female participants, gender diversity could have provided me with another layer of perspectives and explored whether male and female students think about their future differently or not. However, I recruited three males, eight females, and one gender non-binary individuals.

I did not intend to restrict recruiting by nationality, ethnicity, or race to attract a diverse group of undocumented immigrant students. This would have allowed for a more detailed description of 1.5 generation student experiences and give voice to some of the lesser represented immigrant populations such as Arab, Chinese, Indian, etc., who may not have such an extensive network already established in the U.S. My initial plan was to recruit participants from the New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Delaware areas, as these states attract many immigrants and would help me cast a wider net to recruit the required number of participants. However, when I realized that social media was the only source through which I could recruit my participants, I had to tweak my inclusion criteria to include anyone who is an undocumented or DACAmented young adult residing in any part of the U.S. Participants recruited were selected either from exclusively undocumented or from mixed-status families. The combination of different families helped me explore how different families may bring different perspectives when the young adults of their families are ready to look beyond their academic lives. Another limitation I encountered in recruiting participants from social media was that only those who are vocal and have an online presence are recruited. Therefore, my intention to recruit participants from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds was unfortunately not fulfilled, and I ended up recruiting only Hispanic/Latinx participants. There are Indians and Chinese undocumented and DACAmented individuals who are active on Twitter, but they either did not respond to my message or excused themselves from giving me the interview.

Recruitment Process

After IRB approval, I used a purposeful snowball and stratified sampling technique by contacting several MSU professors teaching undergraduate students of the Family Science and Human Development (FSHD) program to request assistance in disseminating information and

recruiting participants for the study. I also sent a recruitment email to the grassroots organization in the college chapter that advocates for undocumented immigrant students. The email contained contact information, informed consent, and confidentiality/privacy information. This document and email also requested that students share the study proposal and recruitment information with other undocumented immigrant students they believe would benefit from participation. One is "Conversations Without Borders," which holds monthly meetings with undocumented students online or in person. I attended those meetings twice, but since the end of the semester in November 2021, students did not show up. Additionally, organizations like "Make the Road New Jersey," "Conversations without Borders" and "DACA students" are some of the critical networks that I reached out to recruit participants.

It became clear that I had to get more creative and look for my participants on social media platforms, as it was becoming challenging to contact the desired population through the organizations mentioned above. By then, I was already following some anonymous Twitter accounts that specifically mentioned their undocumented or DACA status in their bios. I also followed the Twitter handles of some of the organizations mentioned above. In "Make the Road New Jersey," I saw a poster of a young person with his name who gave a small interview on a local news channel. I reached out to that person through the Messenger app on Facebook. He happily agreed to an interview. After he agreed and shared his email, I sent him the study invitation with the consent form and demographic survey link. This is the same recruitment method I followed as per my IRB protocol. After the interview, I asked him to forward my email to his undocumented community of young adults to recruit more participants potentially. My first participant sent me the contact information of another person who is active on Twitter, and that is how I started recruiting participants through Twitter primarily. I employed a snowball

sampling strategy with the first participants helped me in recruiting other participants for the study until I had twelve participants recruited (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Therefore, completing my recruitment process took three to four months after the first interview. I used Pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. The participant recruitment process started in November 2021 after the IRB approval in the first week of November 2021.

Getting the desired number of participants, 12, took four months to complete. Therefore, I conducted the last of the first round of interviews in March 2022. Since the recruitment and the interview process happened virtually and through social media, participants are from different states all over the U.S. After the first round of interviews was conducted, I started my second round of interviews. I completed the process by October 2022. As a result, I conducted second interviews with ten of my participants, as the remaining two participants did not respond to the email sent to them for another interview.

Data Collection Methods

This research is an interview study utilizing two rounds of semi-structured interviews. First, potential participants who agreed to do the discussion were sent a letter of information via email containing complete information about the study's purpose, participant criteria, and the time commitment needed. In addition, they were given complete information on IRB and their rights therein. After each potential participant received and read the consent form and filled out the demographic survey. I scheduled the interview using email for convenient dates and times suitable for the participants. I also sent them the link for the demographic survey along with the consent form, which they all filled out before the interview. I conducted the first round of 60-90 minute interviews via Zoom as preferred by all the participants. The interviews

started with reading the consent form again as per IRB protocol, and the participants were asked to select a pseudonym of their choice.

The first round of interviews was based on semi-structured interview questions with prompts depending on the responses provided by the participants. The first interview had nine sections: (a) migration to the U.S., (b) sense of belonging, (c) struggles to enrolment in college, (d) college experiences, (e) DACA and its impact, (f) fears for the family, (g) social relationships, (h) romantic relationships, and (i) envisioning the future. All the questions were framed, keeping the research question in mind, asking about their migration stories, educational milestones, families, and romantic and social relationships. Lastly, they were asked how they see their future with their continuous liminal status

After an initial analysis of the data from these interviews, I conducted a second round of 50-60 minute interviews with new questions prompted by emerging themes and member-checked my initial understandings to clarify my interpretations and readings. The first and second interview guide is included in Appendix A and B, respectively. The open-ended semi-structured questions were designed to understand and cover some of the undocumented students' circumstances and lived experiences in the last two years of their degrees in the United States and their thoughts on how they plan and envision their future after graduation. This covered their economic and career trajectories and familial and social plans concerning their current and future relationships within the liminal legality domain. The second interview was based on the emerging questions, themes, or clarification from the first round of questioning my initial analysis. Throughout the interview process, I conducted member-checking of my initial understanding from first and second-round interviews to follow up on areas that might need clarification or confirmation. I also had a telephonic interview with one participant in addition to

the second interview. One participant emailed me the second interview's responses as they were relocating.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and recorded digitally on an audio device. During the interview, I listened and used probes and follow-up questions to understand participants' initial replies, asking them to further develop their answers to the interview questions. I also used my journal to write notes/reflections to document them with Saldana's guide. The data was kept on a password-protected computer that only I could access, and audio files were transcribed and then eventually will be deleted later as per the IRB guidelines.

Demographic Information

Inclusion criteria included participants between the ages of 18-29, either enrolled in a community college or state university or recently completed their degrees. In addition, they could be DACAmented or undocumented with no DACA status., being 1.5 young adults. Initially, my idea was to recruit participants from tristate areas of New Jersey, New York, Delaware, and Connecticut. However, due to issues recruiting participants, I relied mainly on Social Media, which meant participants from across the country.

The total number of participants (N =12). The average age of participants arriving in the U.S. was five years, with an average current age of 25. Eleven participants were born in Mexico, and one was born in Venezuela. Nine had DACA status, two were completely undocumented with no DACA, and one had recently received a green card through marriage to his husband. Eight had driver's licenses, two had received permits, and two did not. They belong to mixed-status families with various combinations of citizen siblings and undocumented parents. Three were identified as male, eight as female, and one as non-conforming. Six identified themselves as heterosexual, one pan-sexual, two gays, two bisexuals, and one trans-non-binary. Three

identified themselves as Mexicans, five as Latinx, one as Latin/Mexican, two as Hispanic, and one as Afro-Latino. One resided in New York, one in New Jersey, five in California, one in Arizona, three in Texas, and one in Florida. Five were fully employed, two were students and fully employed, one was unemployed, one was part-time employed, one was self-employed, and one was a self-employed student and part-time employed. Two have reported being seniors in the program of study: one is a junior, one is a Ph.D. student, and the rest have recently completed their undergraduate degrees. Six were single, three were dating, one was cohabiting, one was divorced, and one was married. See the following table for the complete information:

Table 1. Participant Demographic Data

Participant Demographic Data				
Participants	**Age**	**Gender**	**Sexual Orientation**	**Ethnicity**
1	**28**	**Male**	**Hetero**	**Mexican**
2	**23**	**Gender nonconforming**	**Trans nonbinary**	**Latinx**
3	**22**	**Male**	**Gay**	**Mexican**
4	**23**	**Female**	**heterosexual**	**Latina/Mexican**
5	**25**	**Female**	**Pansexual**	**Latina**
6	**33**	**Male**	**Gay**	**Mexican**
7	**28**	**Female**	**cisgender**	**Latina**
8	**23**	**Female**	**Bisexual**	**Latinx**
9	**23**	**Female**	**Straight**	**Hispanic**
10	**23**	**Female**	**straight, cisgender**	**Latine**
11	**21**	**Female**	**Bisexual**	**Afro-Latina**
12	**26**	**Female**	**Heterosexual**	**Hispanic**

Table 2. Participant Demographic Data

Participants	Age of Migration	Relationship Status	Immigration Status	Current States
1	6	**Single**	**DACA**	**New York**
2	5	**Single**	**DACA**	**California**
3	6	**Single**	**DACA**	**Arizona**
4	15	**Dating**	**No DACA**	**California**
5	1	**Divorced**	**DACA**	**California**
6	2	**Married**	**Green Card**	**California**
7	8	**Single**	**DACA**	**New Jersey**
8	8	**Single**	**DACA**	**California**
9	4	**Cohabiting**	**DACA**	**Texas**
10	8	**Dating**	**DACA**	**Texas**
11	1	**Dating**	**No DACA**	**Texas**
12	2	**Single**	**DACA**	**Florida**

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed by looking for common emerging patterns and themes. Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process concurrently with data gathering (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative data analysis is a cyclic process that entails "comparing data to data, data to code, code to a category, category to category, category back to data, etc." (Saldana, 2011). It is a thematic analysis using the coding cycle with an ongoing comparative strategy to arrive at themes and patterns (Glaser, 1965). Through this constant meaning-making process, the data analysis generated valuable findings from my data by making sense of their lived experience and thus highlighting important aspects that resonate with my research question (Charmaz,2014).

As I gathered the data based on an initial round of in-depth interviews, I conducted an ongoing analysis through open coding by making a table with each interview on the side panel. I color-coded them as the conversations aligned with the interview questions' sub-sections that align with the larger research question. From the color-coded side-table, I transferred the same codes into an excel sheet, as I saw emerging conversations like initial migration journeys, parental sacrifice, settling in schools, applying to colleges, financial issues, DACA impermanence, hopelessness in the future, no sense of belonging, Dreamer identity, romantic social relationships and disappointment with the current Presidential administration. Along these larger themes, many other patterns emerged in connection to those families of themes. For example, the refusal to be Dreamer was connected to parental sacrifice. According to them, it is unacceptable for these participants to be part of immigration reforms that provide them with a permanent solution but leave their parents or elderly members of the community who are equally deserving. As I kept conducting data analysis, the point came by the end of the twelfth interview

that I felt saturation had come, and new participants would not provide me with anything different. So, finally, I conducted another round of follow-up interviews driven by these emerging patterns via Zoom.

The follow-up interview was designed by re-reading and comparing all the interviews repeatedly. The most recurring theme and conversations were about the significance of their communities and how they feel that their communities have always been their building blocks and sounding board. I wanted to explore whether they find their communities sufficient for their future survival in the U.S. Additionally, they spoke about their social and romantic relationships and previous negative experiences with their citizen partners. Finally, I wanted to ask them with whom they envision their social and romantic lives. Do they think their personal and their peers' experiences have pushed them back to expect any future with citizen partners, or would they rely more on their undocumented community forging and forming social networks and romantic relationships?

Once data gathering was complete, I conducted an in-depth analysis of the data and grouped codes into emergent categories and themes that addressed the research question. Following the recommendations of Saldana (2011,2015), I started the first step of coding manually to feel the ownership and control, as is explained comprehensively, "more control over and ownership of the work" (Saldana, 2011, p. 22). The data were later grouped with matching themes such as "sense of belonging," grouped with "confused sense of identities," "feeling of un-American," and so on. The second coding phase focused on narrowing more concepts that repeatedly emerged into the family of main themes which I categorized into three more prominent themes named as (1) Claiming rights to citizenship (2) Chronic uncertainties for careers and relationships (3) Confused sense of belonging and Ambivalent Futures.

Trustworthiness

A common strategy used in qualitative research is member checking to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). I followed up on some emerging themes and ideas and asked the participants for their feedback throughout the process by member-checking at every step. These follow-up interviews allowed me to member-check initial reports and avoid misinterpretations due to mishearing or my preconceived ideas or biases (Maxwell, 2012). As a result of my constant comparative data analysis strategy, I kept conducting member-checking throughout the data gathering and analysis process. I was in touch with them through their social media accounts and would ask them for clarification through the direct message option on Twitter. If there were any misconceptions on my part, the participants helped me to identify them and recognize them. This process helped me fine-tune the analyses and recognize my biases and misconceptions. I have two critical friends who served as a collective sounding board during my data collection process, pushing me to think differently about the data I am gathering. I shared my initial interpretations of data with one to provide another layer of reliability. It helped me to illuminate any personal biases that might have arisen in my initial analysis, especially since one of them is a Spanish-speaking friend; she was more thorough in understanding some concepts due to her relatability with my participants. I discussed my initial understanding of some of the themes from the first analysis stage with my other friend, who is apt with U.S. immigration policies and laws. Through this collaboration, I expanded my perspectives on the data and emergent patterns.

Researcher's Journal

I have a habit of maintaining a researcher's journal. I have documented all my analyses throughout the data collection process from the beginning until the end in my journal. I wrote

short notes immediately after each interview and later analyzed and self-reflected on the essential issues discussed by the participants. My journal was my best friend throughout my dissertation process, as I wrote my daily feelings on issues about my data and at the lowest of my life when I lost my father to COVID. My daily notes were constantly documented based on the interviews conducted, rethinking and analyzing, and continually comparing and constructing themes. Because of this constant self-reflection, I started to see what I should avoid asking my next participant. I felt that this process helped me become more conscious of the interview process and its effect on my participants. In addition, this process helped me check my interpretation by reviewing the notes I wrote for each participant. I compared these notes at the end of my data analysis to see how different my initial interpretations were from the end of the process.
My journal helped me become a better researcher, providing a safe space to self-reflect by writing my continuous struggles with data collection and my interaction with my participants.

Positionality

I came to the US because I envisioned it as a country of dream fulfillment-a land of opportunities. I believe hard work pays off in America, especially in education and advanced degrees. So, I came as an international student from Pakistan, completed my Master's from Montclair State University, worked for a year at a public school as a Teacher's aide, and got admitted to my Ph.D. program. Coming from a family that always valued education, pursuing a higher degree from the US for the betterment of my children was very important to me. Although I am fully aware of my uncertain future regarding staying and having a career in the US, I also acknowledge my privilege of having documents. These documents have helped me open bank accounts, get a driver's license, and enjoy many other aspects of life that US citizens take for granted. Due to the family support and documentation privileges my family enjoys, my

children are on the path to higher education. Therefore, in conducting this study, I fully recognize my positionality as a documented immigrant with a support system- arriving via an education visa and studying undocumented students who did not come to the US with the same privileges. My US experience is similar and different from the population I intend to study.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from 12 in-depth interviews with 1.5 undocumented young adults who graduated from their programs or are still finishing their studies. This study aimed to explore the experiences of this 1.5 undocumented population living in the constant fear of losing their lives, which they have built up in the U.S. after completing their high school education. Existing within the realm of ambiguous lives, they grapple with the various intersectionalities of their identities attached not only to their immigration status but also to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. These undocumented 1.5-generation young adults live in a liminal status surrounding their lives, constantly juggling their feelings of belongingness and confused sense of identity. At a time when their American peers are navigating young adulthood, choosing their careers, and getting driver's licenses, these undocumented/DACAmented young adults are learning to navigate their careers and social-romantic relationships via the lens of their illegality. Their status dominates their life decisions and thus forces them to reimagine their future which is different due to their precarious undocumented position. At this time of transition in their lives, their sense of belongingness and unique identities become increasingly more significant when they realize their set of differences from the majority of their American peers. Their conversations indicate that the negative impacts of their liminal undocumented status are mitigated by their immense sense of belonging to their undocumented communities in their life course transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood. As a result, these young adults find themselves in situations where they have to revisit or curate their future decisions regarding career options and romantic relationships, existing in their liminal status with no foreseeable future. Throughout the in-depth interviews, the participants shared their stories of challenging

migration journeys, language barriers, academic and financial challenges, and hardships of their lives due to their liminal legality. This study seeks to illuminate the educational, career, and social context of 1.5 undocumented and DACAmented students' navigation in their life course in the backdrop of their liminal space. The discourse during the interviews was on a broader stroke about their future plans and their navigation to their young adult lives during the uncertainties of the political spectrum in the United States. The research question that guides this qualitative interview study is as follows:

Q. How do 1.5 undocumented immigrant college students experience the liminal world they reside in and imagine their futures after university/college life?

Although the method section explains the recruitment process in detail, a brief introduction about how I connected with these participants merits reiteration here to give the reader an idea before reading the findings section. When my IRB got approved, I contacted several non-profit organizations and student affairs officials at Montclair State University who work with this student body. However, as time passed, it became evident that it would be challenging to reach this population without anyone personally knowing them. I have followed organizations like "Make the Road New Jersey" on social media for over a few years. From there, I learned about a DACAmented young adult who was supposed to talk about the undocumented immigrant community on a local news channel. I immediately reached out to that person, and he responded after a couple of days and happily gave me the interview. He was my first participant in this study. Therefore, I started following people on Twitter who would openly tweet about immigration and DACA, and the way the algorithm works for Twitter, several people with DACA and undocumented status written in their bios started showing up on my timeline. These people would share their opinions and tweet about immigration and DACA

updates. I started sending them direct messages about my interest in recruiting them for my study. Several people instantly showed their interest and enthusiasm to share their stories. A couple responded negatively and explicitly informed me that they do not want to revisit their immigration stories as it only brings heartbreak and trauma to them. I apologized to them and told them that I respected their decision. From my second participant, it turned out to be a textbook case of snow-balling, and that participant introduced me to more people on Twitter, and I happened to recruit all 12 participants in 3-4 months. The only difference was that I initially wanted participants from the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and other bordering states. However, with recruitment through social media, I ended up recruiting participants from all over the United States, which gave me a diverse group of interviewees with diverse experiences depending on which state they reside in. Therefore, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 in the methods section, my participants are from California, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Florida, and Arizona.

Some of the terms I have consistently used in this study need to be stated again for a clear understanding of the varying degrees of experiences by these undocumented and DACAmented individuals. Following are some of the recurring terms used throughout the dissertation:

1.5 Undocumented Students

1.5 Undocumented students are those born in a different country and brought by their families to the United States, where they are raised and educated (Buenavista & Tran, 2010). This category includes some who entered without legal authorization but also those who hold an expired visa, hold a different type of visa (‘tourist’ instead of ‘student’), or are currently in the middle of extended judicial proceedings to remain in the United States.

Dreamers

The "Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors" (DREAM) act was the bill introduced in 2001, which was meant to repeal the provision in "The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996. That provision prohibits undocumented students from accessing higher education benefits (H.R. 1918, 2001; S.1291,2001; Olivias, 2004). However, the senate never passed the bill because it did not garner enough co-sponsors (American Immigration Council, 2017). Since then, different versions of the Dream Act have been presented, but it was in 2010 that it passed in the House of Representatives, followed by failing to pass in Senate by only five votes (American Immigration Council, 2017). Participants arriving in the United States after 2001 and onwards are called "Dreamers" due to their connection and struggles with getting this bill passed to date.

DACAmented Students

After the Dream Act failed to pass in the senate in 2010, President Obama announced "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" (DACA) in 2012. DACA was a program announced as an executive order to give protection to undocumented individuals who arrived as children and were under the age of 31 at the time of the program (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018). The participants in the study who have DACA status are termed as DACAmented

Undocumented Students

Individuals who do not have DACA status are termed undocumented students.

Following the sequence of the questions and the responses shared by the participants, their migration to the United States stands out as their first life trajectory. Most participants shared that their parents brought them to the U.S. as little children without understanding why they left their lives behind in their countries of origin. Several shared fun and lighthearted stories about meeting their extended family or fathers working in the U.S. However, for some, their

stories included harrowing journeys that their parents took with the help of coyotes to transfer their young children to the U.S. border. After getting older and realizing how much their parents have sacrificed, they have all acknowledged that they encountered extreme hardships to migrate to the U.S. to give them a secure future. Most participants shared their association with their countries of origin and the ambivalent sense of anchoring they feel when they cannot visit their extended families due to the immobility attached to their undocumented status. Some of them felt the pain attached to their country of birth as they realized that their connection to their countries only brought a sense of deprivation and a sense of immense loss to them. However, they invariably emphasized their sense of belonging to their undocumented community, providing them with solid ground.

Many parents kept their immigration status hidden from their children in fear of repercussions. Most of these children learned about their undocumented status at the time of college application in their junior or senior years when they realized they did not have social security number to apply for scholarships. Though many received DACA at or just before college, some could not qualify due to its strict eligibility criteria, which is discussed later.

Interestingly, most parents are not formally educated but did their best to help their children figure out the college admission process and not give up on their American dream. Most participants shared how their parents improvised their sources of income to finance their education, which was extremely difficult for them with no federal financial aid. The participants shared their acknowledgment of their parents' sacrifices. They often emphasize the importance of their life decisions, like the geographic location of their college selection, because they prefer to stay close to their parents. Some participants stressed how the roles had reversed to being the caregivers and interpreters to their parents when they reciprocated their parents'

sacrifices. Especially female participants shared that they have more responsibilities to look after their aging parents and help them with house chores.

Though DACA recipient participants have some local/state scholarships, they are still insufficient to cover tuition. Moreover, those who did not qualify to receive DACA had to work under the table without legal authorization, endure long hours, and work full-time to cover the tuition cost, as they do not qualify for any local or state scholarship or have legal authorization to work.

The responses also highlighted their affiliation to their community, how it led to advocacy work, their sense of belonging, later experiences with higher education, career options, and social and romantic interactions in their emerging adulthood. However, they shared that community affiliation was insufficient to help them create pathways to permanent solutions for their immigration status. Neither is the community well-equipped to compensate for their lack of resources in navigating their lives.

The following themes emerged as a result of data analysis and are then divided into sub-themes:

1. Claiming rights to citizenship
2. Chronic uncertainties for careers and relationships
3. Confused sense of belonging and Ambivalent Futures.

To make the findings concise, I have divided this chapter into three identifying themes mentioned above.

Theme 1: Claiming Rights to Citizenship

For the last decade, undocumented young adults have been using their Dreamer identity to empower their narrative for Activism because they were educated and were brought to the United States by their parents to render a better life. For that period, undocumented Activism

was based on Dreamer identity and enacted by the students looking ahead to the path to citizenship. However, over time, they realized that their identities are intersectional and cannot be confined only to the Dreamer narrative, which excludes undocumented community members without American education. Their advocacy and activism are not for a specific segment of their undocumented community, but they want to encompass all who have not been part of this "deserving narrative" using their privileges that others do not have. They wanted to surpass the idea that only the educated deserve to be integrated into American society. Those who have had the opportunity to access a college education, albeit with severe challenges, now understand how the politicians falsely steered this Dreamer identity, exacerbating the ideology of a good and deserving immigrant. Therefore, the ideology they used has been intentionally manipulated by politicians and mainstream media. The idea was to portray some undocumented community members as desirable and deserving of all the rights to citizenship since they are educated, and others who are not educated are excluded.

The finding suggests that media and politicians see their critical consciousness and awareness of their educated selves separate from their undocumented community. Their acceptance and awareness of their privileged identity made them realize that those who are not Dreamers also deserved the same citizenship rights and social acceptance.

The participants with DACA status saw themselves through a lens of privilege and entitlement, which many members of their undocumented community lack for several reasons. They showed how they utilized their voices unapologetically and came out openly to work for their community. Using their DACA status as a tool to empower themselves and their undocumented communities, they actively participated in their campuses and the limited spaces they occupied to create awareness about the unique needs of their community members. Their

active participation was their only contribution to asking for their rights to access educational resources and opportunities for themselves and equally demanding the same civic rights for the senior members of their communities.

Many participants expressed their resentment with the word "Dreamer," explaining how it creates a division and a narrative politicized by politicians and exploits the basic concept of immigration reforms for a specific population. They also highlighted that they would prefer to be called undocumented instead of Dreamers, as the word has a negative connotation entailing the divisive ideology of good (young and educated) and bad (old and uneducated) immigrants. When the Dreamer movement did not pass in the Senate in 2001, President Barack Obama passed an executive order in the form of DACA to provide protection only to the youth from detainment, arrest, and deportation. DACA éxplicitly excluded the elderly members of the community.

This study includes twelve participants, out of which ten participants have DACA status, and the remaining two do not have DACA status. The DACA status holders expressed their whole-hearted gratitude for the opportunities it provides but also their frustration about the limitations of DACA, which was a temporary solution in the first place. To them, DACA has become an active tool to aid their liminality because it has a two-year validity to work and protection from deportation as it does not lead to a permanent residency or a pathway to citizenship. Moreover, strict eligibility criteria, a constant threat of being taken away by the courts, and not recruiting the younger cohort to apply to the program are all the more reasons for these young adults to ask for aggressive immigration reforms in the community for everyone, irrespective of their age or educational attainment.

Three sub-themes that emerged from the data under the family of "Claiming rights to citizenship" are (1) Civic engagement and advocacy; (2) DACA liminality; and (3) Dreamer-a misnomer.

To make the findings comprehensive and concise, I have inserted the tables for each family of themes and their sub-themes before discussing each qualitative theme.

Table 3	
Theme 1. Claiming Rights to Citizenship	
Civic Engagement and Advocacy	*Activism as a Tool*
	Unafraid of Consequences
	Trump Effects and Creation of Safe Space
	The intersection of Race, Ethnicity, Color and Class
DACA liminality	*DACA Provides protection, not Permanence*
	Benefits of DACA
	Selective Eligibility Criteria for DACA
	Fears attached with DACA
	DACA Guilt
	Negative Effects on Mental Health
	Self-Deportation: A New Idea
Dreamer- a Misnomer	*A Divisive DREAMER Narrative*
	A Demand for Parental Inclusion
	Critical Consciousness and Awakening

Civic Engagement and Advocacy

The main conversation throughout the interviews was focused on the significance of community activism as a tool of identity and action for all participants. Almost all of them shared their active participation in civic engagement, which started primarily when they realized their liminal undocumented status.

The Realization to use Activism as a Tool

For some of them, that time came when they found courage in their high school senior years, and for others, they gained freedom of expression in college. Despite their internalized hopelessness and immense exhaustion due to their liminal status, they expressed a desire to continue to stand up for the rights of their undocumented community. Guided by their sense of belonging only to their undocumented community, they participated actively in civic engagement to stipulate the rights of the less-privileged members of their undocumented diaspora. Unafraid of consequences, they used this tool to counter their liminality and speak up against injustices on campuses or in the media. These participants talked primarily about the validation of their immigrant rights and how their lives gravitated toward community building by making advocacy for their sense of identity. Drawing from their interviews, their conversation shows that they believe that the only tangible thing in their control is their activism and civic engagement, which is their right and that empowers them. They do that by being vocal on mainstream media, talking on different panels and podcasts, or voicing their concerns on social media. With their limited resources and ideas, their Activism challenges the notion of existing exclusive policies for their communities. They understand that their active participation in helping the community is like an incubator for those who do not want to reveal their undocumented status and come forward and ask for support. These active undocumented students have shown their capabilities and sense of organization by confronting government officials and covertly supporting those who feel uncomfortable asking for help. Some of them are quenching their thirst for belongingness. They took that as a connection to their roots when they reached out to vulnerable students on campus or elsewhere. Carol described her experience visiting and later working with the organization of Multicultural affairs at her campus. That was when she started meeting diverse students with

different ethnicities who were all undocumented. From there, she developed strong ties with students like her and felt validated. She expressed:

> It was then that I started hanging out with Latin kids, Hispanic kids, Mexican kids, and black and Asian students as well. So I was like, Okay, I feel like I am starting to identify. And that is when I started slowly being open about my immigration status, being comfortable, talking it out with people, and sharing my experiences and difficulties, and I started connecting with other Hispanic folks and other undocumented folks as well. So like, right now, I do feel a little closer to my roots because of other people who I am close to and around and who share similar experiences from the same cultural background.

The participants in this study are all vocal, active, and public as far as their opinions are concerned. Most of them recognized the significance of community work which has yielded many of the resources they can access now. The implementation of many favorable states and federal policies to date is the mere efforts of constant Activism of their community members. Some of these are in-state tuition in many states to date, and DACA came into being to protect these young high school students when the DREAM Act did not pass in the Senate during President Obama's administration. Kathy, who has always been an advocate for her community and worked with organizations like "Make the Road New Jersey," emphasized the role of community in her life and other undocumented people's lives:

> I really value community support and community work. I am a firm believer that the community is going to get us somewhere, whether it is full liberation of systems or whether it is some sort of immigration path without the community; nothing will ever get done. I do not put it in the hands of the government. Like I am here, and I am going to graduate because of my community, not the government, not the institutions.

They use their Activism on social media or electronic media by deriving power through an explicit understanding of their rights. The same rights they learned through education and acute awareness of their surroundings are framed on global tenets of social justice and equity for all. As Kathy said during the conversation, her reading and researching led to a more nuanced understanding of what she had been projecting earlier. She said, "Do not give us more; give to all of us." She further emphasizes, "We all deserve it outside the good narrative because I was part of, like, oh, being the good narrative Immigrant. I was like, Nah, screw that. Again, the evolution of a lot of reading and a lot of community."

The binary rhetoric of deservingness that fosters the rights and privileges for high-achieving, young, and law-abiding young adults and criminalizes the older and those who are different is no longer an acceptable argument for their activism and advocacy. Instead, they constructed another empowered identity not associated with their previous "Dreamer" identity. They shunned their previous identity due to its exclusivity, which bars all their undocumented community members. Some said they would rather call themselves “illegal” instead of Dreamer, as illegality is their real identity. Elizabeth explained:

> We often subscribe to it being illegal and not because, you know, and not because we are in quote, unquote, degrading ourselves, but because it is our reality, like in this country, we are viewed as illegal, and we are viewed in this very stigmatized way. So like in my community members, I do definitely, definitely call myself illegal because being a dreamer being undocumented or being, you know, having DACA, no matter what the legislation, or quote, unquote, the policy says, I am still going to be viewed as illegal.

They believe navigating spaces shared by other undocumented members in their community means that if they consider themselves Dreamers, they will exclude the undocumented senior members who do not identify with Dreamer identity. She further said:

> That is a term that I do use often, and I do feel myself in again; I am not the gradient way or not in a way where citizens can call me illegal because that will be a problem. But in a way that you know, my community members and myself interact with one another.

Their liminal existence has led to a more selfless and critical analysis of the political realities that impact their other undocumented peers who are not afforded the same opportunities as they are with their DACA status. That is why the participants demonstrated in the interviews their selfless advocacy to include those on the peripheries situated at the margins without any rights and privileges.

Another prevalent motivation to create those spaces for undocumented students is to share their trauma with those with the same experience and where they can listen to each other without being judged. Kathy was amongst the first pool of young people who applied for DACA when she was about to graduate high school. It was a time when she had bought a ticket for her home country with the sad realization that she had no future at that point after her high school graduation and did not want to end up working at McDonald's, according to her. However, her parents told her this would not be an option; either she would return to Venezuela or look for something that could work out for her college. That was when she entered the activism part of her life and got involved in immigrant rights. She reached out to several immigrant organizations like the "New Jersey immigrants Alliance," the "New Jersey Dream Act," and the "Immigrants Alliance" to find out about her options or any prospective scholarships she could apply to. A

person in one of these organizations took her under his wing and encouraged her to apply to all her desired institutions, especially private colleges with more money for students. Kathy stated:

> And that was the first time in 2012 when I became really involved in the immigrant rights movement. So that is where my Activism came in. So from 2011 and starting 2012. I was born under the "New Jersey DREAM Act. Coalition". I have been involved with immigrants' rights throughout New Jersey. So I have been part of passing the New Jersey DREAM Act. I have been part of passing state aid and financial aid. I have catered to an organization where we have done presentations and all access to educational resources. So that has been my bread and butter throughout my career, giving back to my community and providing all the resources I was never provided.

Unafraid of Consequences

Many said that though the activism started with the Dreamer campaign, it has become a burden for them by becoming a source of division between good Samaritans with 4.0 GPAs and the older ones with no formal education and skills. However, several of them shared how proud they feel connected with their undocumented identity and openly flaunt their immigration status and discuss it without fearing consequences for themselves and their families. They believe that growing up in the U.S. and getting educated has given them enough bearing to care for younger siblings in case their parents are deported. While many posited the apprehension and fears for their parents' future in the United States, others shared that by now, they can look after themselves and their younger siblings in times of crisis independently without the help of their parents if their parents are deported to their countries of origin. That is why they are now unafraid of consequences and unapologetic about their immigration status.

Carol shared how she feared her parents getting deported when she was little, but now she is old enough and feels confident to look after her younger siblings in case her parents have to leave or get deported. She thinks her parents would fare better now in Mexico than here. She shared:

> That fear is not there anymore. I know it sounds bad if my parents ever get deported, but they will be in their homeland. And we have actually talked about it before. So I will be back in my own country [her parents saying this]. I am going to be back with my own people. I will not suffer from xenophobia and have access to health care, and I will be able to see my family members.

Several participants shared that they had become unafraid of media exposure and shared their stories unapologetically on all the platforms. Their heightened sense of vulnerability did not come into their way of expressing their stories without fear of consequences. Nearly all of them shared that becoming open about their status helped build their network in their community of undocumented and DACAmented young adults. The average age of these young adults is 25 years, and they had been vocal for several years and seen ups and downs during the last decade regarding hopes being squashed by democrats; they have now become fearless in speaking up. Becoming open has given them a new sense of liberty and freedom which they realized, especially during President Trump's era. Arturo is the only undocumented member of his family and the first participant in my study whose video I saw on Facebook. He describes how he had been extra conscious about sharing his status before President Trump came to power. However, he became vocal in the media to share his story and what defines an undocumented young adult when he felt that he had nothing to lose now:

> Before Trump was elected, I was very introverted about my status. I was very careful and selective of whom I chose, whom I chose to disclose my status with and my background,

> and my experiences with, and then when he got elected, DACA was at risk of being sort of taken away. That is when I became very vocal with organizations and the press, like with my friends and my family. It made me who I am today, and I am not afraid to show that to anyone.

Trump Effect and Creation of Safe Spaces

Jack, a very active community member, had endured extreme racist, xenophobic, and homophobic behaviors from different people. Jack described some heart-wrenching incidents at their (Jack's) school when President Trump came to power, fuelling racism and discrimination by peers and teachers. The school had only 100 undocumented students; however, Jack started an immigrant club with the help of another undocumented student to provide a safe space to those who would be hesitant to come forward due to their status. Jack's experiences of hostility and discrimination led them (Jack) to form safe spaces on a college campus as their (Jack's) only option. They (Jack) worked on forming an advocacy organization to help other undocumented students on campus. They (Jack) created that safe space for those who fear talking openly about their undocumented status in other places on campus. In these safe spaces, all those afraid to talk openly about their undocumented identity in other parts of the campus could easily share their experiences without fear of revealing their status in front of everyone on campus. Moreover, Jack's school did not help provide resources for undocumented students, so they took matters into their own hands:

> The reason why I was open about my identity, I was swaying because of Trump. There was a lot going on, and the school was not helping our undocumented population. I started talking to them like, hey, these are resources you could send out, and they would not send them out; they would deny them. So I was pretty mad. Because I was part of a

> school and I was part of a lot of these organizations inside the school, they would still deny me. So I decided that I was going to take it into my own hands and help the students by myself. And that is why my identity was shown and known, but I do not regret it just because I know what I was able to deal with.

Elizabeth acknowledged the privilege of being part of those spaces in college where she was allowed to talk about her challenges. Nevertheless, she said," I felt like I did not have a right to quote-unquote complain or feel defeated by the higher education system because, you know, I, at the end of the day, it is a privilege to be in those spaces?

The intersection of Race, Ethnicity, Color, and Class

These participants shared how they have actively used their time to work in whatever capacity they can to contribute to their undocumented community. The work they are constantly involved in is their conscious effort to bring out changes where they are most needed. Moreover, they realize how racism and discrimination are other layers attached to their undocumented status. During the conversations, they often talked about color, race, and ethnicity, which played a pivotal role in their lived experiences. They perceive their lived experiences as the intersection of race, class, and sometimes gender, along with their immigration status, as the reason for discrimination in the form of exclusionary policies that result in detainment, deportation, and racist attitudes by authorities. Nevertheless, those who have not experienced discrimination due to their smooth assimilation due to their lighter skin tone also acknowledged their privilege. To them, their white skin tone has acted as a protective factor to merge easily into mainstream American society. However, some do not enjoy that privilege as they are aware of their obvious phenotypes as a brown Hispanic person. Elizabeth is one of the participants who fearlessly talked about how race and ethnicity have played a role in the deportation pipeline for Black

undocumented folks. She worked for an outreach program to facilitate safety for people at higher risk of getting deported by providing response training to those most vulnerable. She posits that Black undocumented individuals are more likely to be deported due to their race. "I think the way that this country criminalizes races is rooted in many historical accounts. Undocumented black folks are targeted simply because of this country's racial biases against black communities." She further shared," It is clearly shown that black folks are at higher risk of deportation because there are such huge ethnic and racial biases here in the U.S." Carol, who identifies as a Hispanic, lived in East Texas throughout her life in the U.S. and had faced her peers using derogatory language in school against the Hispanic/Latinx population. She recounted that she had schooling in a predominantly white conservative neighborhood and had to hear negative terms that the children would repeat in school what they heard from their parents. She shared:

> You hear a whole bunch of little kids in this conservative area repeating what their parents are saying at home, about Mexicans being rapists and like killers and drug dealers, about how undocumented immigrants are like freeloaders, and how they do not contribute to society. And that was one of the other times that, like, it just hit me that like I realized like, Oh, not only am I undocumented, but this whole area hates people like me, you know. But it was a realization that just kind of like gradually increased over time, and it just kind of hit me in the face towards the end of high school.

Carol's perception of her marginalized status made her realize earlier that she had to find resources for her education due to fear of racist repercussions from her school administration.

Many participants in the study are critically conscious of the discrimination and racism their communities face daily. These educated young adults know systems of oppression and

discrimination based on their immigration status and skin color. Many opined that racism was always there, but the racist nativist narrative enforced by President Trump and his administration gave rise to many people voicing their opinions openly. To Kathy, credit goes to President Trump; she explained, "Trump administration really did a good number in bringing up to light how racist the country has always been. Racism never went away. But it gave voice and power to the people that have always and continued to think a certain way about us."

Elizabeth is one of the participants who carries her undocumented identity associated with her undocumented community. She explained that being undocumented and a low-income immigrant are entirely different identities from being a low-income and second-generation immigrant. She said," I think my idea of belonging is more geared towards community building, more geared towards abolition," She talked about how she developed critical consciousness about systems of oppression when she was growing up in a low-income people of the color neighborhood and attending a low-income predominantly Latinx school. Her teacher made a significant impact on the way she views herself and her undocumented community. She started understanding how communities of color face discrimination and violence in this country. She asked herself and her teacher questions, "When I was young, why was I born like that? Why is my family in the situation that it is? She [The history teacher] was able to answer, and it was because of, you know, the marginalization of people of color. And that was my first understanding and shape of that." She shared how other students would infiltrate those spaces and dominate them with their experiences without realizing their experiences are entirely different from hers. The contradictory sense of self-esteem with both positive and negative consequences of being in DACA status created lower self-esteem for many DACA recipients when they realized that many in their community do not enjoy the same privileges and

opportunities as they do not qualify for DACA status. Participants used this privilege of constructing their specific DACA identities to educate people about their unique marginalized experiences but are also acutely aware of their privileges that many in their communities do not share. They understood their marginalized status and dealt with the hierarchy attached to their DACA status.

Participants who have seen and faced racism and lived in conservative towns in conservative states have echoed the exact reflection. Their sense of association only comes from participating actively in their undocumented community. They also find solace and peace when they go to such spaces and mingle with people with the same marginalized experiences. For example, Carol was introduced to some multicultural meetings in her college, which she attended regularly. Her previous experiences at her conservative high school made her lean toward people whom she feels aligned with in college for the first time in those spaces. Then she started feeling seen and resonated with the other students who shared the same experiences:

> It was then that I started hanging out with Latin kids, Hispanic kids, Mexican kids, Black, Asian, and other students as well. And I remember hanging out with them, and I feel like I am starting to identify. And that is where I started slowly, being open about my immigration status, being comfortable, talking it out with people, and sharing my experiences and difficulties. I started connecting with other Hispanic folks and other undocumented folks as well.

DACA liminality

DACA is the most talked about item in the data as almost all the participants echoed how DACA, over ten years, has become a source of inclusion and exclusion in the social fabric of American society for the undocumented community.

DACA Provides protection, not Permanence

They used the words like "grey" or "in-between" to describe their liminality, which allows them a quasi-state of social acceptance but not a permanent solution to fully attaining citizenship. There are around twelve million undocumented people in the U.S., and only 8% have DACA, as noted by Daniela. Mainly, all the participants endorse that DACA has provided a Band-Aid, which the courts could remove at any time due to its being an executive order and not legislation already challenged in court. It communicates contradictory messages to the DACAmented folks about their illegal stay and the ability to work legally in the United States. It gave them the hope of legality initially. However, after ten years, these undocumented individuals have realized the temporariness of their status, which is linked to DACA, as it provided them with a whitewashed status with no permanent solution of actually attaining complete legality.

Beneficiaries of DACA realized the privileges it provides them, but they also shared that it does not give them complete protection from deportation. For example, Carol and her mother endured severe hardship in crossing the border to get a better life through a coyote and recognized how her life had changed due to her DACA status. She says:

> Again, I have a lot of privileges, you know, and being able to apply for DACA and being able to renew every two years. Because I do know a lot of my peers that were not able to apply for DACA because, you know, they were not here before June 2012, or that did not pursue higher education or did not graduate, or they have like some criminal conviction, you know. So, in a way, I do see it as a privilege because I am able to work and I am able to have a license, but at the same time, it does have restrictions. It does not give you any permanent residency. It does not fully stop you from getting deported.

Though the DACA holders appreciate many benefits of DACA status, they are also upset that they are not eligible for government-provided insurance or other services. Additionally, individuals who want to travel out of the U.S. cannot return unless they have a special privilege of advanced parole with their DACA status. Kathy echoed her concerns:

> And then in the concept of the limitations that you have with DACA, so flying in and out of the country, you know, you cannot really do that. The whole like not really being able to take care of access to Obamacare because they do not really consider you legal. Or, like you know, having to go a private way to find insurance.

Benefits of DACA

Although not all the participants have DACA in my study, those who have DACA acknowledged its benefits in whichever state they reside in. It gives them a sense of protection and economic stability for themselves and their families as these DACAmented individuals become primary earners with better-paying jobs compared to their parents, who do not have any legal authorization to get employment. In addition, DACA has allowed them to get a driver's license and social security number, open up bank accounts and build up their credit history. As Carol explained, "In a way, I see it as a privilege because I am able to work and have a license, but at the same time, it does have its restrictions. It does not give you any permanent residency. It does not fully stop you from getting deported." For all these benefits, these DACA participants have shown immense gratitude for their privilege, which their parents lack. Carlin reinforced the same thing:

> I think it opened a lot of doors. I cannot lie and say that the social security number did not help, as the driver's license has helped. It is like; I think DACA, aside from everything, is mobility, like it is the ability to move. And I think people take that for granted, like your

> ability to cross state lines, your ability to drive, your ability to be mobile, to go to places without fearing deportation. As much as I cannot like the liminal status it has, it gives you mobility, not only economically but physically. And I think, to me, that is the most important part of being able to move, being able to have more of a normal experience.

Arturo, a DACA holder and a participant who called himself a "pseudo-US citizen without papers" and had flown under the radar for a very long period of his life, as he was brought here when he was a baby, shared the same feelings about DACA how it gave him a sense of relief. He recounted, "DACA opened up a million doors, like for socially, academically, professionally, like basically, that allowed me to think further than 2015, which was my graduation year. That allowed me to think past that."

Selective Eligibility Criteria for DACA

People who do not have DACA have zero protection from deportation or detainment and no work authorization because they do not meet the selective criteria. DACA program has strict eligibility criteria that many young undocumented adolescents cannot meet. Daniela mentioned, "It is like a very selective process, and you have to have a lot of resources to get it." Raphael critiqued the eligibility requirement as arbitrary and unfair when he compared another student who did not qualify for DACA due to some criteria she did not meet:

> And this is where my critiques of DACA come in. One, you have these arbitrary, like, eligibility requirements. What is the difference between myself and the other student? I think we have the same goals. We have the same dreams and aspirations, and experiences of being undocumented. So what makes me deserving but not her? Why? That does not make any sense to me.

Two participants in my study did not qualify for DACA for different reasons. One of the participants, Evangeline, did not qualify because of some of the missing documents. However, she came as a minor to the United States before 2007. Currently, she is preparing for the medical school eligibility test and working at a local hospital to serve her community. The situation for individuals who cannot qualify for DACA puts them in the same category as individuals who do not have social security number and thus have no authorization to work. Ale, the other participant who does not have DACA, has shown immense resilience to complete her education independently without financial aid. After completing her education with the help of her parents and self-financing, she established a small business on her own. Thus, due to the absence of work authorization, these individuals do not find employment that matches their programs of study. Ale came to the United States at the age of 15 in 2014. Therefore, she did not qualify for DACA because one of the requirements to qualify for DACA is to be here in the U.S. before the year 2007. Ale recounted her ordeal about realizing her status at the time when she went to college:

> I did not really like to care about being documented in high school like nobody really talked about it. So it was not like a big thing. But then, once I went to college, oh my gosh, the first year and second years were rough. Like everything ahead, I realized that I could not have a job after school like after I graduated.

Fears attached with DACA

The participants who have DACA did acknowledge the privileges of DACA, but they also shared their frustration about renewing DACA every two years. The renewal of DACA with the fees of approximately $450 is a challenge for these young participants as they have low-paying jobs and are still completing their education. Many also take care of their families financially,

which makes it challenging to arrange this amount every two years. They call it an "expiration date" to live in the United States. Renewing DACA after every two years is the most significant negative of DACA, expressed by the participants. This process is frustrating, unfair, and entirely beyond their control, as their livelihoods depend on an active DACA status. Elizabeth expressed her feelings, "Like I want to leave, I want to go back to Mexico like it is so embarrassing and dehumanizing to, like, have to pay rent to live here when I have contributed so much to the community."

Participants also shared the fear of revealing their personal information to the authorities when they filled out the form to renew. Participants described how having DACA is an added worry to their already precarious lives as they are stuck in the vicious cycle of applying and renewing to stay in that status. Jack expressed their anxiety about revealing too much of the information to ICE when they renew their DACA every two years:

> I feel like before you get DACA and when you are in the process, you are scared, and you finally get yourself accepted, you are happy, but your happiness turns into realizing that now you are stuck in this cycle. Are you going to be deported now? Because they have all of your items and information, and if they do not deport you, is it done? Are they not going to look for you, or are they just waiting for something to happen? So you are stuck in this cycle where you have to figure out, okay, do I really want to renew it, or what are the consequences if I do not, so I do not feel like it has helped me? I feel like it has just given me more things to worry about.

Kathy, an active community participant and an advocate for immigrant rights, gave a fascinating angle about the program. She described that due to DACA, all the other opportunities

to make immigration reforms have stalled because it became a contentious program over the years:

> I love the opportunities a program has given me, and I love that it was done, but I hate that it potentially stops something greater from happening. I hate that it made people complacent. I hate that it benefits such a small number of people. I pay taxes and pay rent every two years to live here. So it is like a constant slap in the face; this is such a terrible Band-Aid.

Evangeline, who does not have DACA as she could not meet the strict eligibility criteria, shared the experiences her DACAmented friends have faced after every two years. Though she does not have a personal experience to cite this specific vulnerable situation, she recounted that many of her DACA friends shared with her how their employers pressure them to renew it way before the expiration date that comes after every two years. The problem arises when they apply to renew it, but it may take longer to come back with the extension due to bureaucratic procedures beyond these DACAmented individuals' control. For example, suppose the employers are not ready to let them keep the job with the pending DACA renewal. In that case, the DACA beneficiary might lose the job waiting for the DACA to arrive before the expiration date. The process is lengthy and complex and depends on the bureaucratic procedures that can take longer, which is in no one's hands. That throws light on the exploitation by employers of these DACAmented young people who have no way to challenge this situation as they are already vulnerable. Evangeline explained:

> A lot of my friends have had [DACA], are working in like hospitals or just large scale companies that they are constantly pressuring them to renew stuff even though it is like six to 12 months out from expiring, and they threaten them with termination and stuff like

> that if they do not get renewal from the time that they are requesting, but they do not know how long it takes to process.

DACA Guilt

Participants were also worried about their parents who do not have the Protection of DACA like them. Some expressed discomfort about having the DACA identity separating them from their parents. They feel the guilt of betraying their parents. Elizabeth voiced her concern and consciousness of her privileges due to her DACA status and ability to navigate many spaces due to DACA privilege, which many undocumented folks cannot do as they do not have DACA. It is uncomfortable for them, not only for their immediate family but also for the community at large, which has many members without DACA:

> Knowing that I had access to these opportunities made me feel uncomfortable because it made me lose a little bit of my identity of being undocumented, and I guess that I was now a part of this new system that a lot of my community members did not have access to. My own family, the immediate family, did not have access to it. So feels those emotions constantly arising in me, frustrated and angered for my community and family members. Because, as I said, now I had access to this financial or a lot more financial opportunities.

Carlin shared his appreciation and the pressure he feels because of his freedom due to his DACA status. However, he believes that all the privileges that come with DACA should not be taken for granted. He said:

> And I think people take that for granted, like your ability to cross state lines, your ability to drive, your ability to be mobile, to go places without fearing like deportation. The liminal status it also gives you mobility, not only economically but physically. And I

> think, to me, that is the most important part of being able to move, being able to have more of a normal experience.

Raphael, who recently changed his status to green card holder but had been an immigrant activist himself, talked about the limitations of this discourse:

> We are leaving out so many people; who cares whether they have a Ph.D. or a master's; they still deserve a chance at everyday life. They still deserve every freedom that I am fighting for so passionately, right, regardless of whether they are educated regardless of whether they are assimilated, or whether they speak English well or not.

Negative Effects on Mental Health

The narrative from these participants clearly states how the DACA status has given the beneficiaries some social capital and economic opportunities they would not have if they did not have DACA. However, the temporary nature of the program makes it too precarious for those who have them because they are always afraid of losing it. Furthermore, since the program does not provide a pathway to citizenship, it perpetuates the liminality of the DACA status in which they exist in their daily lives. This liminality and the ever-existing fear of losing it adds to depression and frustration for these youth. Some reported how they spent sleepless nights fearing losing their DACA status, especially during the Trump era, because that would mean losing their scholarships to continue their education. Carlin shared the memory of those days: " I spent a lot of sleepless nights worrying about what I was going to do next, worrying about where I was going to go next." That was when many undocumented individuals started self-reflecting on the legal limbo and the privilege their DACA status entails for them and their community. Elizabeth is one of those who shared her critical consciousness and awareness of the marginalization of her

community; she said this about when DACA was suspended in 2017 during the Trump presidency:

> So it was a very devastating time, but also a very eye-opening time for me in how I viewed my identity. And that is when I started the process of really learning what it meant to be undocumented or with DACA. So that is when I feel like I started that process as well. So especially this it was. I am really glad for that, you know, for that time, or that suspension, because it really made me think deeply about my family.

Participants shared the frustration and anxiety that comes with the fear of being in a liminal situation, knowing that the politicians already betray them. Arturo shared, "So you are being anxious to being sad and then like, you are angry because you are sad like you are angry at the government. You are angry at the situation you are in because it feels very unfair." Arturo talked about the anxiety and sadness that has engulfed him because he feels frustrated that nothing is in his control. He lamented:

> I cannot control anything else like, they are winning like these people that are, you know, anti-immigration, and they want to deport all of us. Like, they are I in my head. I am like, you know, this is what they want. They want us to be frustrated. They want us to be sad.

Self-Deportation: A New Idea

Some participants in the second round of interviews reported how they weighed self-deporting with the current uncertain situation regarding their future as they have lost hope for any permanent solution to their immigration status. They have also shared how the liminal situation has detrimentally affected their mental health due to constant exhaustion and feeling unwanted. Some participants voiced their looming decision whether to apply for an extension for their DACA status or move back to their countries of birth. Kathy shared the second time I took

her for the second interview that, she is considering moving back to her country, Venezuela. Diana, too said she has started thinking of either moving to another country or back home to Mexico as she sees no future here. However, she is another participant deeply invested in her community and advocacy, so she works in a coalition that helps undocumented youth find resources for college applications and scholarships. Therefore, for her to leave altogether means leaving all those folks whom she cares for and would want to help. It is difficult for people like her who do not know their future. She said, "So I am just tired of it. It is exhausting. So I have considered, like I shared with you right now, maybe self-deport or just moving to some other place, but there is also a coalition that I am working with."

Kathy shared the same feeling of distress about whether to renew her DACA or leave the country, as she feels stuck in a vicious cycle of renewing and waiting for something permanent to happen. For Kathy, the motivation to renew her DACA every two years was her inspiration to complete her undergraduate degree, which is somewhat easier with DACA. In addition, she could work legally and get some state financial aid due to her DACA status. She completed her undergraduate degree after our first interview together. However, there is not much for her to look forward to now as she sees nothing to come out from the political front on immigration reforms. Nevertheless, going back to her country of origin also means never coming back to the United States and not seeing her parents, who are living with her as undocumented:

> My renewal process. I keep debating if I should renew. A big driver for my renewal was my degree which I finally got. So I have been contemplating the idea of what it would look like not to renew and go back home. But what is the home, you know, like accepting the fact that if I leave, I can never come back and I will never see my parents? But what is truly the driver of renewal? It is the question I ask myself now.

These narratives and findings from these accounts identify how DACA and Dreamer narratives are not enough for undocumented youth. Though DACA provided them opportunities, it lacks legal grounds to give them a sense of permanence. Moreover, the rhetoric surrounding Dreamers is not acceptable to them as it narrows down a specific undocumented segment leaving the ones who are elderly and not palatable for the politicians. Therefore, these young adults see themselves as aligned with their communities and working actively to advocate for everyone's rights to immigration reforms regardless of educational attainment or age. However, the temporary lawful status generated by DACA and the immigrant advocacy rhetoric created by Dreamer's ideology fall short of creating a path to a permanent solution for the undocumented community.

Dreamer- a Misnomer

Over the last two decades, undocumented people, especially students, have galvanized their advocacy and civic participation in curating "Development Relief and Education for Minors" (Dream Act). They have used their collective voice to create a new identity of Dreamers that manifests as a hard-working immigrant who is a model citizen surviving and thriving, getting high GPAs, and working towards higher education to later become an American citizen. However, the association of this ideal framework of identity did not come to fruition, and the Dream Act never passed since its existence in 2002. In today's America, the Dreamer identity has become contentious instead of gaining traction.

A Divisive DREAMER Narrative

All the participants in my study unanimously debunked the Dreamer framework and showed distrust of the Dreamer identity. They all see themselves as united on being undocumented rather than called Dreamers. They shared that for them, the term Dreamer aided

and abetted their community members' criminalization; for that, they sometimes feel complicit in generating this narrative. They shared that the Dreamer narrative was rightfully and strategically used by the activists initially; however, they realized later that it was not inclusive enough for all members of the undocumented community, giving out the very narrative that only educated immigrants deserve a path to citizenship. Raphael criticizes the term, Dreamer:

> It has been very strategically employed by activists, and let us take it; let us call what it was also very beneficial, but again, that does not mean that it is perfect, right? I think that maybe we can think of another term that's either more inclusive or stop framing the narrative as like, these are the perfect immigrants, and these, therefore, are not right. So if we find a way to include everyone else, that would be better, because I do not like that.

Participants shared that the Dreamer terminology is used to shun their parents as if they are not deserving and should not exist, and only those like them with a cap and gown are the only ones deserving. Elizabeth, who prefers to be called an undocumented rather than a Dreamer, explains:

> That is a term that I rejected very early on. Because again, I think I mentioned a little about the criminalization of my community and that term. That term definitely aids in that because often, when you think of a dreamer, you think of someone who knows, quote, unquote, going to college, right?

The most prevalent narrative by the participants, that is, they did not want to be associated with the term Dreamer, stems from their past experiences that shaped their reactions when they saw their parents not being included in the rights of considered deserving immigrants.

Many acknowledged that initially, they used to call themselves Dreamers. Still, as time passed, they realized that the Dreamer narrative was a tool to divide the immigrant community,

which they did not accept. To them, this concept endorses the idea that children should not be punished for the actions of their parents, creating a division that these participants reject. Therefore, they blatantly refuse the narrative when their parents are not considered part of the process of Dreamer identity. Elizabeth rejected the Dreamer framework again by emphasizing:

> I think my parents are equally deserving; my worth is not based on the labor that I can produce. Nevertheless, I think my community's worth is not in labor; we can produce simply because we exist and deserve that existence. And I think many of these terms, like Dreamers, limit those ideas and possibilities.

Kathy also pointed out the ideology that the Dreamer narrative excludes their parents from the picture of demanding immigration rights for them, which is unacceptable for them. Additionally, for all the participants, the term Dreamer is unacceptable because it refers to the classist approach of deserving and non-deserving immigrants that makes the young immigrant members of the community more palatable, undermining and disempowering the older members of the community. For example, Daniela says," I would never say I am a dreamer. It feels disempowering. It is a label given to undocumented people by all. These are people; it is a thing that is meant to make undocumented more palatable." However, almost all of them shared that they started participating in immigrant Activism when the Dreamer narrative emerged. Although nevertheless, with time, it was revealed to them that the elders in the community were not going to be part of their call, so they left this framework and recalibrated their Activism. Kathy said:

> And I saw that elitist conversation out of people where I am like, bro; it is not just some of us, it is literally like all of us, it is not you get papers and then you can give your parents papers. It should be both of you getting papers. So since then, yeah, since I was

> 24-25, I have stopped using the term to define myself and where I take space in the movement.

A Demand for Parental Inclusion

They acknowledged the sacrifices their parents faced to provide them with a better life. Most of them appreciated that the opportunities they have in the U.S. are not available to them in their countries of origin. They feel there should be a program that embraces everyone in their community regardless of age or any other criteria it requires. Although participants did not address their parents' decision to migrate to the United States without legal status, they know how convenient it was to cross the border when they were children. The discourse that enforces the false dichotomy of documented and undocumented is a total contradiction of their childhood border-crossing experiences.

Participants shared their diverse border-crossing stories narrated by their parents or remembered vaguely by them. Many have termed it rough terrain with extreme hardships laden with encounters with border patrols. Elizabeth described her immense respect for her parents for going through migration for the potential economic stability of their children. To Elizabeth, her parents are the real heroes in her life; they went through the traumatic journey of coming to the U.S. and would never understand how her parents, who just came to the United States in search of a better future, can be criminalized by the people and not included in any immigration reforms is not right. Elizabeth did not explain in what circumstance her family decided to overstay their visitor visa at the time of their first visit. She said:

> I view my parents in such a beautiful light, like my parents are my heroes. My mom is my role model, and to know that there are people out there that view her as a criminal quote, unquote. It is very devastating, and it is very angering. So migration is not

> beautiful. It is not fun being resilient. It is not, you know, it is not. It is a very traumatic experience, and being undocumented is really fucking hard. And migration has been really, really, really, really hard.

Carol voiced her concerns not just about her parents but also about some older members of her community who could not qualify just because they did not fit the age criteria. She said," A lot of your older generation or a lot of, you know, dreamers, there are parents, you know, who cannot apply for DACA. So I do not see it as a solution for immigration." Therefore, for them to leave their parents out of the rights of equal immigrant rights is like rejecting and not appreciating their parents' sacrifices. According to them, it is deeply significant for them to face the trauma their parents have endured throughout this migration trajectory and get these young adults to settle in the United States. Their understanding of how their parents brought them here and how they have gone through a challenging and life-changing life course to give them a better life is manifested throughout their conversations. Several participants narrated that their parents transitioned from office work to cleaning work. Kathy remembered:

> So my mom in Venezuela never got a college degree, but she was certified when she used to work at a law firm. So my mom used to do clerical work for a law firm, so she went from an office environment to having to work at a factory to having to clean, and I know we have not really spoken about that. Maybe one day we will, but I know there is still trauma in that aspect because she went from, you know, from an office life to a cleaning life.

To them, the hardships their parents have faced provide their children with a life that, according to them, is better than what they could have back in their original countries is not to be taken for granted. They shared that they already feel complicit about their privileges due to their

DACA status, which their parents do not share. Elizabeth shared her feelings about the time when President Trump rescinded DACA, and they were living in fear of completely losing it:

> I also realized that I had relied too much [on DACA] and was complicit in the criminalization of my community. Because, you know, at the end of the day, that is what DACA is. It is another criminalization process. Because now you have a model who, quote-unquote, is a good immigrant, deserving of protection, and I was complicit in that.

The participants voiced that they had no say in this decision during migration. Nevertheless, they realized how significant it had been for their life trajectory. They understood and respected their parents' decisions when they learned how difficult it would have been if they were still living there. Kathy's parents came from Venezuela when she was five; her sister was just three. She described how she had comprehended her parents' decision:

> I think throughout the years, I have been able to understand that due to the economic differences in Venezuela, the political regime was taken over at the time. My parents knew that we did not really have a future there. So that is why we migrated here. And yeah, it was in 2002; I landed at the New York airport and have been in New Jersey since then.

Several of these participants had lost their loved ones to deportation or detainment because of their undocumented status. The members of their families who have left voluntarily or are forcefully deported do not have the DACA status that protects them from detainment and deportation for at least two years. This harsh policy by the American enforcement agency called "Immigration and Customs Enforcement" (ICE) is a constant reminder for these Dreamers or DACAmented individuals that their parents and other older members of their undocumented community are dispensable people who are not needed and should not be the rightful claimants

of citizenship in the United States. Daniela's mother had been recently deported and had no one in the family to care for Daniela. She has two citizen siblings who do not care about her and are also not in contact with her father. However, despite all her issues and loneliness, she has been very vocal on CBC and Buzz feed channels. She has lauded her immigrant rights, explaining her opinion and position and mentioning her mother's deportation, which has been a thorn in her side. Therefore, she is very hurt about the concept of being accepting of some and excluding others, "I do not really feel comfortable with other people just throwing that label on me because I feel like it usually implies like an upstanding person, a good Samaritan, I deserve to be American, and I deserve to be here. I do not appreciate that."

Critical Consciousness and Awakening

The participants accepted and admitted that initially, they were part of this framework but not anymore. Now with educational maturity, time, and experience with different regimes during the last decade and their network on social media has provided them with insights into how elite the Dreamer narrative is. For example, Kathy recounted how initially she was part of the Dreamer movement when it started. Still, later on, she had to let go when her Twitter circle made her realize and see through the lens of equity about the divide due to this narrative:

> I got a real awakening on Twitter. I am not a dreamer. I do not consider myself part of that movement; I think it has been very elitist. It is very one-dimensional. But, I do challenge the notions of the dreamers because it goes back to the good immigrant narrative.

Carol echoed the same issue she sees as DACA and Dreamer narrative creating a divide between a "good and a bad immigrant" that reinforces the idea that those immigrants who are "model citizens" are eligible to be looked after and should not be punished for the crime of

crossing the border illegally like their parents. She recounted the days of the Obama administration when this narrative of children being innocent and should not be responsible for their parent's deeds was the main idea behind DACA. She explains why she is not ready to accept that only Dreamers get the significance because their parents are not an economic burden to American society:

> When people talk about DACA, specifically Dreamers, they always imagine a goody two-shoe immigrant, you know, like your model immigrants, you know, minority. Yeah, you know, they are minorities. Yeah, but they work hard. They pay their taxes. They are not a burden to society. And every time in my experience, every time there has been a talk about immigration, DACA kids have always put up a front, as you know, very, very top of the total topic.

Another participant expressed her dissatisfaction about the image created for Dreamers by organizations to fuel the media with the widespread belief that these deserving Dreamers have not been involved in any offense or felony. According to these participants, many people are trapped in situations beyond their control, like a minor offense of a broken taillight or something trivial. Dianna, who belongs to a mixed-status family and one of her brothers is in the deportation pipeline, confesses how this perfect image is not showing the actual picture of immigrant families:

> So Dreamer used to be a big thing in the undocumented community. And in the very beginning, I was like, I am a dreamer. However, recently, I want to say that maybe two years ago, I started to see this cookie-cut crust of what a dreamer is. They are, you know, the spitting image of a wonderful American. So yeah. And although I agree, you know,

we should have like a pretty good image. There are a lot of people who are criminalized because of unfortunate things.

The dominant narrative shared by the participants is their concern about excluding their community members, which they feel are compromised on their backs. They shared that they have left behind the Dreamer narrative in their Activism to include everyone in their community regardless of age and educational attainment. They declared their clear stance to move away from that narrative and show the multi-dimensional issues of their community and the nuances of the diverse experiences of the undocumented community. Drawing from the conversations and narratives shared by these participants, the results suggest that they comprehended how the double bind of DACA has been used to divide their undocumented community. The community deserves the same respect and right to a passage as themselves because although they are aware of their elders not being formally educated in the U.S., they are also critically conscious of how their labor is used and exploited when the U.S. needs them. It was a paradox that they were able to come and settle down, and now they are deemed undesirable when the U.S. does not need them. This contradiction reinforced by political discourse is not just heart-breaking for these participants but is also unacceptable. They do not want to gain permanence in their immigration situation at the cost of the rest of the community members.

The narratives shared by these participants show distress, frustration, and exhaustion associated with the liminality of their status, which does not seem to go away in the foreseeable future. They were reminded of the centrality of their temporary nature and the uncertainty associated with their DACA status. Those who do not have DACA are more tumultuous as they lack legal authorization to work or protect themselves from detainment or deportation. These aspects of their liminal status have been shown to negatively impact their mental and emotional

well-being, leading to anxiety, negative emotions, and exhaustion. Finally, they see no solution coming out of their liminal situation in the current state of affairs. They are not ready to accept anything related to immigration reform that benefits them but not their parents and older undocumented community members. Emphasis on facilitating and supporting the community was prevalent throughout their conversations.

The overall prevalent narratives and findings from this theme identify how DACA status and Dreamer identity are not enough for undocumented youth though they are concomitant narratives. Though DACA provided them opportunities, it lacks legal grounds to give them a sense of permanence. Moreover, the rhetoric surrounding Dreamers is not acceptable to them as it narrows down a specific undocumented segment leaving the ones who are elderly and not palatable for the politicians. Therefore, these young adults see themselves as aligned with their communities and working actively to advocate for everyone's rights to immigration reforms regardless of educational attainment or age. However, the temporary lawful status generated by DACA and the immigrant advocacy rhetoric created by Dreamer's ideology fall short of creating a path to a permanent solution for the undocumented community.

Theme 2: Chronic Uncertainties for Careers and Relationships

The most compelling issue these participants discussed was their challenges in accessing higher education because of their liminal status. Depending on which state they reside in, segmented local, state, and federal policies create confusion for them, school counselors, and college administration. Despite the financial and administrative challenges, the participants in this study pursued their undergraduate degrees, and a couple also completed their Master's degrees. The ever-contradictory and changing political landscape does not help institutional agents and administrative staff understand the peculiar needs of the undocumented population,

which leaves these students to navigate complex college lives on their own, grappling with whatever breadcrumbs in the form of aid or help is available to them. This situation, in turn, makes the complex college admission process daunting for undocumented students. They echoed their frustration with how unprepared higher education institutions were to fully understand the complexities of their DACA and their completely undocumented status when filling out forms and accessing resources. Many complained about under-preparedness, unawareness of college administration, and the unwillingness of guidance counselors in high schools during their educational endeavors. However, many appreciated the professors and faculty in their colleges. They credited their success in completing their degrees to the unconditional support of faculty members who understood the needs of these students. Many claimed that their advisors and faculty members went out of their way to provide services or guide them during their difficult college days, thus mitigating the negative experiences of institutional agents and administrative staff.

Many worked long hours as full-time students, with no break to rest and eat, which sometimes compromised their health and academic performance. However, nearly all stayed and were either in the process of completing their degrees or had already completed them despite extreme obstacles and life responsibilities. After completing their undergraduate degrees, these undocumented and DACAmented students faced challenges due to their immigration status in finding and accessing decent work or internship opportunities, thus lacking potential opportunities for upward mobility. Their undocumented status puts them in a particularly vulnerable position, where they are at their employers' mercy and utterly dependent on their active DACA status. Despite having academic credentials and brilliant grades, these

undocumented and DACAmented students do not qualify for certain positions because they lack permanent status.

The legal limbo of their status also played out when it came to maintaining friendly or romantic relationships during and after their education. Their continuous inclusion and exclusion lead to segmented integration into American society, intertwined with their liminal status. The same liminality also transitions when forging and maintaining social or romantic relationships.

Depending on where these students reside, various state educational policies have led to diverse college experiences and access to resources. Given the significance of their tough academic trajectories and professional careers and the forging of romantic and social relationships, this theme is divided into three sub-themes: (1) Utilizing limited resources in the face of institutional indifference, (2) Difficulties transitioning to professional careers, and (3) social and romantic liminality.

See the following table for the family of these themes with their sub-themes.

Table 4	
Theme 2. Chronic Uncertainties for Careers and Relationships	
Utilizing Limited Resources in the Face of Institutional Indifferences	*School Counselors*
	Financial Restraints
	Parental Support
	Support from Faculty
Difficulties Transitioning to Professional Careers	*Blocked Career Goals*
	Legal Restraints to Gain Employment
	Creating their Own Brands
	Continuing Higher Education
	Employment Linked to Active DACA Status
Social and Romantic liminality	*Power Dynamics and Save You Narrative by Citizen Partners*

	Fears of Revealing Status
	Social Media: A Safe Space

Utilizing Limited Resources in the Face of Institutional Indifferences

Undocumented students in this study shared their experiences regarding college access, financial aid, the processes involved in applying to colleges, and the knowledge the guidance counselor provided or did not provide. They also shared a supportive attitude from their college faculty at different points in their academic journeys.

School Counselors

The experiences shared by these participants demonstrate how high school counselors are under or unprepared to guide undocumented students in the college application process. They are either unaware of the resources available or unwilling to find out what kind of resources and services these undocumented students can avail of, keeping in line with state laws and policies. They spoke about the limitations on the part of school personnel to serve them, provide helpful information, and remove barriers impeding college access. For example, Elizabeth shared that living in California; she knew she would get support as an undocumented student because these students are allowed admission to higher education institutions there. She said:

> I also realize to applying to any colleges in California because I felt that, you know, like I need to stay in at least a state that, you know, somebody supports undocumented people. So that was my one, quote-unquote, requirement for myself that I could only apply to colleges in California, which, which I did. And at the end of the day, I end I ended up making this decision on my own because I do not think like my college advisors and whatnot really understand, like, why I felt so limited in my options.

Many participants shared that the school counselor often did not know how to cater to the needs of undocumented students, even if they wanted to help them. Jack recalled when no counselor could help because they were not knowledgeable about DACA or undocumented students. By the time Jack received DACA, it was their senior year when the scholarship opportunities were already exhausted. Jacks shared:

> I already have DACA, but most of those opportunities are not given to you in your senior year. They come to you the year before. So all those were gone. And by the time I was already applying for scholarships, which is what you are doing senior year, most of my counselors would continuously forget that I was not documented. So it is not that they were not trying to help me, they were, not because they were sending me scholarships, and none of the scholarships were for undocumented people in 2016, so at the time, they did not really know about DACA.

Some participants reported that their school counselors would not help them navigate the form-filling process, as most college application systems would only allow them to identify as international students because of their undocumented status. The inability of school counselors to support these students forced them to navigate the college admission process independently. Arely shared how she went to her guidance counselor for advice. The guidance counselor told Arely to identify as an international student only. Arely said:

> And then, it would just give me the option to put that I was an international student, but I was not an international student. So I asked my counselor, and I feared revealing my status. And she just told me, Well, if they are telling you to put an international student down, you have to do that, and she did not really care.

Some constantly had to prove they were worthy enough to study in high school by sitting for English proficiency tests and qualifying for Advance Placement (AP) when they knew they had already qualified. Daniela felt humiliated when asked to sit for her English proficiency test when she had studied in the U.S. since childhood. She believed that because her school was racist, she had to sit for those tests without a concrete reason. She recalled:

> My school would constantly try to kick me out of the school; like you do not have a Social Security [number], you could not go to school there. Or you speak Spanish. You cannot be in these honors or AP classes. So they would try to pull me out. And they would make me take these really humiliating tests to prove I could speak English because, back then, the idea was that if you could speak more than one language, that meant that you could not be good at two languages. So you must be bad at English. So because of my status, not only am I being Mexican, not only was I experiencing horrible racism every day, but they were trying to kick me out of school. They are trying to remove me from my classes. They did not want to help me through college because they did not know what they were supposed to do with an undocumented person. So it was just a mess.

Several participants declared the unhelpful attitude of their school counselors in providing the specific guidance they needed in the college access process. Sometimes, these counselors misguide students because they lack knowledge about undocumented students. For example, Ale, when Ale informed her guidance counselor that she did not have DACA, she recalled how her school counselor told her that she did not qualify for anything. However, when she went to another person in her school who was in the administration but did not have

counselor duties, that school official helped Ale and informed her that she could still apply to college:

> And then she was like, no, you cannot go to college, and I was like what, and she was like no, you cannot; you are not qualified. You are going to have to find, like, someone like a husband, I got so scared, and I went to another counselor. And I told her what happened, and she was like, No, first of all, you can go to college. Do not stress about it. I am going to ask someone, and she is going to help you throughout the whole process.

Many of these students recounted that getting a college education was their primary goal, as taught by their parents for upward mobility. They learned this concept by studying in public schools, like their American peers, that accessing higher education should be the crux of their goal of achieving the American dream. It made perfect sense to them to accomplish this goal, as it would open many opportunities for economic stability. As Elizabeth shared how the narrative is to attain a higher education degree to succeed and gain economic freedom:

> Just because that was the only narrative that I knew during that time, that, you know, college is the only way that open doors for folks, and getting that college degree was really important to economic stability. So I think that made perfect sense as I get, Okay, I will go to college. That is a logical path that I had already set up for myself. And I was a very determined teenager, so I knew that regardless of the support I had around me, I was going to accomplish that goal.

Participants also shared that school officials knew about the resources for low-income students but not for low-income undocumented students. Therefore, undocumented students must rely on their determination to obtain resources to access college information. In many cases, the transition from high school to college is left for undocumented students to navigate without

appropriate guidance and support. Elizabeth recounted that she never considered her undocumented status a limitation and was determined to attend college. However, not many services in her high school could benefit her in attaining that goal. She posited that although there were resources to access colleges for low-income students, there was practically nothing to support students like her who needed financial assistance and navigated the application process without legal status. "There was a lot of help in that sense, like, going into programs that would benefit my college application. But there was no support in my specific need, which was, you know, being an undocumented student." She attributes her college access and success to her determination and hard work to achieve that goal of higher education:

> I think I was lucky because I had so much determination to get to college. There are a lot of these obstacles that kind of brush them aside, like the financial aspect of it. I just looked at whatever gave me the most money, and I was like, Okay, I will figure out the rest once I am there.

Unfortunately, for these participants, their school counselors are unaware of the unique requirements of undocumented students to attain college admission, which creates frustration and confusion for these students as they are left on their own to find out what services are available to them

Financial Restraints

Many participants realized the obstacles to achieving their degrees when they found they were not eligible for federal financial aid. Although most participants received financial aid from the state or other scholarships, they could not cover these undocumented students' full tuition and living expenses. Therefore, many had to work full-time in school to pay for a significant part of

their tuition, which impeded their academic performance and compromised their mental and physical health.

The participants in the study are primarily the cohort who were among the first ones when DACA was announced. Therefore, many received DACA in their senior years of high school. However, some did not have DACA when they graduated from high school and received it in their first year of college. Those with DACA could receive in-state tuition, financial aid, and authorization to work. However, there were more hardships for those who did not qualify for DACA, as they could not work or obtain any scholarships without DACA status in their states.

Having DACA status during the college application process gives these undocumented students the privilege to access state financial loans depending on the state. However, many received DACA after their college application which meant no financial loans at that time of admission. Several participants shared how they had brilliant GPAs but did not have the privilege of getting any scholarship at the time of their college application because they received DACA at the end of their senior school year. Carlin has recently completed his Master's in Human Rights practice and has always been an excellent student. However, he remembered how his GPA was much better than his peers, but he still could not receive any scholarships. As a resident of Arizona, the state policy did not consider him an in-state student, and he was charged three times more for his tuition than his American peers. He shared how the over-priced tuition cost and the funding restriction felt unfair to him:

> I had to pay three times what they had to pay to take the same class. So I thought it was really unfair. So that is when I started realizing this was going to suck; this was going to be bad for me. So applying to colleges, and applying for program scholarships, was pretty hard. And that is when I realized, like, this is going to be a problem.

Some participants reflected on how they thought about moving back to their countries of origin as they found the college application process overwhelming due to their undocumented status and the lack of financial help from the state, especially for those who did not have DACA at the time of application. Evangeline shared how her undocumented status made her rethink moving back to Mexico (her country of birth). However, the system was completely different, so she had to let go of that idea. She provided how it was a time of frustration and depression because she was not eligible for any scholarship:

> During senior year, I contemplated a lot about moving back to Mexico just because I was so overwhelmed with college and how I was going to pay for it. Especially since I could not apply for scholarships like the state scholarship or full ride because I was not; I had all the requirements except that one for most of the scholarships. So I was very depressed during that time. I was crying a lot.

Nearly all participants shared that the most significant barriers to continuing and completing their higher education were financial restraint and lack of monetary assistance due to their undocumented status. Even those with DACA have to work extra hours to self-finance their education due to a lack of federal funding for which they are not eligible. In addition, varying policies and ever-changing regulations in different states make the academic trajectory daunting for young adults. Participants who resided in states that did not provide in-state tuition for undocumented students and state financial aid faced additional barriers to completing their programs. Despite these challenges, many undocumented students aspire to become doctors and nurses and build new lives. Evangeline is one such participant who does not have DACA but aspires to study medicine and serve her community. During her undergraduate studies, she received state aid but still had to pay $1200-$1400 every semester from her pocket. For that, she

would do babysitting or waitressing for twelve hours shifts to cover her tuition fees. These stressful working hours would mean little time for school and compromise students' academic performance. She told me:

> And the way I did that was by taking side jobs and doing people's homework. They would pay me for that. Or sometimes, babysitting or I used to go to this restaurant, and they would let me work as a server for $20 a day. And then I would just get to keep whatever tips I need. So I would make maybe $100 to $200 100 $300 between Saturday and Sunday. But it was 12-hour shifts. So from 10 am to maybe like a 10-hour shift 10 am to 11 pm, Saturday and Sunday. So I would try to do all my homework between Monday and Friday. But then I could not start when I did not finish it; then I would do it on Saturday or Sunday. Just repeat, and that went on for most of my college life. So that is how I would pay for everything.

This demanding lifestyle made it extremely hard for her to look after herself and take some time off or take a break from work and studies. She recounted:

> I was overworking myself with the 70-hour weeks, and then I would not do anything. I would not have any time for myself to sit and breathe. It was like schoolwork, schoolwork, schoolwork, and that was it. And the job I worked did not allow any breaks either. So it was just working, work, and work—school, school, school, and then nothing.

When asked how she managed her school and personal bills and academic demands, Carol shared the same ordeal. She replied that she had a summer job before her first semester and paid her tuition out of pocket. However, working full-time and maintaining school status is extremely difficult for students like Carol. She said:

> What made it really hard is again that I was funding my own education out of my own pocket, was working a full-time job to pay for my next semester of college while I was, you know, going to school full time, you know, that first semester of college, it was a really, it was really, really hard to balance and it had a lot of consequences that came with it too. But that is how I was able to fund my first semester of college, you know, by working full time that summer and then just by paying my first semester upfront, and then working that semester as well while I was going to school to fund for next semester's tuition.

Carol explained that it was impossible to maintain the same focus on her studies due to her busy work schedule. The repercussions of this demanding lifestyle were missing out on school work:

> Either you work your full hours to make ends meet, you know, to be able to save for your tuition, or you completely focus on school, you know, it is either, or some people have good time-management skills. I did not, and it is really high. Yeah, it was really, really stressful, and I ended up missing a lot of assignment deadlines.

Ale is the other participant who does not have DACA, and she shared how hard it is to pursue her studies, knowing that she cannot work or receive financial aid. She called the whole process "Super, super hard" when she realized she was not eligible to receive any financial aid and could not work because of no DACA. Nevertheless, despite these significant college access barriers, such as financial hurdles and ineligibility to work, she recently completed her undergraduate degree with flying colors.

Several reported that their mental health took a toll due to continuous hard labor to pay for their education. Their education also took a setback because of the limited time available for

academics. Some of them indicated that, although there were some resources for low-income students at their colleges, they were only for citizen students, not for undocumented students. Evangeline shared how difficult it was for her during her college days:

> Definitely not smooth sailing. I had issues with my mental health for most of 2020, so I had no motivation to do any of my work. And my GPA took a hit because I was just not doing anything. And then, although they were bringing resources into the school, they still required citizenship status as one of their main points. So I would get very disappointed.

These undocumented students, who typically see themselves as well-integrated into American society while in high school, realize at the time of college application their limitations and sometimes their immigration status that stalls their participation in their dream of higher education going away because of their inability to get a federal loan like their American citizen peers. They heard meritocracy and good academic achievement was essential for successful college admission and access to high-paying jobs. The harsh realization comes as a complete shock to them that they are not eligible to receive any aid or financial assistance, especially if they live in a state that is not un docu-friendly.

Nearly all the participants reported the lack of access to financial support and services as the main obstacle to accessing their dream school. Despite their stellar high school performance, their inability to access federal student loans is the biggest hurdle to achieving a higher education dream. They took all the advice of going the extra mile and being all-rounders to obtain full scholarships, as they heard throughout their high schools. However, it becomes evident to them when filling out the forms that they have a very different situation, which means there is no federal loan for them despite their good grades. Federal financial loans are only available to

permanent residents or citizen students. Carol shared how realization struck her when she was handed the Free Application for Federal Student Loan (FAFSA) form to fill out when she saw the criteria to receive the federal loan is to be a citizen or a permanent resident. That was the point in her life when she realized that her hard work in high school did not matter if she was not a citizen or a permanent resident:

> So when it hit me really hard, I think it was like the last couple of months in high school when our teachers handed out a bundle of scholarship forms. To fill out and okay, this is the Beta club scholarship. I read through it, you must be a citizen or legal resident who applies, next one, you must be a citizen legal residents stuff like Okay, next one, and it was like page after page of you must be a citizen or legal resident to apply. And I was like, what do I do now? Because I have strived to be an all-rounded student all my academic life. To have the best grades, to be, I guess, the highest of my class, so I could go into higher education, seeing all my hard work thrown in the trash. Oh, you are telling me I worked this hard for nothing.

Parental Support

Many also shared how their parents went the extra mile to provide for their education by doing more than one job. In addition, some participants reported their families' role in motivating persistence in education and college aspirations. For example, Arturo, the only one of six siblings without citizenship, shared how his father, with no formal education, helped Arturo figure out to get a scholarship in an excellent liberal art college under the need-based financial assistance program. In addition, his parents paid yearly educational expenses even with minimal income. He remembered that time:

> So my dad was able to figure out that we could apply as international students apply under the need-based financial aid. So my parents were not making much money at all. So given that we were very poor, my parents were not making a high income, our need-based financial aid got approved, and we won, and we got a scholarship.

Jack shared how their father paid for Jack and their siblings' education by doing extra work at different places like a junkyard or doing upholstery work to get some extra money for his children's education. Since he did jobs under the table, he would find ways to do anything that could help support his children's educational expenses:

> I know that my dad would get many extra jobs to pay for it. So he worked in upholstery. So and he knew some interior designers outside of his job that he would like to do jobs for when he knew that he was going to need a little bit extra help to pay because my tuition was about 2000 a month, almost plus having to pay for everything else at home. He will also go into junkyards, like when the car police take your car away. Yeah, so he would go to those places, and then he would buy the cars, fix them, and so he sells them so he could be able to pay for our college.

Support from Faculty

Contrary to the numerous challenges these students faced at the hands of unaware school counselors at the time of college admission, they highlighted the supportive role of their college faculty and advisors in their academic journey throughout their four years of navigating the college experience. Many credited their faculty and advisors and highlighted how they helped them decipher the complex college challenges. In addition, they shared how these supportive faculty members created access to resources and opportunities, supported their academic endeavors, and helped them graduate.

Many participants shared that their academic journey began with a community college because it was less expensive than a four-year college. In addition, closeness to their homes suits their overall economic situation. However, many also started with four-year institutions as their primary access point for higher education, with significant economic constraints and challenges. Kathy shared her experience at the community college, which was rough for her as she was treated as an international student, and the staff was unaware of the policies for undocumented students. However, during her time there, her physics professor was extremely kind to her and arranged some funding that helped her graduate with her associate degree from the community college. She described the professor as someone sensitive enough to call her up when President Trump came to power, knowing that President Trump's presidency was anxiety invoking for students like her:

> He was someone who would vouch for me. He was someone that, in my last two years, that community college gave me funding through the foundation. So they gave me, I think it was like $500 for the spring and $500 for the fall, which, as you know, a little bit so I can graduate. So he was a professor who, even to this day, will check it on me like when Trump was big, he was always in my corner.

Ale reported having a great relationship with her Spanish professors, with whom she can communicate easily. She shared, "When it comes to Spanish, I love my Spanish professors. I became really close to them. And yeah, they know everything about me, I guess because, like, we all understand each other and because they made me feel comfortable." Kathy shared her challenging situation when her GPA fell due to stress, especially during COVID days when she lost her financial assistance. At that time, two advisors helped her find financial assistance and made her graduation possible. In addition, both advisors understood her circumstances and

helped her during the pandemic when Kathy lost her job and was forced to take only one course at a time. She appreciates these two faculty members who helped her gain confidence again in times of extreme crises:

> Like, I think at one point, I hit every financial department I could possibly think of asking for help, and no one was able to offer me anything, and this was before the pandemic. And then, during the pandemic, I lost my job and could not pay my tuition bill. And I had to drop and take one class, and no one was able to like financially help me, you know, because that the students at the time when able to apply for like that aid that was given to the students and all of that. But then these two ladies [her advisors], you know, were able towards the middle of 2020 were able to find funding, so I could take three classes because everything was virtual. So that is how I have been able to speed up my graduation and be able to graduate this May.

Participants shared diverse experiences in navigating the college admission process and success in opportunities to gain financial aid and faculty support. Their experiences vary depending on which state they reside in, as local and state policies depend on whether the states are sanctuary states for undocumented people. Sometimes, experiences also vary with faculty and administrative staff depending on their ability and willingness to help them. The quality and services of institutional staff differ from school to school in facilitating marginalized students. Many faculty members interact with these students without thoroughly understanding their socioeconomic challenges and limitations because of their immigration status.

All participants shared that their school counselors were unaware of the various restraints due to their undocumented status. Many participants were either misguided or did not know how to provide services that matched the unique needs of the student body. Therefore, many

navigated the complex college admission process independently and sought resources to advance their higher education. Despite their challenges and obstacles, their perseverance and resilience to complete their degrees did not deter them from pursuing their dream of a college education.

Difficulties Transitioning to Professional Careers

Efforts to enter professional fields are formidable and daunting for these undocumented students. Their undocumented status and the liminality attached to their DACA status make it almost impossible for them to obtain the employment they aspire to during their education, for example, in public policy or nursing.

Blocked Career Goals

Varied state policies to issue professional licenses impact the career goals of these undocumented young adults. It again depends on the state where they reside, as many states have started allowing undocumented students to obtain licenses, seek employment in their educational programs, and achieve their career goals. Nevertheless, the liminality of these provisions is not a permanent solution for them to plan their careers as their citizen peers do after completing their degrees. At the end of their programs, most participants realized that their career decision-making was impacted by the same circumstances that influenced their other life decisions. Therefore, the opportunity to choose their careers with precarious status may not come to fruition.

Career and professional plans have usually started to be formulated in the minds of college students in the last two years. However, the career interests of undocumented students and their selection to apply to places that match their education might not be the same for them as for their citizen peers. Many undocumented and DACAmented students realize that their degrees are just a backup plan, as these career choice options may not be compatible with them,

with little to no freedom to choose. As the participants discussed their future career goals, they highlighted the significance of the barriers and challenges associated with immigration status in choosing their preferred jobs. Despite most participants doing exceptionally well academically, they lacked options to continue in their field of education, knowing they had little to no choice in those fields.

Pursuing higher education does not warrant a smooth transition to employment opportunities or career fields of their choice that align with their professional degrees. Moreover, they do not enjoy the same rights of passage as their American peers to put their hard-earned degrees into use because of the temporary nature of their status.

Daniela believes she can do incredible things only if her status allows her. She shares how she coped with it well, way before she graduated, and that her status will impact her potential employment opportunities:

> I lost so many opportunities, so many opportunities I lost on because I was undocumented. And I knew that job opportunities would not come up. So. So my status continued to, like, really negatively impact me through college, but in college, I definitely tried to, like, own it more and like grapple with it more.

Daniela shared how she tried to find employment but did not get anything she wanted after she graduated. Ultimately, she chose to teach as that was the place that would hire her. She said not a single employer wanted to hire her because of her immigration status though she has active DACA status, which means she has legal work authorization:

> So how can I say that the degree will do anything for me? So I left my country and got the degree here that should open up opportunities for me, but wherever I go, everywhere I

> turn, every single job does not want to hire me because of my status. So it is impossible to get the job you want, which is why I am teaching.

Legal Restraints to Gain Employment

The legal restraints associated with the immigration status of these undocumented young adults stand as a hard wall to hit when looking for employment in the fields of their education. Although they are completely integrated into mainstream American culture, they lack the privilege of obtaining employment that can sponsor their visas or obtain offers to work in their chosen field of education. They also voiced their concerns about employers' exploitation in the case of uncertainties attached to DACA and long working hours with no breaks due to their precarious status, sometimes leading to physical and mental health issues.

Carol shared the same scenario about her inability to find employment relevant to her degree. She cites that although she has privileges with DACA, due to many legal restrictions, securing a job relevant to her degree is impossible. She told me:

> I do not have high hopes. Mostly because even with a degree, like yeah, there are some advantages to having the degree, but at the same time, there are so many restrictions, you know, even with the degree, even with DACA, you know, like, there is a core of privilege that comes with having DACA on you know, you can get a driver's license, you are able to work legally, you know, things like that, but at the same time, there is still a lot of restrictions that come with it. Most of us being undocumented, actually, like I see myself not working in my field. I see myself working on something else.

Carol explained that she thought and hoped her degree would be enough to ameliorate her immigration status but realized later that working in her professional field might not materialize as she expected; she said," Because for me, up first, college was like, oh, yeah, you know,

college is gonna get me out of it." Still, after observing other undocumented people's experiences, she realized that getting a matching job with her degree might not be in the cards for her. "I have been learning, you know, with my past experiences and then hearing other undocumented folks' experiences; I do not see myself working or like working in my degree." Participants reflected on how their immigration status restrained them from finding employment after graduation as they thought about their future careers. Kathy, who recently finished her undergraduate degree, shared how she is contemplating going back to her country of origin because, even with the degree, she sees herself with no future career in the U.S. She described why it is difficult for her to see her future here, "The idea of just staying here really constrains me. What does this look like? As I move forward and like as I try to build my career, like, what does that exactly look like for me?"

Another issue shared by some participants was revealing their DACAmented or undocumented status at the time of hiring. They explained that even if they say they do not need any extended visa or sponsorship at the time of the job interview, the question will eventually arise because of their undocumented status. Therefore, sooner or later, employers will discover that these participants are not citizens and might be unable to continue the work as they need sponsorship. That falls on the employer, and a lengthy legal process, and not every employer would be able to go that route. Therefore, even when these participants meet the job criteria, they may not have had a chance because of their immigration status. Daniela further explained:

> Either way, the employers can deny you a job if you require an extended visa or require a renewal: even if I Iie in all my applications and I say I do not need sponsorship or anything like that, it always ends up coming up. They say, sorry, we cannot hire you because of your visa; you are not a citizen or something along those lines.

Creating their Own Brands

Those who completed their degrees without DACA did not look for employment opportunities and started investing in small businesses. All participants acknowledged the benefits of education and how they shaped their perspectives. Many used the skills they acquired during their college education to transition to small-scale business. For example, Ale established her small homemade candle business, sells it online, and maintains a small shop. She does not have DACA status, so she understands that after completing her education, the only option for her is to have her own business, as she is not eligible to work legally. Ale said," I am going to start, like, well, not start with like, continue growing my shop. I want to say how much I can make it grow. I am just going to a full-time focus on that." Ale recently graduated with her undergraduate degree and now fully focuses on her business.

Participants acknowledged that their degree helped them create a good brand for their small businesses or social media presence. Jack runs their fashion accessories and garments business along with a podcast with the mindset of community-led support. The profits are used to help the undocumented community and raise funds for the community members in times of need. With a major in political science, Jack thinks that the degree has helped them navigate better and understand what people want:

> I think everyone who has a degree here is kind of better off anywhere else. So I feel like that is something that's helped me. I am not doing anything, and my degrees are into running a brand by myself and with my sister but mostly on my own, so sometimes it is hard to feel like you did not just waste that time. But I do see that when I do talk. When I do podcasts, it has helped me because I have a background in political science, and I

> understand what people are doing more than if I had not gone to school and just learned how to navigate the world.

The participants shared that a degree is good because it is vital to get a foot in the door or a kind of a "backup plan," as Carol named it. Several participants explained that they would not like to work for anyone else but instead have a small business and work independently. Carol, like Jacks, wants to have a small business where she does not have to work under any person or institution. "I actually see myself having my own small business, but I really do not want to work for anyone else or like any institution, you know. I just see myself having my degree as a backup plan. If anything happens, I just see myself working for myself." However, due to competition, lack of networking, and referrals belonging to low-income groups, they posited that they hardly have any social capital and network to rely on because of their undocumented status to seek jobs. It seems more feasible for them to establish their brands or small businesses instead of seeking employment. They think their undocumented status impedes their chance of getting a job as employers look for a referral or a connection they lack. Daniela shared her dilemma:

> As an undocumented person, I do not have a network like no family to get me jobs. I was uprooted to come to California with no connections and no friends. To get new jobs, so being undocumented has really made my network very small, while the degree is very important to actually secure a job and to get your foot in and meet someone too. It opens the door for you a little, but I feel like being undocumented has really affected that, yeah, and then if I do get my foot in, as soon as they [employers] hear about your status, they do not want to hire you anymore.

Continuing Higher Education

Some participants believed that the only way for them to have a better career was to return to school and get admitted to graduate programs. However, they are unsure of their academic trajectory, with no knowledge of financial aid or financial assistance in graduate school. They still want to learn more and excel in their professional fields, but the absence of financial help stalls their desire to graduate school. Diana explained, "I want to go back, you know, for my Master's degree. If possible, but that is not possible for me because, like, I do not have like the financial aid." Kathy, who graduated with a public policy in her undergraduate degree, described how she was rejected for many jobs due to her status. She explained:

> I am trying to build my career like I am trying to, you know, do something, and I do not know what it is. I honestly do not know. But if that does not happen, then is higher education or the continuation of higher education something that I want to do, you know?

Additionally, she shared a scenario where potential employers rejected her because she did not have a master's degree. She shared that after going through many job rejections based on not having a master's degree, she rethought advancing her education. After realizing that her hard-earned bachelor's degree would not get her a job she thought she needed and deserved, she started pondering her next option if she went back to school. She said:

> A lot of these places now want someone with a master's or bachelor's is not enough. And that is something that sat with me a very long time ago. I think I got that eye-opening in 2020 before the pandemic 2019 2020, and where, like, I noticed that a bachelor's was not enough. In contemplating the idea of what it will look like for me to go back to school.

Employment Linked to Active DACA Status

The main focus during the conversation about their professional careers was based on the fact that their uncertain status, whether DACAmented or undocumented, was a hurdle to gaining

any permanent position because it might require permanent residency or citizenship. Participants with DACA are in a better situation as they have more freedom to choose their job opportunities and afford better job prospects. However, the sustainability of their employment depended on the precariousness and liminality of their DACA status. There is always fear that the employer will ask for renewal of their DACA status. Suppose that renewal of their DACA does not occur before the required time. In that case, they will lose their jobs, or the employer might refuse to keep them because they do not want someone who might be unable to maintain their work authorization status actively.

One participant did not even immediately pursue his college admission in fear of being employed in the same job market after completing his degree, which he was doing after high school graduation. Raphael, who is currently pursuing Ph.D. now, took a gap of ten years to get admission to a local community college as there was no DACA when he graduated from high school. According to him, he navigated the job market smartly and did the kind of work that he could do easily. However, he did not want to spend money on a degree that would not change his future. He recalled:

> Why am I going to go to school? Like I did not have a degree and then not use it later and be in the same job like there is no reason and that just stops, but how am I gonna pay for tuition? Right, like, I mean, as an undocumented person working in a job in a restaurant, I was not exactly making a lot of money. Right? Like paying tuition out of pocket.

Social and Romantic liminality

Like young American adults during and after college graduation, the participants in this study also talked about their social and romantic relationships as a life course norm in their transition to adulthood. They reflected on how their immigration status constructed and shaped

their experiences in maintaining and sustaining relationships and networks. Undocumented and DACAmented individuals have unique experiences and perspectives on social and romantic partnerships.

Power Dynamics and Save You Narrative by Citizen Partners

The results indicate that most participants in this study did not see marriage as a solution to their immigration dilemma and believed that when they wanted to have a relationship, it should be based on the purity of love and not the need to change their immigration status. Almost all of them eschew the idea of marriage as their only solution to stagnant immigration status. The apprehension dovetails with many negative experiences regarding their relationships with ex-partners who were citizens. Many participants recognized the power dynamics associated with forging a relationship with a citizen and encountered sexist and racist behaviors from their former partners. Therefore, many are hesitant to move forward to any romantic relationship with an American citizen for fear of having another negative experience with their prospective partner. Kathy shared that she was very upfront about her immigration status when she went on a date with an American citizen. She said, "I went on a couple of dates. And I got ghosted, you know, and it was a horrible experience." She thinks her dates did not show up because of her immigration status.

Some have experienced the "save you" narrative by their citizen partners, and in return, they asked for strange demands, which turned out to be toxic and insufferable for them to stay in the relationship. Ale recounted her harrowing experience at the hand of her previous boyfriend, who started taking advantage of her and gave her the "save you" vibe, which she did not like. She said that she did not want to be saved by anyone. She shared, "And he [her boyfriend] was understanding at first, but then he became really like, he got into this, I will save you narrative."

She further narrated her story: "I hate it. I was like I do not need you to save me. Like, just listen to me. You know? And he Yeah, he got into this like positioning he was thinking that I was nothing without him". She explained that the relationship became toxic when she broke up with him. He started exploiting his citizenship as a power dynamic, as if she depended on him and could not function without him because he was a citizen. She could change her undocumented status to a legal residency by marrying him. She said:

> And then also, when I like to break up with him, he used my identity as a little like power, I guess. Like he knew how to like make me feel bad. So I would not leave him, so it was really hard leaving him, and yeah, he made me feel really bad because he will, like, say like, really hurtful things. That he was like, wow, you are nothing without me. Like, like, I am gonna help you. I am gonna help you get the papers. And I was like, no, like, I do not need you to like help me. You know, I do not need you to save me. So that was bad.

There is another experience these participants shared: their citizen partners would ask for something in return for marrying them and getting their immigration status adjusted. Diana, nineteen, shared a similar story about her first relationship. She shared her traumatic story of how her first partner told her he would help her adjust her status, but he wanted to have children with her in return. Diana, very young, did not want to commit to a transactional relationship. She said:

> So he had offered several times like well, I will adjust it for you. But the way that he approached the situation was like, I fix your status for you go ahead and give me kids, and essentially, you know, I am like, I am very young, I am only 19. So I do not think I can do that.

Diana did not have a good experience with her next boyfriend, who was in the military. She shared that they had been engaged and seeing each other for six years. However, that person would also use a threatening tone whenever they had an argument or a conflict, using his power and sharing that he would report to the authorities. Diana feared his power and status because he was in the military and could easily use the power against her and her family. As a result, it became too difficult for her to carry on with this relationship too:

> It was very hard to navigate that relationship just because even though he understood my situation, he would use it against me. So whenever we would argue because of things, it would be like, well, it would be very bad if you knew this happened to you or your family all of a sudden had a raid by immigration, and it is like, you say you love me, but you are saying these things me.

For Diana, even breaking up with such a person was a challenging and scary decision, as she was aware that he would use his connections to harm her. However, she used her courage and broke up with him recently.

Fears of Revealing Status

Some shared that they were lucky to have good partners and enjoyed a healthy normal relationship with them without any negative experiences. For example, Raphael's partner is now his husband, and they are happily living in their new home. However, the experiences shared by some participants speak of their immense daily fear, even in romantic relationships. These fears include detention, arrest, and deportation if potential partners decide to report them to authorities.

Their negative experiences due to their undocumented status dominate their decision to disclose their immigration status to their partners, even in situations of love and romance. Participants shared that their fear of consequences after revealing their position was so high that

it took them a while to disclose their immigration status. They are not sure about the reaction of their potential partner, even if their partner has seen the same experience up close and personal in their family. Raphael explained how he hesitated to tell his partner, now his husband, about his DACA status; when he did, he cried and was scared of how his partner would react to it. He shared that although his partner had some family members who had faced the same experience, Raphael did not know what the outcome of his revelation would be for his relationship. He narrated:

> Even with my husband, I did not tell him we had been dating for about four months, probably into our relationship. And when I told him, I cried because I was afraid that even though he grew up with parents with his older siblings who were undocumented for a while, people in his family were like, he has very close proximity to all of these things. But there was still that fear. Like, you know, is someone gonna want to be around me knowing that, you know, I am one of those illegals, yeah, one of those people that just, you know, they do not deserve anything. They are just here, mooching off the government or whatever the narrative was at that time.

Facing the threat of detention and deportation when President Trump came to power and rescinded DACA, some undocumented and DACAmented individuals drove to marriage when the first offer came. Daniela narrated the experience she had with her ex-husband. It was a time of fear and frustration when Trump came to power, and she married her now ex-husband, a citizen, in a hurry. Unfortunately, that person turned out to be an extremely abusive person who used his citizenship as a powerful tool to demean her and made her realize that she needed him to survive in the current political situation, which was adverse for undocumented people. Daniela stated that it is easy for people to suggest that getting married is the answer to changing status to

permanent residency. However, she delineated that it is difficult to get married and change immigration status. Daniela explained that to change immigration status through marriage, the citizen had to show a certain amount of income at their disposal, which did not work out for her husband. Ultimately, she divorced him to escape the abusive relationship, which proved more harmful than beneficial. She said:

> So I got married in an interfaith marriage, but even if you get married, there are a lot of requirements. Make a certain amount of money, and we did not make enough money. Oh, that to the concept of money is always there. A lot of people just say why don't you get married? And that is not the only thing; there are other things as well, so I could not do that. And then, my husband ended up being very abusive and cheated on me, so I left him. And then I tried the U Visa process, but I could not get enough proof of the process.

The over-arching point reported by the participants is that their undocumented status impedes relationships of trust, that their status inserts another dimension into trying to build a relationship, and that the uncertainty undermines whatever kind of relationship they hope to build. It is just not the citizen partners. These participants are afraid of judging or impacting their decision to move forward with their relationship with their partners' families. Several participants shared how they feel anxious about the families of their potential partners, who might think that the only reason for their interest in the person is to get their immigration status adjusted. Diana, whose story I mentioned above, recounted that the mother of her ex-fiancé had a bad experience with her husband, who left her after getting his status adjusted when she married him. Therefore, people who have already had one bad experience tend to judge the whole community like that. She said:

> So when they [her partner's family] were aware that we were engaged, they were not really happy because his mom had been married to someone with no status. She had adjusted his status, and when the adjustment was made, that person just basically left her, so she thought, oh, she is Latina. She is gonna do the same thing to my son.

These traumatic experiences with citizen partners make these undocumented and DACAmented individuals wary of getting into romantic relationships. Even if people approach them, they hold themselves back for fear of the potential dangers of toxic and blackmailing situations. In addition, the fear of being judged by family members discourages these participants from getting into any serious relationship that can become permanent. Carol gave the exact reasons for her hesitancy to form any romantic relationship with citizen peers:

> I had been a little hesitant to form, you know, any romantic relationship because of my thinking process like, whenever they find out I am undocumented, will they think that I am only interested in them for citizenship? Or do you know, not accept me because they think I am after them for citizenship, you know?

Social Media: A Safe Space

Participants also shared about sustaining their social networks and gauging people's opinions to decide whether it was worth interacting with such a person. Many participants claim that being vocal on social media and some on electronic media has given them recognition, which is a blessing, as many people who disagree with their social and political mindset stay away from them. Therefore, for many participants, their undocumented community of friends was the leading social network they relied on whenever they needed support. Some also shared their strong social network, which they gained through Twitter, a space where they feel heard and recognized when they post their opinions, especially when they feel lonely and isolated.

Some claim that Twitter is where they feel safe and sometimes receive immense help, even financial support, whenever they ask. Some have also met their online undocumented and DACAmented friends in person, as most live close to each other, especially in California.

The deep-seated effects of undocumented and DACAmented status also impact these individuals when disclosing their status or forming social relationships. Most participants believed they felt more accepted and safe by their community members and people from the same ethnic and racial background. These people primarily do not judge them or understand their struggles. The results indicate that the participants gauge their prospective social friends by initiating conversations on socially sensitive topics, such as immigration laws, abortion rights, and the Black Lives Matter movement. They prefer

friendly relationships with people who align with their social and political mindset. They shared how they navigated conversations with citizens and made decisions about discussing the intimate details of their immigration situations. In addition, many of them use social media to interact with friends who have already disclosed their undocumented status and are open about their activism and opinions. Arely shared her strategy for forming friendships like this:

> Sometimes I will throw in, like when I first meet people; I like to throw in keywords to see their reactions. And if they are okay, I am good, you know, or another thing I feel helps a lot, of courses, like social media, and people tend to be very open about what they think and how they are like, yeah.

Carol recounted the way she moves forward with meeting new people in the same way to gauge their opinion:

> Thus, whenever it came to meeting new people, I would hold back on, you know, telling them I was undocumented until I was aware of their political ideologies. So I would kind

> of listen to what they had to say, you know, about immigration rights, abortion rights, things like that. And in my head, if they were cool enough, I would be like, so hey, you know, I am undocumented and things like that, you know, and so we carry on the conversation.

The stigma attached to their undocumented identities also shapes how they try to stay away from people with whom they feel exhausted in explaining their identities. Their hesitancy to explain their situation to citizens leads them to gravitate toward their undocumented communities for social interactions. It happens unintentionally, and at times, it is how they see themselves subconsciously navigating specific spaces for the sake of not being in the realm of exhaustive explanations about their experiences to people who do not understand their unique experiences. Elizabeth reiterated the same philosophy:

> It is just kind of like, whom I navigate towards just happens to be folks that are an understanding of my identity, or frankly, most of my friendships are folks who are undocumented themselves. And I am telling you, it is not something I have done on purpose just kind of has happened because the spaces that I navigate to are just very geared towards undocumented folks, and I think, in essence, it has been intentional on my part.

Participants shared that their fear of being caught for doing something they are not supposed to do can become a problem. Therefore, they are always cautious of their activities and social hang-outs and try to avoid trouble, fearing their fragile DACA status. Arely shared that she was too conscious of going out with her friends and getting into trouble that could suspend their DACA status. She said, "A lot of friends would like to drink and do stuff, and I would ask myself, is there risk in it? Should I risk it because if I get in any sort of trouble, my DACA can

be repealed?" Therefore, online friendship on social media has become the safest place for these undocumented and DACAmented people to interact online without revealing their true identity. They seek their online friends by following the "undocumented" or "DACA" accounts mentioned in their bios. The Undocu-Twitter has immensely supported these undocumented young adults in times of distress. They have found supportive groups of friends and acquaintances online through this network. Carol appreciated how she connected with undocumented people who had the same experiences and challenges she had faced. She said:

> And it [Twitter] was very, very, very helpful in connecting with other undocumented folks, with or without DACA, that were in school or that are not in school—and then relating to their struggles and how they have each other's backs and support each other.

Carol explained that whenever their community member needs financial support, the undocumented community always comes forward to support each other. She said," Most of the time whenever an undocumented person online shares like "GoFundMe" or mutual aid, most of the time it is the same undocumented community supporting that mutually." She feels grateful for her online Twitter friend community, whom she says has always their back. She shared, "It is always the undocumented folks you know how to reach out to, so I am very grateful for that online Twitter community because I met great people." Ale felt lonely due to her being undocumented with no DACA status. She found her friends and supportive network through Twitter, who shared the same status as hers, which helped her understand and accept that other undocumented young people do not have DACA:

> So there was a point in my life in which I was feeling so lonely, like so lonely when it comes to being undocumented. And I started using Twitter, and I found a big community of undocumented people on Twitter. So we made a group chat, and I found many people

> without DACA. So from all over the country, we made our group chat, and it was so nice, like talking to them and realizing that I was not the only one and I was not alone. So even though I cannot see some of them in person, it is still nice knowing they are there. And a few of my best friends, like my bestest friends that I met on Twitter.

These participants shared their opinions about maintaining social networks in their trustworthy inner circle, where they feel safe and unjudged by people who are either undocumented like them or friends who have an understanding of their experiences attached to their immigration status. Many shared that being vocal about their status gives them an upper hand in understanding how people react. Participants like Arturo, who is very vocal on local media channels and give talks on platforms like Facebook, shared, "I think it actually is funny because it works in a very interesting way that it sort of it sort of helps me like to avoid out people that I do not need in my life." These crucial aspects of coming of age constantly remind them that their undocumented status is a permanent liminal patch that impacts all their life decisions.

Participants also believed their responsibility was not to educate others about their unique situation. Instead, they hope that an interested person would move forward with the romantic relationship, and they would do their research about undocumented people. Elizabeth said:

> So I would expect that whomever I become romantically involved with has a clearer understanding of that and has, in a certain set, could put in the work themselves to understand it. Because yeah, that is an expectation I will have moving forward. Simply because I do not feel like it is my place to educate citizens about my experience, much less someone I will become romantically involved with. I would hope that they would also put in that work because they want to be in a romantic relationship with me.

Some participants reflected on how they lost friends who did not understand travel limitations as one of the dilemmas attached to an undocumented status. Their friends do not comprehend that they cannot leave the U.S. and enter the country as American citizens do. As being undocumented, they can leave the country but cannot enter unless they have advanced parole on their DACA status. They shared how their friends would plan international travel and trips and did not realize that their undocumented friends could not accompany them because of their immigration status. Carol shared:

> One of my closest friends is documented; she is a citizen. And not too long ago. She was like, hey, we should take a trip to Paris. You know, I always wanted to go there. And I was like, hey, I can take a trip to Paris too, but I am staying there. You know, things like that. That is whenever I hit them like, Oh, that is right. She knows she cannot go.

Some participants also shared about losing their previous friends because they could not accompany them on holiday trips abroad. For example, Evangeline distanced herself from her previous friends, who learned about her travel limitation after they realized that she could not go along with all their fun plans. She said," And then they would stop inviting me to things because, you know, they were like, Oh, well, you cannot do it anyway."

The above findings indicate the complexity of undocumented status in forming social and romantic ties. The stigmatization and precariousness of their complex identities govern their decisions to navigate social networks and romantic partnerships. The participants shed light on how their reluctance to move forward with social and romantic relationships with citizen partners prevents them from forging relationships. Finding like-minded people from an undocumented community through Twitter has been termed the most preferred way to form social networking, especially when they have no other way to interact socially or romantically. Female participants

were more hesitant to reveal their status for fear of dire consequences, such as abuse and toxicity by their male partners. Undocumented status makes it challenging for these individuals to find trustworthy and meaningful romantic relationships, leading to more breakups than permanent ones.

The findings in this theme amplify the liminal experiences these young adults encounter due to their immigration status when pursuing higher education, looking for careers in their field, and forming social networks and romantic relationships. All these life decisions influence and shape their life course milestones, which they must adapt to and recreate with the myriad challenges facing them.

Theme 3: Confused Sense of Belonging and Ambivalent Futures

A prevalent theme that emerged from the participant responses is their confused identities and their navigation in different spaces that can be welcoming and unwelcoming simultaneously. The constant realization of where they belong and what their future pertains to creates a sense of desperation and a strong feeling of not belonging when they navigate spaces like their colleges or work. Contradictory inclusive and exclusive policies in social and academic spaces function as an exacerbation of covert boundaries to navigate and explore amid an ever-changing political landscape. Furthermore, the conflicting situations in which they see the unfairness attached to their immigration status brought a sense of immense realization that their existence in the United States is unwanted, creating a contradictory sense of their identities. These experiences of vulnerability due to the denial of privileges and rights create a sense of rejection and unwantedness in American society.

The mixed messaging of belonging and not belonging to the systems they exist in, such as college, graduation, and work, without any permanent solution to their immigration, makes it

difficult for them to feel associated with the U.S. or their countries of origin. The realization of inclusion and exclusion also brings them a sense of resentment and confusion as they see themselves with no roots in their parental or American heritage. Some even want to strip off their connection with their heritage as it constantly reminds them of their undocumented status.

Although many aspire to the same goals and ambitions as their American peers, they see blocked pathways and closed doors to achieve their goals and lose access to upward mobility. On the one hand, they are raised as their American peers studying in public schools, and on the other hand, they cannot enjoy the same privileges as their citizen peers. Embracing their liminality, they must adjust and adapt to their previous aspirations and ambitions and make changes that fit their immigration status.

The feelings of helplessness due to not having any permanent roots lead them to a new level of identity formation founded on affiliations to only their undocumented community and people. As they navigate their legal liminality, especially their transition to college and young adulthood, the identities that shape their lived experiences underscore their sense of dislocation, entailing acute feelings of resentment. However, they do not see their identities in isolation; instead, their sense of identity is deeply rooted in multi-dimensional dynamics of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and gender orientation that have changed their sense of perception in relevance to their liminal status.

Among the family theme of “Confused sense of belonging and ambivalent futures” are three sub-themes that the data analysis showed (1) contradictory feelings of being un-American and American; (2) feelings of unfairness and frustration; and (3) hopelessness for their futures. See the following table for a detailed description of this family of themes with its sub-themes.

Table 5	
Theme 3. Confused Sense of Belonging and Ambivalent Futures	
Contradictory Feelings of Being Un-American and American	*The Transition from Acceptance to Rejection*
	Unwelcome Spaces
	Encountering Discrimination and Racism
Feelings of Unfairness and Frustration	*Lack of Mobility Creates Frustration*
	Living in Mixed Status Households
	Disappointment from Changing Immigration Policies
Hopelessness for the Future	*Disappointment from Politicians*
	Extreme Hopelessness without DACA

Contradictory Feelings of Being Un-American and American

Transitioning into adulthood by finishing high school and getting to college is a milestone for young adults in the U.S. However, the transition to young adulthood for undocumented young adults is accompanied by a transition to illegality and the realization of their undocumented status when college application forms ask for citizenship status. Understanding their immigration status rethinks how American society looks at them and makes them acutely conscious of their confused sense of belonging.

The Transition from Acceptance to Rejection

Until now, in high school, they were socially and educationally included in the American system, but right at the time of transitioning to higher education, the realization comes with the fact that they are excluded now from access to higher education. This brings the feeling of not being welcome and how significant it is for them to find a permanent solution to their liminal

status. The participants' most frequent conversations were around their consciousness about not belonging to the United States. They shared how their in-between positionality is consistent in their lives until they see any permanent solution to their immigration statuses.

Carlin has always been actively participating in the immigrant rights movement since his high school days. He has worked with a diverse immigrant population like asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, and incarcerated individuals. Carlin's experience with immigrant non-profit organizations has helped him understand all the nitty gritty of immigration laws. Carlin has worked with these organizations, which support the rights of marginalized immigrant communities and help them with legal services. He has learned the legal language and skills required to do well in his field and admits that he has many privileges due to his professional network but is still not at peace. Acquiring higher education and doing well in the field he is passionate about still does not bring Carlin a sense of permanence that entails legal citizenship status. As he knows, his status is not legally permanent. Carlin said:

> I definitely know I have more opportunities here. But I always think maybe I would have been happier. Or maybe I would have been more at peace. I do not know what it feels like to be a citizen anywhere. So perhaps that would have given me more. But you know, you cannot dwell on the waters.

Participants expressed that the realization of their in-between existence due to their immigration status and their identification as outsiders impacts their feelings of belonging to the U.S. For years, they have lived as deserving citizens during their K-12 days, and suddenly, they see themselves outside American society's scope when they want college access. Kathy explained it like this:

> I do not feel like this country's home. But I also, and I am pretty sure a lot of immigrants kids, you know, we feel like in the middle, Yeah, that is a neither here nor there. You do not really belong here. I have never in the 20 years I have been in this country. I have never been able to call America my home. Feels very temporary. And this is 20 years. When I refer to my home, it always goes back to Venezuela. Or it goes back to Ecuador because I have family in Ecuador, you know, because of migration. But never, the word home does not fit America like it does not fit me, and I really do think it is because it is tied to the fact that I was undocumented for so long.

The path to adulthood and their experiences of discrimination, especially when they attempted to obtain financial assistance during college access, have shaped their feelings of alienation. Many participants reported that their feeling of not belonging to the U.S. stems from being rejected on so many levels at different points in their lives, which they would not have if they had a permanent status. Arely shared:

> I feel like my peers are like, this is where they [American citizens] were born, like, this is what they have known all their life. So in a way, they have been able to grow accustomed to the way life is here. For us, I felt like I had always been rejected in a way like I had never felt at ease with it.

Evangeline described how she felt betrayed and sad when she still did not receive a scholarship despite her credentials and higher GPA. She realizes she does not enjoy the same privileges as her American peers even though she has excelled in all high school markers:

> Because I am still salty about it. Because I had other requirements. I had some things that other students did not have. And they were even surprised that I did not get it because I

> had a higher GPA and had more extracurricular activities. And I held a lot of leadership positions at schools, so they were very confused, and I was confused. So it was a mess.

Elizabeth echoed the same experiences when she realized that there were so many options that she could have attained but was unable to do so due to limitations to her immigration status. This feeling of sudden rejection creates a sense of immense realization of what their immigration status entails for them. Elizabeth said, “I never realized that as the limitation until, you know, applying to different like programs that I could not be a part of because citizenship was required. I thought that it was the first time that I felt limited in my immigration status.”

The participants' responses speak volumes about their feelings of rejection which impeded them from feeling American as they were repeatedly reminded that they did not belong here despite their accomplishments.

Unwelcome Spaces

The participants constantly felt that they were not welcomed in many places. This is because media and politicians and the general rhetoric at colleges and workplaces where they have to present their work authorization every two years have ensured that they are not allowed to take their situation for granted. Raphael, who calls himself an undocumented American and recently got his Green card, critiqued the existing policies:

> Especially as an undocumented with DACA, I am supposed to be very thankful. Oh my God, this country. Thank you for allowing me to live my life for and gap of two years and pay $500 and still not get the full benefits, despite the fact that we contribute so much to the economy, despite the fact that I am highly educated at this point.

Participants shared how they are constantly made to feel that they are not wanted here in the U.S. due to negative experiences interacting in spaces such as college campuses or social

interactions with people. For example, Jack shared their (Jack) experiences at the time of college admission when they (Jack) were offered admission in Alaska but were unable to join that college due to their (Jack) status. At that time, Jack was not a DACA recipient, so they (Jack) could not air travel domestically without any legal documents. Jack stated, “There is a lot of things that constantly remind you that you are not wanted here. So it is hard to feel like you are American when you are also continually being told that you do not deserve things and that you are not valued as a human being.“ Jack also narrated a story when they (Jack) had a strange interaction with a person at a restaurant when that person noticed a mark of vaccination on Jack’s arm, which people get it at the time of birth in many countries other than the U.S. The whole verbal interaction made Jack feel like an unwanted person:

> So I remember one time we were eating lunch, and someone saw it, and they started asking me questions about it. And I know they did not mean that. But they started asking me about my papers and all of that. And I remember, Yeah, and it was a friend, so it was not like they were trying to be xenophobic, but at the time, I was not open about being undocumented. So it felt more like an attack, and I was like, Oh, I have to make sure that people cannot see that because apparently, people know. So it was a lot of those types of situations.

After this episode, Jack hid their (Jack) arm in a public space, as it can incite unsolicited questioning by people. Arturo also echoed the same concerns when he responded to whether he feels welcome after being in the U.S. for almost the last two decades. He said, “I have a lot of resentment towards the United States because of the experiences I have had to go through, and still, I do not feel like literally welcome here. Technically I am still not a US citizen. So it is like that is very frustrating.”

Many of them openly shared that they have a clear sense of critical consciousness about their standing regarding their uncertain conditions and immigration status. However, they also reported their gratitude for being in the U.S. and availing themselves of the educational opportunities they received for growing up in the U.S. Carlin talked about his education opportunities in the U.S., "I have more opportunity here. And maybe I will be graduated with as much education. I want to speak English. I would not be the same. But I always think maybe I would have been happier."

Facing harsh immigration policies like deportation for family members influences the overall perspective of how these undocumented young adults feel towards the American system. Their understanding of the complexities of their own lives and those of their family members manifested in their conversations. They feel that their full participation in mainstream American society does not guarantee permanence as they experience feelings of unwantedness. Diana, who has faced the trauma of seeing her father get deported, echoed the same emotions:

> And because my father was deported during that period, before I applied for DACA, in my mind, I was like, You are not American. You do not belong here. They do not want you here because this is what happened to your father. And what is happening to so many other people, right? So even though we were still going to school, even though we were still going to church or doing things here, this country never really allowed me to be attached to the culture.

Another participant, Arely, shared the same feelings when she talked about living in the U.S. for the last fifteen years, which still does not feel like an American. She shared:

> I reside in the United States. I could call it my home, but to say that like an American. No, like, I never felt welcome here. I am gonna say, like, I do not want to say it because it is corny, but it is like, I belong to nowhere.

Encountering Discrimination and Racism

Participants feel that their sense of not belonging to the U.S. despite living here for most of their lives is also characterized by negative interactions with many people. Their intersectional lived experiences due to race, class, and color add another layer to the already undocumented and DACAmented identities. They felt that after growing up in the U.S. and living here for most of their lives, people still call them racist terms. Arturo sadly shared, "There were some times where you know, I got called, like, derogatory like Hispanic names, and people were telling me like, you know, both like directly, like, mean way like you do not belong here. " They shared several xenophobic incidents and sometimes extreme racism in schools and colleges. Some incidents are related to their skin color, ethnicity, language barrier at a young age, or even gender orientation, as some pointed out. For example, Diana, who identifies as a Hispanic, described how she and her siblings had to leave formal schooling due to severe bullying by her peers. In addition, she recounted that she and her siblings would not socialize with the other Hispanic children due to fear of revealing their status:

> Even though we would not hang out with anybody else, we would keep to ourselves. So essentially, they [other students] were the ones who were bullying us. So we were not Mexican enough. We were not like them. And, as I said, it was extreme. So we have faced discrimination from other students. My brother was actually stabbed by a white person just because she felt like that; she came up and just stabbed him. When they asked her why she just said, I do not know. I just do not like why he is Mexican.

Some participants shared how the intersectionality of their gender orientation opened up the window of discrimination in addition to their undocumented status. Jack recalled how they(Jack) were abused at a young age [first grade] in school by their(Jack's) teacher due to Jack's LGTBQ identity. Due to the language barrier, the same bilingual teacher was supposed to help Jack integrate into their (Jack) school. "The first-grade teacher was very abusive towards me, and it sucks. I have always had issues with school, regardless if it was immigration or because I am part of the LGBT community." The fact that the same teacher was there to help Jack learn English so that Jack would feel supported did the opposite was heartbreaking to Jack. Jack felt that they (Jack) were a victim of xenophobia. Jack shared," The thing is that since I did not know English, and she was Hispanic, she was also supposed to help me learn English while I was in class with her." Jack further shared, "So I have always been in the situation where I am an outlier."

Other participants mentioned how physical appearance and the particular way of dressing up are considered a willingness to be accepted by their American peers, especially by girls, and an easier way to assimilate into American society. That points to the significance of the socioeconomic role in immigrants' lives when assimilating and integrating into the host American society. One participant expressed how their family could not afford better dresses due to lack of money, and their classmates would make fun of them. Another participant shared that despite her entire life here, she never felt at home due to American society's standards. She shares how you are only accepted in schools when you dress up and speak a certain way; Arely said:

> It was weird. Because a lot of it had to do with, like, growing up, it is like, I feel like it is a very American thing. Like you have to dress a certain way. And if you are not dressed

> in a certain way, you are excluded. And you have to talk in a certain way, and if not, you are excluded. And then you have to think a certain way as well. So, no, no, no, no, I do not feel American.

She further expressed that in terms of a sense of identity, she feels she does not belong anywhere.

However, some participants also expressed how their light skin tones made them invisible, helped them assimilate, and let them merge with the white population. They shared that their lighter skin tone served as a protective factor, and they do not have any traumatic experience relevant to their ethnicity because of that. Carol talked about her experiences growing up with her American peers and how her light skin tone had helped her to integrate into American society:

> You know, growing up, I did get assimilated quickly into, like, American society. Part of it was because it has to do with colorism as well. Being light-skinned Latina, you know, and learning to pick it up really quickly, you know, other kids around my age. They viewed me as an American, you know. So I started talking like them, dressing like them, thinking like them.

Participants had mixed and ambivalent feelings about their countries of origin and opinions to share. They shared unique relationships, with feelings of exclusion and belonging. Their inclusion in K-12 warrants their feelings of integration into American society due to their formative experiences growing up in the U.S. However, with the transition to adulthood, feelings of rejection made them aware of the consequences of their undocumented/DACAmented status. While navigating social and personal spaces, they encounter status- or ethnicity-related

discrimination and racism, creating an extreme sense of unwantedness in American society.

Feelings of Unfairness and Frustration

In some cases, the inability to travel outside of the U.S. and not meeting their extended families and grandparents elicit frustration and non-fairness treatment at the hand of U.S. policies.

Lack of Mobility Creates Frustration

Carlin discussed the lack of mobility that entailed his status. He believes that mobility comes from access to culture and a sense of belongingness to the roots. His inability to travel to his country of birth underscores the significance of citizenship and his awareness of his lack therein. He yearns for knowledge from visiting places and tasting the culture he belongs to. He experienced a sense of loss by seeing from the eyes of his American-Mexican friends who easily visited the country of his parents. That is why, for him, that is the enormous privilege of being an American citizen. He said:

> My Mexican friends that were born here because they have had access to the land have the mobility, and the privilege of U.S. citizenship which is an immense privilege like you can honestly go anywhere in the world without being stopped.

He explained further that the ability to access your culture brings in the sense of identity connected to your roots, which he lacks; thus, it creates a sense of identity crisis for him. Additionally, he said, "The mobility gives them access to the culture and the land that I probably never will have. So I think that is where my struggles come from like I just do not have access."

Arturo, the participant with advanced parole with his DACA status that gives him the special privilege to travel out of the U.S. and return, got the opportunity to travel to Mexico after twenty years since he came to the U.S. as a child. He described his experience as "surreal" when visiting his birth country. He shared:

> It was this beautiful feeling of being in the culture that I had, seen and heard about but had never actually physically been a part of since I was six. So being able to go back to my home country and, like, actually as an adult and have like these beautiful memories and be able to experience, like thankfully, I am able to speak the language and communicate and like my people are extremely hospitable, extremely friendly, extremely giving and empathetic. So being able to like being surrounded by that was like an experience in 2015 that I will never forget. And it was just this really, really beautiful moment in my life, for sure.

Evangeline got very emotional talking about her dilemma of limitations to travel.

> I get very emotional when it comes to thinking about that because I see all my friends and anybody go back and see families all the time, and I am like, wow, and it must be nice to go back. And see everybody. And with my grandparents passing away, both of them within the last year on my dad's side, it was more. I do not know what the word is like, jealous of everybody. And I was especially feeling that way for my dad because he had not seen them in over 20 years.

Almost all the participants said that even though they have lived their entire lives in the U.S., they do not see themselves as belonging to this country. For example, Ale said," I feel like when it comes to the sense of belonging, I feel like I do not belong here. Just because half of my life or more than half of my life is over here. So yeah, it has been rough."

Raphael, another participant who is a Ph.D. student and grasping his complex identity, mentioned how humiliating it is to feel illegal. Though Raphael is the only one on the path of the green card process at the time of the first interview, he shared how the experience of living illegally in the U.S. has been dehumanizing and embarrassing at times he said:

> As I have gotten older, I have started to realize that it is not right for a country or a society to do that to people, regardless of whether they were born here or born somewhere else. You should not make someone feel like they have to hide parts of who they are. Right?

Raphael considers himself American but is also critical of the policies. He thinks it is not the best country in the world and does not feel good to be associated with the colonized policies. However, he also acknowledges the irony that he is critiquing the country where he desperately wants to belong; he said," There is this idea that if you are a true patriot of true America, then you do not critique this country, that America is the best, that we are number one. No one questions that; I do not believe that." He laughed and said he felt quite the opposite.

Living in Mixed Status Households

The fact that their citizen siblings can travel outside of the U.S. and visit their extended families in their countries of origin. This highlights how immigration status affects undocumented members' emotional well-being in mixed-status households. The legal status of a mixed-status household adds another form of emotional stress to undocumented members. The frustration of seeing their younger citizen siblings able to return to the countries where they were not born brings a feeling of severe unfairness for these young undocumented people. Here they remember their childhood memories with fondness only to see their siblings who never shared those memories go and visit those places.

Some participants demonstrated their utmost desire to visit their countries of origin but could not do so due to restrictions on their immigration status. Several of them shared their fond childhood memories of their homes in their countries of origin, where they used to play at their

grandparents' houses or visit their aunts' and uncles' places, which is a lost opportunity now. Carlin has a vivid memory of his childhood home in Mexico and recalls:

> So I remember the way the mountain looked outside of the window from where I used to live. I remember my grandma's house—the roses in the front. I remember the way her kitchen looked. I remember the way the room my family shared work.

They expressed their sense of deprivation and how their citizen siblings have the privilege of seeing their grandparents back home when they are left behind, as they do not have the liberty to do so. Carlin shared sadly how he feels about not being able to visit his home country, which some of his family members were able to do:

> They have been able to meet their uncles, their aunts, their grandmothers, and they have relationships, and they can go back and feel like they belong. But for people who just do not have that mobility and that access, feels like something's been cut, and you cannot like so back together.

These participants also expressed frustration about their parents, who know their dying parents (participants' grandparents) but cannot travel to meet them. This also highlights the complexity of mixed-status families, where some members have privileges due to their citizenship status. For example, Raphael, who has recently become a permanent citizen, is continuously worried about his undocumented mother, who is longing to visit her home country, but if she goes there, she cannot return to the U.S. Raphael visited his country of origin Mexico but his mother is unable to do. He explained his feelings like this:

> When you have to live with this. This condition of like illegality, right? This idea that you cannot leave, you cannot enter, that your body is, you know, so limited to being able to

> move across space. And so I think for her like that, longing will always exist regardless of her experiences in our home country.

Mixed-status families and households can have serious implications for undocumented members if citizen members are not caring or are estranged from their undocumented family members. These relationships between undocumented and documented members can become conflicting and toxic due to restricting governmental policies in mixed-status or blended families. Daniela talked about her relationship with her father, who became a citizen through marriage to another person, and her American-born citizen sisters, who are not in contact with her and never care about Daniela's well-being. She told her story about her father's abusive attitude towards her mother and how he demeaned her because she was undocumented and uneducated. Her father was also an undocumented person; though he was educated himself, he got his documents through second marriage with a citizen of the U.S. She remembered her childhood like this:

> So they were fighting, and my father was like, Oh, you are always going to be like cleaning tables, like cleaning houses, like you are gonna nothing, and yada, yada. And then he turned to me and was like, you too; you are going to be nothing because you do not have papers, you are undocumented. So you are going to be cleaning tables for the rest of your life, and you are going to be cleaning toilets for the rest of your life.

When he was undocumented, he would feel ashamed around Daniela and her mother, who were also undocumented. She recalled:

> And my father was like, really like he was; my mom was not ashamed of her status. But I think my father was ashamed of his status. And so, even though he did not have status, he was really convinced that he was going to have it.

Daniela's father never reached out to her to inquire how she was doing, and she felt that her mother and Daniela's undocumented status was a reminder of his past, so he never reached out to her. She shared:

> But because he was a citizen, he didn't he no longer wanted to be associated with us because we are his past. We were like a reminder of where he came from. So he did not give me status. So I have not forgiven him.

Daniela shared that both of her citizen sisters had the same persona as her father, and they never offered a hand for help or said anything to her regarding her status. She believed that they could have sponsored her or their mother, but they also behaved in the same way as their father. She stated:

> So I have two sisters one of them took on my father's persona. So they are both citizens. They were both born here. The middle one took on the persona of being hyper on American. She wanted to be big cuz [because] she was ashamed of me and my mom like my father was.

Daniela lives alone without any contact with her family after her mother was deported back to Mexico.

Another participant stated that it is sometimes difficult for the citizen members of the family, too, as they have to be extra cautious of whom to bring home or socialize with. For example, Diana has a mixed-status family that is very close to each other. One of her brothers is a citizen, but he is very careful about making friends for fear that they might harm his undocumented family or reveal their status to officials regarding them. For this reason, to ensure the safety and security of undocumented family members, her brother does not make friends or go out with others, as he feels pressured to be careful about their well-being. She explained:

> The youngest for him, it is hard because he does not want to make friends that maybe are racist. And if you know, they come over, and they found that the situation it would be on him, so he also keeps to himself.

Disappointment from Changing Immigration Policies

Some participants shared how President Trump's four years have pushed them to the brink of being exhausted from challenging the narrative of good versus bad immigrants that the media also portrayed. Further, the constant uncertainty surrounding the future of DACA is a great source of frustration for these young people when their major life decisions depend on the renewal of DACA or the very existence of DACA. Kathy expressed her frustration about what is happening politically regarding the future of DACA. In her second interview, she was even more ambivalent about deciding whether to renew her DACA as she recently completed her undergraduate degree, for which she had been continuing her DACA for the last several years. She also shared that she was thinking about self-deporting as it has become significantly challenging to live in the uncertainties:

> I think I just got really tired. I was very, very over it. It came to the point where I was like; I cannot feel for my life anymore. Like I can feel like I am gonna [going to] wake up one day, and this man…. (Trump) gonna be like DACA done. So let me remove myself from it from the equation itself.

Another participant echoed his frustration when President Trump came to power and removed the advanced parole option from DACA. Arturo applied for advanced parole in 2015 when he got his DACA for the first time. However, this option was rescinded when President Trump came to office. Though the advanced parole option for DACAmented people was brought back during President Biden's presidency, it is always possible that this option might be taken

away soon, depending on the political climate. Arturo said, "I have a lot of resentment towards the United States because of the experiences I have had to go through, and still, I do not feel like welcome technically; I am still not a U.S. citizen. So like that is very frustrating." Arturo also called himself "pseudo-American," an American without a piece of paper." He also expressed his frustration based on the fact that he and many others like him are doing their best and are still not considered worthy enough to have a path to citizenship:

> If you are here contributing to the country, if you are doing your part, if you are a positive member of American society, you should 100% have a pathway to citizenship. Does not matter if you are DACA or you were seven years old when you came here, you want to come to this country to succeed, and you are doing your part by paying your taxes and paying your fair share.

Arturo also explained how the politicians make them feel hopeful, but mere rhetoric does not transform into sweeping changes in immigration laws. He said:

> The government would be telling us the same thing like with the laws or the lack of laws and bills that they were passing like; for the past decade, they have been promising us the Dream Act that people like myself and DACA recipients would eventually be able to get their citizenship and, again, even now, and that is what the Biden administration ran under the promises that it is still happening and so now, whenever there is some sort of positive development in the in the immigration fight and like in the fight to get citizenship like I honestly don't even It is so exhausting. I do not even get excited anymore.

Carol shared the same hopelessness from the politicians who have not done anything to bring about any positive change in the lives of the undocumented community. She shared her views as follows:

> I would like to see something better. But with this current president, and like, the office and everyone that's in there, I really do not have any hopes. Just because we have seen the same promises. Over and over again year after year, and nothing has, you know, like gone through.

Hopelessness for the Future

There was a sense of hopelessness for these undocumented emerging adults when they discussed their future. Despite meeting all the markers of success while growing up in the United States, they still feel ambivalent about their future.

Disappointment from Politicians

They are all hardworking, did their best during their academic trajectories, and got their driver's licenses like any other American young adult. However, their precarious and liminal situation does not give them any sense of surety and permanence even if they meet all the milestones as their American peers do. Some participants demonstrated their lack of faith in the American political system; some were more nonchalant and wanted to go with the flow. A fascinating fundamental difference of opinion was demonstrated based on their gender identities. Participants showed how they react to their hopeless futures by using humor to take it lightly if they were male participants. The male participants got humorous when they talked about their situation. Arturo said that he had not committed a crime, and if something worst happened, he would take it; smilingly, he said:

> I have done my part; I have done nothing wrong. I have never committed a crime. So the only thing they could arrest me, deport me for is not being a U.S. citizen." And like, if that happens, it happens like I am not going to lose sleep over it.

In contrast, many female participants got emotional and got on the verge of crying to express their hopelessness about their future. Some participants shared that having a degree does not guarantee any stable future and is just a backup plan for them. For example, Kathy responded emotionally about her future prospects and the limitations attached due to her immigration status. She started crying when she responded about how she feels about her future," What is next in this big bubble but also taking into consideration that my opportunities in what I do are limited because of my status, unfortunately."

When asked about his plans, Carlin from Arizona expressed how unsure he is about his future, even though he has completed his Masters and has done well in school, especially in the state, which is very unfriendly towards immigrants. Unfortunately, he does not have the funding to continue higher education. He wants to go to law school, which is his passion, but the absence of funding stops him from doing so:

> I tried law school, but because of my status, it was too expensive. There were no scholarships, so that was not an option. I am looking for Ph.D. programs. No schools want to fund me because of the status in Arizona, so I just realized that was not really an option. So maybe education is not an option anymore. Honestly, I do not think I can give a good answer. I think I will fit. I will definitely figure it out. I am very educated. I like working with migrants.

Carlin also canvassed for President Biden during his campaign and is rightfully disappointed that nothing came out of it, as the Democrats have been unable to reform

immigration and look for a permanent solution for undocumented people. The sheer lack of confidence in the politicians leads to a lack of faith in them, reminding them that there is no hope for their future. They see this as an utter failure by the politician on whom they have rested their hopes for their future:

> I think it depends on the administration, and if the senators or people in Congress want to get reelected, I canvassed for Joe Biden; I did all of that stuff, even though I cannot vote. I think, at this point, I will not be doing that again. It has just been like 15 years of constant dry max, constant votes, and constant nothing ever gets done where I just do not really trust the political process anymore.

Jack also shared the same hopelessness for the future, giving the analogy to the current administration playing games with the undocumented community when I asked them whether they (Jack) have any hopes for the Biden administration:

> No, I wish I could be, but I feel like it is all games. They want to give us the impression that we will get some type of help, and we do not get it, and it sucks not to be a hopeful person.

Daniela expressed her hopelessness with her future because of no permanent status. She said that even though she has a degree, without solid references, finding a job that can sponsor her is nearly impossible because she needs extended visas, which her DACA status does not allow. Daniela agreed that though the degree is essential to get a foot in the door, it is insufficient for a stable future with no permanent stamp on her status. When I asked her about her expectations with the current administration, she was not very hopeful. "The government is serving a very small number of people and is not so serving the majority of the country, so I do not anticipate that anything will be done."

Extreme Hopelessness without DACA

Ale was one of the two participants with no DACA, challenging her throughout college. She could not get any work, had no access to any scholarship, and did not get any support from her school counselors during the college application process. She shared that she has no hope for the future or specific plan after graduation due to her status. For Ale, it is more challenging for her to explain to her parents, whom she shared, that her degree will not be enough for a promising future. She explained that her constant debate with her parents had created a conflict between her and them as it was difficult for them to understand the complexity and nuance of her situation. To them, having a degree from a U.S. school is enough to get a pathway to get employment, which is not the case as she does not even have DACA protection and work authorization:

> So they are like, No, you are, you will be fine. Like, you will find a job, and I am like, I can't, like, I literally can't because I do not have a social [social security number], so we always get kind of into fights. And then my mom thinks I qualify for DACA, and I do not, and it kind of like hurts me when she is trying to ask questions to a lawyer or something.

Ale has been focusing on her handcrafted candle business for some time now as she has no hope of getting a job with her completely undocumented status without DACA. She wants to take a gap of a year after graduation and use all her energy to build and grow her shop. Currently, her parents are supporting her financially, but she is worried about how long they can help her. The uncertainty about her future scares her, and she is more concerned about the upcoming situation where she will not be able to support her elderly parents the way they have always supported her:

> And I know there is going to be a point at which they will not be able to work anymore. And I am scared of not having like, like, something stable, that like I am scared of not being able to help them out. The way they [parents] have been helping me out. Oh my gosh, I am gonna cry.

She shares how getting worked up does not serve any purpose because her situation is beyond her control. She said she has no plans and no goals for her future:

> I would think about this a lot, but then I was like, is it worth it to be thinking about this a lot and stress myself out for something that I cannot control for the future that I do not know? So I just decided to ignore it and then just decided not to think about it anymore. So I am just going with the flow right now. Since everything is so uncertain. I just do not make plans. I just do not make established goals. I just do not come up with any goals.

The data analysis in this theme speaks about the extent of the different feelings of belongingness and exclusion that persist in the lives of these undocumented and DACAmented young adults. Sometimes, the lines of inclusion and exclusion become too vibrant to avoid oversight. Those with DACA feel themselves expanding in those spaces of inclusion more than those without DACA. However, these expanding privileges only lead to a certain extent of acceptance in social and academic contexts. Racial discrimination and racism, followed by the anti-immigrant sentiments they encountered, impacted every aspect of their young adult lives. The impact of deportation, living in mixed-status families, and navigating unwelcoming spaces may differ in degree from participant to participant. Nevertheless, the feeling of not having roots in their countries of birth or the United States perpetuates their liminality and vulnerability.

Almost all the participants demonstrated a lost sense of self, not belongingness, and hopelessness for their future. The results indicate how myriad factors and experiences determine

their sense of self due to their undocumented or DACA status. The feelings of un-wantedness and lack of belonging to the U.S. are based on their narrow pathways to citizenship contextualized by their immigration status. However, they also exhibited perseverance and resilience in their current liminality by achieving their educational goals. Despite all the hopelessness they demonstrated due to their immigration status, they still survive and do their best within the limited resources.

Chapter 5: Discussions

U.S. immigration policies have increasingly made the lives of undocumented people and young college-going adults more complex, ambiguous, and liminal. Of the total 11 million undocumented individuals, there are 2.5 million individuals who have lived in the U.S. since childhood (Gonzales et al., 2020). Moreover, 800,000 youths have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) status (Cadenas et al., 2022). The previous and current political impasse has created a grey space for those who have had the U.S. as their home since childhood, completing their high school education and seeking higher education for upward mobility for themselves, their parents, and their undocumented community. While growing up in the United States with their American peers, these young adults graduating from high school follow the same life course trajectories and milestones set as a standard in mainstream American society. However, their understanding of their legal liminality in their final years of high school was a painful realization of their limitations in pursuing the dreams of a young adult's life in the United States. This upheaval in the form of unpredictable life circumstances due to their immigration status, which is either undocumented or DACAmented, creates a sense of loss with a feeling of unwantedness by the American society leading to civic engagement for the rights of their communities. Their higher education dream is a big challenge due to their undocumented status and is a barrier to seeking employment after completing their degrees. Furthermore, with no permanent path to citizenship, their social and romantic lives also take a jab, and most of the time, their precarious immigration situations impede maintaining and sustaining relationships.

Guided by the Life-course theory by Elder (1998) and its implications in understanding how life trajectories transition for this population, the findings indicate how the liminal immigration status impacts these emerging adults. These young adults begin to critically

understand their existence in liminal space and what it means for their future life decisions. At the same time, acknowledging and making meaning of their immigration identities and sense of worth, their idea of belongingness ruptures. Coming to terms with their liminal sense of identity is not only an impingement on their future dreams of life in the U.S. but also makes them critically aware of their precarious situation caused by racist nativist immigration policies and attitudes of society around them.

Nevertheless, those who persevere enough go to college and try to finish their higher education with financial challenges and barriers. They try to stay in their inner circles, which tie them through trauma bonding, and participate in civic engagement in their limited capacity to facilitate all their undocumented community members. Immigration status also defines their social status when forging social and romantic relationships. As a result, they remain wary of going forward, forming social networks for fear of harmful and toxic consequences.

This chapter aims to frame the migration and the growth of 1.5 undocumented young adults in the United States as a life-course trajectory. The strength of the life-course theory amplifies its connection of individuals and how they make sense of time, place, lifespan development, agency, and turning points in growing up as an undocumented in the U.S.

The term "emerging adulthood," coined by Jeffrey Arnett (2000), covers a life span of late teens through the mid to late 20s, which helps me understand the life trajectories of these young adults. Emerging adulthood is considered a period in the U.S. and other industrialized nations when distinctive characteristics develop in puberty until the late teens, followed by young adulthood, lasting from late teens to late 30s (Erikson, 1950). This paradigm explains the life course that people in the western industrialized world enter a stable full-time work by around the mid-20s after completing their higher education and getting married. However, this paradigm

does not fit the normative pattern of 1.5 undocumented or DACAmented young adults who do not have the same privileges as their American citizen peers in accomplishing the same milestones due to their tenuous immigration status. Theorists have also implied this change for not just emerging adults but also the entire life course of individuals to differentiate one period from another (Arnett, 2007). This transition period to adulthood has been widely used to explain the chronological life events of finishing high school, pursuing higher education, employment, and relationships/marriage. Therefore, I will use this framework to contrast the life trajectories of this emerging adult population who find themselves in a completely different space after graduating high school.

I have used the fundamental tenets of the life course trajectory for 1.5 undocumented and DACAmented individuals with the intersecting lens of emerging young adults to explain the diverse experiences of these individuals regarding their decisions to pursue higher education, career choices, and social and romantic relationships. These milestones do not happen in a vacuum for this population, as every action and decision is made against the backdrop of precarious immigration status. Characterized by the restraints and limitations attached to their immigration status, these emerging adults are increasingly left to use their resources facilitated by supportive communities to gradually reach their milestones in a different realm encompassing the liminality in which they exist. Their life trajectories are not only limited by their immigration status but also by race, class, color, and gender, which affect many life events and experiences. Therefore, I also analyzed their conversations in light of their resistance to encounters relating to race, class, color, and gender, to which many of them stood up and worked diligently to call for the basic rights of their undocumented community by participating in civic engagement (Collins et al., 2021). Through conversations with these participants, they discuss the systems of

oppression and power that influence their major life decisions and how they foster their survival and resistance to achieve their dreams. The primary purpose was to understand how these 1.5 undocumented young adults see their future in light of their life experiences contextualized by their liminal, ambiguous, and impermanent immigration status, which impacts every aspect of their lives. The research question that guided the study is as follows:

Q. How do 1.5 undocumented immigrant college students experience the liminal world they reside in and imagine their futures after university/college life?

Interpretation of the Findings

In the present study, the life course theory by Elder (1998) has been used to explain major life events for 1.5 undocumented young adults, their transition to illegality, and the realization of its consequences on the path to higher education, careers, and romantic social relationships. The fundamental principle of the Life Course Theory is that lives are socially structured on five characteristics that configure the individual's social participation and success, they are (a) time and place; (b) lifespan development; (c) timing; (d) agency; (e) linked lives (f) trajectories, transitions, and turning points (Black et al., 2009). Using the same tenets, as I think about my findings, here is how I see them at play in concomitant with the concept of omnipresent liminality to remind them of their precarious situations.

Time and Place

Elder (1998) explained that the life course of individuals is influenced by factors embedded in time and space. Therefore, the experiences of these undocumented and DACAmented individuals are based on their residency in different states. Scholars have noted that higher education institutions that offer In-state Resident Tuition (ISRT) have seen a significant decline in high school dropouts, whereas states that do not support this policy have

the opposite effect (Potochnick, 2014). In the present study, participants residing in states that supported undocumented students' academic integration into higher education could complete their degrees with state financial help. However, students living in places such as Arizona faced extensive economic issues, especially if they did not have DACA at the time of college admission. Time and place greatly impacted these individuals' pursuit of higher education.

Undocumented students, as shared by all the participants, encounter several barriers to achieving the goal of college education, including prohibitive admission policies in some states like Alabama and North Carolina, higher tuition fees, funding restrictions, and under-prepared or unwillingness to school counselors. Although schools are legally obligated to serve all students regardless of immigration status (Green, 2003), school counselors still do not have sufficient knowledge to help undocumented students uninhibitedly access financial resources and navigate the complex and daunting admission process. Many states like California and Texas help students by giving them the perk to access in-state tuition policy. Several of my participants resided in California and stated that due to California's AB540 law, they could secure college admission and access in-state tuition, although financial obstacles remain the same due to a lack of federal financial aid (Ruge and Iza, 2004). Therefore, those who reside in states like California and Texas are still better off financially than those who live in those states that do not serve this student population.

Participants shared the overall unhelpful attitude and limited knowledge of the school counselor. Sometimes, these students fail to reveal their undocumented status for fear of being deported. Therefore, many of them share their status as a last resort or prefer to remain undetectable and independently navigate the college admission process. These students needed a helping hand to address their specific needs and support services from the school counselors to

foster academic success, which they hardly received. Some shared that their school counselors would have helped them if they had better knowledge and awareness of the available resources for undocumented students in their states. Several participants echoed the role of school counselors as extremely crucial when they needed advocacy and unconditional support in confronting the financial and administrative challenges in access to college admissions. Those who did not get the appropriate support had to rely on outside resources like some non-profit immigration organizations that provide services to support them. Many participants also shared that their civic engagement sprang up from realizing that students like them need extra support from schools and their administrative staff.

The place where these students reside also makes a big difference in their encounters with racist attitudes by their peers and sometimes school staff in the form of bullying or enacting some rules that stall their progress. Participants who resided in conservative white towns or attended their high school in predominantly white schools did not have a good experience, especially in their high school years. One participant shared that home-schooling was the only option left for them to continue their education due to extreme bullying and harassment in their schools. Incidents like these place these undocumented students vulnerable and may discourage them from dropping out or discontinuing their education.

Scholars advocating for access to education for undocumented students have been writing consistently about the financial barriers due to legal restrictions like the inability to access federal financial aid for these students, which serves as the first roadblock for these students to get discouraged from the pursuit of higher education (Perez, 2010). The biggest hurdle these participants shared is the financial restrictions limiting their access to a college education. The Title IV of the Higher Education Act states that students must be American citizens or permanent

residents to receive federal financial aid, such as grants, federal loans, and work-study (Enyioha, 2019). The undocumented or even DACA status does not grant the right to receive federal loans and aid to this student population. Therefore, the much talked about topic throughout the interviews with the participants in the current study was that the inaccessibility to financial assistance had been extremely challenging for them to continue their education. Due to little to no help, many worked long hours and harsh conditions to pay their tuition fees and other living expenses. The continuous long hours resulted in lower academic performance and delays in graduating from their programs, thus making it more difficult to carry on with their dreams of achieving their higher education goals. Therefore, no matter if the states let them access some state financial aid, it still does not cover the full cost of higher education for this financially deprived population aspiring for post-secondary education. Additionally, the varied and ever-changing policies from state to state make the higher education
journey even more discouraging for undocumented students. Despite these challenges, many come out as successful degree holders with stellar grades and high aspirations for their fields of education, such as nurses, doctors, teachers, or engineers. Again, these graduates need career readiness or program information to step up their future goals. Some of the participants in the current study showed their interest in pursuing their graduate degrees to further their education but are apprehensive about approaching that path without any information or support of financial help for them.

Lifespan Development

Participants shared the negative impacts of these ever-changing immigration policies on their mental and emotional well-being. The promises made and broken by the democrats after President Biden not aggressively addressing these issues have made these young adults wary of

politicians. They unanimously and invariably voiced their desperation and disappointment with politicians. They believe that politicians have made immigration a tool to come to power, and when the time comes, these marginalized communities are left high and dry without any positive outcome. In their minor years, migration to the United States has completely integrated them into the host society and culture. Their legal participation in K-12 education has granted them a sense of citizenship and belonging to the U.S., which they thought they possessed. However, the previous government's perpetuation of anti-immigrant sentiment in the media and society has made them aware of their lost sense of belonging to the United States. Their childhood migration had already taken away a sense of affiliation with them their countries of birth. The constant negative experiences promulgated by policymakers have created a space where they feel they belong nowhere. Emerging adulthood at the time of entering college milestones turns out to be a completely different event for them when they realize that they do not hold the same civic rights as their high school American citizen peers. Their previous sense of belonging because of their experiences of being part of the American school system was suddenly removed (Santa-Ramirez, 2022).

The reality of the lost social status that these young adults enjoyed earlier is a completely new experience for many participants. Their existence in welcoming and now unwelcoming lived experiences have paved the way for the creation of new identities that they want to carry with them regardless of their circumstances. They shared their preference to be called illegals rather than dreamers, which creates a division, puts them on the pedestal of good immigrants, and separates them from their other community members who are differently projected by media and politicians. Many migration researchers have conceptualized Dreamer as a legally, socially, and politically constructed identity that maintains the oppressive hierarchal system (Abrego,

2004). In this case, these undocumented young adults fully understand the marginalized liminal grey status that they now hold and do not want to be associated with the identity of Dreamer.

Another life course event that intersected with their lived experiences reproducing their sense of unwantedness in American society came from their racial encounters or ill-equipped high school counselors and student affairs professionals. Many of them concurred how their guidance counselors' inadequate responses and underprepared attitudes left them at a place where they questioned their identities as Americans, which they had initially perceived as part of mainstream school systems. It should be noted here that it is very difficult for these young adults to feel a sense of belonging, as a racialized minoritized person, especially with the intersection of their immigration status in the U.S. In the last two decades, these emerging adults have witnessed racist nativist and exclusionary xenophobic policies. The rhetoric and discourse in the media have added fuel to the fire by calling many members of their undocumented community rapists and criminals. They acknowledge their lived experiences in their life span as more of an outsider as a citizen in the United States. Though some appreciated how the college faculty had provided them with as much support as possible, the overall experiences were of under-staffed or under-resourced colleges, which could not provide them with the unique services these students specifically required. However, with the determination and ample use of their available resources, they found ways to complete their degrees, as most of them in this study have. They kept a brave face in their legal limbo and advocated for their less privileged community members without considering exposing their identities. These experiences have a negative psychological impact on their mental well-being.

Timing

The political climate at the time of the interviews with the participants had become relaxed as President Trump had lost the election and President Biden had come into power. However, the continuous and regressive legal violence in the form of DACA facing legal threats has diminished hope for these undocumented young adults. DACA is in court and faces the danger of being revoked sooner or later. The timings of these legal threats, like a sword hanging over their heads, have exacerbated the taking away of any minimal sense of hope for these individuals. In the current situation when politicians are at a stalemate in terms of passing legislation that could permanently change the status or the quality of their lives, some participants shared their desire to self-deport after acknowledging their lost hope and despair with the systems that governed their lives. We do not know how many fall through the cracks and leave the journeys of higher education in the face of unsupportive policies and regulations. Many are considering leaving the United States due to lost hope for their future in this country where they have spent almost their whole lives as perceived Americans. Many shared that they did not want to be affiliated with American identity due to its racist and colonist ideologies and policies. Though DACA temporarily relieved many undocumented young individuals, its liminality and inability to provide a permanent solution have taken a toll on many undocumented individuals. Those who have completed their education and were paying the fees for DACA renewal every two years see it as a lost cause and feel no longer a desire to continue with the practice.

These young adults hoped that the new democratic government would bring about some positive changes in immigration laws to incorporate them and their family members, which President Obama tried but failed to get passed in the senate. That was when DACA was launched as an executive order providing relief from deportation and detention to young dreamers but

nothing for the older generation of undocumented people. President Biden's victory was fresh hope for the undocumented community. Unfortunately, however, the hope of a permanent solution to their uncertain future is lost after almost three years of no decisive policies to support this community.

These undocumented young adults who are now entering their professional lives and still living in a liminal status, as they continuously renew their DACA status every two years to keep their status legal, are extremely disappointed and see no foreseeable future in the United States.

Agency

Consistent with the literature, the participants in this study showed their empowerment through community activism and advocacy campaign as their tool for democracy. Talking about their agency and civic engagement and publicly exposing themselves became their expression of empowerment (Galindo, 2012). Undocumented students have shown fearlessness through grass roots organizing despite the threat of having their status revealed and a chance to be detained at best and deported at worst (Hinton, 2015). With the current divisive scenario portrayed by media and politicians, each participant in the study moved away from the Dreamer identity to validate their feelings for their entire community. They repeatedly showed their anger and distrust of the policymakers who depart them from their less-privileged community members. Their agency efforts endorse their desire to call for immigration reforms for them and their parents, and other undocumented individuals are seen as lesser by mainstream society.

Nearly all participants shared their experiences of community engagement and reciprocal relationships with their community throughout the interviews. Many of them reiterated that their identities are attached to their communities, as they see themselves recognized and heard when they participate in the rights of everyone. Many termed their agency a rewarding and selfless act

that empowers them and gives them a platform to voice their concerns. Their experiences of different forms of activism shape and construct their sense of identity dear to their hearts, rather than an inflated Dreamer identity that puts them on a different level from their parents.

President Trump's anti-immigrant policies brought many DACAmented young adults on the verge of losing hope for their future when he announced the termination of the DACA program (Andrade, 2021)**.** Many other anti-immigrant policies were announced in September 2017, along with stricter enforcement to deport undocumented individuals. Losing DACA status meant that around 800,000 DACA recipients would lose their work authorization and benefits, such as driver's licenses and the right to state aid for higher education (Hansler, 2017). The era created a sense of anger, desperation, shock, and a new level of liminal fear for these DACA recipients as they understood the precarious nature of their DACA status. This realization also made these young adults see themselves as complicit in implementing policies that benefited some but not all members of their undocumented community. Many participants shared how they critically came to the awakening of their tenuous status and their privileges, which the elderly undocumented community members are deprived of. This conception and harsh anti-immigrant policies made young adults vocal and defied on electronic and social media. They became more resilient, unafraid, and unapologetic in voicing their concerns and using these platforms to discuss their status openly. They used the privilege of being educated and critically aware of their sense of citizenship. They revealed their undocumented status and spoke against hurting policies on behalf of their whole community.

College campuses also became safe places for student activism and participation in civic engagement. Many of them used their multicultural college organizations and multicultural centers as a safe space for those undocumented peers afraid to reveal their status and ask for help

from institutional agents. These safe spaces, organized by unafraid DACA members, provided support services to those who were shy about revealing their status to officials. In addition, many undocumented young adults also participated in protests, volunteered, and did community service to empower their causes. Although the experiences of these young adults on campus activism are multi-faceted, it did reinvigorate the drive for the rights of their undocumented community. Resultantly, the Biden campaign ran on supporting undocumented immigrants, as many participants shared during the interviews. When President Biden came to power, many of these undocumented and DACAmented emerging adults hoped that now comprehensive immigration reforms would take place as promised by the democrats.

Their openness about their activism and use of their agency tied to their education stems from their awareness and acknowledgment of the significance of their undocumented community in their lives. Their parents brought them to the United States for better economic lives. They hoped to provide them with education using the agency they had at that point by migrating to the U.S. Now, they feel that the time has come to reciprocate the same as their efforts to work for the entire community. Several were part of protests and organized community efforts when they became highly visible in national and state media, resulting in President Obama's executive order of DACA (Vargas, 2012). They have demonstrated their professional skills in organizing and defending the rights of their communities with their non-citizen status.

In online activism, participants demonstrate an interesting form of agency. Many used their Twitter accounts and profiles to announce their immigration status openly. These accounts promote and raise funds for the needy and raise awareness for anti-immigrant policies through podcasts and Twitter spaces. They also discuss anti-immigrant incidents and legal cases in the social media courts to garner support for their community. They created an online forum through

which they regularly communicate with each other to announce important events that could affect their community. This new form of online activism has helped them become community leaders in initiating social movements by using their leadership skills and education.

Linked Lives

The different legal statuses in mixed-status families in the present study are consistent with the literature showing that different immigration statuses can be a protective factor or a point of conflict for the members of the family, creating additional challenges living in these households (Romero Morales & Consoli, 2020). The participants shared very different lived experiences in relationships from the perspective of an undocumented or DACAmented family member. The undocumented or DACAmented status intersects with jealousy, frustration, anxiety, and sometimes hate or toxicity due to people using their citizenship status to ruin their relationships. Living with liminal immigration status can drive citizen siblings to move away from their undocumented siblings. But, at times, it also brings more care and attention from the citizen siblings for their undocumented family members. Participants shared the dynamics and relationship trajectory of experiences laden with intense feelings of bonding and conflict. The findings of the present study underscore that immigration status has the potential to shape family relationships in both positive and negative directions.

The life course principle of linked lives also considers informal connections such as social networks and intimate partnerships. Mobility and navigation in social spaces were also influenced by immigration status, as suggested by the data. Many participants shared how they moved around socially while gauging and reading the room to ensure that they were not connected to someone who could be threatening to them or their families. Therefore, the

underpinnings of their decisions, even those of making social friends, are seen from the lens of extreme caution to keep their families safe.

Many participants shared their apprehension about making social connections with citizen friends as it is too demanding, such as making travel plans or indulging in risky behaviors, such as getting drunk. Such behaviors can put these undocumented or DACAmented individuals' lives at risk or open up a window of deportation for their family members. That is why several of them find comfort and relief in the company of their undocumented friends who share the same experiences and understand the risks of undertaking any steps that could harm their futures or put their undocumented family members in danger.

Several participants compared the privileges of citizen siblings who could travel to their parents' home countries and meet grandparents or extended families. Unfortunately, this access to freely traveling with no fear of being unable to return to the U.S. was not available to the participants in this study. The citizen siblings traveling back to their country of origin evoked a sense of jealousy for these undocumented individuals as they do not possess this privilege, and they felt that they were more connected to their childhood homes than their citizen siblings. They believe that traveling back to their countries of origin and exploring their indigenous culture could give them a sense of identity rooted in their past or childhood. However, since most of them did not get to travel and see their grandparents' homes, they felt that the disconnect had given them a feeling of not belonging anywhere. The missing channel to their roots due to immigration status and policies also removes the family connection from them. Therefore, in this light, many focus on their immediate families and communities in the U.S. instead of hoping to keep in touch with their extended families living back home. However, they can obtain special benefits to travel out of the U.S. if they have advanced parole benefits with their DACA status,

which has higher fees for availing of this special benefit. Only one participant in this study had that benefit, and he traveled to Mexico immediately after receiving the advance parole. Many of them shared how they were saddened by the fact that their parents could not see their dying parents in their home countries, as they had no status to travel back and forth. Consequently, they do not want to let their parents go, as that would mean seeing them for the last time in the U.S.

Trajectories, Transitions, and Turning Points

I have used the theoretical concept of emerging adulthood to explain how the participants in my study see themselves when they meet the same milestones that American society has created for young adults reaching their mid-20s. I aim to contextualize and draw attention to the period of undocumented young adults called emerging adults, as Arnett (2000) referred to as a new period of the life course in industrialized societies. However, by examining the data, the participants concurred that their cultural norms were pivotal in making many life decisions as undocumented young adults. For example, in their culture, as some of the female participants shared, it is culturally accepted to ask permission from their parents for late-night meetings, even after the age of 21 years, which is not a norm for emerging adults in the U.S. In this study, many participants also shared that they are still living with their parents or selecting schools that are geographically as close to them as possible to their families. Therefore, this paradigm is no longer practical as the normative pattern for young adults who are DACAmented because their families are dependent on them as they have drivers' licenses and better incomes. Many of them are language brokers, caregivers, drivers, and sometimes the sole providers of their aging parents. Therefore, following a normative American culture of moving out or to another state for education or employment is not feasible for this population, as their younger siblings or aging parents depend on their physical presence in their households.

The academic trajectory of adolescents who graduate from high school and transition to college is an important component of set pathways in the life course of the American system. However, the realization of undocumented status and the limitations entailed was a turning point for many of the participants when they came to know that the normative set patterns of applying for federal financial aid or getting state aid, or being able to get admission in their preferred school are not an available set of opportunities for them. This turning point not only came as a shock to many, but it also turned out to be an eye-openeing event in their life course to comprehend that their only tool was to raise their voice for themselves and many like them. Many participated in protests and asked for financial aid and access to state schools. In addition, many of them in this study shared critical awareness of their precarious status when they realized how privileged they were compared to many in their community or were even more susceptible than they were. Many undocumented and DACAmented individuals became aware of the importance of their voices on different platforms to discuss their communities unapologetically. These life course events turned out to be a turning point in their life trajectory.

Entering colleges and later graduating with their degrees are also embedded in the fears of their precarious immigration status. They realized that the job market is not as open as their American counterparts, as employers are hesitant to hire them due to their DACA status, which needs to be renewed every two years. Many of them shared that it was extremely difficult to find employers ready to sponsor them to change their DACA status to a permanent visa category that could put them on a path to permanent residency. In addition, the academic milestone, which brings much joy for anyone graduating, differs for undocumented or DACAmented emerging adults. The same norms of finding a job, matching their education, or moving to a new state to settle for something better for their future are not on the plate for them. That is why two

participants in the study have already established a small business, and some are planning to have their start-ups shortly, as they see a little prospect in the job market for them. Those who do not have DACA status are even clearer about not following the typical trajectory of looking for an employment opportunity or career pathways after graduation due to a lack of work authorization.

The sequence of career trajectories is followed by intimate and romantic relationships and planning for parenthood for emerging adults in the U.S. It is also considered a global phenomenon in this age group. However, the existing literature has not adequately explored the impact of undocumented status on the romantic relationships of these individuals, pointing to a gap in the literature. This study examined how the life trajectory of these emerging adults influenced dating decisions, specifically with American citizens, to understand the dynamics of their relationships. This opened up many emotional outbursts and incidents the participants revealed, both positive and negative, about their past and present dating experiences. The findings suggest that, in most cases, the experiences of liminality dictate the decision to date and enter romantic relationships for these individuals, especially with citizen partners when there is power balance in the relationship due to citizenship status.

The emerging adults in the present study always agreed to maintain their romantic relationships based on loyalty, truthfulness, and the selflessness of love not on the basis of getting a permanent status by marriage. Stephanou (2012) explained that perceived displays of love, acceptance, and honesty are important features of a good relationship. However, the participants in this study maintained that openness in revealing their undocumented status led to power dynamics and exploitations by their previous partners. The fear of deportation and the risk of getting exposed came from having romantic relationships with their citizen partners. Laura E.

Enriquez (2017) found similar results in her study that undocumented young adults fear deportation or losing their jobs in romantic relationships with citizens if the relationship does not work out. As shared by several female participants in this study, undocumented status can be a significant conflicting element in their romantic relationship, leaving them with negative experiences and inhibition to move forward in the future with citizen partners.

The participants reiterated that marrying to obtain legal documents for citizenship was unacceptable to them, as it manifested selfishness in the relationship. They shared that they do not favor transactional marriages in which they are offered citizenship and must comply with the demands of their future spouses. Some shared that citizen partners used their citizenship to provide them with the savior role of saving them from illegality. If they do not agree with their set demands, they would have to face dangerous consequences, such as threats of detainment or even deportation of their family members. This turning point in their life trajectory for my female participants transitioned into a situation where they only saw themselves comfortable with their undocumented partners. Nevertheless, some enjoy healthy relationships with their citizen partners.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I examined the impact of liminality on the lives of undocumented and DACAmented emerging adults. The purpose was to explore how this population sees themselves in their precarious and tenuous status, which depends on the current administration's legal and court decisions dictated by political leanings. These undocumented and DACAmented students shared their whole life trajectories, from challenging or not-so-challenging migration journeys, facing difficult barriers to education with no federal financial aid, choosing their romantic partners, and getting employment after completing their undergraduate or graduate degrees. The success of

their life trajectories is directly relevant to navigating challenging situations when making crucial life decisions. They acknowledged that although they were raised as Americans due to their legal integration in K-12 education but later, due to unwelcome policies in higher education, they do not see themselves as welcomed by the United States. The anti-immigrant sentiment, unfriendly rhetoric, and many xenophobic policies have also not helped them to feel welcome, especially during the previous government. In the last two decades, the lost promises by governments and liminal programs such as DACA have pushed them to the brink of hopelessness and frustration. Consequently, many fear returning to their countries of origin, as they see no permanent future for themselves and their families in the United States.

Significance of the Study

The existing research on education and career opportunities of DACAmented immigrant students is inconclusive so far (Hamilton et al., 2020). Research studies have shown that undocumented students encounter blocked pathways to employability after graduation due to a lack of permanent legal status (Lara & Nava, 2018). After completing their degree, most students continue to work in the same service sector jobs they previously had, which do not need a graduate or undergraduate degree (Lara & Nava, 2018). This further complicates their relationships and other life goals, goals to which their legal counterparts (graduates who are US citizens or permanent US residents) have the privilege to have access. Additionally, the research on undocumented immigrant students' social and familial relationships is almost nonexistent, underscoring this current study's importance. I have examined this study to understand how these undocumented immigrant students' liminal legal status affects their perception of their future in the US after they complete their studies.

Although individual U.S. Presidents may sign some executive orders to provide relief to this population, the uncertainties surrounding the complex nature of immigration laws and the role of Congress do not help in having permanent solutions to this issue. Moreover, given the current media coverage of the immigration problems, especially after the Biden administration, it becomes even more compelling to talk about issues relating to this population's education, employment, and social integration. Therefore, it is imperative to study how the legal status of undocumented young adults determines many aspects of their life goals, trajectories, romantic relationships, and day-to-day life (Pila, 2016).

Limitations of this study

The study can have several limitations. Due to the sample's sensitive nature and self-imposed anonymity, I must use purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques that might limit the study's generalizability to a particular ethnic group or to the participants who were willing to self-identify and disclose their legal status. This self-disclosure might also skew the findings to certain undocumented immigrants who desire to share their experience and thus might be more civically engaged and willing to enact change in immigration policy. Moreover, as I have chosen to focus solely on undocumented students who are either enrolled or pursuing their undergraduate or, in some cases, graduate degrees, the group reflects those who are highly motivated. Thus, the findings may not apply to undocumented students who drop out of higher education or solely finish high school.

Additionally, with the varying degree in the immigration policies of states and the diverse experience of the participants due to their DACA or non-DACA status, the study does not reflect the experiences of undocumented students in other parts or regions of the U.S. Although one participant belongs to a state that is not un docu-friendly, it still gives me a narrow perspective of

a single interviewee. Finally, this is a qualitative study of a specific participant group over a relatively short period, so the findings are highly contextual.

Future Recommendations and Policy implementation

The research findings and implications of the study inform recommendations for higher education institutions to have a welcoming campus and student affairs staff to support and meet the unique needs of the undocumented student population. The plan should include training institutional agents and other administrative staff to be prepared and equipped with the resources available for this student body. It is also extremely important for high school administrations and teachers to be educated and informed about the state rules and policies about undocumented and DACAmented students seeking college admissions to support them. Guidance counselors, in particular, should be well informed, especially regarding state policies in their specific states.

Finally, future directions should include a long-term examination of the impact of undocumented liminality on the academic trajectory, college readiness, career pathway, and graduation rates. Finally, it is imperative to provide professional development and training services to the faculty, student affairs professionals, and other administrative staff, which is also culturally competent to support this marginalized group of students in every way possible to cultivate an environment of social justice at higher education institutions, The findings in this study also demonstrate the significance of guidance counselors, academic faculty, and institutional agents making the most interaction with undocumented students. Targeting professional development for all these officials will be a turning point in this population's academic and career trajectories. Weaving social justice into the campus environment will go a long way to support all marginalized groups of students, including undocumented students.

The liminality of the immigration status and sense of confused belonging of the undocumented and DACAmented young adults is forever attached to them if politicians do not understand the significance of working together on a bi-partisan base to support this population. Politicians and policymakers must find permanent solutions to give them a path to permanent residency in the U.S. Politicians should be aware of the demographics of this population and the fact that programs like DACA are not permanent; they perpetuate only the liminality of undocumented young adults, making it immensely challenging for them to make important life decisions. Since this formally educated population has been living in the U.S. for the last two decades and is completely integrated and assimilated into American society, it should become the most important agenda for politicians to work on drawing a roadmap for these emerging adults. These emerging adult populations see the U.S. as their home and are interested in getting a permanent residency to serve this country, their only home since their arrival in the United States. In addition, if the United States believes in family unification and support, then the undocumented elderly family members of this population should also be part of immigration reforms. If the on-going stalemate at the federal government level continues, it does not bode well for young adults in this study and other individuals like them. They are observing and reading the landscape and the overall signals of hopelessness embedded in the lack of action.

Implications for Family Science and Human Development

Research on undocumented emerging young adults in Family Science and Human development can contribute to a holistic understanding of human development using life course theory for this vulnerable population. Scholars can shed light on how the past two decades of political and immigration impasse for a permanent solution to their status in the foreseeable future would shape the decisions of these undocumented young adults who are thinking about self-deportation,

whether they are DACAmented or undocumented. Future research can focus on systems and policies to support social-emotional development and the impacts of mental trauma these young adults endure due to policies, laws, and events that have a bearing on this population's life trajectory and development. Future research can also inform interventions needed to promote the well-being and development of all marginalized youth, regardless of immigration status.

Another potential future implication of this study in the family science field is that it can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of undocumented young adults living in mixed-status families. For example, future research should focus on understanding the relationship between financially independent DACAmented children and aging parents. Scholars can examine how their relationships with aging parents impact young adults' decisions about the family formation or romantic relationships. Additionally, some study participants mentioned how DACAmented youth take up the role of caregivers. Future research can examine how the role of caregivers influences other life decisions related to pursuing education and career options, such as moving to another state for education or work and leaving their parents behind. Further, the future implications of this research are that it can better inform family policies and interventions to support citizen members of mixed-status families. Finally, I am hopeful that the rhetoric behind immigration would move from legal to socio-emotional development so that comprehensive immigration reforms would be able to address the mental and psychological impact of the liminal status, specifically on deportable cases on communities and families.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant #_____ Date_____ Time_____

Location of Interview/Zoom_____

Introduction

Hi! My name is Ismat Abbas. Welcome to the interview. I highly appreciate your voluntary participation in this study, in which I will learn about your experiences as an undocumented emerging adult studying in your college.

Before I start asking questions, I will read the informed consent to you, and I will require your verbal consent to participate in the study and your consent to record the interview session. You will also be able to pick a pseudonym for the study. The purpose of choosing a pseudonym for the study is to protect your identity so your name will never be identified. Before we start with the interview, let me inform you that if you want to skip any question you are uncomfortable answering, do so. Would you please keep in mind that you do not need to disclose anything you are uncomfortable sharing?

I look forward to hearing about your experiences, and if you have any questions during the interview, you are welcome to ask as we move forward. As we agreed, I will share my interpretations of the interview with you later to clarify anything I might be confused about. We will discuss many things about your experiences, and I hope you feel it was worth the experience. This interview will last 60-90 minutes. Before we start, I want to know if you have any questions about me or this study.

Do you have any questions for me about this study?

If Yes: Answer the question & record below.

If No: "Great, Thank you."

Today I will ask you questions based on your experiences migrating and growing up in the U.S, your journey to higher education, your fears for your family, how your immigration status plays out in your social and romantic relationships if any, and lastly, how you envision your future in the current uncertain situation.

- What pseudonym would you like to choose for the study?
- Where were you born?
- At what age did you migrate to the U.S.?

MIGRATION TO THE U.S.

The first set of questions will focus on your migration experience to the U.S.

- First, I would like to know about your childhood memories or what your parents told you about coming here to the U.S. Describe what you remember.
- What else do you remember about your feelings when you came here?

- Do you have any recollection of your country of birth? If yes, can you share what you remember?
- Describe your feelings about your country of birth.
- When did you come to know about immigration status? Would you please share your feelings about it?

SENSE OF BELONGING

The next set of questions are going to focus on your sense of belonging.

- So, after being here for that much time, I was wondering that by now do you feel American?
- I was hoping you could help me understand why you feel that way.
- What is your sense of identity about both the country of your birth and America?
- How much do you think the American school system has played a role in giving you a sense of belonging?
- Tell me, how do you describe yourself, American or both? Can you explain that to me?

STRUGGLES TO ENROLMENT IN COLLEGE

The next set of questions will focus on your journey to your college.

- So now, you are a high school graduate and in college now; describe your feelings to me about having come this far.
- Do you think it was challenging for you to come this far because of your immigration status? Explain that to me.
- What kind of support did your high school provide you on how undocumented students pursue higher education?
- What kind of obstacles did you cross when achieving this milestone of becoming a college student? Can you give me an example?

COLLEGE EXPERIENCES

The next set of questions is going to be about your college experience.

- Let us talk about general obstacles in pursuing your college degree and prospects after graduation. Then, please tell me why you selected a particular institution.
- Did your college assist you with the overall enrollment process? Can you give me an example of how they helped you if they did?
- Do you think your path to higher education regarding finances and support from your institution is different from your American peers? Why do you say that?
- Do you think your higher education degree will bring you greater prospects of belonging to American society legally and socially? Could you help me understand your answer?

The following set of questions will be omitted if the participant does not have DACA status.

DACA AND ITS IMPACT

The questions that are coming now are going to focus on DACA status and its effect on your life.

- Tell me, in what ways has DACA status affected your everyday life?
- How different do you feel after getting DACA as compared to before DACA?
- What do you think about living in the uncertain protection provided by DACA?
- In what ways does the DACA uncertainty affect your emotional health?

FEARS FOR THE FAMILY

Now let us talk about your family.

- When you think about your family's future here in the U.S., what kinds of things do you find yourself thinking about?
- Are there things you worry about in terms of your family? Describe those for me.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Now let us talk about your relationships with your friends.

- Now I would like to know how your immigration status plays out when you socialize with your friends.
- Have you ever felt that your immigration status is a problem in associating with your peers? Can you give me an example of how?
- What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you go out with your friends?
- How comfortable are you sharing your immigration status with your friends?

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Now I will ask questions about your romantic relationships.

- Now let us talk about your romantic relationships and your liminal immigration status role in this regard.
- What role does your immigration status play when you are in a romantic relationship if you are in a romantic relationship?
- What are your thoughts about your immigration status when you move ahead with your romantic relationships?
- Do you think your immigration status has any impact on your future relationships? Describe that to me.

ENVISIONING YOUR FUTURE

Last but not least, let us talk about how you see yourself in the future.

- Moving forward, where do you see yourself in terms of career after completion of your degree in these uncertain times?
- What are your critical thoughts about living in this uncertain situation?
- Do you think you have a better future under a friendlier administration for yourself and your family in the U.S.?
- What are your hopes for your future in this country, regardless of who is in the office?
- Where do you see yourself in the next five years in the current immigration situation?
- What else would you like to share about the current situation?

Thank you so much for your time!

Appendix B

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY FOR A RESEARCH ON UNDOCUMENTED COLLEGE STUDENTS

You are requested to answer the questions you feel comfortable answering, and if you do not want to answer, you can skip any question you do not feel comfortable sharing.
You can reach out if you have any questions or concerns at the following email:
abbasi2@montclair.edu
Your participation is greatly appreciated.
Ismat Abbas

Q.1. Kindly state what age did you come to the U.S.?

……

Q.2. What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Q.3. How do you identify your sexual orientation?

- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Transgender
- Queer
- Non-binary
- Others
- Prefer not to say

Q.4. Which ethnicity do you identify with?

- White
- Asian
- African
- Pacific islander
- Middle eastern or North African
- Hispanic Latino or Spanish origin
- If others, specify----------
- Prefer not to say

Q.5. Which current state do you reside in?

- New Jersey
- New York
- Delaware
- Pennsylvania
- Connecticut

Q.6. Which year are you in your undergrad or your associate program?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Transfer student
- If others, specify----------

Q.7. What is the type of your employment?

- Student
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Part-time employment (20 hours or less a week)
- Full-time employment (21 hours or more a week)
- Internship
- Coop
- Check all that apply
- If others, specify----------

Q.8. Kindly name your country of origin.

Q.9. What is your marital and relationship status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Dating
- Cohabiting
- Others
- Prefer not to say

Q.10. What is your immigration status?

- No documentation
- DACA
- Papers submitted for DACA
- Papers submitted for Green Card
- Green card holder
- Prefer not to say

Q.11. Do you have a driver's license?

- Yes
- No
- Permit received
- Provisional license

Q.12. What is the immigration status of your family?

- All family members are undocumented
- One or more parents are undocumented, but siblings are citizens
- Parents and self are undocumented, but siblings are citizens
- If others, specify----------
- Prefer not to say

Second Interview Guide for the second round of interviews

Q. How do the experiences of welcoming and unwelcoming spaces inform your sense of identity?

Q. How much do you carry forward your good experiences in your college to the outside world? Will that be enough for you to cope with the challenges of your practical life?

Q. Since you have coped pretty well due to your interaction with your community, what do you think will sustain you other than your community? -You might outgrow your community.

Q. You have created a different future in your liminal space; how do you see yourself managing in the next five years?

Q. What do you imagine creating yourself in your future?

Q. Is it correct to believe that you are hesitant about romantic relationships with American citizens due to the fear of being judged by them or their families?

Q. Do you imagine your future partner from the same undocumented community or a citizen?

Appendix C

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Title: Undocumented college students and their liminal world

Study Number: IRB-FY21-22-2298

Why is this study being done? This study is conducted as I am interested in exploring the impact of undocumented status and liminal experiences of belonging and exclusion among college students and how this precarious situation influences their various experiences and intersects with their future plans in regard to their educational trajectory, careers, and the formation of social and intimate relationships.

What will happen while you are in the study?

The participants will be asked to fill in a demographic sheet via google forms which will take 5-10 minutes. Later they will be interviewed for 60-90 minutes via Zoom or skype and another round of interviews will be conducted for 60-90 minutes within a period of 4-6 months. The interview questions are based on their lived experiences as undocumented college student and their future plans in regard to their status.

Time: Your participation will comprise of two 60-90 minutes interviews over a period of 4-6 months. The time you are asked to commit to the study will be approximately two hours for two interviews.

Risks: During the study, you might get emotional or mental stress as some of the questions pertain to your immigration status and your tough experiences with organizations and people. A

list of organizations that provide emotional support to you is provided in the email in case you feel any emotional stress due to participation in this study. You can leave the study if you feel uncomfortable.

Data will be collected using the Internet; we anticipate that your participation in this presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet. Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though we are taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through email or the internet could be read by a third party.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits involved for the participants.

This study will be an addition to the field of immigrant studies for college students who are undocumented but their views about their future plans are not accounted as yet in any known studies specifically.

Compensation There is no monetary compensation in this study.

Who will know that you are in this study? You will not be linked to any presentations. We will keep who you are confidential by assigning you a pseudonym of your choice.

Do you have to be in the study?

You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer! It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be included in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You can leave the study at any time you want to.

Do you have any questions about this study? Phone or email the PI: Dr. Kathryn Herr, email: herrk@mail.montclair.edu. OR you can email the main researcher at: abbasi2@montclair.edu

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant? Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Dana Levitt, at 973-655-2097 or reviewboard@montclair.edu.

Future Studies It is okay to use my data in other studies:

_____ Yes _____ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape me:

_____ Yes _____ No

You can keep this consent form and you are not required to send it back to the researcher.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

_____

Name of Principal Investigator Signature Date

Email Recruitment

Dear Mr/Ms. ABC

I want to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about undocumented college students and their struggles in their current and future lives. This study requires you to participate in two 60-90 minute' interviews which will be audio-recorded and taken on Skype or Zoom as per your preference. You are also requested to fill a short demographic sheet before the online interview. The study will ask questions related to your experiences as an undocumented college student in a college setting and how your immigration status impacts your relationships with your peers, intimate partners, or your plans for your future.

This study is conducted for my dissertation topic, and your participation is highly appreciated. You are also requested to give another round of interviews after the first one, which will also be audio recorded and will take 60 minutes of your time.

If you are undocumented or DACAmented, a college student, and live in a tri-state area, including Delaware, you may participate.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with **Ismat Abbas** at **abbasi2@montclair.edu.**

Thank you for considering participation in this study. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, Study no. IRB-FY21-22-2298.

Sincerely,

Ismat Abbas, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Family Science and Human Development
Montclair State University
1 Normal Ave, Montclair, NJ 07043
IRB-FY21-22-2298

Recruitment Material for Social Media

Dear ABC Organization

I am writing to inform you that I am researching undocumented college students and their lived experiences in the current situation as my dissertation research topic. I need 12 participants from your organization who are undocumented or DACAmented and studying in colleges at the moment. This study requires the participants to participate in two 60-90 minute' interviews that will be audio-recorded and taken on Skype or Zoom as per your preference. The participants are also requested to fill out a short demographic sheet before the online interview. The study will ask questions about their experiences as undocumented college students in a college setting and

how their immigration status impacts their relationships with peers, intimate partners, or plans for the future. I would highly appreciate it if you could connect with the persons mentioned above for my study.

Let me know if you are aware of any such students who can be my potential participants.

Ismat Abbas, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Family Science and Human Development
Montclair State University
1 Normal Ave, Montclair, NJ 07043
IRB-FY21-22-2298