

Latinx Women's Leadership: Disrupting Intersections of Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” in Contexts of Institutionalized Racism and Heteropatriarchy

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**Boston College
Lynch School of Education**

Department of Teacher Education, Special Education, and Curriculum and Instruction

***LATINX WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP: DISRUPTING INTERSECTIONS OF GENDERED
AND RACIALIZED “ILLEGALITY” IN CONTEXTS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM
AND HETEROPATRIARCHY***

Dissertation

By

Rocío Sánchez Ares

**Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

May 2018

Abstract

Latinx Women's Leadership: Disrupting Intersections of Gendered and Racialized "Illegality" in Contexts of Institutionalized Racism and Heteropatriarchy

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Despite the 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* court decision, which upheld the constitutionality of undocumented youth having access to public K-12 education in the United States, Latina students who are undocumented continue to face unique educational and societal barriers. Latina students continue to lag behind their Latino and white peers as a result of historically built gendered and raced school structures of dispossession (Cammarota, 2004; Fine & Ruglis, 2009). Interlocking material and psychological conditions of "illegality" permeate these young women's social worlds (Muñoz, 2015). This institutional ethnography used the lens of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) to examine how ten Latinx young women navigated "illegality" in three institutional contexts, schools, a state house, and a youth-led organization.

Intersectional analyses of the Latina youth's multiple experiences within and across institutional structures shed light on the specific ways that "illegality" and heteropatriarchy manifested, changed or remained stagnant, interconnected with race and class, and how these cultural junctures were negotiated in undocumented spaces of resistance. Based on intersectional analyses of policies, interview, and observation data, it became apparent how nationalistic discourses of citizenship were embedded in structures of white racist heteropatriarchy. The Latinas of color predominantly endured raced gender violences, including sexual abuse, which became a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color seldom confronted.

This institutional ethnography undermines nativist conceptions of citizenship, advocates for legal pathways for undocumented communities, and proposes action-oriented policies, theories, and pedagogies rooted in intersectional frames to eradicate the institutionalization of heteropatriarchal whiteness (Collins, 1998), and more in accordance with the fluid, complex realities of interlocked global economies, local cultures, and transnational citizenry. These women's multiple voices and agencies hold critical power to alter the dominant narrative.

Acknowledgements

Words cannot convey the deep gratitude that I hold for the many people in my life who supported me throughout the process of completing this dissertation. To all those voices who haunt these pages, I offer my most sincere gratitude for your mentorship, courage, insights, love, and companionship during the five years that took me to finalize this research. While it would be unwieldy to detail the contribution of each individual who impacted this work, I would like to underline the significance of central people who made it possible in extensive ways.

My deepest gratitude is owed to the ten Latina organizers who participated in the study. Thank you for sharing your stories, knowledge, and expertise, and for teaching me the lessons of your multiple struggles and strengths. This research honors your immigration narratives and community engagements for justice. This work is dedicated to you and other *nepantleras* who live their lives on the border, and for whom the border lives inside. We listen as la maestra Anzaldúa whispers: *aquí estamos y no nos vamos*.

Many thanks to all of the immigrant young leaders in the organization to which the Latina participants belonged. Thank you for welcoming me in your organizing world, and teaching me about your histories, challenges, and complexities of the DREAM Act movement. This dissertation could not have been completed without your support and tireless work to advance the rights of immigrants. A special acknowledgement goes to DREAMers across the nation, and their supporters in the state house, schools, the media, and other institutions. To the thousands of anonymous youth and adults who endure the burden of “illegality,” including my students, mentors, friends, and colleagues, thank you for your encouragement and collaborations.

I am profoundly indebted to the four professors in my dissertation committee. Their passion and commitment to the rights of immigrant women invigorated my research in various ways. To my mentor, dissertation chair, and academic advisor, Dr. Leigh Patel, thank you for making me believe that work like this could be possible, for inspiring me, for challenging me, and for guiding me through dark corners in my doctoral career. To my mentor, Dr. María Brisk, thank you for your constant warmth and wisdom since the early stages of my doctoral journey. To my mentor, Dr. M. Brinton Lykes, I am profoundly inspired by your transnational activism and scholarship, and appreciative of the opportunities you have given me across borders. To Dr. Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales, thank you for your willingness to join my dissertation committee all the way from the West Coast. Your critical insights, scholarship, and activism collaborating with undocumented youth and organizers influenced this research in exceptional ways.

My deepest recognition goes to Jesús Ares Rial, my grandfather, my father. Although your recent death has left us heartbroken, your immense goodness, your relentless support in my life and education, and your fierce determination to always stand up for what is right is why I am who I am today. My deepest appreciation also goes to my mother, María Teresa Ares Míguez. You nourished me when I was empty, you motivated me when I was overwhelmed, and you gave me strength and love every step of this path. This dissertation is dedicated to you and *abuelito* for everything you are and have done. Without you nothing would have been possible.

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CHAPTER ONE: Latinx Women in U.S. Society, Schools, and Organizations

This initial chapter introduces the research questions and theoretical frameworks shaping the institutional ethnographic study. This chapter contextualizes the ten Latinx¹ women's overlapping, and at times conflicting experiences having to navigate three major institutional spaces: different schools, a local state house, and an immigrant youth-led organization. The legal development of citizenship in the United States, and its establishment through gendered and raced² practices are briefly discussed in this chapter as well.

Undocumented immigrants within the Latinx diaspora represent an ethnically diverse group. Currently undocumented Latinxs are mostly from places in Mexico and Central America, with increasing numbers of Latina youth and adults moving into the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (Passel, 2011; Pierce, 2015). Latinx women's reasons to leave their countries and migrate to the United States are complexly situated, and often connected to interlocking forms of structural, interpersonal, and state violence, or what some scholars describe as feminicide (Merry, 2009; Parra, 2015). Many Latinx women remain separated from their families and networks by borders, despite transnational economic relationships between the United States and Latin America (Cacho, 2012). Lacking authorized legal status, these women are unable to physically reunite with their families in their home countries; as a result, these women and girls are placed in vulnerable locations across borders (Sánchez Ares & Lykes, 2016). In fact, for most of these women returning to their countries is not an option, considering combined menaces to their safety (Ahmed, 2004; Pierce, 2015). The performativity of gender violence and lack of legal

¹ Some of the participants in the study self-identified as "Latina" and others as "Latinx." Their ethnic self-identification prompted the use of both terms interchangeably throughout this research. The term "Latina," alluding to the female sex, was used to underline the linkages between socially constructed ethnic and female locations. This study deployed the gender-neutral term "Latinx" when underlining the social construction of gender. The phrase "Latinx women" was used to note the complexities of women's issues and prioritize critical discourses in Latinx studies.

² This study used the terms "raced" and "racialized" interchangeably following critical race theoretical discourses. Looking at race as a social construct reflects the racialization processes deployed to imbue a person of color with negative stereotypes.

protections in the borderlands mirror immigrant women's vulnerability to undergo similar gendered and raced forms of violence in the United States. For instance, Latinxs who experience sexual abuse in their home countries, and before migrating to the United States, cannot qualify for a refuge visa under current immigration law. Their likelihood of re-victimization becomes enhanced as a result of their unauthorized status and dominant cultures.

To counter nativist constructions of gendered and raced citizenship, this institutional ethnographic study examined interlocking socio-legal and cultural structures shaping ten Latina youth's experiences as undocumented across institutional contexts. This three-year institutional ethnography was developed in the context of a highly contentious political climate, during the transition from Obama's administration into Trump's, which influenced shifting immigration policies and fueled xenophobic and sexist discourses in immigration debates.

Research Questions

Main Research Question: The main research question of the study was the following:
What are the experiences of Latina youth navigating gendered and racialized constructions of "illegality" in schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization?

Research Sub-Questions: To unpack the leading research question, five sub-questions were formulated:

- *How do Latinx women make sense of their experiences as undocumented? In schools? The state house? The organization?*
- *What are some differences and similarities in how the Latinx women experience "illegality" across institutional contexts?*

- *What are some challenges to Latina leadership in schools and immigrant youth-led social movements?*
- *How do Latinx women resist gendered and racialized “illegality” across institutional contexts?*
- *How do Latinx women’s counternarratives and experiences challenge gendered nativist constructions of citizenship?*

Research Purposes

This study investigated how gendered and raced configurations of “illegality” were experienced by the participating Latinas across institutions. This research sought to challenge gender-evasive theorizing in policy by unpacking the fluid systemic negotiations of gender, labor, education, and *forced migration*. Using the lens of intersectionality theory, this study attempted to answer questions regarding the ways that gender and heteropatriarchy manifest in U.S. society, change or remain stagnant, intersect with race and class, and how these intersections are negotiated in undocumented spaces of resistance.

The Development of Citizenship Rights in the United States

An Overview of Immigration and Education Policies

To better understand Latinx women’s experiences as undocumented, it is important to reflect on the development of citizenship rights in the United States. This section summarizes major immigration and education policies relevant to the ten Latinas’ socio-political experiences. Within the estimated four and a half million undocumented women living in the United States,³

³ Statistics from a report by the *Southern Law Poverty Center* (2012), which can be accessed online at: <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/publications/injustice-on-our-plates>.

most of them work in low-paying jobs; endure interlocking forms of discrimination; and lack access to public services, such as quality education and health care (Eckenwiler, 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007). Historically, systemic oppressions against Mexican and other Latinx populations have been woven into United States immigration and educational systems with the purpose of preventing othered individuals from accessing the same citizenship rights and pathways, which have been granted to white Europeans (Chomsky, 2014; Gallo, 2014). In the imperialistic construction of physical, legal, and mental borders, white supremacy was equated with “an Anglo-Saxon American identity that served as bulwark against a multi-ethnic working class” (Akers Chacón & Davis, 2006, p. 188).

Under the *Naturalization Act* of 1790, there were no legal restrictions on immigration. At the time, the newly created United States settler state’s primary goal entailed appropriating Indigenous lands while eradicating Native peoples’ heritage and property rights (Anzaldúa, 2012; Glenn, 2015). As advocated by decolonizing education scholars, a white settler state has been configured as a nation established by white Europeans among Indigenous populations, with the intent of seizing their land, eradicating their Indigeneity, and exploiting chattel slaves (Tuck & Yang, 2012). To assert and protect white supremacist interests, the 19th century solidified a model of the national identity that was socially homogeneous, spatially continuous, and well defined in its outer boundaries (Cacho, 2012). The ideology of *the melting pot* made assimilation a coercive national project in which, by the end of the 19th century, every citizen had to learn English only, and fully assimilate to the mainstream white monolingual norms in order to succeed (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Pallares & Flores-González, 2010; Patel, 2013a). In the early 20th century, and before the *Great Depression*, the *Immigration Act* of 1924 became a cultural and political platform to largely exclude immigrants from citizenship rights, and hence justify

their societal exclusion and subjugation to the white status quo (Akers Chacón & Davis, 2006; Ngai, 2014). Under this nativist model of citizenship, foreigners were othered in opposition to white settlers, and became dehumanized through raced processes of dispossession. In *Impossible Subjects*, Ngai (2014) challenges the construction of white U.S. citizenship leading to raced immigration for exploitative purposes. The author points out how “transnational Mexican labor force, and especially its *Bracero Program* constituted a kind of imported colonialism that was a legacy of 19th century conquest of Mexico’s northern territories” (p. 129). Mexican populations have been paradoxically racialized as foreigners in their own land. The first lived in western and southern territories prior to the European colonization. As a result of the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* in 1848, this land became occupied by white European settlers (Akers Chacón & Davis, 2006). Such histories of oppression and resistance are not typically taught in U.S. schools (Camangian, 2011; Freire, 2000).

Subsequent immigration policies persisted to maintain, rather than to interrupt, sexist and racist ideologies of nationhood, such as Clinton’s 1996 *Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA), which blocked unauthorized immigrants, including women, from accessing government-funded programs (Patterson, 2000). It has been under the umbrella of white settler colonialism that racialized individuals have been perceived as a threat to white property (Harris, 1991), similar to how immigrant women’s leadership has been perceived as a threat to male political control. As long as gendered and raced colonial violence continues to be unaddressed, immigration policy will remain a white male-dominant enterprise.

In the context of education policy in the United States, white settler monolingual logics have historically permeated teaching and learning discourses, which sustained institutional cultural practices that strip non-white students of their heritage, languages, and opportunities

(Paris & Alim, 2014; Patel, 2013b). U.S. educational policies are shaped by nations that “actively write themselves onto human bodies” through the ink of citizenship (Patel, 2017, p. 62). Until 1982, undocumented youth lacked the right to public education. The *Plyler v. Doe* education policy upheld the constitutionality of undocumented youth having access to public K-12 education. However, undocumented students continued to be denied pathways to citizenship, and institutionally forced to comply with white norms. For instance, bilingual, multilingual, and ethnic studies programs have faced significant white backlash, such as the 2002 *Question 2 Bill* in Massachusetts, which banned bilingual education, and pressed schools to teach non-native English speakers entirely in English. The 2010 *Arizona House Bill 2281* banned Mexican-American studies in public schools (Patel Stevens & Stovall, 2010). Most recently in 2018, and also in Arizona, DACAmented students were blocked from access to in-state tuition. DACA became revoked by Trump’s administration, putting young DREAMers across the United States at risk of deportation and other forms of institutional vulnerabilities. U.S. schools, while offering possibilities for immigrant socialization, learning, and growth, have primarily served the needs of the status quo. As a result, schools have mirrored structures that dispossess Black and Brown young women and men in what is configured as the school-prison nexus (Vaught, 2017).

The Gendered and Racialized Implications of TPS and VAWA

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is a program within the United States immigration system designated to an eligible country that is experiencing an ongoing humanitarian crisis or natural disaster (Hartry, 2012), but excluding cases of gender and racial violence (Pierce, 2015). Research notes that the majority of women facing gendered forms of violence in Central America or Mexico, for instance, are excluded from applying for TPS or asylum visas; as a

result, they are often re-victimized upon arrival to the United States (Pierce, 2015). Currently, protected status for many Salvadorans is being jeopardized by Trump's administration.

Thirteen countries have been designated eligible for TPS. Individuals with TPS must apply every six to eighteen months in order to qualify for re-designation. The program is inherently temporary, and does not lead to citizenship. The program is at the total discretion of the Department of Homeland Security, which operates under the executive branch, currently run by a president who has strengthened the federal government's activity in removing individuals who are not citizens. The ongoing anti-immigrant political climate renders this already provisional legal status incredibly fragile. While TPS gives immigrants some respite from deportation, the current government has a clear *Americans First* mandate, which leaves programs like TPS in a further state of uncertainty.

The implications of losing TPS status and deportation cannot be overlooked. For immigrant women, losing their TPS status predisposes them to being re-victimized as undocumented in the workplace and other relationships. Pro-immigrant organizations have poignantly challenged the TPS nonchalant legislation, through the 1995 *Violence against Women Act* (VAWA) policy, which can lead to the legalization of undocumented women who are survivors of violence (Berger, 2009). Yet, VAWA fails to protect women from violent threats, since it is required that the women prove their victimization when exposing their oppressors in order to receive legal concessions from the U.S. nation state (Merry, 2009).

The Gendered and Racialized Implications of DACA

DACA furthers the differential treatment racialized Latinx women experience in the United States. In 2012, Obama's administration implemented the *Deferred Action for Childhood*

Arrivals (DACA) program, geared towards the protection of eligible undocumented students from deportation (Batalova et al., 2014). To the credit of DREAMers across the United States, the DACA program represented a huge victory, albeit citizenship access was still blocked (Martinez, 2014). DACA temporarily granted relief from deportation to eligible undocumented youth, allowing them to temporarily work in the United States, apply for a driver's license, and renew their DACA permit every two years. Upon submission of extensive documents of evidence and paying high application fees, applicants had to wait for a written determination.

Approximately half million young people out of the one million undocumented youth that met the DACA criteria received approval by August 2014, and many of them were high school students at the time (Batalova et al., 2014). Requests for renewal were recommended four-five months in advance of expiration of DACA status. As the process was laborious and paperwork requested extensive, applicants found great benefit from the assistance offered by community-based organizations, which through DACA clinics, for instance, raised awareness about the program's weaknesses and strengths as well as its implications (Gonzales et al., 2014). Researchers found the greater the offering of application assistance through community-based organizations, the larger the number of applicants enrolled in the program (Batalova et al., 2014).

For many DACAmented youth, the program improved their socioeconomic opportunities remarkably. However, a significant number of undocumented youth neither applied nor qualified (Martinez, 2014). The reasons why DACA-eligible youth did not apply were multiple and challenging to pinpoint considering the silence and stigma around "illegality" within the undocumented community. Fear of deportation as well as lack of information about *Deferred Action* configure major obstacles for applying. Despite having DACA, many students have continued to be excluded from societal power, and thus struggled at the intersection of

oppressive gendered and raced practices (Gonzales & Chávez, 2012; Patel, 2013a). DACA does not grant full legal status (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013). DACA recipients were able to transition from eligible-to-deportation status into a semi-authorized status through the program (Gonzales, 2010; Martinez, 2014). Thus, these students were still imprisoned in a kind of racialized semi-legal limbo (Martinez, 2014; Menjivar & Kanstroom, 2014). Although undocumented organizers and their supporters have been pressing for the DREAM Act legislation to pass congress, it would only impact high-achieving undocumented students, and, as a result, many young people and their families would become criminalized and excluded (Patel & Sánchez Ares, In Tuck & Yang, 2014).

The temporary nature of DACA as a program, not a law, predisposes undocumented youth to multiple threats, including the risk of DACA being taken away from them at any time. Recently, DACA has become rescinded by the Trump administration. Ending DACA holds implications for women and men. DACAmented women have been legally protected from threats of sexual violence, which is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment Latino men seldom confront. This is not to say that men cannot endure sexual violations, but statistics reveal how Latinx women are more often sexually victimized violence across borders (Parra, 2015).

Foregrounding Latina Leadership

DREAMers have challenged gendered and racialized oppressions. By coming out as undocumented, Latinx women seek to affirm their political power to lead social change and their independent lives (Muñoz, 2013). Increasingly, youth organizers have embraced intersectional frames, while positioning themselves at the forefront of immigration debates (Muñoz, 2015).

Latina Leadership

In November of 2014, a young Latina organizer, who was originally from Mexico interrupted Obama's speech during his campaign in support of a Democratic candidate in the East Coast. This Latina publicly raised her voice at a community center to address Obama. She demanded: "*I am a DREAMer and I live in fear that my mother will be deported.*" While holding up her mother's hand, she urged: "*President Obama, will you include my mother in your administrative relief?*" As a DREAMer, this young Latina advocated for the *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act* (DREAM Act), which is a proposed legislation first introduced in the United States' House of Representatives and Senate in 2001. As a narrowly tailored bill, the DREAM Act would enable eligible undocumented students to legalize their immigration status (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). The DREAM Act has undergone multiple revisions since early 2000's, and it has been reintroduced in Congress several times. In 2010, the bill managed to pass in the House of Representatives with a vote of 216 to 198;⁴ however, it was later blocked by the United States Senate. A new attempt to introduce the DREAM Act was undertaken in late 2017, as a reaction against Trump's racist anti-immigrant initiatives, including the ending of the 2012 *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* program.

Despite the challenges to pass the DREAM Act, undocumented organizers have continued to empower themselves and their communities publicly by claiming their rights to citizenship. Among their most common organizing endeavors have been the following: trying to legalize their immigration status, advocating for in-state tuition, and stopping deportations through the *Education Not Deportation* (END) campaigns (Corrunker, 2012). DREAMers have relentlessly resorted to the power of counternarratives to articulate their theory of change, and

⁴ The 2010 DREAM Act bill introduced in U.S. Congress can be found following the link: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/senate-bill/3992/text>

advocate for citizenship pathways (Negrón-Gonzales, 2015a). These organizers had initially resorted into assimilationist discourses that spoke of shared values and concerns similar to those of the status quo; thus, playing within the logics of the settler state in order to gain inclusion and citizenship concessions (Patel, 2017). Increasing numbers of media outlets, including newspapers across the nation have portrayed the plight of these undocumented organizers, promoting the same assimilationist and paternalistic discourses. Other times, the media held the DREAMers accountable for their unauthorized border crossing, being rendered visible, but only as law-breakers.

In her confrontation and direct questioning of the state, the Latina DREAMer in the previous example advocated on behalf of her mother in front of the president. This mother, as an undocumented woman from Mexico was racialized and exploited in the workplace, similar to thousands of immigrant Latinas (Gallo, 2014). Just as the movement around the DREAM Act has grown exponentially since the bill was first introduced, DREAMers' discourses and leadership have shifted considerably since the last years of Obama's administration in late 2016, to grapple with the criminalization of parents, the underrepresentation of Black and female populations in organizing arenas, and the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality in undocumented youth's counternarratives (Muñoz, 2015).

The Latina organizer publicly supported her mother, and, by extension, other undocumented Latinas by raising awareness about undocumented women's needs and conditions. This multigenerational and feminist approach in the politics of undocumented youth resistance shows the reconceptualization of the priorities of the DREAM Act movement, which originally focused its efforts on access to higher education for undocumented students, and later,

as this example revealed, advocated for an administrative relief for unauthorized immigrant families at large (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2013; Martinez, 2014).

Following the Mexican Latina's intersectional call, a group of organizers in the crowd, raised their voices to advocate on behalf of undocumented families. These organizers were yelling in unison for "*Administrative Relief Now!*" Their actions were shortly followed by police officers tearing their protest signs to pieces, and afterwards escorting the youth outside of the building. Employing a political discourse on family unity to challenge "illegality" frames, these DREAMers managed to publicly undermined Obama's callous deportation policies, which had grown stricter than those developed by previous administrations (Menjívar & Kanstroom, 2014, p. 17). Despite the advancement of policies such as the 2014 *Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents* (DAPA), and the 2012 *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* (DACA), which allowed for a degree of "liminal legitimacy" (Menjívar, 2006), the U.S. deportation regime has continued its full force exploiting, criminalizing, detaining, and removing from U.S. soil these individuals (Dick, 2011; Fernandes, 2007).

The DREAMers' interruption of Obama's speech in the previous example had an impact on the audience who was confronted by a story of exploitation in the case of undocumented women. The youth pushed the audience to rethink the cultural and economic politics of citizenship, which are at play within the logics of capitalist heteropatriarchy (Ahmed, 2004; Chomsky, 2014). Obama attempted to dispel these historical ghosts lulling these protesters by reminding them of his "already" granted administrative relief through *Deferred Action for Children's Arrivals* (DACA). His response implicitly held these protesters accountable for previously negotiated compromises between DREAMers and political agents within the United States' capitalist apparatus (Monzón, 2011; Rincón, 2010). At the end of his speech, Obama

called for immigration reform in order to regularize unauthorized immigrants like “*these poor children*.” Yet, his political promise never materialized.

Just a few weeks after these DREAMers’ interruption of Obama’s speech demonstration, his long-awaited announcement of comprehensive immigration reform, would leave many immigrants, including young DREAMers, frustrated and disappointed, since his 2014 immigration executive orders failed to meet what undocumented immigrants deemed to be vital premises for citizenship pathways (Chávez et al., 2015). Currently, under Trump’s administration, the undocumented community, and their supporters are challenged once again to organize against increasing xenophobic immigration laws and human rights violations.

The Media and Latina Leadership

The mainstream media through its political platforms operationalize highly gendered and racialized discourses of “illegality” in order to control national debates on undocumented youth and their communities, the political economy, and immigration reform (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). To counter these dominant narratives, undocumented organizers have built relationships with different media outlets for the distribution of their counterstories (Corrunker, 2012). The media represents a double-edged sword when it comes to addressing undocumented politics. The mainstream media functions as a politically biased enterprise. It has promoted a negative portrayal of unauthorized immigration and immigrants as scapegoats rather than *forced migrants* (Pierce, 2015). In the previous example, the Latina DREAMer gave a short interview to the media following the protest. She expressed both her frustration of a broken immigration system and fear that her mother might be deported. This interview was echoed in different mainstream

media channels, including an online article in the *The Washington Times*,⁵ which erased this Mexican DREAMer's gender discourse concerning her mother's exploitation as an argument for regularization. Instead, the media appropriated the young organizer's story to convey a malignant narrative in which the image of DREAMers as hecklers was underscored as well as Obama's failure to endorse immigration reform. Therefore, the media, in its multiple ramifications, plays a central role either advancing or blocking the rights of Latinx women (Costanza-Chock, 2014).

Latinx Intersectional Politics and Resistance

In her intersectional analyses of racist gender violence, Crenshaw (1991) problematizes the role of *identity-based politics* as a tool for grass roots' resistance, community organizing, and intellectual development (p. 1242). The author contends that *identity politics*, that is, the social tendency to form political alliances based on a shared aspect of their identity, stands as deeply problematic. A focus on identity, rather than interlocking systems, can erase certain voices and struggles within social movements, including hegemonic relations in this realm. For instance, the experiences of transgender undocumented immigrants, who according to research are at higher risks of experiencing sexual violence (Parra, 2015), continue to be invisibilized across institutions and borders. Sometimes their deaths are spectacularized, especially in the case of Black or Brown bodies. Both invisibilization and spectacularization stand as modes of capitalist heteropatriarchal consumption that work to install fear in larger marginalized communities (Cacho, 2012). Terror is forcefully crafted onto notions of "illegality," delineating hierarchies of personhood, which are imbued with capitalist and racist measures of worth (Cacho, 2012).

⁵ For online access to the newspaper source, follow the link: https://mail.google.com/_/scs/mail-static/_/js/k=gmail_main.en.ZAd4jo-udwU.O/m=m_i,t/am=PCOG-b_7g5gz3KUPqv3773eWFDt7D-fmQBI dgLA_2b_D_D_gX3qhwQ/rt=h/d=1/t=zcms/rs=AltRSTMxByl_LmaV2AXulFc2P8nhADJ8lw

Immigrant Latinxs' civic engagements have historically advanced cultural and political transformations (Anzaldúa, 2012; Pérez et al., 2010; Seif, 2011). At the individual level, Anzaldúa (2012) describes the *mestiza consciousness* as Latinas' critical awareness regarding intersections of systemic oppressions in the borderlands. This critical consciousness allows the women to cultivate their agency and undermine heteropatriarchal discourses of power and powerlessness, while redefining the role of women and men.

Intersectional Barriers to Latina Leadership

Increasing numbers of undocumented Latina youth have come out of the shadows to lead social movements (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). Undocumented Latinx youth have traditionally resisted societal exclusions across intersections of gender, class, race, and sexuality (Muñoz, 2013; Seif, 2009). However, these young women navigate a myriad of oppressive cultural structures preventing them from accessing leadership positions in and outside social movements (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012).

Despite Latinx women's agency to lead and theorize about social change, multiple risks and compromises are apparent in their organizing (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Muñoz, 2015). In their discourse for citizenship pathways, DREAMers have to negotiate their multiple social locations and concerns amongst themselves and multiple others following *identity politics* (Crenshaw, 1991), as previously described. These DREAMers come together as *unapologetic* and *unafraid* following a *good citizen/student* narrative, which can strategically facilitate legal concessions from the state. Yet, divisions are promoted amongst the youth as some issues are obscured. For instance, Latina DREAMers face the need to silence their intersectional narratives for the interests of the whole social group (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). In the DREAM Act

campaigning, Milkman and Terriquez (2012) note how “calls for gender equality do not figure centrally in the movement’s public claims-making repertoire, yet women leaders do promote women’s rights inside movement organizations” (p. 743). As a result, undocumented Latina youth’s organizing works as a double-edged sword, offering the youth, on the one hand, opportunities leading into social mobility; on the other hand, abiding necessary personal compromises to benefit the larger group (Coe et al., 2013; Peña, 2007).

The white settler colonial state similarly delineates immigrant women’s conditions for their civic engagements (Glenn, 2002). In the case of Latinx women who are undocumented, their political and legal subjectivities become contingent to specific legal and policy arrangements that maintain the legacy of their political subordination to men (Spade, 2013). Since the early 2000’s, DREAMers have created a counterfield where to build community, impact policy reform, and interrupt sexist and racist immigrant narratives. However, these young organizers also run the risk of playing into the white settler logics they seek to undo, when feeding the dominant narrative that criminalizes immigrant parents.

Framing the Problem of Latinx “Illegality” in the United States

Latinx Women in Contexts of Unauthorized Immigration

There are currently more than three million undocumented youth living in the United States, and approximately half are young women (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Nationwide, eight out of ten undocumented youth are from Latin America, representing sixteen percent of the overall undocumented population (Passel, 2011). Moreover, an increasing number of young women are crossing the border as *forced migrants*, fleeing soaring conditions of violence in their home countries (Pierce, 2015). Recent demographic research has brought to light the crisis of

unaccompanied minors from Mexico and Central America (Pierce, 2015). Yet, Latinx immigration continues to be framed as a scapegoat used to sustain a global capitalist economy and the war on terror (Golash-Boza, 2016). The criminalization of certain immigrants due to their raced “illegality”⁶ serves white supremacist agendas (Ngai, 2014). The materialization of citizenship rights holds different consequences for people across the gendered and raced political spectrum. Who is then granted land control and settler rights, or what Harris (1995) defines as “whiteness as property”?

The Gendered and Racialized “Illegal” Latinx Subject

In the United States, settler nationhood has been orchestrated in nativist policies that have historically rendered some people as human and others as non-human (Patel, 2017). White humanity has been authored through the inscription of Black sub-humanity with specific colonial goals. In turn, male white freedom has been insured through the refusal of female and Black freedom (Vaught, 2014). As a result, “citizenship, though, simultaneously, contains within it and obscures complex histories and logics of race and property” (Patel, 2017, p. 67). Settler nation states resort into biased immigration laws and narratives of the *good/bad* immigrant, to promote ideological regulations, which in turn delineate borders of civic engagement and materiality (Glenn, 2002). The colonial settler vision of nationhood is securely connected to whiteness and militarized borders and schools (Vaught, 2017). Such oppressive vision works to gauge restrictive citizenship rights for some and unquestioned citizenship for others. As Chávez (1998) points out “quite often undocumented immigrants are unaware of the ins-and-outs of immigration law” (p. 164). In the case of undocumented youth, they learn about the obstacles

⁶ The term “illegality” is placed between quotation marks to underline its socially constructed nature. Being rendered “illegal” places immigrants in hierarchies of human worth that hold material consequences.

related to their undocumented status in their teen years as they start contemplating their college and career options (Gonzales, 2010). Traditional gendered roles push young women to learn about the challenges of “illegality,” earlier than men as some are expected to marry U.S. citizens for purposes of getting a green card (Pierce, 2015).

Nativist configurations of citizenship have historically dispossessed Indigenous populations, including women, from their right to land (Anzaldúa, 2012; Cacho, 2012). Looking at the case of undocumented Latinas in the United States, it becomes evident that presumably racial and gender-neutral policies have stripped these women from material access and opportunities in order to ensure the proliferation of systems of heteropatriarchy and white supremacy (Anzaldúa, 2012; Cacho, 2012). Anzaldúa (2012) urges Chicanx and Latinx populations to challenge assimilationist frames by exposing the dangers of internalized white *machismo*. She argues: “the dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination. It has made us weak and empty [...] We have not been allowed to be fully ourselves” (p. 103). Anzaldúa underscores the oppressive intentions of white colonial systems rooted in gendered and raced structures. These cultural politics became operationalized under Europeans’ genocide of Indigenous communities throughout the American continent. This genocide paradoxically continues to be celebrated by large sectors of the United States population both in and outside schools, such as the celebration of *Thanksgiving* and *Columbus Day*. To undo these colonial heteropatriarchal practices, Anzaldúa (2012) encourages Latinx women to operationalize a *mestiza consciousness* in the women’s assessment of settler colonialism, building their agency, and seeking action by defying white property rights and its erasure of Black and Brown women’s heritages and political power.

These women's racialization and dispossession are orchestrated through legal venues (Salcido & Menjívar, 2012). Although immigration policies are presumably gender neutral, they are in fact inflected with gendered meanings and enacted in social and cultural practices (Gallo, 2014; Salcido & Menjívar, 2012). Salcido and Menjívar (2012) condemn heteropatriarchal gendered roles that shape multi-linear naturalization processes for Latina women (Latinas) and Latino men (Latinos). The authors argue that "gendered immigration rules that focus on the subordination of women as wives and mothers and men as breadwinners reinforce women's dependency on their husbands, and this in turn serves to further veil the active presence of immigrant women as workers in the United States" (p. 355). Salcido and Menjívar (2012) underline how Latinas who are undocumented encounter legal opportunities to become naturalized if they victimize themselves as survivors of domestic violence, while acting against Latino men. As a result, Latinas' options to become naturalized demand conformity to gendered roles as wives, caregivers, and/or victims of abuse (p. 339).

The research on immigration and gender in historical and contemporary cultural politics exposes how Latinx women's socio-legal opportunities to become naturalized citizens are severely restricted, and large numbers of undocumented women, including mothers, face intersecting challenges related to institutionalized violences (Fernandes, 2007). Constrained by these gendered and racialized power dynamics, immigrant Latinas who are mothers and daughters have been portrayed in dependency roles with respect to men in policymaking (Gallo, 2014). Some Latina mothers who are undocumented, for instance, have been released from deportation threats on humanitarian grounds to take care of their children (Hamman & Reeves, 2012). This legal framing perpetuates immigrant Latinx women's dependent roles as mothers,

while contributing to the criminalization of Latino men. It also overlooks the specific challenges and struggles of childless immigrants.

Latinx Women's Intersectional Vulnerabilities in the Global Economic Apparatus

The lack of a comprehensive immigration reform has posed interlocking vulnerabilities for the over four million unauthorized Latinx women living in the United States (Patel, 2013a), including the increasing numbers of unaccompanied Latina girls crossing the U.S.-Mexican border (Pierce, 2015). The rule of Western law has always been a conduit for whiteness as property and the exploitation of human beings as chattel (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Because restrictive immigration policies work hand in hand with economic policies, undocumented Latinas are forced to remain undocumented so that they can be exploited in the United States (Parra, 2015). In fact, this female population makes a large body of the United States' low wage workforce, often performing highly gendered jobs under oppressive socio-emotional conditions, including harassment and sexual abuse (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007; Parra, 2015). As low-wage workers, undocumented Latinas encounter less opportunity for upward mobility, and have fewer legal protections against violence and exploitation (Merry, 2009).

Gendered and raced immigration discourses have been used to dehumanize immigrant women, as disposable, lazy, and criminal subjects in order to validate heteropatriarchal colonial domination over their bodies (Anzaldúa, 2012; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Parreñas, 2001). In the case of Filipina female workers in the United States, Parreñas (2001) unmask the reciprocity between heteropatriarchy and global capitalism when it comes to generating economic dislocations shaping Filipina immigrant women's every day experiences of labor across gender, race, class, and citizenship dynamics (p. 73).

This conceptualization of family roles in the creation of the settler state permeates the workplace. In *Women without Class*, Bettie (2003) underlines the importance of gender and race shaping class formation in the United States as “women are still too often conceptualized in the nation’s mind not as workers, but as wives and mothers, and people of color are not imagined as full citizens or true Americans and are therefore believed to deserve only the lowest rung of occupations” (p. 41). The United States national identity is popularly imagined as white. As a result, the pervasive ideological conflation of whiteness and citizenship places Latinx women of color in the most liminal oppressive situations. This global capital takes advantages of pre-existing formations of gender and race to exploit and subordinate immigrants to whiteness. As the population of Latinx women continues to grow (Parreñas, 2001), it becomes a central work force within the United States socio-economic apparatus. Since undocumented Latina workers represent “the silenced victims” of the United States immigration system (Parra, 2015, p. 125), the challenge remains for institutions, communities, schools, and policymakers to dismantle the systems at blame for their exploitation to validate their humanity and dignity (Merry, 2009).

Intersectional Barriers to Latina Education

Alongside immigration policies, educational policies and practices are framed to exclude the multiple experiences and strengths that Latinx immigrant youth bring to schools (Muñoz, 2013; Patel, 2013a). Instead, dominant educational discourses tend to reproduce deficit views regarding undocumented Latinx youth’s intelligence and capabilities (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007; Patel, 2013a). Schools and educational policies at large have failed to meet the needs and strengths of undocumented Latinx children and youth, including the six million youth in mixed-status families (Gonzales, 2010) by avoiding to address undocumented issues in schools and

teacher education programs (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2013; Varela, 2011). Thus, few schools contribute to undocumented resistance and offer possibilities for immigrant young people's civic engagement and academic opportunities (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2013; Pérez et al., 2010).

Approximately sixty-five thousand undocumented youth annually graduate from high school, but their postsecondary educational pathways are severely blocked due to constraining educational and immigration policies (Muñoz, 2013; Patel, 2013a). In 1996, the *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* (IIRIRA) was introduced to prohibit states from granting in-state tuition rates to undocumented students seeking to enter college, with legal variations depending on specific states' predispositions (Gonzales, 2011; Olivas, 2012). Despite Obama's DACA premises and its rhetoric of partial inclusion (considering how DACA never promised full citizenship), undocumented youth continued to be disallowed from attaining full citizenship and access to higher education (Gonzales, 2010; Martinez, 2014). Undocumented Latinx women struggle to access and thrive in higher education (Muñoz, 2013).

The lack of citizenship status excludes Latina youth who are undocumented from reaching institutional power positions across educational and social spaces (Muñoz, 2013). Undocumented Latinxs who have dreams of becoming lawyers, for instance, might not be able to legally practice with their degree having only DACA. It should be noted how many immigrant women do not qualify for DACA.

Due to the culture of silence around undocumented issues in schools and teacher education programs (Varela, 2011; Vélez et al., 2008), immigrant Latinx youth's academic performance and capacities to lead change have been severely restricted (Seif, 2008). Proof of this educational inequity is the widening achievement gap between immigrant Latinx youth and

Black youth, and their white citizen peers⁷ (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008), with Latina students lagging behind their Latino and white peers (Cammarota, 2004; Gándara, 2017).

Gendered and racialized “illegality” as a practice contributed to silencing the needs of undocumented Latinx women in schools (Cammarota, 2004). On the one hand, schools have the liberatory potential to build undocumented students’ resilience, power, and skills (Flores-González, 2002). Schools can likewise support undocumented youth by bridging connections with community organizations, while helping the youth meet political supporters (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). On the other hand, schools can perpetuate patterns of gender and racial subjugation, mirroring U.S. larger societal stratification, when offering scant support mechanisms to Latina students on how to navigate issues related to their undocumented status. Internalized fear and shame also contribute to the women’s exclusion from material opportunities in and outside schools (Martinez, 2014; Patel, 2013a; Valenzuela, 1999).

Another institutional barrier to Latina education has to do with parental involvement. Many undocumented Latinx parents cannot provide strong school guidance to their children due to language, educational, cultural, economic, and/or legal barriers such as the threat of deportation (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). Seeking to protect the family from the perils of deportation, undocumented Latinx parents encourage their children to remain silent about their immigration status (Patel, 2013a). As a result, undocumented youth internalize the stigma of “illegality” (Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011), leading to mental health issues.

⁷ This study employs the term “U.S. citizen” instead of “American citizen” to challenge racist U.S. nationalistic discourses. From the perspective of Southern American nations, the use of the term “American citizen” is deeply flawed and imperialistic, since Latinxs, including Indigenous communities, are also “American citizens.”

“Illegality,” Intersectionality, and Latina Mental Health

Gendered and raced practices of “illegality” entail material and psychological influences on Latinx without papers. Unauthorized status and deportation threats have been reported to have a negative influence on Latinx youth’s mental health (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2012; Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Gulbas et al., 2015; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). It is often during the crucial time of adolescence in their psychological and personal development (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011) when undocumented Latinx youth come to the harsh realization of how their socioeconomic mobility and educational outcomes are severely compromised (Gonzales, 2010). In addition, parental deportation represents a traumatic experience leading to depression on both undocumented and citizen-children and adolescents (Gulbas et al., 2015; Hagan et al., 2008). Yet, undocumented young people affected by parental deportation become further re-victimized as they are legally unable to reunite with their families, and thus, lack their support.

In her ethnographic case study of Latinx youth organizers in California, Negrón-Gonzales (2013) accounts for the emotional burden legal status represents for undocumented youth. The author illustrates how these young people “reflect that not only it is difficult to carry the weight of the secret around on a daily basis, but that having such a big secret impacts their ability to form meaningful relationships with other people” (p. 1288). Negrón-Gonzales (2013) analyzes undocumented youth’s wellbeing by uncovering the ways in which “illegality” and central aspects of social interactions have been constructed to reproduce patterns of structural violence, such as poverty and racism. While it is necessary for practitioners to understand the psychological dimensions of “illegality,” it is highly problematic to do so uncritically by focusing on the individual from a deficit lens, rather than on addressing the social determinants

of health (Eckenwiler, 2011; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006). Reflecting on the pathologization of “English Language Learners,” Gutiérrez and Orellana (2006) argue how “by avoiding frameworks that identify people as problems we may be better able to shore the spotlight on institutional practices, social processes, material resources, and situational contexts, and see other problems that are currently obscured” (p. 120). These psychological lenses in interventionist practices need to further address institutionalized oppressions for a comprehensive analysis and effective interventions regarding Latinx youth’s health and mental health.

Lacking support mechanisms, undocumented Latinx youth often internalize the stigma of “illegality,” which pushes them to a life in the shadows (Seif, 2014). Immigration policies, including Obama’s 2014 executive orders on immigration reform, continue to underpin “illegality” discourses that perpetuate the stereotype of the dangerous Latinx “illegal” criminal (Chávez et al., 2015; Lara et al., 2010), which has been internalized by immigrant populations in the Latinx diaspora (Gallo, 2014; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2012). Racial profiling also shapes linguistic and cultural practices that Latinx youth experience growing up in schools and society, which develop on feelings of linguistic and ethnic inferiority in comparison to whites (Morris, 2007; Romero, 2006). In turn, white normativity is institutionally embraced by those benefitting from whiteness.

For Latinx women, mental health complications are exacerbated due to structural impediments to build networks and cultivate agency across institutional arenas. Gallo (2014) offers a groundbreaking gender and racial analysis of undocumented Mexican middle school youth’s hybrid identities as a result of racial profiling. The author (2014) directs policy attention towards prevailing xenophobic sexist assumptions internalized by the Latinx youth, arguing:

“ethnicizing discourses that position immigrant difference as safe rather than dangerous tend to center on immigrant children and women” (p. 477). The reinforcement of gendered and raced discourses in policies has influenced immigration law enforcement practices, including racial profiling, which are based on racist linkages between presumed border-crossing “illegality” and Mexican-ness (Gallo, 2014; Romero, 2006; Zepeda-Millán & Wallace, 2013). Latino men are typically dehumanized as criminals through these discourses (De Genova, 2005; Gallo, 2014). A clear example represents dehumanizing political debates on immigration. The current president of the United States, who is the leader of a seemingly democratic nation, referred to undocumented immigrants as “animals” publicly. Counteractively, coming out as undocumented has represented an act of resistance through undocumented youth’s leadership and visibility, which can help advance subversive narratives and break the fear and stigma related to unauthorized status (Corrunker, 2012).

Theoretical Frameworks: Intersectionality, Borderlands, and Settler Colonialism

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality provided the primary theoretical framework through which to analyze the experiences of ten Latina youth who were undocumented and organizers in an immigrant youth-led organization. Crenshaw (1991) defines intersectionality as “the study of forms or systems of oppression, domination and discrimination” (p. 1246). Intersectionality examines the subordination for women of color to whites, addressing vectors of oppression pertaining to class, gender, race, language, sexuality, and immigration status (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory advances interlocking analyses of institutionalized oppressions for challenging societal and material barriers faced by institutionally marginalized women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) describes the case of immigrant women who are survivors

of domestic violence to expose how interwoven systems of race, class, and gender oppressions victimize women of color. The author urges for intervention strategies that consider how women from different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds confront multiple institutional obstacles (p. 1246). Thus, intersectionality facilitates critical understandings of how Latinx women's institutional barriers might be resisted, negotiated, and overcome. In the context of resistance, Crenshaw challenges the notion of *identity politics*, considering how intergroup differences are often overlooked in social change processes; hence: perpetuating the oppressions of certain groups, such as women of color, for the benefit of a larger group identity (p. 1242).

In this institutional ethnographic study, intersectionality theory was deployed to analyze supremacist heteropatriarchal dominance in relation to the Latina participants' multiple social locations, noting differences in how the women navigated "illegality" across three institutions, which included: multiple schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization. The institutional ethnographic research prioritized the perspectives of historically minoritized women navigating institutional structures. The principles of intersectionality theory informed both this methodology allowing for "a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities" permeating school and societal structures (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788). White citizens might be impacted by one of more of these socially constructed conduits of oppression, such as class and gender; however, racism and its intersections with other forms of subordination shape the experiences of Latinas who are undocumented differently from white individuals (Muñoz, 2015). Therefore, it becomes evident that "illegality" holds different implications for different immigrants, despite some institutional commonalities.

Given the relatively recent use of intersectionality theory in educational research, it is helpful to review the origins of the theory as well as the other contexts in which it has been applied. Intersectionality theory was originally proposed by feminist scholars of color and critical race theorists as an analytic tool for recognizing the complexities of women's social conditions, and suggesting forms of resistance during the Civil Rights movements during the 1960's and 1970's. These critical legal scholars exposed how individuals and groups have been historically situated socially in terms of their gender, race, sexuality, and class (among other socially constructed categories, including immigration status). Intersectionality theory contends that these structural dimensions are rooted in interlocking structures that configure hegemonic practices, which cannot be analyzed in isolation (Collins, 1998).

After advances in the 1960's and 1970's in the United States in the context of the Civil Rights movement, progress on racial equality stalled and resistance grew to impact progressive racial reforms such as *affirmative action* (Patterson, 2000). Legal scholars including Bell, Delgado, and Crenshaw examined the structural role that the law played in the construction and continuation of racially and gender-based oppressions. These scholars aim to redefine racism and sexism as structural practices that sustain hegemonic relationships (Taylor, 2009). Collins (1998) advanced intersectionality theory to explore how multicultural identities are socially constructed and woven in intersections of institutional power that sustain white heteropatriarchal normativity.

Borderlands Theory

This study also deployed the theoretical scope of borderland theory, as introduced by Anzaldúa (2012) to represent how race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, citizenship create systems of constant border crossing among people. Similar to intersectionality theory, borderland theory

examines the impact of interlocking vectors of oppression, while focusing on addressing the agency of Latinx female populations. Latinxs in these borderlands speak from a position of hybridity and multiplicity beyond dichotomies; hence, rejecting the *legal vs. illegal* binary. Latinx women can develop a critical awareness of these conditions through their hybrid consciousness or *conciencia mestiza* as to challenge hegemonic practices that deny their histories, epistemologies, and resistance (p. 102). While intersectional theory focuses on structures, borderland theory pays attention to processes of Latinx and Chicanx exclusion and inclusion as well as resistance. Borderland theory was used as an analytical framework to investigate patterns of Latina agency and ability to challenge white heteropatriarchal normativity (Anzaldúa, 2012; Hurtado, 1989).

Borderland theory facilitates the deconstruction of historically built oppressive narratives and policies leading to the formation of *nepantleras* (Anzaldúa, 2012). For Anzaldúa, the “hybrid space” of the borderlands creates new possibilities of being a woman of color in this country. As she emphasizes, “from this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer*” (p. 102). Borderland theory was used in this research to examine the Latina participants’ forms of subjectivity, connections to local forms of knowledge, and subversive multiplicities to reveal how they navigated and intellectualized their undocumented status.

Settler Colonialism Theory

Settler colonialism was used in this study as a secondary theoretical framework, which allowed for a historically grounded investigation of gendered and racialized U.S. citizenship formation imbued with notions of humanness and non-humanness (Glenn, 2015). Settler

colonialism is presented as a set of violent practices led by white Europeans against Indigenous populations, including women, with the intent of seizing their land and eradicating their Indigeneity (Glenn, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Settler colonialism's analytic lens sheds light on whiteness as a normalized national ideology, which obscures the conditions of its own production under very subtle logics of oppression (Patel, 2015). Settler colonialism relates to intersectionality theory in that it "can encompass the specificities of racism and sexism affecting different racialized groups while also highlighting cultural and structural issues that link racism and sexism" (Glenn, 2015, p. 59). Settler colonialism was deployed in this study in the deconstruction of colonial narratives and practices influencing the participating Latinx women's experiences.

CHAPTER TWO: A Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a synthesis of the multidisciplinary scholarship investigating Latinx women's institutional involvements influenced by socially constructed "illegality." This literature review deployed analytical tools from intersectionality theory to examine themes regarding the ten participating Latinas' multiple experiences as undocumented; hence grappling with systemic intersections of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and unauthorized status in theorizing about the intricate ways the women navigated institutionalized racist heteropatriarchy.

Different gaps in the undocumented youth literature informed the research question of the study, which seeks to address intersections of oppression by analyzing the institutional experiences of Latinx young women who were both students and organizers. Based on intersectional analyses of multidisciplinary scholarship on Latinx women's institutional experiences as undocumented, the following eight themes emerged:

1. Assimilationist Educational Frames
2. Capital, Higher Education, and the Economy
3. Undocumented Politics in Teacher Education
4. Gendered and Racialized "Illegality" in Schools
5. Gendered and Racialized "Illegality" outside Schools
6. "Illegality," Intersectionality, and Latina Youth's Mental Health
7. Human Rights Perspectives on Gendered and Racialized Immigration
8. Undocumented Youth's Organizing for Citizenship Rights

Assimilationist Educational Frames

Data on undocumented students' academic performance expose the continuities of educational inequities disproportionately affecting Black and Brown students (Cammarota, 2004; Meiners & Winn, 2010). In the context of high-stakes testing and teacher accountability (Patel, 2013a), research on academic performance reveals that immigrant Latinos (males) stand as higher achievers than Latinas (females), although both ethnic and gendered groups continue to

lag behind their white peers (Cammarota, 2004; Marschall, 2006). Under the rhetoric of facilitating undocumented youth's incorporation into U.S. social fabric, assimilationist frameworks have been promoted in the education. This positivist scholarship grapples with the youth's educational barriers primarily as newcomers and "English Language Learners" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Increasingly, undocumented youth's access to higher education has been explored critically (Gonzales, 1997). However, intersections of gender, race and class, and immigration status have been flattened when theorizing about undocumented students' linguistic and sociocultural obstacles and assets (Gonzales, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995).

Positivist research regarding language policy has described the need for immigrants to assimilate to white linguistic standards for their social inclusion and mobility (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). By focusing on assimilation as a pressing need for undocumented youth's wellbeing, undocumented youth are pathologized as a result of their intersecting social vulnerabilities. Their transnational experiences and funds of knowledge become likewise overlooked (Jefferies, 2014). Early studies addressing undocumented and other immigrant youth's education followed a functionalist lens (Dewey, 1916; Parsons, 1959). Functionalism in education privileges the established social order; hence, schooling seeks the stability of society for the benefit of the status quo, contributing to its cultural and social reproduction on assimilationist grounds for youth who do not fit the established norms. A critique of functionalist perspectives of schooling unveils a soaring reality: despite the 1982 *Plyler v Doe* court decision, educational policies and practices continue to marginalize immigrant youth's native languages, cultures, and histories, by upholding white normativity (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Viesca, 2013), while obscuring issues pertaining to undocumented status and citizenship rights (Patel, 2013a; Seif, 2014). Moving away from individualistic and meritocracy frames, critical scholars have

investigated the social contexts of undocumented youth's schooling holding schools accountable for their failure to serve immigrants' diverse needs; hence following justice frameworks (Patel Stevens, 2009).

Research on undocumented Latinx youth's educational outcomes show how "illegality" frames at the policy level operate ahistorically when infusing education with assimilationist agendas (Negrón-Gonzales, 2015b; Patel, 2013a). The citizenship binary of *us vs. them* is critiqued by scholars like Patel (2012), who defines the "rules of engagement" in students' interactions as embedded in "an institutionalized structure of assimilation for immigrant youth," which "offers little room for the kind of interaction with cultural practices and knowledge" (p. 343). Putting it simply, undocumented students are pushed to assimilate to white normativity, not for their own wellbeing but for the status quo's. Vectors of institutionalized oppressions pertaining to gender, race, class, and immigrant status exclude undocumented young people from access to equal educational rights and opportunities (Muñoz, 2015; Viesca, 2013). As a result, "undocumented students actively try to understand and navigate their place in society while simultaneously silencing, masking, and negotiating who they are in order to fit within the law" (Muñoz, 2015, p. 97). Some Latinx scholars have contended that because of their rendering as "illegal subjects," undocumented Latinx students will never be able to fully assimilate or be solely immersed in white monolingualism and dominant cultural values (Muñoz, 2015; Negrón-Gonzales, 2013). In fact, some of these values and ideologies have been used to foster the youth's marginalization. More research should be developed to address undocumented students' aspirational and navigational perspectives in order to flesh out the nuances of institutionalized gendered and raced "illegality" in and beyond schools.

Critical educational scholars have drawn on intersectional lenses to decenter assimilationist logics together with sexist discourses influencing immigrant Latinas' schooling (Muñoz, 2013; Patel, 2013a; Rincón, 2010). According to Rincón (2010), assimilation to whiteness presents "equal access to higher education as a reward that is deserved by undocumented students who demonstrate a high degree of assimilation" (p. 14). The author points out how Latinx women, more often than Latino men, are pushed to comply with the logics of heteropatriarchal whiteness to gain societal supports through the myth of meritocracy (Patel, 2013a). This literature exposes schools' work for hegemonic cultural reproduction when installing gendered and raced expectations on minoritized immigrant students (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007, p. 711). Ochoa and Ochoa (2007) expose how U.S. schooling has imbued the K-12 curricula with racist and sexist ideologies that sustain power imbalances among U.S. born and non-U.S. born students. Other Latinx scholars have likewise paid critical attention to Latina students' specific educational dilemmas, beyond language, which include invisibility, trauma, not belonging, and gender re-victimization (Camarota, 2004; Muñoz, 2015).

The school common core curricula, as described by critical scholars, functions as an assimilationist enterprise; albeit it has the potential to facilitate processes of cultural contestation (Paris & Alim, 2014; Patel, 2012). Even when educational policies and school curricula claim to serve the needs of multilingual learners and plan intervention programs that promote immigrant students' wellbeing and academic performance (Menjívar, 2006a; Nieto, 2002), most curricula collapse intersectional issues affecting immigrant students beyond linguistic concerns (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007), including issues of "illegality" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). For instance, the teaching scholarship devoted to analyze the school experiences of immigrant Latinx focuses primarily on their needs as "English Language Learners" (Suárez Orozco et al., 2008); thus,

failing to address the contextualized challenges immigrant young people face in U.S. schools and daily lives. Critical bilingual education scholars have challenged the deficit label of immigrant students as “English Language Learners” or “ELL’s,” as the youth might be in fact fluent in other languages, including English. Bilingual youth, some of whom might be undocumented, bring an array of strengths and forms of capital with them to school, despite these being institutionally undervalued (Gándara, 2017; García, 2009). Thus, critical education scholars reject deficit views of undocumented youth’s academic performance, intelligence, and resilience, as white monolingual lenses have been used as academic measures that further immigrants’ societal and academic exclusion (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007; Patel 2013a). This scholarship also advocates for undocumented students’ access to full citizenship, realizing how the youth cannot achieve equitable educational outcomes until they are institutionally allowed to legalize their status (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2013; Varela, 2011).

Based on findings from this literature synthesis, the scholarship on multiculturalism needs to advance analyses of what it means for a young undocumented person to be communicated the importance of multiculturalism while facing multiple “illegality” challenges, including socio-legal exclusions. The academic erasure of ethnic and racial differences across the heterogeneous immigrant population serves two main purposes. First, undocumented students become further victimized across a gendered and racialized spectrum when citizenship is framed hierarchically, rendering some students more human than others; hence worthy of resources and supports in schools (Muñoz, 2015; Patel, 2013a); second, hierarchies among immigrant communities that are established on assimilationist grounds divide communities of color, and benefit the status quo (Patel, 2017; Seif, 2014).

The reviewed literature revealed a concerning demographic gap. The educational scholarship on undocumented youth has failed to document the realities of undocumented students from non-Latin American ethnic and geographical backgrounds, including places in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, who are equally ostracized within globalized systems controlled by whiteness (Patel, 2016, p. 398).

All in all, the literature of undocumented youth's schooling still largely echoes assimilationist deficit frames negatively impacting the students' academic attainment and overall wellbeing. Tensions between calls for assimilation vis-a-vis citizenship status, which is vital for immigrant justice, must be further theorized in different fields. Ultimately, achieving whiteness in linguistic and cultural educational spaces must be pressingly de-centered as the norm.

Capital, Higher Education and the Economy

The reviewed literature grappling with undocumented students' experiences in higher education has drawn on Bourdieu's socio-capital and Marxist theories in order to advocate for the youth's access to higher education (Jefferies, 2014; King & Punti, 2012; Varela, 2011). Varela (2011) challenges arguments that deploy assimilationist logics in education by showing how economic frames serve to benefit the status quo, and promote exploitative relationships in the marketplace. The author contends that assimilationist discourses permeate economic, educational, and immigration policies, which block undocumented youth's access to higher education settings and quality jobs.

Undocumented youth studies deploy Bourdieu's sociocapital and Marxist theories to challenge functionalist views of schooling. These studies replicate a focus on immigrant youth and education that link educational and legal theoretical frames to economic value (Gonzales,

2010; Rincón, 2010; Varela, 2011). For instance, Gonzales (2010) interviewed undocumented high school Latinx youth in California to examine their social networks and access to varied forms of capital. The author unraveled structural barriers, such as poverty and discrimination that limited the students' upward mobility (p. 471). The youth envisioned higher education as a way to achieve economic and social mobility. Although Gonzales (2010) did not address intersections of gender and racial oppression in his study, the author discovered that teacher support worked as a form of social capital linked to undocumented students' social and academic success. These undocumented students could name only a few teachers and counselors who helped them to navigate the socio-legal construction of "illegality" for accessing higher education.

Bourdieu's theory of capital (symbolic, cultural, economic, social) has been used in education studies on immigration and social class to explain youth's academic and societal progress (Gonzales, 2010; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015; Vélez et al., 2008). Sukarieh and Tannock's (2015) *Youth Raising? The Politics of Youth in the Global Economy* underscores the social construction of youth as workers and consumers unveiling how "there has been a long tradition of embracing, celebrating, promoting and empowering young people (and images, characteristics, and behaviors associated with youth) in the service of capitalist profit-making interests" (p. 48). As it happened during the time of the *Jim Crow* laws in the South, many states, although they might not legally prohibit undocumented students from accessing higher education, purposefully saddle those who have recently graduated from high school with the tremendous hurdle of paying annual out-of-state or international tuition fees (Gonzales, 2010; Rincón, 2010). These financial constraints make it almost impossible for the youth to afford and thus access higher education (Muñoz, 2013). As a result, undocumented students become underprivileged consumers within the larger political economy.

Some critical studies underline how the exclusion of undocumented youth from access to higher education leads to the control of their political consciousness and opportunities by the white settler state (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Patel, 2013a). In *Youth Held at the Border*, Patel (2013a) weaves female and male undocumented youth's stories of strength, pain, solidarity, and resistance at the interface of convoluted immigration politics. The author states: "undocumented youth's personal narratives reflect much larger systems of global economics, political treaties, and commercial interests" (p. 33). Patel undermines the criminalization of undocumented youth exposing the historical exploitative practices of the U.S. settler state. Noting how schools promote the implicit values and priorities of the sovereign state, Patel (2013b) describes institutional attempts for cultural assimilation and erasure. In this regard, undocumented students are meant to act in "loco emporium," that is, they need to comply and act for the economic benefit of the empire that claims to be sheltering them in public education, but socially oppressing them. Students of color who fail to comply with these dominant white norms and expectations are disciplined and deprived from institutional supports (Bettie, 2003; Morris, 2007; Morris, 2016). Teachers have a central role as gatekeepers in this context (Vaught, 2017). They can interrupt or perpetuate the myth of meritocracy, that is, when undocumented students are blamed for their academic struggles, and teacher non-political action or nonchalance are justified on the grounds of meritocracy, schools are ignoring possibilities for social, legal, and individual change (Patel, 2013a).

A growing body of literature has examined the contradictions between education, society, and the capitalist economy following critical approaches to analyzing interactions of gender, race, class, and immigrant status (Chávez et al., 2015; Muñoz, 2013; Patel, 2013a). These critical analyses challenge constructions of immigrant youth as human capital (Sukarieh & Tannock,

2015), attributing the racialization of these students to U.S. capitalist interests (Abrego, 2006; Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2013). Drawing on decolonizing educational frameworks, Patel (2013b) advocates for immigrant youth's agency to dismantle these capitalist practices. The author advocates for the development of critical educational spaces (not just within the university realm) for all young people and their teachers where to collaboratively and actively decenter whiteness and ultimately galvanize cultural transformations (p. 45).

Undocumented Politics in Teacher Education

Research on how to best equip teachers with tools to address undocumented issues still lacks (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Some scholars argue for teacher training in culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Richards, 2017) to effectively address undocumented youth's complex needs. For instance, Alvarez Gutiérrez (2013) exposes how “despite shifting demographics leading to an increased number of Latinx immigrant high school students, culturally responsive initiatives encouraging school leaders to validate and honor linguistically and culturally diverse student populations do not exist” (p. 319), as well as anti-racist policies that unseat white supremacy (Patel, 2016). Historically, education policy affecting immigrant youth studies have disguised the domination of white normativity and assimilation supporting practices of erasure that silence culturally and linguistically diverse perspectives (Varela, 2011; Viesca, 2013). Such policies have influenced teacher education and preparation programs in ways that whiteness continues to be shielded in the field (Gallo, 2014).

Teachers' social locations are identified as predictors of undocumented students' academic achievement (Cammarota, 2004; Patel, 2013a). In their conceptual work about breaking silences pertaining to undocumented students in teacher education, Jefferies and

Dabach (2014) encourage educators to interrupt silences surrounding the role that immigration status plays in youth's schooling, which remains an issue disproportionately affecting Latinx communities. In addition, whiteness should be actively challenged as the norm in these immigrant youth's education. The ongoing *unafraid educators'* movement, which happened as a backlash to Trump's DACA overturn, stands as an example of teacher solidarity with undocumented students. Yet, reflexivity on the role of white educators for immigrant and racial justice needs to be further theorized from different perspectives. In addition, more teachers of color who are sensitive to the structural realities young people face in schools should be supported in accessing leadership roles (Patel, 2013a).

A few quantitative studies in teacher education have investigated the role parental involvement in schools plays in undocumented youth's education (Marschall, 2006; Patel, 2013a; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). In her empirical study using survey methods to examine policies that promote Latinx parent involvement, Marschall (2006) concluded that schools need to accommodate cultural differences and dismantle oppressive cultural structures through the proper training of teachers, who might overlook opportunities for parental involvement; thus, improving parents and schools' understanding of each other, including expectations, barriers, and resources. Through school-community partnerships, schools can effectively train their teachers to decenter privilege, undermine hegemonic oppressions, and construct a more equitable society.

Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” in Schools

The reviewed literature on undocumented youth's schooling highlights persistent racial and gender inequities in educational outcomes for Latinx students who are undocumented (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Patel, 2013b). Educational inequities are tacitly activated by the

underrepresentation of immigrant youth's histories and cultures in the school curricula, the pathologization of their intelligences, and the flattening of their intersectional challenges (Martinez, 2014; Nieto, 2002; Patel Stevens, 2009). Educational policies and ideologies dangerously shape curricular mandates, which continue to exclude the wealth of immigrant students' heritages, ontologies, and testimonies (Bartolomé, 1994; Patel, 2013a), including Latin American Indigenous youth (Seif, 2011). Curricular studies examining ways to improve the education of immigrant learners illustrate how Latinx students can best acquire academic skills through the critical inclusion of their varied experiences to the school curricula (Bartolomé, 1994; Nieto, 2002; Paris & Alim, 2014).

A few researchers have exposed the permeability of undocumented students' exclusion across institutional spaces (Gonzales, 2016; Menjívar, 2006; Milkman, 2012). According to Gonzales (2016), young undocumented children who grew up in the United States experience highest levels of integration to this society, when "positive messages from teachers about being part of a group, being committed to hard work, adhering to the rules, and striving for high academic achievement were typically reinforced by peers, other school personnel, and community members" (p. 82). A related finding from the present literature review suggests that undocumented Latinx youth learn about the burdens of unauthorized status with the coming of age (Gonzales, 2016). Gonzales (2016) underscores how "for undocumented youth the transition to adulthood is accompanied by a transition to illegality" (p.11), as students learn to perform this socially constructed "illegality."

Critical sociological scholarship shows how school integration is desirable as long as it conforms to whiteness (Menjívar, 2006; Muñoz, 2013). In her ethnographic study, Muñoz (2013) uses the lens of Latinx critical race theory to denounce how nativist discourses of immigration

permeate schools, including higher education structures, in the case of the Mexican young women. Muñoz (2013) elucidates how these students equated having a college degree with having a voice, which allowed the women to challenge “illegality,” and related practices vilifying Mexican women without papers (p. 236). The author advocates for inclusive educational practices that challenge “illegality” and its institutionalized silences. Some scholars underline undocumented Latina women’s structural obstacles to access higher education, including: oppressive cultural practices; exclusion from federal financial aid; ineligibility for in-state tuition; recurrent microaggressions across gender, race, language, and status; and fear of deportation or detention (Gonzales, 2016; Hardina, 2014; Muñoz, 2013; Patel, 2013a). Based on these findings, educational policies, schools, and communities need to collaborate in the development of strategies and practices that can enhance these women’s leadership, forms of capital, and multiple agencies in schools, ultimately challenging oppressive gendered roles.

Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” outside Schools

Few scholars have examined the role of Latina youth’s social contexts across institutions (Muñoz, 2013; Patel, 2013a). Some scholars have developed historical analyses of racism and sexism tied to the formation of the United States colonial state, and its nativist citizenship rights (Glenn, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Societal hierarchies undergird the construction of a gendered and racialized national identity that normalizes male whiteness in the United States (Glenn, 2015, p. 60). In this regard, male whiteness is not simply defined as an identifier of the settler state, but it also becomes a pernicious practice. White settlers have dehumanized Indigenous peoples, including women, through linguistic, racial, and gendered discourses perpetuated cross-institutionally (Anzaldúa, 2012; Patel, 2015). Challenging heteropatriarchal relations, Chicana

and Latina scholars have denounced how immigrant women of color have been traditionally pushed to fulfill gendered colonial roles of submission based on second class citizenship discourses that portray them as dependent on both their husbands and the nation state's welfare (Gallo, 2014; Lara et al., 2010; Salcido & Menjívar, 2012). Salcido and Menjívar (2012) address the role of the state promoting gendered and racialized "illegality" arguing: "gender is not just a tool for classification, but also a relationship between women and men based on socially and culturally constructed and defined identities that influence the process of immigration" (p. 341). The authors highlight the interdependence between intergenerational gendered categories that portray undocumented women and young women as economically dependent on men, taking care of children or younger siblings in the domestic sphere, rather than showing them in non-heteropatriarchal familial roles, such as being cultural workers and community leaders.

As a result of these gendered and raced practices, Latinas' possibilities of transgressing such roles, even in schools, are severely limited (Merry, 2009). By thwarting undocumented Latinas' social and economic access, the U.S. nation state has employed the gendered and raced construction of "illegality" as a power instrument to perpetuate its heteropatriarchal control over immigrant women's bodies (Ahmed, 2004; Anzaldúa, 2012; Peña, 2007). Alluding to the power that emotions (anger, guilt, love) play in neocolonial relationships, Ahmed (2004) explains how "the cultural politics of emotion is deeply bound up with gendered histories of imperialism and capitalism, in which violence against the bodies of subaltern women is both granted and taken for granted in the making of worlds" (p. 170). The author describes historical challenges and sacrifices endured by immigrant women of color within white settler colonial systems as disseminated in heteropatriarchal discourses. The lack of scholarly attention to this institutional nexus is concerning. It is important for multidisciplinary researchers to reconfigure what counts

as democratic spaces and advance intersectional interventions that undo undocumented Latinas' historical and systemic exclusion (Anzaldúa, 2012; Patel, 2013a).

A few scholars have investigated undocumented Latina youth's organizing, addressing the intersectionality of gendered and racialized subjectivities negotiated in immigrant spaces of resistance (Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Muñoz, 2015; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). These scholars juxtapose the silencing of undocumented women's social contexts with the larger silencing of their agency and leadership.

“Illegality,” Intersectionality, and Latina Youth’s Mental Health

Although this study does not focus on the psychology of being undocumented, it stands as an important discipline recurrently cited in the educational scholarship. A few empirical studies regarding undocumented Latinx youth's mental health have examined the psychological stressors that unauthorized status holds on their wellbeing and academic performance (Gonzales, 2016; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2012). Other scholars have investigated the impact of parental deportation on immigrant children (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Dreby, 2012; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011), leading to anxiety, depression, and academic underperformance. Some researchers describe how the social constructions of “illegality” are internalized by undocumented young people and become manifested in symptoms of depression (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Gonzales et al., 2013; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2012). The psychological literature has theorized undocumented status as having negative implications for undocumented Latinx youth's individual development and life trajectories, considering how the students are “at risk” of dropping out of school, and occupy marginal socioeconomic positions (Martinez, 2014; Varela, 2011). These studies offer implications for counseling and teaching interventions working with immigrant youth whose

lives are constrained by “illegality.” Based on the analyses of the findings, it is important that the mental health literature on undocumented Latina youth considers trauma interventions at the intersection of culturally relevant and gender sensitive ones (Espín & Dottolo, 2015).

In fact, few researchers have explored the linkages between gender and race-based discrimination and mental health in the case of undocumented Latina young women (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2013; Espín & Dottolo, 2015). Espín and Dottolo (2015) contend that “for immigrant Latinas it is imperative that programs not only consider personal histories of violence but incorporate a deep understanding of gendered experiences carried over from their countries of origin and during the migration process” (p. 219). The authors challenge psychological frames that overemphasize undocumented youth’s psychological damage as well as the construction of their identities as fixed, since such deficit framing fails to document the strengths and skills students cultivate in their daily lives (Cammarota, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Human Rights Perspectives on Gendered and Racialized Immigration

Examining the human rights literature on undocumented women, their social locations as transnational immigrants is described as *forced migration*. Although these women do not qualify for refugee status under current immigration law, numerous feminist legal scholars advocate immigrant women’s rights to international support (Merry, 2009; Pierce, 2015; Salcido & Menjívar, 2012). The human rights scholarship on immigrant women has denounced the gendered and raced structures preventing them from achieving legal status in the United States (Menjívar & Salcido, 2012; Merry, 2009). Human rights scholars deploy the term *forced migrant* to refer to the displacement of people happening against their will, and as a result of war, violence, environmental disasters, among other causes (Merry, 2009; Pierce, 2015). Immigrant

women face intersecting strands of oppression that permeate borders. These unjust structures and laws prevent immigrant women from accessing societal supports, speaking up against injustice in different institutional contexts, and leading a better life.

Following justice and human rights frames, Latina scholars have pointed out the interconnection between undocumented women's experiences of "illegality" vis-à-vis immigration policies (Anzaldúa, 2012; Muñoz, 2015). By thwarting undocumented Latinas' social and economic stability, the U.S. settler state has employed the construction of "illegal subjects" as a power instrument to exert its heteropatriarchal control over Latinx women of color (Anzaldúa, 2012; Peña, 2007). Some Latina legal scholars point out how undocumented Latinas who could have legal options to get naturalized cannot afford to pay for legal services, because of their underprivileged socioeconomic status and gendered roles (Menjívar, 2006).

Gendered and raced "illegality" is likewise reinforced in social relationships, such as undocumented Latinas who marry U.S. born citizens, and then become subjected to male authority and expectations (Hurtado, 1996; Parra, 2015). Undocumented Latinx women who face gender violence in marital relationships might fear to denounce the abuse due to lack of legal protections and cultural stigma associated with divorce (Merry, 2009).

Multiple legal studies regarding structural violence influencing undocumented Latinx women have advanced legal frameworks rooted in human rights claims for citizenship pathways (Salcido & Menjívar, 2012). Yet, this legal framing has been historically confined to national and international law, with limited interdisciplinary rigor (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012; Merry, 2009). Furthermore, few studies have analyzed practices of human trafficking, including sexual trafficking among undocumented young women, and trans women (Parra, 2015), and the connection of those victimizations to the school-to-deportation pipeline (Morris, 2016).

Western perspectives on refugee and immigrant women continue to fail to address the harms faced by these *forced migrants* around the globe (Spade, 2013). Some feminist studies employ intersectional analyses in human rights legal discourses to incorporate cross-disciplinary formulations (Guerrina & Zalewski, 2007; Spade, 2013) as well as research accountability to the community (Tuck, 2009). Calling for a careful examination of the fluctuation of women's resistance and social locations within heteropatriarchal global systems, Spade (2013) exposes Western viewpoints within international human rights law that encourage gender equality. Instead, the author argues for a focus on the intersection of multiple social ailments and resistance as operationalized "on the ground" in order to bring people advocating for interrelated rights in social movements (p. 1032).

The social movements scholarship on undocumented women's rights has underlined their capacities to galvanize social change beyond rights-based frames (Ferree & Tripp, 2006; Guerrina & Zalewski, 2007). Guerrina and Zalewski (2007) problematize a Western gendered rights framework in organizing arguing: "the value of rights discourse can and needs to be challenged, particularly in the context of women's private lives, which remain largely outside the scope of legal protection" (p. 7), such as the case of undocumented women whose rights have been established by Western standards. This critique of a rights-based discourse and organizing reveals how immigration and education policies have historically excluded the perspectives of grass-roots organizers when delineating citizenship rights. Rights-based approaches need to expand definitions of citizenship to include multiple forms of civic engagement and capitalize on the assets and knowledges immigrant women bring with them to the host nation (Menjívar, 2016; Merry, 2009).

Undocumented Youth's Organizing for Citizenship Rights

Since the early 2000's, research on undocumented Latinx youth's civic engagements around the DREAM Act has focused on their interconnected roles as students and organizers, paying attention to the youth's collective efforts to attain access to higher education (Muñoz, 2015; Seif, 2011). Immigrant youth-led social movement research politically aligns with DREAMers' theory of change when challenging racialized immigration discourses that criminalize Latinx youth, and blocks their access to higher education (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Muñoz, 2015; Torres & Katsiaficas, 1999). These researchers portray undocumented youth organizers as "multifaceted, conscientious, and strategic" (Vélez et al., 2008, p. 22). It should be noted that less attention has been given in the activist literature to youth who have not publicly come out as undocumented in some spaces, but who might still be organizing in more private arenas (King & Punti, 2012; Martinez, 2014; Patel, 2013a). The scholarship on social movements underlines how present generations of immigrant leaders ground their ideas on previous and/or contemporary anti-sexism and anti-racism female leaders, from the Chicana activism in the 1960's and 1970's to the most recent 2014 domestic workers' bill of rights *AB 241*, while validating their epistemologies and capabilities (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). The literature on undocumented youth's civic engagements has investigated the time constraints, considering multiple responsibilities immigrant youth face in their daily lives (Seif, 2009). The more hours these young people work, coupled with familial responsibilities, the less time the youth can devote to be civically engaged (Pérez et al., 2010). DREAMers have to split their organizing efforts across institutional contexts in order to negotiate their ideas, skills, and responsibilities more effectively towards justice.

One of the main differences between early and recent immigrant youth-led social movements lies in undocumented youth's use of the media considering the ongoing territoriality of the cyberspace (Costanza-Chock, 2014). Indi-media in social movements literature has argued that "political action is made easier, faster, and more universal by the developing technologies," (Van de Donk et al., 2004, p. 97) while still resorting into more traditional protest banners as forms of communication and outreach (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007; Salkowitz, 2010).

Overall, the major literature on undocumented youth-led social movements falls into two major paradigms: civic engagement and community organizing (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Seif, 2008). This scholarship notes the paradox of being legally excluded while being civically engaged (Seif, 2011). Undocumented youth's civic engagements function as an umbrella for Latinx immigrant youth's cultural works. In her intersectional analysis of Latinx queer youth's organizing, Seif (2011) compared and contrasted Latinx immigrant young people to U.S. born peers, and concluded that despite higher social obstacles, "some of the most creative and courageous activism in the U.S. today is driven by undocumented youth" (p. 72).

Multiple studies reveal varying forms of civic engagement depending on intersecting vectors of gender, race, age, English proficiency, and immigration status (Muñoz, 2013; Seif, 2011). Undocumented youth's civic engagement manifests in providing social services, such as volunteering, tutoring, and extracurricular activities (Pérez et al., 2010), as they have the opportunity of interacting with different individuals. Through these relationships, some social movements scholars, such as Seif (2009) argue that "when undocumented youth organize for their own rights with documented immigrants and U.S. born peer allies, they demonstrate the creative identifications and citizenship practices of those who grow up as 'illegal aliens'" (p. 9).

Only an emergent body of the literature on immigrant social movements underlines organizers' attempts to address the intersectionality of undocumented struggles (Muñoz, 2015; Seif, 2014; Zepeda-Millán, 2014b), focusing on issues pertaining to sexual orientation, as advocated in the undocuqueer movement, an LGBTQ subgroup of the DREAM Act organizing (Seif, 2014). A few scholars have studied the influence of Latina youth's organizing in their lives and communities, leading to personal and cultural transformations. According to Seif (2009), "women who are unaccustomed to speaking publicly beyond their extended families develop leadership skills that they later bring to male-dominated public arenas" (p. 89).

The social movements literature pertaining to undocumented women's leadership critique the racial and gender barriers to their organizing (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Muñoz, 2015). These studies call on forms of intersectional resistance as displayed by immigrant women of color in organizing realms to lead social change (Spade, 2013; Taylor, 1999). Spade (2013) describes *intersectional resistance* happening when intersections of harm impact women of color. The author poses the example of reproductive justice organizing, which is framed from white women's perspectives, while silencing or collapsing immigrant women's voices and conditions. While it is true that non-white women also need access to safe contraception and abortion rights, Black and Brown women's reproductive conditions have been controlled by assimilationist programs, welfare policies, among other systems (Spade, 2013, p. 1036). This intersectional analysis of immigrant women's reproductive justice sheds light on issues that are privileged and underprivileged in undocumented organizing agendas. From an intersectional grounding of resistance, critical theories of change can be advanced to bring forward legal recognition on intersectional issues, which are often undertheorized in lawmaking processes.

The neoliberal assumption that youth, including undocumented Latinas, lack agency to lead change, and that they have to be empowered by others has been highly problematized in Chicana studies (Hurtado, 1996; Seif, 2014). In her book *The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism*, Hurtado (1996) differentiates blasphemy, described as internal criticism of the silencing of women of color in feminist arenas. The Chicana scholar extends these metaphors to theorize about feminist researchers from multiple contexts, understanding that “these social contexts are not independent of a ruthless, relentless, and pervasive social structure that still uses gender, race/ethnicity, class and sexual orientation to enforce privilege and subordination” (p.12). Chicana and Latina researchers have urged other feminist scholars to problematize how they experience feminism in connection to asymmetrical power relations, denouncing how white women are often familiarly related to white men, whereas women of color have been historically related to white men as their property through ongoing colonial relations (Anzaldúa, 2012; Hurtado, 1996; Mendoza, 2004).

Significantly, several scholars have analyzed interlocking differences in how undocumented women’s political agency and mobilization have been historically constrained by the mutual reinforcement of their immigration status, gender and race-based discrimination, economic marginalization, and educational and language barriers (Costanza-Chock, 2014; Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Peña, 2007). Peña (2007) explains how “the system of race, gender, and class domination has exposed Indigenous women to triple jeopardy” (p. 13), whose fluid cultural manifestations cannot be oversimplified by white feminist colonial interests.

Based on the analyses of these findings, systemic intersections of gender, race, and immigration status in social movements warrants further research that includes varied perspectives across gender, race, class, sexuality, status, (dis)ability, and organizing. Latinas’

challenges pertaining to “illegality” at the intersection of racism and heteropatriarchy as community organizers needs to be further theorized in order to promote the women’s institutional advancement into political roles (Muñoz, 2015). Similarly, the differential impact of DACA on undocumented youth needs to address the intersectionality of DACA-status, gender, race, and sexuality in order to holistically meet the socio-legal needs of all undocumented people. As previously noted, there are also numerous differences emanating from being seen as an undocumented organizer and a non-organizer publicly, which needs to be addressed scholarly in order to advance immigrant youth’s agency in institutional spaces.

Within the scholarship on undocumented youth’s organizing for citizenship rights, Latinx youth’s reasons for coming out of the shadows are described as multiple, complex, and sometimes conflicting, but their pleas for economic and educational opportunities stand as a common drive (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Vélez et al., 2008). Vélez and other Latinx critical race theorists (2008) have noted how undocumented youth organizing “mostly focused on issues such as racist criminalization, educational equity and access to educational opportunities and concerns about migration and policies” (p. 14). These authors accounted for vital shifts in framing immigrant youth’s social movements, such as the growing numbers of female leaders in these movements (Muñoz, 2015). This gender leadership shift in immigrant social movements is closely related to women’s increasing participation in public spheres, the labor market, and the development of a feminist consciousness (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012).

The literature on undocumented Latinx youth’s organizing emphasizes the power of counternarratives to lead social change (Muñoz, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Undocumented Latinx youth’s counternarratives have the power to advance forms of resistance to contest racist gender violence (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Muñoz, 2015). The recent scholarship on

immigrant youth-led social movements, such as the DREAM Act mobilizations, methodologically employs narratives or *testimonios* as forms of countering racialized “illegality” by validating the perspectives of undocumented organizers, including women (Corrunker, 2012; Negrón-Gonzales, 2015b; Seif, 2011). Counter-stories or, as Negrón-Gonzales (2015b) puts it, “counter spectacles,” work as transformative cultural practices for exposing, analyzing, and debunking majoritarian narratives rooted in nativism. Some researchers point out the role of the mainstream media perpetuating these anti-immigrant discourses (Costanza-Chock, 2014).

Some Latinx critical race theorist pay attention to the role of discourse on immigrant activist narratives (Lara et al., 2010; Seif, 2011). These scholars have addressed the racialization of immigrants through language, race, class, and immigration status. For instance, Lara, Greene, and Bejarano (2010) undermine “illegality” discourses exposing how immigrant advocacy tropes that resort into the *good/bad immigrant* binary perpetuate the criminalization of immigrants. While this discourse might aim at appealing to capitalist sensitivities, it fails to address the complex relationships within groups, such as between immigrant and non-immigrant populations, between undocumented young people and U.S.-born youth, in their struggles for societal power. Even immigrant advocacy tropes, such as *immigrants are not criminals*, *education not deportation*, or *Latina solidarity*, may reinforce the very gendered and racialized positionalities that immigrant organizers aim to counter by using such linguistic binaries, which “can influence how, which and to what degree different immigrant groups perceive and politically respond to policy threats” (Zepeda-Millán, 2014a, p. 7). What becomes apparent on the literature is that undocumented youth’s testimonies provide systemic analyses, through which the youth develop an oppositional consciousness that challenges white normativity (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013).

The literature on immigrant youth-led social movements has examined young Latinxs' legal consciousness regarding the gendered and racialized "illegality" (Lara et al., 2012; Muñoz, 2013; Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Vélez et al., 2008). According to Negrón-Gonzales (2013), undocumented Latinx organizers "operate in a constant context of otherness and extra legality allows undocumented students to assume a removed and more critical location from which to contest societally-accepted truths about the inevitability of inequality" (p. 1289). The literature on Latinx youth's political consciousness has to grapple with the fluid intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and citizenship status, and how these, though differentially, influence undocumented Latinx youth's conceptions of (individual and collective) self within social movements (Alvarez Gutiérrez, 2013; Zepeda-Millán, 2014b).

After surveying Latinxs' perceptions of racialization processes during the 2006 immigrant rights protests against the *HR 4437* anti-immigration bill, Zepeda-Millán (2014a) contended that: "the relationship between threat and mobilization is imperative to note because political scientists have found that the presence of nativist legislation increases Latino electoral participation" (p. 4). According to the author, immigration policies are rooted in racialized immigration discourses that assign Latinx immigrants into exclusionary racial and ethnic categories; which paradoxically galvanize these communities into collective action (Costanza-Chock, 2014; Zepeda-Millán & Wallace, 2013). Some studies have discussed racial identity issues in the DREAM Act social movements arguing how the youth's political engagement through their racialized identities leads to their social mobility and cultural transformations (Costanza-Chock, 2014; Negrón-Gonzales, 2015b; Zepeda-Millán, 2014a). Other studies have unveiled the risks DREAMers' discourses entail as some youth and adults' narratives are

commonly left out in organizing discourses (Patel & Sánchez Ares, In Tuck & Yang, 2014; Pérez et al., 2010).

A few scholars have noted how gendered and raced construction of “illegality,” albeit latent in negotiated organizing discourses, have remained publicly unchallenged in immigrant youth-led social movement practices (Muñoz, 2015; Torres and Katsiaficas, 1999). In their book *Latino Social Movements: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives*, Torres and Katsiaficas (1999) go even further in their intersectional analyzes of immigrant Latinx-led organizations by declaring how “the group’s inability to nurture in a more explicit, proactive fashion the leadership of women also hindered the organizations’ effectiveness” (p. 104), which would sustain gendered practices that are more deeply rooted in the grass-roots knowledge of immigrant communities. Thus, policy makers, researchers, and cross-community organizers must closely examine the role racist heteropatriarchy plays in framing social movements and immigration reform (Taylor, 1999).

Social movement scholars have analyzed undocumented Latinas’ diverse cultural experiences as a result of being institutionally minoritized, and concluded how the women, as a result of these experiences, develop diverse ways of knowing in organizing (Costanza-Chock, 2014; Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). According to Milkman and Terriquez (2012), many Latina organizers “have developed a feminist consciousness in the course of their political careers” on both sides of the border (p. 727). The act of coming out as undocumented has been described as a form of defiance against gendered roles that have traditionally confined Latinas to private arenas (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Peña, 2007; Seif, 2008). Seif (2008) states that “power not only flows from politicians to undocumented women but also circulates, albeit, in a limited way, in the other direction through the organizing efforts of undocumented activists” (p. 79). Despite

undocumented Latinas' growing public visibility, some scholars denounce how youth-led social movements continue to be undertheorized from Latinas' perspectives; thus, following the logics of racist heteropatriarchal subjugation (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Seif, 2008).

Therefore, the previously discussed themes emanating from the literature review revealed multiple gaps regarding vectors of intersectional gendered and raced oppressions shaping undocumented Latinx organizers' lives and opportunities. For instance, few scholars have analyzed the gendered and racialized constructions of "illegality" in the case of Latina young organizers (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Muñoz, 2015). This literature synthesis also sheds a light on the need to further examine practices of intersectional resistance across disciplines. The major research on Latinx students' experiences of "illegality" in schools has focused on analyzing the youth's educational access and achievement in K-12 settings (Patel, 2013a; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008); less scholarly attention has been devoted, however, to the exploration of undocumented students' transitions into higher education (Gonzales, 2016; Muñoz, 2013). Significant research on Latinx youth's mental health has been conducted in the context of deportation and stigma related to undocumented status (Dreby, 2012; Gulbas et al., 2015; Hagan et al., 2012); however, the youth's emotional wellbeing due to "illegality" in the context of schooling has been underexplored (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013).

Scant educational research and interventions have been designed to address the intersections of gender and racial oppressions influencing undocumented Latinx students' academic achievement, leading to trauma, and obscuring their funds of knowledge and resistance (Cammarota, 2004; Muñoz, 2015; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). Teachers and school staff's roles promoting undocumented students' inclusion in the classroom have been underresearched as well (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014). Considering these gaps in the literature, this review advocates

for the advancement of intersectional frames to analyze undocumented Latinx youth's institutional experiences.

Methodologically, educational research on undocumented students has extensively drawn on qualitative methods in order to advance interventions for educators and schools to effectively address academic stressors related to undocumented status (Patel, 2013a). More quantitative research is in turn needed to bring attention to undocumented educational issues (academic, social and emotional) at the policy and structural levels in order to institutionalize practices and programs that challenge second class citizenry, which in the context of U.S. schooling, has been conditioned by heteropatriarchal whiteness.

CHAPTER THREE: Research Methods

This chapter offers a detailed description of the ethnographic study's theoretical frameworks, research methods, and reflexivity. In order to analyze the multiple experiences of the ten Latina participants, this institutional ethnography employed components of interviews, both individual and focus group, and observations to unpack the intersecting vectors of “illegality” shaping the women's complex realities as unauthorized immigrants.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study utilized an institutional ethnography methodology with the principles of intersectionality theory providing the primary lens for investigating the ten Latinx women's experiences as undocumented in three institutional domains: local high schools and colleges, a local state house, and an immigrant youth-led organization.

Intersectionality represented the primary theoretical framework deployed in this institutional ethnographic study (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory was developed by feminist scholars of color and critical race theorists as an analytic tool for recognizing the complexities of women's oppressive social conditions and forms of resistance without reinforcing one vector of oppression over another (Collins, 1998). Using intersectionality theory, this institutional ethnography examined vectors of domination, including heteropatriarchy, racism, and capitalism, which were manifested in the participating Latinas' lives through structures of exploited labor, nation/state economies, and racist gender oppressions.

The Latinx young women in the study shared the burden of unauthorized status with other youth and adults in their community. Their experiences of “illegality” included ranges of racialized phenotypic locations as women from low socio-economic backgrounds. Some

participants were othered as women of color, whereas those who had light skin were able to pass as white in contextualized circumstances (Dreisinger, 2008). The intersections of social categories combined with these women's institutional experiences revealed significant differences among them in terms of both their socially imposed "illegality" across institutional domains. Collins (1998) expanded intersectionality theory to explore how women of color are influenced by intersections of institutional power imbued with white heteropatriarchal norms. For Latina youth who were undocumented, intersectionality entails a process of contestation through which their dynamic selves are socially constructed. Undocumented women of color are likewise situated within hegemonic structures pertaining to interconnected systems of nationhood, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy (Collins, 1998).

The second theoretical framework deployed in the study was borderland theory, which allowed for analysis of socially constructed borders as well as Latinas' agency across these in-between spaces (Anzaldúa, 2012). Borderland theory focuses on the study of Latinas' agency in their connections to local forms of knowledge and resistance (Anzaldúa, 2012). The underlying assumption behind this framework is that Latinas' *mestiza consciousness*, which is described as an awareness of systems of heteropatriarchal dominance, can be used to critically analyze and at the same time undermine power imbalances across dominant structures. Anzaldúa (2012) calls for Chicana and Latina agency in the implementation of cultural and social transformation against the racist capitalist status quo. The Chicana scholar argues that "it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions," and urges Chicanas and Latinas to actively undo these oppressive structures; hence: "challenging patriarchal, white conventions" (p. 100). Using the analytical lens of borderland theory combined with intersectionality theory allowed for an examination of how the participating Latinas made sense and intellectualized their experiences as

undocumented, and co-constructed new knowledge regarding what it meant to belong to particular social groups; hence building a *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 2012).

In addition, this study used settler colonialism to analyze ongoing colonial structures influencing the women's institutional experiences. White settler colonialism as a practice has historically promoted the fallacy of righteous white citizenship in connection to ethnic and linguistic erasure. White settler colonial structures are pervasively imbued with notions of humanness and non-humanness that render some people legal and others "illegal" in order to secure property rights for whites (Glenn, 2015). As an ongoing structure and practice, settler colonialism relies on assimilationist practices to turn minoritized peoples into private white property (p. 61). In this study, settler colonialism frames exposed whiteness as a normalized gendered and raced national construct negatively influencing the participants' lives and opportunities.

Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study was as follows: *What are the experiences of Latina youth navigating gendered and racialized constructions of "illegality" in schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization?*

Research sub-questions included the following:

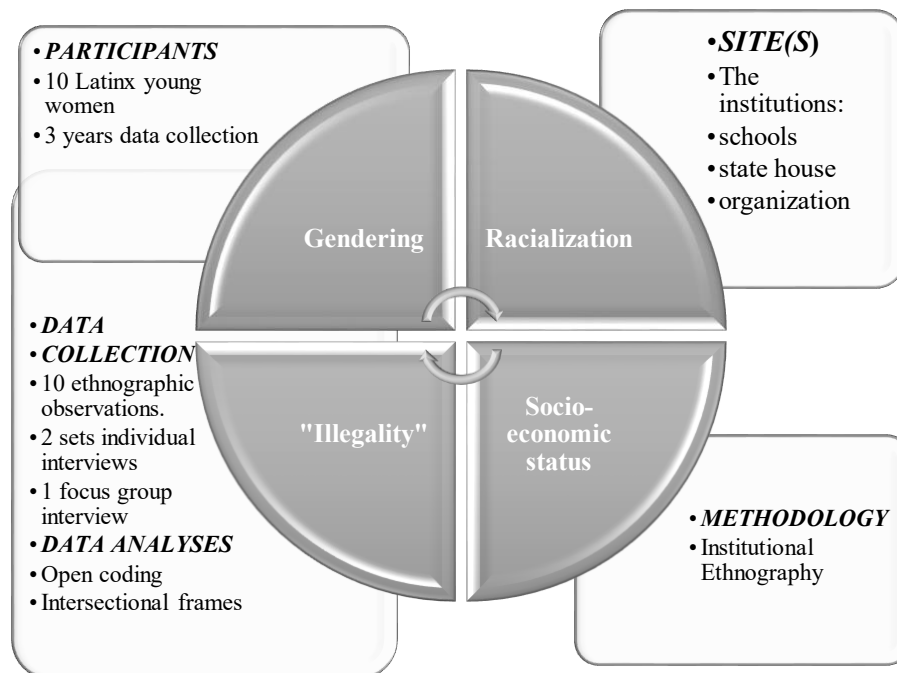
- *How do Latinx women make sense of their experiences as undocumented? In schools? The state house? The organization?*
- *What are some differences and similarities in how the Latinx women experience "illegality" across institutional contexts?*

- *What are some challenges to Latina leadership in schools and immigrant youth-led social movements?*
- *How do Latinx women resist gendered and racialized “illegality” across institutional contexts?*
- *How do Latinx women’s counternarratives and experiences challenge gendered nativist constructions of citizenship?*

Research Design

The following diagram captures the description of the major research sites, participants, methodology, and data collection and analyses. Table 1 below summarizes the research design.

Table 1. Research Design



Methodology: Institutional Ethnography

Configured as an institutional ethnography, this research gathered interview and observation data of the ten Latina participants in three main institutional sites for the period of almost three years, that is from early 2014 until the end of 2017. This qualitative study examined ten Latinx women's experiences as undocumented students and organizers across institutional arrangements (Anderson & Collins, 2013; Smith, 2005). Institutions are portrayed in this study as representing societal structures and norms, which define as well as confine immigrant women of color's circumstances.

In contrast to traditional ethnographic research, an institutional ethnographic methodology demands understanding the culture of institutional power from the perspectives of those who are forced to navigate those societal hierarchies. Influenced by Marxist theory, standpoint sociologist Smith (2005) defined institutional ethnographic research as a method of inquiry "that explores social relations and organization in which our everyday doings participate but which are not fully visible to us" (p. 1). Institutional ethnographic research can potentially address uneven power relations in and beyond the research process by bringing forward marginalized voices and redefining institutional structures that equitably serve their needs.

Collins (1998) challenged Smith's individualistic conceptualization of institutional ethnographic research by expanding its framing. Collins (1998) drew on Black women's epistemologies and contextualized experiences. The author reframed the goal of institutional ethnography as dismantling gendered and racialized structures, building on the collective knowledge and power used by Black women to navigate white institutional spaces. Collins (1998) explicitly countered the individualist framing of institutional ethnographic research, and held it accountable to collective negotiations of institutions. According to the author (1998),

“reinserting notions of diversity into analyses of social relations might reveal the varied ways in which people create local knowledges to counteract objectifying knowledge, and thus might disclose the complex dialectic of shaping, and also being shaped by social relations” (p. 78). This institutional ethnographic study followed Collins’ intersectional analyses attending to interlocking oppressions, specifically unpacking the social construction of “illegality.” An institutional ethnographic methodology facilitated the analysis of how young Latina organizers shaped and at the same time were shaped by educational and immigration policies in institutional relations of power and powerlessness with multiple others.

In contrast to traditional ethnographic approaches that solely focus on cultural practices, an institutional ethnography prioritizes the perspectives of historically minoritized women trying to navigate institutional structures in which they do not hold power positions (Collins, 1992). This study analyzed the Latinx women’s multiple ontologies, epistemologies, and positionalities as they interacted with other people, including teachers, legislators, youth, across the three institutions. This institutional ethnography methodology was used to analyze and decenter institutionalized practices of gendered and racialized oppressions, while validating immigrant Latina agency and leadership.

Site Description

This study defined institutional contexts as social sites where power became complexly organized and negotiated among different Latina participants. The main research sites in this study included the following three institutions: 1) schools and school staff (teachers, counselors, students, administrators, principals); 2) state house and legal agents (policymakers, legal aids, local governors); 3) the immigrant youth-led organization where the women worked or

volunteered. These three major institutions involved multiple actions, such as organizational meetings, fundraising events, and DACA clinics, in which the Latina participants, together with other organizers, led informative know-your-rights (KYR) workshops pertaining to undocumented matters.

The ten Latina participants were all members of an immigrant youth-led organization, which had been created in 2007 in the East coast of the United States. The Latina organizers shared their leadership in the youth-led organization with undocumented males, who were mainly from places in Latin America. It should be noted that one male leader in the organization was originally from Vietnam and another one from Congo. During the three-year data collection, there was a significant gender shift in the organization's demographics, changing its core leadership from being mostly male-led to becoming a predominantly Latina-led organization, with young Latinas, including most of the participants in this study, stepping into central political positions in the movement.

Participant Selection and Social Locations

The participants included young Latinas between the ages of 18 and 27 who were all undocumented. Immigration status was central to participant recruitment. The women were all undocumented at the time this study was initiated. In addition, they were students and organizers who lived in a socially stratified city in the East coast of the United States. Only women who were originally from Latin American countries were recruited for the study. Two Latina participants were from Mexico (Gloria and Yahaira), two from Brazil (Lola and Esperanza), two from Colombia (Marta and Tess), one from Guatemala (Angélica), one from El Salvador (Uxía), one from the Dominican Republic (Isaura), and one from Uruguay (Carmen). The ten

participants represented overlapping and at the same time different experiences and histories within the Latinx diaspora. One of the participants (Marta) self-defined as being of Colombian-Venezuelan descent.

At the beginning of the study, the ten participants were members of an immigrant youth-led organization; hence, all of them were organizers with different experiences. The women were also students in the last year of high school or college when this study was initiated. For varied reasons, some of the participants had to put their studies on hold or completed them in the course of the research. All the women had undocumented relatives or belonged to mixed-status families. Two of the participants (Tess and Carmen) had U.S. native-born siblings.

In several cases, the youth had been separated from their relatives, including parents and siblings, due to deportation. Following the *Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects'* (IRB) requirements, pseudonyms were used to protect the ten Latina participants and the organization's anonymity. Most of the women had participated in other research projects, and/or their migratory stories had been publicly shared in varied media outlets as a result of their social location as community organizers.

At the beginning of the research process, the participating Latinas were core leaders in an immigrant youth-led organization. Central staff member positions in the organization were filled by mostly Latinx young people, including women and men. The core positions in the organization were the following: the lead coordinator, the development director, the campaign coordinator, and two lead organizers, all of whom ran the organization's operations and fundraising. The remaining organizational positions were occupied by undocumented organizers who volunteered and were not central decision makers, but instead collaborated as facilitators of workshops co-led in schools or community clinics with teachers, school staff, counselors, and

undocumented youth. Five of the Latina participants occupied these volunteer roles at the beginning of the study, and moved progressively through different organizing positions during the data collection period. During this time, the organization's leadership underwent significant changes to include mostly young women in leading political positions.

By the end of the study and after Trump's election as president of the United States, the youth-led organization re-structured its leadership to include only women in core political roles. Because the participating Latinas navigated "illegality" in varied contexts beyond the study, they were in contact with policy makers, teachers, counselors, students, employers, health care providers, researchers, lawyers, and other youth and organizers.

In the recruitment of Latina participants, I deployed a purposive sampling approach, based on my subjectivity as a researcher (Palinkas et al., 2015). I considered interconnected vectors of oppression pertaining to gender, ethnicity, raced self, and unauthorized status, in relation to my leading research question: *What are the experiences of Latina youth navigating gendered and racialized constructions of "illegality" in schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization?* As a first step to initiate the research, I contacted and met with central leaders in the immigrant youth-led organization to discuss the possibility of working with Latina organizers within the movement. Different individuals in the organization had previously expressed an interest in participating in the study. I had held informal conversations about my research interests with some of these Latina organizers, most of whom were later formally recruited.

Because I had been engaged for two years in some of the organization's protests, policy initiatives, and larger campaigns, such as anti-deportation and in-state tuition initiatives, I had

developed significant connections and levels of trust with members of the organization, which facilitated the inclusion of the research in this activist realm.

To formally recruit the participants, I e-mailed eight Latina leaders in the organization who had previously expressed an interest in participating in the study. After having these women and the immigrant youth-led organization's consent, I completed and submitted my IRB application. Upon IRB approval, I initiated my data collection as a pilot study in early 2014. In addition, the organization's board members supported the development of this study, revealing an interest in addressing intersections of gender and race-based dynamics in undocumented youth-led organizing.

At the beginning of the study, I had been able to recruit eight Latina participants based on the criteria previously described. Two more young Latina participants were recruited a few months later with the support of other central participants, and through a snowballing method. I had not been able to build close bonds with these two Latina participants (Angélica and Yahaira). Since both women were not central leaders in the organization at the time the study was initiated, we had not been formally introduced. Yahaira volunteered as an organizer in a different area of the state from where the other nine Latina participants lived. Angélica had recently joined the organization, and was not initially very involved in the movement. Table 2 below summarizes the Latina participants' social locations at the beginning of the study. It should be noted that some of these locations changed throughout the study. These fluid features were identified as factors for intersectional analyses. During the data collection period, some women transitioned from part time volunteer to remunerated positions as leaders. Also, some of the women's socio-legal circumstances changed.

Table 2: Study Participants

NAME	AGE	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	STATUS	FIELD OF STUDY	WORK	FAMILY IN USA
1) Lola	25	Brazil	DACA	Public policy	Full time organizer	No *deported
2) Isaura	22	Dominican Republic	DACA	Business	Full time organizer	Yes
3) Esperanza	18	Brazil	DACA	Engineering/ Sociology	Part time organizer	Yes
4) Uxía	23	El Salvador	DACA	Public policy	Full time secretary at University	Yes
5) Marta	22	Colombia/Venezuela	DACA	Social work	Full time Legal services	Yes
6) Tess	20	Colombia	DACA	Psychology	Part time babysitter	Yes
7) Carmen	25	Uruguay	NO DACA initially > DACA	Nursing	Part time Health services	Yes
8) Gloria	23	México	DACA	Political Science/Education	Full time Consulate	Yes
9) Yahaira	22	México	DACA	Business/Theater	Part time Health services	No *deported
10) Angélica	18	Guatemala	NO DACA	Art/ Photography	Part time Bakery	Yes

I had previously collaborated with the immigrant youth-led organization the women were part of in the creation of professional development sessions with teachers and parents in schools, addressing undocumented issues, joining in-state tuition campaigns and talking to legislators, and participating in both anti-deportation and fundraising campaigns. Because I had known most of the participants to different degrees, some degree of trust was established from the outset. Based on her participatory action research collaborations with Latina immigrant workers, Dyrness (2008) argues that multiple transformations among Latinx women can be achieved by “highlighting the need for a research process that supports womanist ways of being, based on wholeness and *confianza*” (p. 27). Research collaborations with the Latina leaders in the study allowed for the expansion of already-established degrees of trust or *confianza* through previous

organizing, which in turn facilitated deeper understandings of how Latinx women who were undocumented navigated “illegality.”

Data Sources

The data sources in this institutional ethnography included two rounds of individual interviews, a focus group interview, and ten ethnographic observations of the participants in the three institutional spaces: schools (2 times), the state house (4 times), and the organization (4 times). In addition, relevant documents, including policy and media texts were analyzed to investigate the women’s intersectional experiences across these institutions from a legal systemic lens. Data were collected for almost three years, from March 2014 until December 2016.

To conduct all the interviews, I developed and followed three semi-structured interview protocols that can be found in the Appendix B at the end of the dissertation. Table 3 below summarizes all the major data sources, timeline, purposes, data types, and other significant details of the institutional ethnographic study. All individual interviews lasted for approximately one hour. The focus group interview lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. The women chose the spaces where all the interviews were conducted. Thus, we decided to meet in local parks, coffee shops, and organizational sites. In order to gather information about their past experiences as students and organizers, I had to employ interview methods. While conducting observations, I was likewise informally interviewing the Latina participants.

Individual Interviews

I conducted two rounds of semi-structured individual interviews with the ten Latina organizers at the beginning and at the end of the data collection process. The goal of these

interviews was to reflect on the women's personal and institutional changes. During the initial interview, I asked the ten Latina participants questions regarding their experiences as undocumented being both students in high school/college, and organizers in the contexts of the state house and the immigrant youth-led organization. The final interview included the transcriptions of the initial individual interview as well as a set of clarifying questions tailored to each participant's experiences, which had been shared in the first interview three years earlier. During the final interview, I posed questions related to the women's lives in their countries of origin, and further inquired about their reasons to migrate North. Additional questions in the final interview protocol aimed to address power imbalances throughout institutional ethnographic research processes.

During the final individual interview, the Latina participants were asked to read the transcriptions of their first interview reflecting on what they had shared three years earlier. This interview allowed for member checks, as the participants were able to reflect back on previously shared ideas and experiences (Creswell, 2009). Thus, the purpose of the final interview was twofold. First, tracking changes that might have happened in the organization, the participants' lives, and their own thinking about justice and social change. Second, allowing for the Latinx women's ownership over their narratives and theories of change. Transcriptions of interview data were individually e-mailed in advance to the participants so that they had access to their stories prior to the final interview. I also shared my codes of the analyzed interview transcripts with each participant individually. Some of the reflective questions in the final individual interview asked the participants about the research processes, including their power analyses. For instance, the women were asked whether they remembered ideas that had been shared three years earlier; if they wanted to add, truncate, clarify, or expand any previously shared information. I also

explained to the ten Latina participants my inability, due to IRB's constraints, to make significant changes to original narratives. At the beginning of the study, I had communicated these nuances to the Latina participants. At the end, I informed the women of the possibility to still incorporate new ideas they might have regarding their stories based on data analyses.

Focus Group Interview

I facilitated one semi-structured focus group interview with the ten Latina participants in the middle of the data collection process in the summer of 2015. Yahaira, one participant in the study was missing during this focus group, since she had an emergency. I shared the transcription of the focus group interview with her afterwards, as with the other participants. I asked Yahaira if she wanted to add anything to the interview, but she did not have time to discuss this issue further. This interview was an important method to allow the women's co-construction of knowledge regarding gendered and raced "illegality."

Ethnographic Observations

In addition to the interview data, ten ethnographic observations of all the Latina participants were conducted in the three institutional contexts during the three-year data collection period. I was a participant observer examining the Latinx women's experiences as undocumented in these contexts. I did not observe the participants as students in high schools or colleges, but in their primary roles as organizers conscientizing others about undocumented issues. Each ethnographic observation lasted for approximately one hour and not more than two hours. These observations took place in different spaces within institutional domains. Throughout the observations, I was positioned as an active participant observer collaborating

with the participants in their organizing engagements, while taking notes of the women's engagements with policy makers, teachers, other youth, and organizers. I informally interviewed the participants, asking clarifying questions, inquiring about their thoughts, or sharing some of my reflections about uneven power dynamics I was observing.

Document Analyses

As part of this institutional ethnographic study, mainstream media items from newspaper publications, education policy reports from different government organizations, and immigration and education policies at the national and state levels were analyzed from an intersectionality lens. The interview data heavily informed my critique of media and policy documents, when it came to framing immigration and undocumented immigrants.

All in all, the combination of these four major data sources allowed for data triangulation, which entailed processes of data collection and analysis looking at evidence from different angles to increase the internal validity of the qualitative findings (Creswell, 2009). Using multiple data sources facilitated in-depth descriptions of oppressive structures and ideologies across the institutions. Table 3 below summarizes the data sources, purposes, and timelines of the study.

Table 3: Data Sources

DATA TYPE	DETAILS/TIMELINE	PURPOSES
<i>2 rounds of semi-structured individual interviews</i> with the ten Latina participants (1 hour)	One semi-structured individual interview at the beginning of this research in March 2014. A second interview at the end of the research late November 2016, which was configured as a reflection on the initial interview.	The purpose of the individual interviews at different times lied in examining the ten women's experiences of "illegality" in their experiences and engagements with others overtime. Bringing the transcription of the initial interview allowed the women to have ownership over their own narratives, as an opportunity for member check.

<i>1 semi-structured Focus group interview</i> (1 hour/15 minutes)	One semi-structured focus group interview with the ten participating Latinas. One woman missed the interview. The focus group interview took place in the middle of the data collection process in the summer 2015 at an organizational site.	The purpose of the focus group was to facilitate a Latinx inquiry space where to reflect on Latinx women's experiences of gendered and racialized "illegality" and theories of change. Coming together in the focus group interview, the women were able to negotiate their experiences, risks, and compromises from their fluid social locations.
<i>10 ethnographic observations</i> of the ten Latina participants in their engagements with policy makers, teachers, and other immigrants. (Not all of the ten Latinas were in the same space at the same time). (1-2 hours each observation)	Observed the Latina participants in know-your-rights workshops on undocumented issues, which they co-facilitated with other leaders. I observed the ten Latinas in three institutions, interacting with teachers, youth, and policy makers in public arenas.	The purpose of these ten observations was to analyze gendered and racialized "illegality" practices as experienced by the ten Latina participants. The focus relied on the women's descriptions of their social conditions and organizing, examining their institutional interactions with legislators, teachers, organizers, and other youth.
<i>Document analyses</i> , including media items, such as newspapers; policy reports; and immigration and educational policy documents.	Analyzed media and policy documents influencing Latinx youth who are rendered undocumented. The women expressed a concern about the role the media played criminalizing immigrants.	These different documents were analyzed to shed a light on gendered and raced ideologies that shape policies affecting Latinx youth who are rendered undocumented. These sources revealed how narratives of "undocumented life" were socially constructed.

Data Recording

All of the individual interviews were audio recorded along with the focus group interview, whereas data from ethnographic observations were recorded in field notes. I regularly wrote theoretical memos and took field notes; which, coupled with observations, interview, and document data, served as the foundation for a process of qualitative data analysis. All of the interviews were conducted in English and transcribed in verbatim. It should be pointed out that the ten ethnographic observations were not audio recorded. I audio recorded and transcribed all the interview data.

I took field notes that included details about the Latina participants' expressions, and reactions during, before, and after the tape recording during the interviews and ethnographic observations. More detailed field notes were taken during salient parts of the events I was

ethnographically observing, which revealed something about intersections of oppression and resistance. Field notes included conversations and institutional interactions between the ten Latinas and me, between the women and other organizers, teachers, school staff, and policy makers. Because the ethnographic observations took place in public spaces, I was not required to ask the schools and the legislators for permission to observe them in these contexts. I always asked for the women's formal consent prior to the observation via e-mail. I was invited to do observations at times. I checked the IRB consent requirements several times during the data collection, and shared my impressions with all of the Latina participants. It should be noted how there were a few times I organically communicated my research agenda to teachers, principals, youth, a few policymakers, especially in the context of talks, protests, or workshops facilitated by the women.

The data recording process was intrinsically connected to my reflections captured in the field notes and memoing through which "the researcher writes down ideas about the evolving theory" (Creswell, 2009, p. 67). I edited my field notes and wrote my impressions on relevant ideas and situations after each observation and interview. I also shared some of these memos with the faculty in my dissertation committee. These multiple negotiated insights deeply influenced my intellectualization regarding the challenges and themes emanating from the data, which predisposed me to reflect more thoroughly about issues of structure over identity, for instance, in subsequent data collection progressions. I reflected on my positionality and uneven power dynamics in the research during the data recording process as well. The final section of this chapter provides further details on reflexivity.

During the interview data collection, I tried to be mindfully present, avoiding to interrupt the women's talk, and focused on building the participants' confidence by allowing them to

make sense of their own experiences, and allowing them to ask questions. I chose not to take extensive notes during individual interviews, since I assumed note taking could be distracting or even break trust among us. I sought to privilege the participants' confidence and wellbeing by establishing full contact as much as possible.

Given the often challenging and sensitive nature of discussing issues related to racist gender violence, a few Latina participants delved in more detail on these issues outside of the formal interview settings and outside of tape-recording. A few times, I had to start audio recording again after I had concluded an individual interview, when a participant elaborated on a previously discussed experience of trauma. I asked for the women's consent to record their narratives again. One time, I did not record or asked for permission to record again, because the Latina participant was visibly upset at the end of the interview when she started to recount an experience of sexual assault. I took notes outside of the interview context afterwards. She later gave me consent to use her personal experience in this research.

Data Collection

Interview and observation data were collected from March 2014 until December 2016, which was a period of approximately three years. I decided to end collecting data prior to writing the main findings of the study. As previously described, I employed ethnographic tools, such as participant observations, a semi-structured focus group interview with the Latina participants, two semi-structured individual interviews with the women, and textual evidence. During the extensive data collection period, I interviewed the participants individually both formally and informally, while simultaneously observing them in the three institutions, which allowed me to generalize how Latinx young women navigate "illegality" systemically, while interacting with

policy makers, teachers, youth, and other organizers. The following sub-sections describe in depth the data collection processes.

Ethnographic Data Collection

I conducted ten ethnographic observations of the Latinas as they interacted with different individuals across the three institutional sites: schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization. The women engaged in conversations about “illegality,” oppression, and social change with different agents, including teachers, policy makers, other youth, organizers, and immigrants. I focused my ethnographic observations on the experiences the ten Latinx women underwent and knowledge they exchanged with others and amongst themselves as Latina leaders. I paid close attention to the particular ways all of the participants urged multiple audiences to challenge “illegality” discourses and policies from an intersectional frame. I was also sensitive to contextualized differences regarding the women’s leadership and agencies.

Overall, I conducted four ethnographic observations of the ten Latinas in the state house as part of their protests, lobbying, and meetings with legislators. I conducted four additional observations of the Latina leaders in spaces directed by the immigrant youth-led organization, such as annual fundraising events, policy brainstorming discussions at organizing meetings, DACA clinics, and undocumented youth trainings. The organization’s foci changed by the end of the data collection period. When I initiated the data collection in the Spring of 2014, the organization was strongly focusing on campaigns for in-state tuition and DACA clinics. Yet, as a result of the anti-immigrant climate during the presidential elections of 2016, the organization started to redirect its organizing gears towards mobilizing teachers and schools, which coincided with the ending of the data collection period in December 2016. Since I was doing a pilot study

during early stages of data collection, I did not conduct as many ethnographic observations during this time; instead, I performed most of the observation data collection towards the middle and end of this study. I intended to observe the women in additional school spaces during the three-year data collection, but I was unable to do so considering the organizing goals set by the organization, which entailed interacting primarily with legislators for in-state tuition in the context of the state house. I strategically avoided accumulating significant ethnographic data, which would be difficult to analyze by myself, also considering pressing dissertation deadlines. Therefore, I chose to focus on observing the women in ten distinct events, rather than repetitive episodes. During these institutional ethnographic observations, I took detailed field notes of how policy makers, other immigrants, and teachers framed “illegality” in their discourses and interactions with the participants, as well as how these individuals responded to the Latinas’ concerns, narratives, and questions. Two formal ethnographic observations took place in schools, one of these at a public high school and the other at a local university. Some of the women had participated as guest speakers in classes I had taught at the college and high school level, raising consciousness about undocumented matters.

All formal observations counted with the Latina participants’ consent prior to the observation. I was invited to observe the women in these institutional contexts. When I heard of specific events, such as the protest during a presidential speech, I asked the participants via e-mail if I could formally observe them at that event. Thus, the observations happened organically, following the women’s needs and goals, and trying to accommodate these into the research.

Throughout the institutional ethnographic research, I was positioned as a participant observer; hence joining the organization’s protests, strategizing, and board meetings. For instance, I wore a graduation robe to protest outside of the state house, while listening to some of

the participants' speeches and writing field notes. I also joined conversations and exchanged ideas regarding undocumented issues with different constituencies, which included both the central Latina participants and other individuals, such as other organizers, legislators, teachers, researchers, journalists, and policy specialists.

As an active participant observer, I asked clarifying questions to the Latina participants to grapple with their arguments or following up on an interaction they had during formal observations. I mindfully avoided interrupting any interactions and/or speeches the women were actively taking part of. There were times, I did intervene to express my point of view for in-state tuition, for instance, with legislators who seemed reactionary. I understood the need to listen to the women's counternarratives. Table 4 below captures central aspects of the ten ethnographic observations, which are presented in chronological order.

Table 4: Ethnographic Observations

Institution	Date	Participants	Goal of Action	Audience
1. High School	Oct 20 th , 2014	Four participants (Angélica, Uxía, Yahaira, and Esperanza)	Organization's DACA clinic	Students Principal Teachers Administrators
2. Community Center (cannot disclose name)	(cannot disclose date due to confidentiality)	Two participants (Lola and Marta)	President Obama's talk in support of Democratic candidate	Obama Democrat supporters Media Organizers (youth)
3. State house	Feb 20 th , 2015	Six participants (Tess, Marta, Yahaira, Isaura, Lola, and Carmen)	Dare to Dream action for the DREAM Act	Media Policy makers Youth Different supporters.
4. Organization's "Camp event" at a union office	April 10 th , 2015	Ten participants present at the event	DACA clinic led by organization	Youth Different supporters
5. Organization's "Congress" at a local university	May 10 th , 2015	Ten participants present at the event	Meeting with new board; in-state tuition action	Media Policy makers Youth Different supporters

6. State House	June 16 th , 2015	Seven participants (Uxía, Esperanza, Isaura, Marta, Carmen, Lola, and Tess)	In-state tuition action	Media Policy makers Youth Different supporters
7. Local College	Feb 13 th , 2016	Two participants (Uxía and Esperanza)	Talk with high school youth who participated in a <i>College Bound</i> program at college	High school youth Teachers College staff
8. State House	May 25 th , 2016	Six Latina participants (Uxía, Esperanza, Tess, Marta, Angélica, and Isaura)	In-state tuition action	Organizers Youth Different supporters Legislators
9. State House	Oct 18 th , 2016	Seven Latina participants (Uxía, Esperanza, Tess, Marta, Angélica, Isaura, and Carmen)	Anti-Trump rally	Organizers Youth Different supporters
10. Organization's fundraiser event at a local restaurant	Nov 10 th , 2016	Nine Latina participants (but Gloria).	Annual fundraiser	Organizers Youth Different supporters

Interview Data Collection

I performed two sets of semi-structured individual interviews with the ten Latina participants. As previously noted, the rationale for conducting two rounds of individual interviews during a year time interval had to do with documenting changes in experiences, perspectives, and contexts burgeoning as a result of the transition from the Obama into Trump's administration. The first round of individual interviews with the participants took place at the beginning of the data collection process between March and May of 2014. I individually interviewed for one hour approximately the ten participating Latinas. I followed a semi-structured interview protocol, which had been previously approved by the IRB.

The second round of individual interviews with all the participants was completed by late November 2016. I provided the transcriptions of the first interviews to the women via e-mail and

hard copies. I e-mailed my codes and transcription to all the participants prior to the final interview. During this interview, I asked the women to reflect on the information previously shared with me years earlier regarding their experiences of “illegality.” I posed inquiries to them regarding their recollection of what the study entailed, including its purposes, the content of previous interviews, personal and social transformations, and their views of the research. I checked in with each participant about their views for expanding, adding, challenging any of their previously shared ideas and experiences.

During these final individual interviews, I had an opportunity to share the coding of the initial interviews with each participant in person. This analytic process allowed for reflexivity about my interpretation of the women’s experiences, which influenced the thematic patterns of the study. I was likewise able to correct transcriptions’ mistakes, expand my theoretical analyses, and challenge my own assumptions about “illegality,” based on the women’s feedback and experiences.

Focus Group Data Collection

I facilitated a semi-structured focus group interview for one hour during the middle of this research in the summer of 2015 at an organizational site. The focus group interview included nine Latina participants who already knew each another. As previously noted, one of the participants, Yahaira was unable to attend the interview in the last minute due to personal issues. At the time, the participants and I decided to move forward with the interview, because it could be challenging to schedule another meeting some time soon. The focus group transcription was shared with Yahaira later on. In addition, she was encouraged to share her input on the transcription, but she was unable to do so due to personal reasons, which prompted her to take a

break from organizing. I used an interpretative focus group through which the Latina participants could collectively make sense of their experiences as undocumented. According to Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005), interpretative focus groups represent a participatory method for extending secondary analysis of qualitative data, including individual interviews and ethnographic observations (p. 951). In the context of this institutional ethnographic study, the ten Latina participants had an opportunity to engage in critical dialogues around issues of gender at the intersection of other societal oppressions, such as racism and classism. In their description of the focus group methodology, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011) urge qualitative researchers to address unequal power dynamics as well as ethical concerns by privileging the perspectives of all the participants in the research, but particularly those whose voices are socially silenced (p. 548). The focus group interview also facilitated a process of member check and discussion of power dynamics in the research, considering conflicting roles as researchers, participants, students, and organizers.

The focus group interview brought different and similar perspectives together to the same space with the purpose of helping the women grapple with their own worldviews and experiences. During this collective interview, the Latina participants were asked to exchange their experiences of gendered and racialized “illegality” in institutional spaces. For the Latinx women participating in the space, the focus group interview opened up whole group conversations about gendered and racialized oppressions, which had been rarely collectively addressed, even in undocumented spaces of resistance, as some of the women noted. Questions from the focus group interview protocol focused on gendered and racialized experiences at the intersection of legal status in the women’s organizing engagements with policy makers, teachers, and youth.

The significance of the focus group interview cannot be overlooked in this institutional ethnography. The Latina participants had a chance to negotiate their varied points of view and experiences of “illegality” as lived in three institutional arenas. I contrasted and compared the focus group data to the individual interview data and ethnographic observations as lessons collected in the findings of the study to draw implications for policy, teaching, research, and youth-led organizing; hence triangulating data for validity purposes (Creswell, 2009). For reference, the three main interview protocols deployed during the almost three-year data collection process can be found in the Appendix B.

I periodically wrote researcher memos to be shared with my dissertation advisor, documenting ongoing data analyses and reflections on my positionality. The committee’s feedback on these developing analyses, theoretical framework, and methodology significantly contributed to the methodological rigor of the study. I made various changes to my final interview protocols based on analyses conducted during the initial interviews. After the initial interviews, I realized I had to unpack the meaning of the terms *gendered* and *racialized* in the protocol questions for the focus group and final interviews to include how the women’s diverse experiences as undocumented were shaped by gender and racial relationships to white heteropatriarchal property rights (Glenn, 2015).

Data Analysis

I performed open coding using the theoretical framework of intersectionality to come up with major codes for each Latina participant across each of the three institutions. I shared my coding of the focus group interview data with all of the Latinas via e-mail and provided a hard copy to each woman individually. I also shared my analyses (codes) of individual interview data

(first and second) with each Latina participant both via e-mail and in person. At the end of the data collection, I met with most of the Latina participants in this study to present a report of the main findings and to discuss related implications. I likewise shared a written report of the results with the immigrant youth-led organization for accountability purposes.

Data analyses drew on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and borderlands theoretical frameworks (Anzaldúa, 2012), which delineated themes from the transcribed interviews and observations. Frames of intersecting power vectors through gender, race, ethnicity, and immigrant status were used as analytical lenses to theorize about the Latina participants' different experiences pertaining to gendered and racialized "illegality." I was interested in looking at differences and similarities in how the women navigated "illegality" depending on their social locations and institutional contexts; thus, I included multiple codes for each participant, and then compared these codes to those emanating from the other participants' data. I additionally examined thematic similarities and differences across institutional contexts. Intersectionality theory was used to come up with an initial set of codes in data analyses, based on early ethnographic and interview data. This initial coding guided the analyses of the focus group, individual interviews, and institutional ethnographic observation data.

Data analytic processes entailed an ongoing and systematic comparison process both during and after the three-year data collection period (LeCompte & Goetz, 1984). The cross codes based on interview data included a total of twenty-one codes. Additional codes were identified for each participant, some of which were not included in the cross participant and institutional analyses, although still inserted in the account of each woman's migratory story. Following an intersectionality theoretical framework, some of the emanating patterns based on theory-driven inductive analyses included: *institutionalized gender and racial oppression in the*

state house, criminalization of undocumented Latina women of color, gendered and racialized roles in organizing, intersectionality of gender, race, language in schools and organizing. From Borderland theory, I used concepts such as *nepantlera, hybridity, mestizaje, border woman* to formulate codes about the Latinx women's multiple forms of resistance and cultural identity construction. For instance, I developed codes such as *in-betweenness in organizing, contradictory cultural roles, building a mestiza critical consciousness, transnational familismo, citizenship claims, and unlearning gendered and raced roles.* These codes were refined and revised as data were collected and analyzed throughout the years of the study.

Constant comparisons were made between and among emerging conceptual themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since the study was driven primarily by the theoretical framework of intersectionality theory, a key part of the analyses entailed identifying institutional structures, policies, and practices that sustained white heteropatriarchal capitalism by marginalizing Latina youth who were undocumented. These structures, policies, and practices were experienced and interpreted differently by the ten participants depending on varying contextual factors and social locations. One of the challenges of the data analyses had to do with reconciling the Latinx women's various experiences and perspectives of "illegality," and illuminating gendered and racialized "illegality" structures and practices.

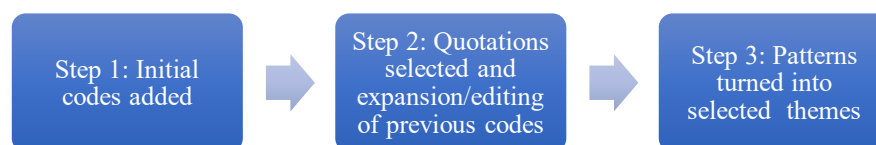
Coding Reduction

I coded each interview (individual and focus group) following a qualitative coding reduction process (Creswell, 2009). I started analyzing individual interviews one by one applying a three-way coding reduction process. I analyzed data inductively (Creswell, 2009, p. 19), which meant that some of the initial codes from early interview analyses overlapped with later codes, a

process of subsequent coding that allowed for new patterns across the ten participants to emerge, including differences and similarities relevant to their socially constructed undocumented status. As a result, I was able to theorize about the women's intersectional forms of oppression and resistance across the three institutions. An example of this inductive analysis was looking for patterns across the women's experiences of gender and racial violence, and how they made sense of those experiences in relationship to their undocumented status.

I performed deductive data analyses having hypothesized for instance that undocumented status at the intersection of gendered and raced locations inhibited the women's leadership across institutional arenas. I was also interested in studying how interlocking forms of discrimination posed negative psychological and material effects for the women. I found data support for this hypothesis based on the findings of the study, regarding educators, policymakers, and organizers' roles grappling with the academic and emotional ramifications of undocumented youth's experiences. Overall, this multi-layered analytic process helped me to edit, add, and expand previous codes, select new quotations, and delete others for the purpose of drawing intersectional themes, which configured the findings chapters of the study. Figure 1 below captures the three-way coding process used to analyze all data:

Figure 1: Coding Reduction



As far as interview analyses, I conducted a general reading of each woman's transcription and the focus group. I applied a general coding following an intersectionality theoretical

framework (Collins & Bilge, 2016), such as *cultural barriers*, *sexual harassment*, *institutional racism*, *gender-based discrimination*, and so on, without delving into detailed description, but focusing on identifying salient themes pertaining to the intersectionality of gender, race, class, sexuality, and immigration status that revealed something about the women's experiences as undocumented.

After this initial coding, I revisited each interview transcriptions and conducted a second reading, and related previously described codes, in order to expand earlier analyses. I came up with patterns after collapsing initial codes. I specifically sought to elucidate intersecting vectors of "illegality," pointing at the varied institutional spaces in which the Latina participants navigated "illegality" and had their needs negotiated with others.

I performed a third reading of the interview transcriptions with the objective of editing and re-defining key patterns. Then, I selected themes that configured the findings of the study. I underlined key quotations from the interview data. The choice of quotations was based on relevant examples of policies shaping the women's "illegality." Contradictions, similarities, and discrepancies among the Latina participants were unpacked. Finally, I conducted analysis of these patterns across the three institutions in order to identify similarities and differences in how Latina "illegality" and resistance were articulated and embodied.

Positionality

My researcher positionality was that of an active participant observer throughout different interactions with the ten Latina participants. In my observations and analyses, I drew on the local knowledge and experiences I had gained as an educator who taught immigrant youth, college students, immigrant adults, and volunteered as an immigrant organizer collaborating with

youth and women affected by immigration locally, nationally, and transnationally. I strongly believe that it is vital as a feminist researcher to grapple with how these multiple relationships and experiences inevitably influence the research process (Lal, 1996).

I had known most of the Latina participants prior to embarking in this research, and as a result of the previous collaborations with the immigrant youth-led organization. I had engaged in multiple actions around immigrant justice, which included: strategizing legislative campaigns around educational policy and in-state tuition, anti-deportation campaigns, strategizing protest actions, creating banners, fundraising, talking to teachers and young people in schools for purposes of education reform and awareness of undocumented issues. Some of the Latina youth in the organization had come as guest speakers to my college and high school classes. Therefore, the nature of the relationship with the immigrant youth-led organization and the Latina participants themselves prior to this research was rooted on previously established significant levels of trust through previous and ongoing collaborations.

My history of collaboration with the immigrant youth-led organization dated back to two years earlier when I was first introduced to the organization by a Guatemalan friend, who was himself undocumented. We had discussed possibilities of collaboration with this immigrant youth-led organization. We both had previously collaborated with local immigrant organizations on KYR and anti-deportation campaigns. Since I was a teacher interested in addressing undocumented issues in policy, classes, and schools, this Guatemalan friend recommended that I connected with some of the young organizers in the immigrant youth-led organization. When I e-mailed the organization, I was promptly invited to join one of its events where I was first introduced to young undocumented leaders from different locations and ethnicities, but

predominantly Latinxs. I developed close relationships with female and male leaders in the organization from the outset.

The reasons that led me to initially embark on this research were varied and intertwined. A central thread in my interdisciplinary research had to do with challenging racist gender violence, as experienced by women of color who were undocumented. I was concerned that the influence of heteropatriarchy and racist capitalism on undocumented Latinas' lives had been underresearched and overlooked in both policy, research, education, and social movements (Milkman & Terríquez, 2012; Muñoz, 2015; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). I envisioned my engagements in this immigrant youth-led organization as an opportunity to counter institutionalized gendered and racialized oppressions from a grass-roots standpoint, and to develop significant networks and support undocumented youth with whom I had worked. While collaborating with the immigrant youth-led organization, I volunteered with other immigrant women's organizations around labor issues, and taught ESOL to immigrant Latinx mothers.

Prior to this study, I had worked tirelessly with undocumented youth and adults for many years and in varied settings. As an *unafraid educator* (Muñoz, 2015), I felt a pressing responsibility to support undocumented students, which also led me to connect with the youth-led organization, and later develop this institutional ethnographic research. I had worked as a substitute teacher in Kansas, teaching Spanish as a heritage language to mostly Mexican children whose parents were undocumented. At the time, I felt unprepared as a teacher to support them legally. To contend with this lack of knowledge, I reached out to local immigrant organizations, since the school did not provide this sort of training and resources. Through this path, I have been humbled by the lessons of undocumented struggles and resistance. Working with predominantly white and middle-class student teachers at the university level, I perceived a need

to address undocumented issues in their teaching practice as well. Educators, especially those of us who benefit from whiteness, must reflect on their biases, and how whiteness permeated teaching and learning.

This study represented an attempt to advance anti-racist and anti-sexist educational practices and policies towards meaningfully addressing the varied needs of undocumented young people and their transnational communities. By facilitating member checks with the ten Latina participants, reflecting on uneven power relations in my field notes, and debriefing observations with faculty and peers, I pushed myself to engage in forms of critical reflection with regards to knowledge, assumptions, and relationships developed in undocumented spaces of resistance, realizing how power fluctuates throughout the research process (Tuck, 2009). I checked for individual biases shaping how we see and treat people from different social locations in conversations with the participants, faculty, friends, and other organizers (Lal, 1996).

I positioned myself as an immigrant Latinx scholar in this research, because of how I have been raced in the United States. This also became a political identity that I embraced in my community scholarship. Yet, I struggled with this “Latinx” identity marker, in part due to my Spanish nationality and my country’s colonial history, but also considering my Galician heritage. I speak a native language, *Gallego*, which is spoken in the Northwestern Spain. There are officially four languages in Spain. My Galician language and heritage have immersed me in Celtic cultural traditions. Like Anzaldúa (2012) underlines, I have changed through occupying multiple, sometimes contradictory positions across borders. Galician language and culture is minoritized in Spain. In the United States, I increasingly evoked a sense of *Latinidad* to reveal the ways I was racialized as an immigrant woman across raciolinguistic lines. My experiences as an immigrant woman having lived for over thirteen years in the United States influenced me

profoundly, primarily through the close bonds and supports I developed within the Latinx immigrant community.

At the core of who I became as an activist critical educator and scholar were my upbringing experiences, having been raised by a single mother and my grandfather in a low-income household in Galicia, Spain. My mother, Teresa, had separated from an abusive partner when I was a child. She barely made it to high school and had worked low-wage jobs all her life. Growing up as a child of working class and raised by a single mother, I faced multiple challenges, but I still managed to excel in school. As I transitioned into college, it became clear that my background mattered, and that larger hegemonic structures were attempting to erase my power as a woman as well as my Galician heritage under nationalistic Spanish discourses. Growing up in a low-income area, I witnessed how my community's schools were under-resourced, and that we as students were seen as culturally deficient. As a result, students like me were mis-educated and pushed to navigate life from a disadvantaged institutional position. It is hard not to internalize these malignant labels, when minoritized students in schools are not taught to see these educational conditions as products of structural problems in society. By developing a critical consciousness regarding these structural issues, and how I was positioned systemically, I was moved to pursue a life in organizing.

In both Spain and the United States, I experienced *linguicism*, using Nieto's (2002) terminology, or language discrimination in different institutions, including schools and universities from peers, students, or colleagues who treated me in patronizing ways. I was racialized due to my non-standard English accent, and thus treated as second class in transnational contexts. I was discriminated against in other Spanish regions, for having an accent or speaking *Gallego*, a language that has been historically deemed inferior to other languages

spoken in Spain, being pushed to assimilate to Spanish traditional values and language, even when attending public schools where bilingual education was normalized. Therefore, I was positioned in this research having a fluid identity, living in borderland spaces that I knew would continue to shift and influence the way I am, become, and think.

Despite these overlapping histories of oppression, my conflicting social locations and the material benefits I had in relation to my country's colonial status could not be overlooked. I understood that as a result of my Western European knowledge and academic and societal power, working at the university, and being seen as a Spaniard in Latinx communities, I held multiple advantages to navigate institutions. In *Mudding the waters*, Nagar (2014) urges feminist scholars to engage in reflexivity, as a process of critical analysis not just on the positionality of researchers, but on how researchers' social locations intersect with institutional, geopolitical, and material specificities of their positionalities. Following reflexivity claims, as mestizo Galician-Spanish immigrant in the United States, and college educated outsider, I benefited from the legacies of colonialism that permeate the social fabric of the United States as well as the participating youth's countries of origin. I did not endure in the same way the dynamics of racism that marginalize Latin American women of color for instance. I was not raced as undocumented, because of my light skin and phenotypical privilege. I had a visa that allowed me to publicly contest oppression, and feel safer in public arenas. Despite these complex social locations and power concerns, I was relentlessly committed to challenging racialized gender violence alongside the communities affected by the socio-legal construction of "illegality."

My multilingual positionality allowed me to theorize about social change dialogically with the Latinx women using at times our native languages in Spanish and Portuguese. The native language discourse used over English in informal research interactions aimed to disarm

the mainstream English feminist discourse “as the elite gobbledygook of postmodernist jargon makes it less and less acceptable to speak comprehensibly” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 29). My critical analyses regarding these socio-cultural locations are illustrated in the following section on reflexivity.

Reflexivity

This section describes processes of critical reflexivity and self-reflexivity, my presence in a writing group, and pre-established work and relationships with the ten Latina participants. Being positioned as an *outsider/insider* in the research calls for a critical reflection on power differentials throughout the research process and amongst different individuals. In this section, I address the contradictions stemming from my multiple positions as an *insider*, an *outsider*, or both, regarding social location, knowledge, and migratory experiences. Lal (1996) encourages feminist researchers to practice critical reflection about situated and negotiated role(s) throughout the research process, considering that “unreflexive attempts to get beyond the binarisms of Self and Other can end up reconstituting them unless they are deployed critically” (p. 205). In this study, I actively engaged in critical reflexivity regarding my positionality and epistemology with multiple others, including the Latina participants, friends, and faculty towards a decolonizing research praxis (Smith, 1999). I negotiated individually and collectively my complex positionality with the Latina participants, and clearly communicated to them the purposes of the research, timeframes, and analyses.

I shared personal experiences about oppression, privilege, and ethical concerns regarding the study with the ten women and the immigrant youth-led organization during initial and later informal conversations. Nagar (2014) underlines how reflexivity in feminist ethnographic

research has avoided to answer central epistemological questions in transnational feminist praxis. The author contends how critical reflexivity is achieved through collaborations in which the researchers are open to be challenged and radically vulnerable. Nagar (2014) argues: “telling stories involves a series of delicate negotiations through which one must underscore the impossibility of ever accessing lived experiences and where one’s engagements with who is speaking, who is referenced, and who is listening can become legible only when contextualized within the multiple and shifting social relations in which they are embedded” (p. 14). By acknowledging hegemonic dynamics throughout the research, researchers can act to avoid perpetuating detrimental representations of gender violence without reducing them to “accessible” narratives, and thus re-enacting the violence feminist researchers seek to confront. Rather than using reflexivity to justify personal biases as if “uncovering a universalizing truth,” I tried to grapple with multiple subjectivities in the study (Nagar, 2014, p. 108). Findings from the institutional ethnography describe the ten Latina participants’ experiences as incomplete, ever-changing, avoiding to collapse complex information into static categories about self, culture, and epistemology. I inserted comments on reflexivity throughout the analyses of the findings.

My positionality as a researcher and an organizer with this immigrant youth-led organization met the duality of working as an asset and a liability. As a doctoral student, I benefitted from institutional power, which might have unconsciously privileged my doctoral interests and epistemological lens over the Latina participants’ perspectives and needs. Hence, the need for a “processual approach to reflexivity and positionality, combined with an acute awareness of the place-based natures of our intellectual praxis” (Nagar, 2014, p. 18). Prior to this research, I was aware of how my research abilities had been shaped by my geographical, temporal, and socio-institutional locations, and by processes, events, and struggles unfolding

across these locations. I had been trained in Western funds of knowledge shaping my perspectives towards the participants, regarding what they did, needed, knew, and experienced. My analytical views were aligned with the Latina participants' "situated knowledges" (Smith, 2005). To contend with Western epistemological biases, I sought to contribute to the Latina participants' agency throughout the research process by sharing ongoing codes and analyses of data. I encouraged the women's input and questions, as previously described. I shared both electronically and in person my analyses of individual and focus group interviews with all Latina participants, encouraging questions, and listening to their ideas, struggles, and concerns. I also facilitated questions and practices that challenged uneven power dynamics, and validating their authority over the research.

In the context of the observations and interviews, the Latina participants and I discussed our beliefs, issues related to the research, including relationships with other youth, teachers, and policymakers, and negotiated our knowledge and strategies for navigating these spaces in ways that empowered the participating Latinas. We likewise engaged in conversations about shared experiences as women as well, including some of us having been raised in a single-parent household, being discriminated against because of a non-standard English accent, being sexually harassed, among other factors. At the same time, the participants and I discussed differences in how institutionalized practices of racism and sexism hurt immigrant women, particularly women of color. In these informal conversations, issues of intersectionality were considered. After the initial interviews, the women started to use the language of intersections of systemic oppressions, conveying an interest in addressing intersectionality in both their narratives, discourses, and youth-led organizing.

During the data collection period, I sometimes reacted as a woman sensitive to the challenges we, as immigrant women, face in a heteropatriarchal capitalist society in which our bodies' dispossession is not just implied, but violently inflicted. When some of the Latina participants recounted episodes of sexual violence, my past traumas were also triggered, since I had been sexually molested by a peer in high school. This relationality revealed the experiential knowledge of the dimensions of the violation I brought to this research when trying to make sense of other Latinx women's sexual abuse experiences. I informally shared some of my own experiences as an immigrant with the participants in and outside of the research context.

As a result of my previous organizing engagements with the youth-led organization and most of the participants, I was able to build significant levels of trust, which facilitated the inclusion of the research agenda in the youth-led organization's spaces. This trust was rooted in previous collaborations and discussions around immigrant injustice, which facilitated the data collection regarding power imbalances.

This pre-established trust worked as an asset, since the participants were familiar with my work and personality. Yet, this level of trust also represented a liability as far as the research was concerned. There might have been unaccounted pressures that the participants experienced to welcome the research and supported its development throughout the data collection period. I had been involved in fundraising events facilitated by the youth organization, for instance, so the participants might have experienced a pressure to join the study to avoid losing that financial support. During the focus group and individual interviews, I asked the Latina youth about their motivations to participate in this study and whether they had experienced any pressure to join. In their responses, the Latina participants reported an interest in advancing intersectionality analysis in their organizing, and conveyed their trust towards me as a researcher, which confirmed part of

the power I held as a researcher. The Latina participants likewise envisioned their participation in the study as an extension of their community organizing, displaying their agency over the research.

Despite the straightforward relations that most of the Latina participants and I had established through previous organizing engagements, the women might still have perceived me as disrupting their routines and a threat as an *outsider*, since I was not undocumented and came from a privileged institutional background. I also had different relationships with the participants, being closer to some women more than others. Although I shared my limited understanding of their struggles as a result of my institutional positionings, the women never shared their ideas regarding my country's colonial history influencing our relationships or my interactions with other Latinx communities. This might be due to their discomfort to voice power differences, considering how the women valued Latina solidarity, or their inability to engage in colonial analyses, or reasons I was unable to decipher.

I engaged in critical reflective processes about my research with others beyond the organization space, including mentors, faculty, and friends. For instance, I shared my memos reflecting on analysis of interview data with my dissertation chair, which always included reflections on my positionality. I was also part of a dissertation writing group in which four different doctoral students met to exchange dissertation-related writings and ideas. We engaged in conversations about our positionalities in our respective research projects. For instance, I was challenged to question my assumptions about what the Latina participants had learned regarding educational and immigration policies throughout the years of data collection. In addition, the women in the doctoral group challenged each other's ideas and perspectives, considering also our racially diverse social locations. We also reflected on power dynamics in the research

questions, processes, and interactions with participants. I was reminded how I had never experienced what it meant to live “in the shadows,” and therefore, I could not make assumptions about the participants’ experiences. The faculty in the dissertation committee emphasized the importance of including direct quotations from the participants to support data analyses, in ways that validated the women’s multiple subjectivities. These reflections on power were central to the validity of research and represented valuable member checks to advance the quality of analysis.

Such collective processes of critical reflection were likewise central for using a non-universalizing feminist lens that challenged racialized and sexualized representations of Latinx women. Not all of the Latins in this study shared a common language, and their heritages, Indigeneity, and epistemologies were rooted in heterogeneous, conflicting, and other times, overlapping histories of resistance (Anzaldúa, 2012). I embraced this multiplicity of experiences facilitated by an intersectionality lens in order to avoid flattening the participants’ lived experiences, while privileging their own languaging about those experiences.

Furthermore, ethical concerns were negotiated with the ten participants. I kept confidentiality of their names and the organization’s following the requirements by the IRB at my university. I had to keep confidentiality to protect the participants’ safety and wellbeing within the system and the immigrant youth-led organization, following the institutional research call. Thus, I avoided writing identifying information concerning the Latina participants’ immigration journeys and direct quotations from talks that could be found online. I shared with the participants my interest in keeping confidentiality, noting the risks associated with their unauthorized status within a changing political climate. Some of the participants conveyed a desire to have their real names used in this research, including the name of the youth-led organization in order to visibilize their organizing work and gain public attention. In fact, some

of these women had been interviewed in the past by other researchers and media outlets. Their real names had been used in these publications.

The Latina participants pointed out how DACA had already provided their personal information to the government, so they were already “at risk.” The ten Latina participants understood the expressed privacy concerns when the ethics of the research were discussed. The women agreed to proceed as participants following confidentiality agreements. Yet, these confidentiality considerations in the case of undocumented organizers who are over 18 raise ethical considerations pertaining to voice, power, and accountability. Researchers working with undocumented organizers need to continue revisiting varied ethical concerns to avoid perpetuating the silencing of a system that relegated undocumented voices to the shadows of the law and society.

Another ethical concern had to do with providing mental health support to participants during the data collection process. In some cases, I was somehow unprepared to refer the women to specific legal or culturally relevant health services, when they might have benefitted from them. Specifically, the sexual assault stories during the individual interviews raised this dilemma. One Latina youth broke into tears when recalling experiences of rape across borders. I needed to have provided the contact information for trained sexual assault therapists, but at the time, I lacked this information. I was also emotionally triggered by her story, but did not show it in the moment. I stopped the tape recording and tried to prioritize her safety. I communicated available counseling resources to her afterwards via e-mail noting the importance of providing information about these kinds of services to participants whose trauma was ongoing. This participant expressed a lack of trust on mental health professionals, which she attributed to

“cultural barriers.” I reached out to professional Latinx counselors that could provide effective care at her university, understanding it was ultimately her choice to seek out that support.

Chapter Conclusions

This institutional ethnographic research aimed to answer the research question on how Latinx young women navigate gendered and raced “illegality” in three institutional contexts through the use of an institutional ethnographic methodology. Both observation and interview data allowed for deep descriptions pertaining to the Latina participants’ experiences as historically minoritized Latina youth navigating a hegemonic institutional nexus. The interviews illuminated the structure of the institutions that were not apparent through its own texts/policies/observation works. That is precisely what makes institutional ethnography different from policy analysis, or traditional ethnography. If researchers would only describe institutions from the privileged point of view of those who hold power in them, they would have a particularly constricted view of the institution.

CHAPTER FOUR: An Introduction to the Participating Latinx Women

This chapter presents the background information of the ten Latinas in the study. First, it highlights relevant collective and individual details about all of the participants. This background information facilitated intersectional analyses of the immigrant women's experiences in contexts of *forced migration*.

As the United Nations Refugee Agency underlines in its 2016 report,⁸ “migrating women face seemingly insurmountable barriers related to their status, living conditions, their roles and responsibilities as women, too often leading to violence, abuse, and the violation of their bodily and moral rights” (UNHCR, 2016). The ten Latina participants were *forced migrants* in that all of them had to cross the U.S.-Mexican border fleeing violence; hence having to leave their countries against their will. Under current U.S. immigration law, however, these Latinx immigrants do not qualify for refugee status. Rather than treating them as *forced migrants*, the U.S. settler state has deployed women's citizenship, or lack thereof, and other liminal conditions to re-victimize them institutionally and deprive them of political power (Chávez, 1998; Parra, 2015).

This chapter presents portraits of the participating Latinas' multiple social locations, immigration stories, and institutional experiences, grappling with issues of immigration on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. Although qualitative researchers cannot provide a whole picture of a participant's experiences, knowledges, and perspectives (Nagar, 2014), it is vital to contextualize gendered and raced locations within societal structures and transnational immigration politics in order to dismantle these systems (Patel, 2017). To advance intersectional analyses of the Latinx women's experiences regarding institutionalized gendered and racialized

⁸ From the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' report of 2016. The report can be accessed online following the link: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/events/ga/documents/2016/14July2016/GlobalUnions_14July2016.pdf

“illegality,” this study drew on portraits regarding the participating Latinx women’s narratives and subjectivities, as described by the women themselves.

A Collective Portrait

The ten participants in this study self-identified as Latina or Latinx in relationship to their ethnicity and place of birth. The women were from places in Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. They had lived in the United States for different amounts of time. Some of them had arrived as children, whereas others had crossed the border as teens. Regarding their experiences as *forced migrants*, two of the women had crossed the border by themselves as teens (Uxía and Angélica), and the others came accompanied by family members as children. Some of the participants’ parents, siblings, and relatives had been deported by the time this study was initiated.

With the exception of Angélica who had recently migrated from Guatemala, the participants were DACA recipients at the beginning of the study. Another participant, Carmen, who was originally from Uruguay, received DACA during the course of the study, since, originally, the youth did not benefit from the program. Although it falls outside of the data collection period, it is still worthy of mentioning that two participants got married while the writing of the findings was being completed. Marta married another immigrant, and Isaura married a long-term partner who was a U.S.-born citizen. Marta divorced after a few months of marriage due to domestic violence issues. She unsuccessfully tried to apply for a green card following VAWA claims.

The Latina participants were all eighteen years old or older by the time this study was initiated in early 2014. The women were in their late teens, or early to mid-twenties. When asked

about their sense of belonging, the Latinx women described a cultural clash as a result of experiencing different levels of exclusion and inclusion in the United States. Because these young women moved transnationally or between borders, they embodied Anzaldúa's (2012) concept of *nepantlera*, described as a fluid condition characterized by the ambiguity of change as women live in the borderlands. In this hybrid cultural space, Latinas experience multiple, sometimes contradictory realities; it is precisely in that in-betweeness of struggles and resistance where cultural transformations are forged. Some of the women identified as bi-racial, such as Angélica, having an Indigenous mother and mestizo father. Being biracial for the women who identified as such entailed that certain aspects of their identities were split into "*white aspects*" and "*black aspects*" institutionally; thus, obscuring the interconnection of both social locations.

In addition, the participating Latinas were all organizers in an immigrant youth-led organization in the East Coast of the United States. They collaborated with other female and male organizers, mostly Latinxs, in the movement. It was through the institutional space of the organization that the women negotiated their needs and experiences as undocumented with others who came from varying levels of institutional power, including other organizers, youth, teachers, policy makers, researchers, and members of the media. The women's collaborations with immigrant organizations was reportedly seen as a trigger for their awareness regarding cultural and political structures imbued with gendered and raced ideologies of dominance.

The ten Latinas collectively identified as DREAMers, being supporters of the DREAM Act, which could open pathways for citizenship for eligible undocumented youth. Because the DREAM Act had failed to pass Congress several times, the women and men in the organization were left to figure out what it meant to be a DREAMer when there was no DREAM Act. In view of shifting political domains, the immigrant youth in the organization were able to creatively

rebuild their organizing and reframe their priorities accordingly. These leaders had led local and national actions for in-state tuition, anti-deportation, *DREAM schools*, and scholarships for undocumented students to access higher education. These organizers struggled to be inclusive of the larger undocumented community (adults, people from other ethnicities, gender non-conforming individuals) in their discourses and spaces, but became increasingly aware of intersecting oppressions, noting how certain immigration policies, such as DACA, promoted hierarchies and divisions among immigrants. The challenge was to act on this intersectional resistance.

The Latinx women were students in high school or college at the beginning of the study, and by the time this study concluded some of them had graduated from high school, while others had to postpone their studies due to financial or other personal constraints. The Latinx women worked full or part time while in school. During this institutional ethnographic study, the women took breaks from school to meet individual needs and responsibilities, such as working to financially support their families or save money for college.

Individual Portraits

This section offers individualized accounts of each Latina participant's migratory story. These narratives were recounted by the women themselves during formal or informal interviews. Although it is impossible to grapple with the complexities of each participant's situated experience, the individual narratives captured in this section offer a snapshot of the most salient episodes in the women's transnational lives, which became central pieces of information for analyses of gendered and raced "illegality."

The individual portraits of the women's social locations and migratory experiences presented below offer the reader a panorama of socially constructed "illegality," imagined citizenship, and individual struggles. The women's complex narratives are presented in the order the participants were individually interviewed starting in 2014.

Uxía

Uxía crossed multiple borders from el El Salvador to the United States when she was twelve years old. Her parents had left El Salvador, and arrived to the United States when Uxía was a baby and her brother three years old. Her family came to the United States during the last years of the Salvadoran civil war (1980-1992) in the early nineties. Uxía's mother feared rape threats from gangs and the military, and the family decided that immigration was their only chance to survive. Uxía migrated North years later fleeing similar gendered victimizations. She endured sexual violence, gang violence, and interfamilial violence prior to leaving El Salvador. Like Uxía, more and more young Central American women have been increasingly crossing multiple borders by themselves to migrate to the United States. As *forced migrants*, these women flee gendered and racial violences when they choose to migrate (Pierce, 2015; Sánchez Ares & Lykes, 2016).

Uxía's parents had left the girl under her aunt and uncle's care when they migrated to the United States. However, this trust was violated when Uxía's uncle and cousin sexually abused the girl. In addition, her uncle had received threats from the local *maras*, Salvadorian treacherous gangs (Winton, 2007), threatening to sexually assault Uxía, if her uncle did not pay back the amount of money he owed the *mara*. Uxía herself had opened the door to gang members who threatened her wellbeing, and, the youth was terrified. As a result of these interlocking forms of

violence, Uxía's everyday life became unbearably confined by fear and pain. Uxía described feelings of fear and isolation to seek help. She led a life of trauma, silence, and isolation. The Salvadoran youth regretted her parents' migration as they were physically away and unable to help her. Institutionally, Uxía also lacked supports to overcome her trauma and victimization on both sides of the border. In fact, the youth experienced societal pressure to suppress her experiences of abuse within a *machista* culture and normalized gender violence (Merry, 2009). Uxía conveyed mistrust in those around her in El Salvador, including the police, as a result of impunity and corruption.

During the initial individual interview, Uxía attributed her ailment to intersections of *machismo*⁹ and gender violence permeating cultural practices. The youth expressed: "*my uncles, like the country of El Salvador, they are really 'machistas,' a woman is not supposed to go to college and needs to put up with stuff like that.*" Uxía's words reveal both the soaring normalization of heteropatriarchal violence towards women, and the socially imposed silence about this violence enforced by politicized forces of terror. According to Anzaldúa (2012), *machismo* leads to "hierarchical male dominance," since "the Anglo, feeling inadequate and inferior and powerless, displaces or transfers these feelings to the Chicano by shaming him" (p. 105). The Chicana scholar highlights the practice of *machismo* as interwoven with colonialism, which has been historically transmitted from white men to Chicanxs and Latinxs.

When she was twelve, Uxía decided to flee her country. She disclosed her experiences of sexual abuse and threats to her parents, who immediately tried to bring her with them to the United States. The parents hired a female coyote to help Uxía to cross the U.S.-Mexican border. With her parents' financial support, Uxía was able to come to the United States, and the family

⁹ Anzaldúa (2012) describes the concept of *machismo* as gender and sexual expectations traditionally attributed to Latinx and Chicana women as a result of the Anglo rape colonial culture, which Latino and Chicano men have embraced to proclaim their systemic power.

eventually reunited. Uxía was stopped at the border when coming to the United States, and as a result had a deportation order. Uxía was still allowed to come into the United States by immigration authorities. To protect herself from deportation, the youth decided to never report back to immigration authorities. Through family reunification, Uxía found a space for healing and reaffirmation. However, she started to undergo multiple challenges resulting from her undocumented status.

Uxía experienced a sense of non-belonging on both sides of the border. She strongly rejected the highly dominant *machista* culture of El Salvador. She did not identify with the individualistic culture pervasive in the United States. She also experienced exclusion and rejection in schools as a newcomer.¹⁰ She drew connections between the heteropatriarchal Latinx culture, including the kinds of violence she endured as a girl growing up in El Salvador, and the institutionalized rape culture in the United States.

Uxía became what Anzaldúa (2012) calls a *nepantlera*, that is, a woman embodying the “ambiguity of change” by living between cultures. The author notes how feelings of inclusion and exclusion can be experienced simultaneously for Latinas living in these borderlands. Moving away from internalized oppression, Uxía grew up to embrace her Latina heritage, showing pride towards her Indigenous roots as a form of resistance against the interlocking oppressions she experienced in schools and society at large.

Living in these borderlands facilitated Uxía’s critical awareness regarding the social construction of “illegality.” Anzaldúa (2012) describes the development of a *mestiza consciousness* by culturally navigating a system while retaining the knowledge of the outsider who comes from the external system, and ultimately never being fully accepted on either side of

¹⁰ In the context of this study, a newcomer is described as a young immigrant person who recently arrived to the United States.

the border. Uxía's development of a *mestiza consciousness* in these borderlands strengthened her agency to join social movements and stand up against continuities and discontinuities of violence. During the final interview, Uxía reflected on the development of her *legal consciousness* (Muñoz, 2015) regarding intersections of sexism and racism in institutions, including the immigrant youth-led organization. In addition, she heartedly regretted having been initially discouraged from leadership positions in the movement, when trying to proclaim her leadership as well as other immigrant Latinx women's. At the end of this study, Uxía was one of the leading organizers in the immigrant youth-led organization. She was in her last years of college pursuing an undergraduate degree in political science. Uxía had dreams of becoming a lawyer to help young women, who like her, had been affected by gendered violence on both sides of the border.

Lola

Lola came to the United States with her parents and older brother when she was six years old. Despite having been raised in the United States, she strongly identified as Latinx-Brazilian, instead of "American." Lola described her upbringing as being in "*constant conflict*" with oppressive gendered aspects of her Brazilian culture. She spoke of resistance when describing her navigation of submissive gendered norms due to *machismo* in her family. Lola's family initially expected her to marry an "American" man in order to attain citizenship status. The family's gendered expectations likewise entailed that Lola made the marriage work by staying anchored to subordinate gendered roles (as wife), and domestic chores (cleaning, cooking, childbearing) without prospects of going to college. It should be noted that her family's expectations towards Lola changed as a result of migration and deportation.

Lola's leadership and political opinions were not encouraged neither by her family nor by schools. Her passion to speak her mind about social issues was suppressed socially. The youth was constantly reminded not to share publicly her opinion about social issues; as a result, Lola felt her voice did not matter in political debates. As an undocumented woman of color, these gendered and raced roles of compliance with the status quo were intensified. Lola witnessed how both of her parents were less stern with her older brother, who had more agency when it came to assuming important family decisions. Lola resorted into silencing her social locations as Queer and undocumented, as a resistance strategy. Lola noted: "*I was never expected to have an opinion on politics. I was not expected to advocate for myself, so I opted for remaining quiet and still try to be who I wanted to be.*" Lola was dissuaded from articulating her political views by her family, schools, and larger society; she resorted into silencing as a defense strategy, which allowed her to hide her status (Dodson & Schmalzbauer, 2005). Silence is cited as a strategy for undocumented women for avoiding deportation as well (Chávez, 1998). Coming out as undocumented and Queer meant facing initial rejection by her family, but ultimately led to significant cultural transformations in this realm.

Lola described the importance of her close bonds with her mother, who had self-deported back to Brazil a few years earlier. The youth was profoundly hurt when her family was torn apart due to both of her parents and brother's deportation. During an immigration raid in their home, immigration law enforcement officials (ICE) came to her home door, and after being allowed in, they demanded identification from the family. Because all of Lola's nuclear family members were undocumented, her older brother was detained in the spur of the moment together with their mother. Lola's father had been deported a year earlier when this raid took place. Lola was able to avoid being arrested, because she was in school at the time. Shortly after ICE's raid in their

home, Lola's brother was deported back to Brazil. Her mother chose self-deportation, because of the trauma experienced during the raid and other familial concerns. Lola was in her late teens when her family was deported to Brazil, and she was left in the United States. Lola, supported by her parents, decided to remain with her aunt in the United States to pursue a college education.

It was after the deportation of her loved ones back to Brazil that Lola resorted into organizing to cope with pain and isolation, support other undocumented youth, and learn about the rights of unauthorized immigrants. As a result, she sought out other undocumented voices in the community. Similar to other Latina youth in the study, Lola came to the immigrant youth-led organization during a time of crisis and trauma. She was the oldest participant in the study, an original founder of the organization, and leading organizer of the DREAM Act movement. Lola's leadership and organizing led to personal, social, and structural transformations, including the increase of female leadership in the movement, and discussions of what it meant to be undocumented.

By the end of the study, Lola had finished her undergraduate studies in public policy at a renowned four-year public university, and created an undocumented *task force* on her campus, which expanded programs and scholarships for undocumented students. As a result of DACA, Lola was able to travel back to Brazil and reunite with her family. Lola spoke ardently about her life as a Latina organizer for immigrant justice. Her life and challenges as a young Latina of color were featured in documentaries, magazines, and newspaper articles transnationally.

Gloria

Gloria was born in a rural Mexican town and came to the United States with her older sister when she was six years old. Both girls were smuggled across the border by a female

coyote. The two siblings reunited with their parents safely. Gloria attributed her family's immigration to trade policies between the United States and Mexico, such as the 1994 *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA), which allowed foreign companies to occupy native lands, and severed opportunities for Gloria's farmer family. As a result of NAFTA taking over people's land and controlling local economies, Mexican farmworkers had no other option than to migrate to the United States to make a living (Akers Chacón & Davis, 2006). Gloria's father had been working in the fields of California for a year when he was finally able to afford bringing his family over to the United States. The family reunited in the Western state. A year later, the family decided to move to the state of Wisconsin, where they eventually settled. Gloria moved to the East Coast to pursue her college studies in political science and education, when she joined the immigrant youth-led organization.

Gloria grew up in a loving Mexican community in Milwaukee. At school, she greatly benefitted from attending bilingual education programs, which built her appreciation for her Mexican heritage and bicultural identity. Her bilingualism and biculturality allowed the youth to keep transnational cultural ties. Teachers made a positive impact in Gloria's life, as the student was taught critical lessons about her Mexican culture and history. She also had Latina teachers as role models. During the first interview, Gloria described her Mexican American identity in ambivalent terms, stressing the importance of talking about women's ethnic and racial diversity within the Latinx diaspora. As a self-identified Chicana, Gloria described her shared history of colonialism and resistance with other Mexican-American immigrants.

Gloria and her family grew up in the shadows of "illegality." Yet, the youth expressed her gratitude for her parents' courageous choice to bring her and her sister to the United States for hopes of a better life. DACA positively impacted her and her sister's opportunities and

mental health due to barriers to upward mobility. Being DACAmented, the two young women were able to access better jobs and higher education scholarships. Gloria and her sister had always been outstanding students. As high achievers, both young women received full scholarships through college and graduate school. Gloria acknowledged the privilege of white passing in institutional contexts, which granted her teacher support and encouragement while other Latinx students of color were left to flounder. Institutional differences emerged among Gloria and her mother and sister, since the last were exploited in society, schools, and the workplace.

Gloria resorted to community organizing to support her family, learn about immigrants' rights, and contribute to her community's development. During her time in high school and continuing into college, Gloria became an organizer for immigrants' rights. She relentlessly supported other undocumented youth condemning the criminalization of students of color who did not have good grades, and negotiating opportunities to support undocumented youth both emotionally and academically. She likewise challenged teacher and institutional racial biases through her organizing work and collaborations with school staff. Gloria joined grass roots efforts to undermine the criminalization of undocumented Latinas in the labour market, as her mother had endured gender and racial discrimination.

When Gloria moved to a new city for graduate school, she brought this critical knowledge and community organizing experiences with her. The youth connected with the immigrant youth-led organization through Lola, another Latina participant in the study. The two women had met at a national organizing event for immigrants' rights years earlier, and after that they became close friends. Gloria did not start to work in the immigrant youth-led organization

immediately, because she disliked its focus on creating *DREAM schools*¹¹ at the time. Gloria also conveyed her discomfort joining a predominantly male-led organization with whom she did not share a lot of personal and intellectual connections. During her last months of involvement in the organization, there was a leadership shift, as increasing numbers of Latinx women stepped into leadership positions. By the end of the data collection process, Gloria had finished her Master's degree, and moved back to Wisconsin to reunite with her family. Back home, Gloria rejoined an immigrant organization that had shaped her earlier organizing. She described aspirations of becoming a community leader and bilingual teacher.

Carmen

Carmen's parents moved with her to the United States from Uruguay when she was not even one year old. Her father passed away due to a health condition when Carmen was in her late teen years. The girl and her U.S. born younger brother faced mental health issues as a result of their loss. Carmen was sixteen years old when she realized the interlocking obstacles undocumented students face in higher education, work mobility, and social life (Gonzales, 2016). The Latina youth initially blamed her parents for bringing her to the United States, when she discovered the interlocking barriers related to her immigration status. Carmen also became sensitive towards discrimination due to the gendering and racialization of her body. Carmen strongly rejected assimilation to the United States' individualist culture and myth of meritocracy. She expressed feelings of strong connections to her Latina heritage, due to her Uruguayan roots, her family, her friends, and the larger immigrant community surrounding her. After a short marriage with a U.S. citizen, Carmen divorced and lost her resident benefits and was relegated to

¹¹ Higher education institutions that publicly support undocumented students through programs and scholarships.

a limbo state waiting for the government to resolve her case. She was advised to apply for DACA at the time. By the end of the study, Carmen had received DACA, and married an undocumented young man from Guatemala.

Carmen regretted the lack of financial support to hire a good lawyer to move her case forward after the divorce. To contend with legal and fiscal challenges, Carmen resorted to work, organizing, and nursing school. She was a long-time volunteer organizer with the immigrant youth-led organization. Although Carmen endured gender discrimination challenges within the movement, she also expressed finding support, especially from other Latinx women in the organization. Carmen reclaimed her leadership in schools and education reform at large through organizing. She assumed the leadership in schools organizing teachers and school administrators in order to address undocumented issues locally.

Esperanza

Esperanza crossed multiple borders with her mother and sister traveling from Brazil to the United States. Her mother had fled Brazil escaping gendered violence. Esperanza was seven years old and her sister, Virginia, was one year old when their mother brought them to the United States. Distance from Brazil helped the three women to heal wounds of past abuse, and start anew in another country. Yet, as an immigrant single mother without papers, the girls' caregiver faced multiple societal challenges. The mother had to work "*day and night*" as a house cleaner in order to provide for both of her daughters. Esperanza regretted her mother was unable to spend significant amounts of time with them. The girls stayed at home by themselves when their mother was at work and their aunt could not watch over them. Esperanza became the primary caregiver of her younger sister, Alicia. Esperanza conveyed the girls' shared feelings of sadness

and loneliness growing up away from their mother. Esperanza recalled with pride her experiences as a language and cultural broker, helping her mother communicate with teachers, the police, and lawyers.

As soon as the family arrived to the United States, the mother asked that Esperanza never disclosed their unauthorized status to anyone. She noted how U.S. citizens could not be trusted. Esperanza thus became aware of the dangers and obstacles related to the family's unauthorized status from a young age, in contrast to other participants who realized about the obstacles of "illegality" in their teen years. Esperanza developed a fear of deportation vis-à-vis a sense of responsibility towards her younger sister and their mother. Esperanza worked diligently in schools and managed to excel academically, fulfilling her mother's wishes. During the interviews, the youth spoke gratefully of her mother's sacrifices, bringing her and her sister to the United States. Esperanza expressed a drive to honor her mother through her organizing, focusing on women's issues, which was manifested, for instance, in the inclusion of her mother's struggles in Esperanza's activist counternarratives.

Similar to other immigrant Latinxs in the study, Esperanza's recently migrated family found support in the Catholic church where they met other Brazilians and Latinxs. Esperanza's mother attended service promptly on Sundays with both of her daughters, and she encouraged the girls' participation in church-related programs. The church community was supportive in different ways (economically, spiritually, emotionally, socially). Gradually, the women built significant relationships that helped them expand their resources and social networks. However, one of the church leaders, a Brazilian man, violated the mother's trust when molesting her two daughters. This man had offered to take care of the girls at times their mother was at work. When "*things got worse*," Esperanza decided to tell her mother the painful experience she and her sister

had undergone for months. As a single and undocumented mother, she did not have a lot of support to pursue legal actions. In addition, members of the church were reluctant to denounce the violation, and, many even turned their backs on the mother and her two daughters.

Esperanza's mother feared reaching out to the police to denounce the man due to deportation threats. Eventually, she decided to call the police seeking to protect her daughters from further threats. The family received police support, and the male perpetrator, who was undocumented himself, was deported back to Brazil. This incident did not, nor the fact the women had undergone similar experiences in Brazil, facilitate any venues for temporary protection status or other sorts of socio-legal inclusion. Esperanza's experiences of gender violence, including being sexually molested as a girl, wounded her profoundly. As a girl, she had witnessed her mother experience gender violence in Brazil and in the United States, as employers had exploited and sexually harassed her. Esperanza underwent the same sexual harassment her mother had experienced in the workplace as a teenager. At that time, in contrast to her traumatic experience with the church member, the youth was able to stand up for her rights, and hence denounce the incidents. At school, Esperanza found a space where to build confidence and leadership as a Latinx young woman. She counted with teachers and counselors' supports, who helped her to develop community networks. In fact, one of these teachers later introduced her to the immigrant youth-led organization.

Esperanza joined the organization after attending a DACA information session in her high school, which a few teachers had helped organized. Esperanza's mother was hesitant to allow her daughter attend this event, because of fears of deportation. Yet, she trusted the teachers, and eventually allowed Esperanza to attend the DACA event. For the first time, Esperanza was able to share her fears with other undocumented youth undergoing similar socio-

legal challenges. Afterwards, she reached out to one of the Latina leaders she had met at the DACA event. Esperanza learned how to advocate for herself, and ask for information regarding scholarships and higher education access. After this initial contact, she rapidly became involved in the organization. In this institutional space, Esperanza encountered some challenges to her leadership related to her interactions with male Latino youth, especially when leading recruitment of undocumented students in schools. Esperanza expressed during the focus group interview how “*Latino men have been taught to rule over women and treat them as sexual objects.*” By the end of the study, Esperanza occupied Lola’s position as the core organizer in the youth-led organization. She had led intersectional work to include women’s voices in the larger DREAM Act movement.

Angélica

Angélica came to the United States from Guatemala under a tourist visa when she was twelve years old. At the start of the study, she was eighteen and a senior in high school with dreams to become an artist. Angélica was a *mestiza*, meaning that her Maya Indigenous mother had been raised in the Guatemalan highlands and her father was a *Ladino*.¹² When both Angélica and her older brother were children, their father left Guatemala City and migrated to the United States in order to provide for the family. He planned to eventually bring all his family with him to the United States in order to escape the soaring climate of violence and impunity in the Central American nation. Time would prove this to be an impossible legal action. The family had lost relatives to gang violence and border crossing. Because of growing mental health issues

¹² “Ladino” is a term used to refer to descendants of Spanish, and non-Indigenous populations in Guatemala.

away from his family, the father decided to go back to Guatemala after nine years in the United States.

Angélica and her brother had been raised by their mother in the city, and the three developed close bonds during the time of the paternal absence. However, the youth had not kept in touch with their father. Years of family distance had created some tensions among her father and Angélica, which were intensified after the family's reunification in Guatemala. The father had the intention to go back to the United States after spending some time in Guatemala, but this time he planned to bring his family with him. He processed a tourist visa for his children with the intention of overstaying it. Because Angélica's parents separated eventually, her mother remained in Guatemala, while Angélica and her older brother were forced to migrate to the United States to reunite with their father.

Because Angélica's parents were concerned with their children's safety in Guatemala, they considered it was best for them to leave the country and live with their father in the United States. Life as undocumented seemed a better option than life coerced by violences. Eventually, Angélica and her brother's visas were approved to travel North. Angélica's brother came a year before her, since her parents wanted Angélica to finish sixth grade in Guatemala City prior to migrating North. Immediately after Angélica's graduation, her father asked that she caught a flight to come to the United States. Angélica described her reluctance to leave Guatemala, and how immigration became painfully imposed on her. She had a transnational understanding of some of the challenges undocumented youth faced in the United States, due to her brother's information. She feared discrimination in U.S. schools, after her brother recounted episodes of language and racial discrimination he had experienced.

Angélica was primarily opposed to leave Guatemala, because she did not want to be separated from her mother. The youth rejected the separation from extended support networks and other significant relations. Living in a transnational family, Angélica struggled to be away from her mother and with a father who she hardly knew, and who she described as a “*stranger*.” The new living arrangements created tensions between the teen and her father. Angélica’s brother tried to help them navigate these conflicts after their reunification in the United States. Thus, her brother became her primary family support in the United States. Both siblings had to manage school with work in order to support their mother who was back in Guatemala, since their father no longer provided for her after their divorce.

Angélica was a recently migrated young Latina from Guatemala by the time this study was initiated. As such, she had lived in the United States for fewer years than the other Latina participants in the study. She struggled to successfully navigate “illegality,” facing gender and racial discrimination across U.S. socio-political arenas. Angélica, like her brother, did not qualify for DACA, which placed her in an additional vulnerable legal position. Despite the pain and constraints resulting from her unauthorized status, Angélica described her experiences of “illegality” as eye-opening or what Anzaldúa (2012) describes as *mestiza consciousness*. There were multiple language and cultural barriers recently migrated youth face in U.S. schooling, but Angélica learned English quickly and succeeded academically.

However, Angélica’s experiences of gender and racial discrimination in schools exacerbated her feelings of non-belonging. Angélica criticized ESOL teachers who overlooked her strengths and needs, and thus failed to support her emotionally and academically. She regretted being tracked out of AP classes. Angélica was racialized and treated differently from her white peers by teachers and counsellors in schools. The youth experienced racial

microaggressions at school (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Sue et al., 2007). Critical race theorists Delgado and Stefancic (2012) define racial microaggressions as “small acts of racism in immigrants’ everyday lives,” which are connected to assumptions about racial lines that have support from public institutions (p. 30). Angélica also encountered discrimination in the workplace. She could not find a job that paid her well, due to her unauthorized status. Without DACA, her prospects of upward mobility were severely limited, which meant additional burdens in her life, including limited legal protection from deportation. Angélica also lacked options to travel legally back to Guatemala and visit her mother and extended family, in contrast to some DACA youth who qualified for advanced travel parole and had that option.

Despite these challenges, Angélica developed some meaningful relationships (with teachers, peers, and organizers) at schools through her engagements in an immigrant youth-led organization. Interestingly, it was her brother who introduced Angélica to the immigrant youth-led organization. She had always kept a close relationship with her brother, and the youth became closer in the United States. This sibling bond helped both of them to navigate life as undocumented, sharing resources, and providing emotional support. Angélica attended one of the immigrant youth-led organization’s annual events, which brought together undocumented youth across the East coast. She was inspired by the strengths and power of young leaders whose lives were likewise circumscribed by *legal liminality*. At that time, she decided to join the movement for immigrant justice. The youth started to attend organizational meetings, protests, marches, and other actions. Angélica proudly connected her engagements in the organization with her growth as a person, community organizer, and Latinx leader at her school.

Angélica assumed a leadership position at her school creating an *undocumented chapter*, an educational space where to provide academic assistance to undocumented students, with the

support of the administration and most of the teachers. This *undocu-chapter* sought to support undocumented students in their development of academic networks and higher education opportunities. Angélica attempted to mobilize school resources to support undocumented students while recruiting youth to join the larger DREAM Act movement. At her school, Angélica also facilitated an arts-based space for undocumented high school students or *undocuartists* to come together and share their art works towards collective and personal liberation. She defined this space as psychosocial, considering the emotional supports it provided for undocumented high schoolers. Although Angélica struggled to reconcile her work as a senior in high school (considering her academic work load, college application timelines, and related academic struggles), a part time job in a bakery, and her work in the immigrant youth-led organization, she, like other Latinas, envisioned her organizing an essential part of her immigrant life in the United States.

Tess

Tess left Colombia to come to the United States with her mother when she was seven years old. Her family decided to overstay their visa in order to procure a better life North. Because Tess arrived to the United States at a young age, she somehow assimilated to its mainstream culture, a process that she attributed to her white passing. When asked about her identification as a Latina, Tess alluded to her ethnicity as a hybrid self, through which she could “*assimilate*” into both Colombian and “American” cultures. For her, assimilation into both worlds became vital for her survival as an undocumented young Latina in the United States.

Despite academic challenges in her early years of schooling, Tess experienced inclusion due to her possibilities to pass as white and gain institutional supports. She was validated by

teachers and welcome by peers, and, as a result, had an easier time to navigate school. She did not have an accent and was often praised for her accentless English by some teachers and school staff.

Tess experienced the pain of “illegality” outside of school, and especially during her final years of high school, when access to higher education became highly challenging. From a young age, Tess had been asked by her mother and stepfather to keep their undocumented status in the shadows, as they feared deportation. For that reason, the youth became very passive in school, and resorted into silence as a survival strategy. The Latina hid the fact that she was a language broker for her mother, for instance, which later became a source of pride. As a result of this life in the shadows, Tess developed an acute stress pertaining to her family’s future and higher education options. The Latina youth considered she had to give up her dreams of becoming a psychologist, until she became involved in the immigrant youth-led organization. By the time this study started, Tess had been volunteering in the organization for a few months; hence her organizing positionality and engagements were limited. During the three-year institutional ethnographic research, Tess grew as an organizer in the movement, meeting with legislators, advocating for undocumented students in college, going to marches for immigrant justice, and training other undocumented youth.

Isaura

Isaura grew up in the rural region of Baní in the Dominican Republic, and she had been raised by a single mother. Isaura was shy to talk about her cultural upbringing at school, because of the pain and stigma she had internalized growing up as undocumented in the United States. Even when sharing her story with hopes of raising people’s awareness in her community

organizing, Isaura was reserved to talk to others about her experiences and emotions growing up in a context of poverty and gender violence. Additionally, Isaura did not share with others her dreams of going back to visit her home country, although she valued her *cultura caribeña* promoted by her mother. She decried the challenges of growing up in a working-class family and never finishing college.

Her mother had brought Isaura and her two sisters to the United States in search of economic and academic opportunities. They overstayed their tourist visas and came to the United States when Isaura was ten. The youth witnessed racist hostility towards her family in the so-called “liberal” East Coast, which led her to internalize discriminatory messages about her capabilities, Caribbean self and body, and unauthorized status. To avoid social exclusion and discrimination, Isaura developed non-personal strategies to remain “*under the radar*,” since she was a child. For instance, she tried not to speak in class, avoided hanging out with friends in public spaces, and learned online about immigration policies rather than seeking institutional help or asking questions to teachers and peers about immigrant rights. Her mother described her as a “*shy treasure*,” claiming that Isaura always showed a role modeling demeanor towards her younger sisters while supporting her mother financially.

At school, Isaura struggled tremendously. Despite her diligent work, her learning experiences, like those of many immigrant youth were influenced by the lack of bilingual and cultural resources, family responsibilities, and the lack of supportive societal networks (Muñoz, 2015; Patel, 2013a). Isaura had to navigate “illegality” in the United States as a young Latina student who was racialized, and made to feel ashamed of her social location, non-standard English accent, and unauthorized status. Fear of deportation, anxiety, and discrimination

negatively influenced her academic performance and overall wellbeing. Isaura took some college courses on business, but later dropped out of college due to financial constraints.

In a self-advocacy process learning about immigrant rights online, Isaura found out about the movement of *undocumented* and *unafraid* youth across the nation. She could not be more thrilled to discover one of these groups being established locally. It all started when Isaura was a junior in high school. She decided to anonymously join a rally in support of the DREAM Act, which was led by the immigrant youth-led organization in the study. That action changed her forever. For the first time, Isaura broke her sense of isolation as a woman of color, and thus was able to break patterns of exclusion as she related her personal struggles navigating “illegality” to those of other undocumented Latinas. What is more, her bravery, as she described it, attending this rally was not different from the youth in the organization who dared to raise their voices against institutionalized racism. Those emotions moved her to take leadership roles in the immigrant youth-led organization. Initially, Isaura did not feel comfortable nor she was encouraged to assume public speaking roles in the movement. Instead, she followed gendered organizing roles, undertaking tasks such as cleaning, providing food, fundraising, distributing flyers, and writing grant proposals. These gendered roles in organizing spaces did not promote her public speaking skills, reinforcing the kind of heteropatriarchal subjugation she had experienced in school. Through time, however, Isaura’s role in the organization changed dramatically as the organization’s leadership became predominantly female. Isaura became increasingly confident and assumed public speaking roles that had been previously relegated to men in the movement. Her relationships with other Latina young leaders in the organization helped Isaura to develop confidence and challenge racist heteropatriarchal oppressions in and beyond the movement. Isaura spoke of achieving a voice beyond herself through relationships

forged within the immigrant community. She noted how this personal transformation burgeoned by building and *una conciencia mestiza*. Isaura actively sought to engage others in similar transformative processes. She married a U.S. citizen a few months after the data collection period had concluded.

Marta

At the beginning of the study, Marta was living in the same town where she had lived during her sixteen years in the United States. It was a safe Latinx neighborhood crowded with predominantly Central American and Colombian immigrants, but increasingly loomed by gentrification. Marta had worked for two years as a Spanish-English translator for an immigration law firm. This position allowed her to reconcile a passion to succor immigrants while fulfilling her financial immediate needs. Marta knew well the exclusion that undocumented immigrants endured in terms of healthcare access, quality education, and dignifying labor. She considered herself “American” having been raised in the United States; however, she described her “Americanness” with contempt due to the overlapping forms of exclusion she and her mother had endured. Marta was born in Venezuela, but her mother moved to Colombia when she was a baby. Because she was raised in Colombia to Colombian parents, she spoke of feeling a strong cultural bond towards this culture. Her Colombian self was reaffirmed by transnational ties she and her mother kept while living in the East coast of the United States.

She was six years old when her mother brought her to the United States, fleeing intimate partner violence. Her mother had been denied a refugee visa at the embassy, and despite her arguments for asylum to flee gendered violence. Her mother was still able to travel to the United

States with her six-year-old daughter under a tourist visa, which both of them overstayed. Marta expressed her pain growing up witnessing the interlocking oppressions her mother endured. She had been mistreated in Colombia due to her Indigenous background, living in an abusive relationship, and later exploited in the United States. Through the years, Marta underwent similar gendered and raced violences, but learned to challenge these oppressions through community organizing. Marta volunteered for non-profits that supported immigrant youth and women.

Episodes of abuse against her and her mother had negatively influenced Marta's self-esteem and mental health. Marta realized that hers and her mother's survival entailed more than just working and studying diligently, but also keeping hers and her mother's "illegality" under the radar. As a result, the girl grew up keeping her immigration status hidden. As an undocumented Latina, Marta experienced sweltering barriers to education, including lack of citizenship and consequent legal and social exclusion. Marta described her aspirations to graduate from college with a social work degree that would allow her to support other immigrant women, particularly those facing domestic violence.

Despite unwelcoming immigration laws, Marta considered herself lucky to have arrived to the United States at a time that bilingual education was still operationalized at the state level. Bilingual education reaffirmed Marta's cultural ties and evolving hybrid subjectivity, as she managed to build transformative relationships with teachers, students, and community members. Three years later, bilingual education became banned in that state beleaguering Marta, along with many other immigrant young people. This impervious legislation met the opposition of many immigrants and organizations, including a third-grade Marta who, following her school's countering initiative, wrote a pro-bilingual education persuasive letter detailing her bilingual/bicultural experiences to the school administration.

From a young age, Marta developed a sense of agency related to her critical consciousness about state violence towards immigrant communities. In her organizing, Marta called other immigrants to raise their voices against oppressions. She spoke passionately about the power of knowledge and education. The Latina youth de-romanticized formal education knowledge and validated grass roots epistemologies.

Transitioning into her adolescent years, Marta reflected on how the U.S. system turned its back on her and other immigrants in favor of white U.S.-born citizens. She resisted this societal exclusion through organizing and diligent work in school, which allowed her to be admitted into a prestigious suburban high school. In this institutional context, Marta made a few significant friendships, mostly with other minoritized students, and she described feelings of exclusion by white peers and teachers. She remained privy about her immigration status with the vast majority of her classmates, teachers, and counselors who she sensed were “*anti-immigrant*.”

In her teen years, Marta underwent racist gender violence. Because of her non-standard English accent, Marta was often teased by peers at school. Due to intersections of language and phenotype, Marta was likewise racialized as “Mexican” by school staff and peers who overlooked her needs, culture, and academic potential. When disclosing her status and needs to an immigrant Chinese teacher, she wanted to learn about opportunities for undocumented students to attend college, but the teacher lacked this information and held deep racial biases. Later that week, this teacher and Marta met in the elevator, and the teacher asked the youth about her Mexican heritage, projecting racial assumptions on the U.S.-Colombian youth, and leaving her even more distrustful of school staff. Here there was an immigrant teacher whose experiences differed greatly from those of the undocumented. All in all, discrimination during her high school years influenced Marta’s sense of self and belonging. During this time, Marta

was likewise involved in intimate relationships that echoed her mother's gender violence experiences.

In her senior year, Marta joined an immigrant youth-led organization and her passion quickly escalated until she became a leading coordinator in the movement. At the same time, Marta pursued a degree in social work at a predominantly white college. She had managed to apply for college under an international student visa. Her working-class upbringing placed her in a vulnerable economic position as she had to financially support her mother while upfronting tuition costs. In addition, she, like other undocumented youth, did not qualify for in-state tuition or scholarships at the state level. Marta started her college career as a part time student having to work full time to afford a college career. She never severed her organizing ties, since these stood as vital supports.

When DACA passed in 2012, Marta's life changed dramatically as she was able to transfer to a well-known community college paying in-state tuition fees. After sixteen years in the United States, Marta was able to receive an advanced parole visa and travelled back to her home country to visit her Colombian family. She described this trip as life changing, albeit it created some ruptures with organizers in the movement. Being away for a few months compromised Marta's leadership in the organization. Marta disconnected from organizing tasks when she traveled back to Colombia, but this distance was not welcomed in the organization, particularly by male leaders. In addition, her savings had been used towards her trip, and, upon returning to the United States, the youth struggled to pay off college-related fees. As a result of these institutional challenges, Marta decided to take a one-year break from college and work with the youth-led organization. Instead, she started to work full time for an immigration law firm. Marta had rejoined the organization taking back her role as a regional coordinator when

this study was initiated. Later, she was able to resume her social work studies. In the last year of the study, Marta married, and shortly after divorced her husband on the grounds of gendered violence. She had hopes to apply for a U-Visa, as a survivor of this form of violence.

Yahaira

Yahaira arrived to the United States when she was two years old. She had crossed the Mexican-U.S. border with both of her parents who were escaping violence in the state of Mexico, which is next to the country's capital in Mexico City. In the United States, Yahaira's parents often changed their place of residence, as they did not feel safe from immigration authorities. In addition, the father had a deportation order. During the first interview, Yahaira emphasized how her family's fear of deportation shaped her upbringing. From a young age, Yahaira was communicated the need to remain silent about the family's immigration status. Her fears of deportation were exacerbated by her family's frequent relocation and knowledge of other people's deportations, leading to anxiety and depression (Lykes & Sibley, 2013).

As a result of her family's frequent relocations, Yahaira could not develop significant friendships and networks growing up; in her own words, she grew up isolated and quite independently. Eventually, Yahaira's family relocated in the East Coast when the youth was in her teen years. In this state, their lives changed forever. Both her mother and father spent all day working in a factory while Yahaira studied diligently in school. Yahaira had always performed well academically, making her family proud. The youth attributed the fact that she was only two years old when she crossed the U.S.-Mexican border to her assimilation to the language and school culture. She was able to develop bilingual skills in Spanish and English, since both of her

parents spoke Spanish at home. Her parents tried to instill an appreciation in their daughter for their shared *Latinidad*, which Yahaira described as a source of strength and social power.

Yahaira's life changed dramatically in the aftermath of both of her parents' deportations. During that time, her town was undergoing a series of immigration raids, which ultimately reached the factory where her parents worked. This raid resulted in hundreds of Mexican and Central American families being turned apart. These raids and consequent deportations likewise had significant material and emotional implications for undocumented adults and the young people left behind (Patel, 2013a). Yahaira's mother was deported closely after the time of the immigration raid in the factory; whereas Yahaira's father, who was also arrested at the time, was deported one year later. Following her family's deportation, Yahaira struggled to adapt to life in the United States. She had to find a full-time job while in her last years of high school in order to financially support herself. Enduring a life apart from her family due to deportation led Yahaira to face mental health issues, which she carried into adulthood (Dreby, 2012). Despite financial limitations related to issues pertaining to her unauthorized status, Yahaira graduated from high school, but took additional years to complete her studies due to work responsibilities. By the time this study concluded, Yahaira had finished her college degree in theater and business at a local community college. She had dreams of becoming a recognized actor, and transforming the world through art.

Right after her father's deportation, Yahaira connected with the immigrant youth-led organization through a common friend. Her life choices expanded in significant ways after this initial encounter. Yahaira became more knowledgeable about both the fallouts and possibilities of the U.S. immigration system while developing an organizing positionality in the DREAM Act movement. Yahaira actively participated in marches to the U.S. capital, protests at the local state

house, and joined local organizing efforts in her town. In her organizing, she learned how to thrive through the caveats of the system, developing vital networks that helped her cope with loss, fear, and exclusion. For instance, Yahaira found out information about her eligibility for DACA when she joined the immigrant youth-led organization. As a result of DACA, Yahaira received *advanced parole* from the U.S. government, which allowed her to travel abroad and reunite with her mother and father in Mexico.

Therefore, this chapter's individual and collective portraits of the ten Latina participants revealed differences and similarities in the women's migratory experiences, and how gendered and raced "illegality" was manifested, experienced, and contested.

CHAPTER FIVE: Introduction to the Findings of the Study

This chapter briefly introduces the main findings across institutional structures influencing the Latinx women's experiences of "illegality." The current chapter offers an overview of the main findings of the study reporting how gendered and raced oppressions towards the women permeated institutional structures, including schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization. Findings from this study were broken down by institutional context. The final chapter adds a layer of complexity to the intersectional analyses by presenting findings across institutions, and perceiving differences and similarities amongst the participants.

This institutional ethnography used the lens of intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016) and borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012) to examine how ten Latinas who were undocumented faced and confronted, the socio-legal construction of "illegality" in three institutional settings, which included: 1) two schools; 2) a local state house, and 3) an immigrant youth-led organization. In their political engagements across highly gendered and raced political arenas, the Latinx women in the study were positioned as organizers developing a legal consciousness (Muñoz, 2015) about the politics of citizenship in direct dialogue with individuals affected and those benefitting from forms of "legal violence" (Abrego & Menjívar, 2012). Muñoz (2015) describes Latinx youth's *legal consciousness* noting how "an undocumented student understands her/his legal status based on the navigational processes and experiences that place that legal status under a magnifying lens" (p. 5). The Latinx women's organizing made them more attuned to navigating institutionalized gender and race-based oppressions. Being knowledgeable about the history of white supremacy and the dehumanization of undocumented immigrants, the ten Latina youth described interlocking vectors of dominance pertaining to gendered and raced practices that excluded them institutionally. Similarities and differences among the participants

were manifested across the three institutions and negotiated in undocumented spaces of resistance.

The women experienced “illegality” similarly and differently across schools, the state house, and the organization as a result of gendered and raced social locations. For instance, Esperanza, one of the youngest participants in the study, conveyed her feelings of empowerment in the state house when talking to female legislators more often than when addressing white male policymakers. In the immigrant youth-led organization, however, the youth felt empowered to speak up against immigrant oppression. Esperanza also acknowledged her ability to pass as white in institutional contexts; that is, being treated more supportively by teachers in schools as a result of whiteness, in contrast to organizing Latinas of color who were often marginalized.

Intersectionality theory was employed as an analytic tool to bring attention to vectors of domination in the ten Latina participants’ varied experiences as undocumented. All of the women described having been victimized on both sides of the border. Yet, there were different facets of “illegality” shaped by racism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism, influencing the women in different ways. Intersectionality denies the summation of a woman of color’s experience of oppression to either racism or heteropatriarchy to unveil cultural processes by which racialization and gendering manifest simultaneously in systems (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Addressing intersecting vectors can strengthen organizing claims towards immigrant justice from different lenses, although policy makers typically refuse to consider variations of the dominant narrative of immigration, when notions of assimilation and meritocracy are questioned. In this regard, intersectionality problematized the dominant categories of whiteness and masculinity noting differences across the Latina participants in the three institutions; for instance, the Latinas of color with non-standard English accents, in contrast to the participants that had light skin and

spoke English fluently, were recurrently racialized as undocumented, deviant, less intelligent; as a result, they became more vulnerable to punishment, neglect, and violence (Bettie, 2003; Morris, 2016).

Intersections of racist gender violence affected specially the lives of the seven women of color in the study who were criminalized and dehumanized. The Latinas of color described episodes of racial microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012) from teachers and peers in schools in relation to their English proficiency and Spanish accent. Building on the work by Pierce (1974), Kohli and Solórzano (2012) define racial microaggressions as “subtle daily insults that, as a form of racism, support a racial and cultural hierarchy of minority inferiority” (p. 441). Latina participants who had an Indigenous background experienced forms of racial violence more often than those Latinas who were able to phenotypically pass as white. Yet, all of the women underwent forms of gender violence on both sides of the border. These intersectional dynamics held varying outcomes, in terms of upward mobility and network building. Table 5 below presents the results consistent among the Latinas across institutions.

Table 5: Consistent Findings Across Institutions

Sexual Violence
Gendered and Racialized Labor
DACA as a Multiple-edged Sword
“Illegality,” Intersectionality, and Latina Mental Health
Latina Leadership

Sexual Violence

One of the cross institutional themes in this study had to do with the pervasiveness of gender violence, including sexual violence in the lives of the Latina participants. Because the young women were relegated to a limbo state or state of “legal liminality” (Gonzales, 2016),

their unauthorized status triggered interlocking forms of gender violence in the United States. The Latina participants exposed how “illegality” was inflicted upon their lives by policies and cultural practices rooted in racism and heteropatriarchy, such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, labor exploitation, and traditional cultural gendered roles. The ten Latinx women’s migratory experiences as undocumented were highly gendered and racialized as a result of transnational heteropatriarchal control (Hartry, 2012; Merry, 2009). At some point, all of the participants had undergone rape, sexual abuse, or harassment by individuals who knew about their unauthorized status.

Tellingly, all the women reported episodes of gendered and raced oppression in the three institutional contexts. Sexual harassment was reported to occur most commonly in professional contexts, including the youth-led organization and work place, and led by employers, clients, and youth. The women encountered pervasive abuse and exploitation in the workplace, especially when men knew about their undocumented status. Sometimes community members would sexually harass the participants, including youth participating in the organization who felt entitled to make sexual advances on the women.

Some of the Latina participants had survived gender violence, including rape in two cases, in their home countries before arriving to the United States. It was not only their liminal status as undocumented that made them vulnerable to sexual violence in different social spaces, particularly in the workplace, but unauthorized status also prevented them from seeking support from authorities, as the women did not trust police officials. Violence towards Latinx women has been tolerated, because of the United States imperialistic ambition to profit from Latin American markets establishing transnational businesses, under which Latinx women become commodities (Merry, 2009). Their racialization as sexual objects to be disposed is linked to their economic

exploitation (Parra, 2015). In fact, the U.S. nation state benefits from violence against immigrant women, as they, lacking legal protections, hardly report these incidents of abuse; hence: the racist heteropatriarchal capitalist system continues to operate uninterrupted (Parra, 2015).

This economic and sexual proliferation from destabilized Latinx immigrant communities is ebbed in the gendered and raced push and pull of immigrants across borders (Cacho, 2012). When some of the women in the study, such as Uxía who was sexually abused by an employer, tried to file asylum claims on the grounds of gender violence, the U.S. immigration system denied them any kind of protected legal status. Uxía had a deportation order as she was stopped when coming to the United States, which further criminalized her. The Latina participants declared how violations on their bodies were intensified when people became aware of their undocumented status, leading to their re-victimization. Legal inclusion, specifically, citizenship pathways would significantly protect the women from continuities of racist gender violence (Merry, 2009; Parra, 2015). It should be noted how the ten participants underscored the legal protection granted through DACA to speak up against injustice and abuse, although they perceived divisions promoted by the program amongst the immigrant community, which ultimately benefitted the white heteropatriarchal status quo.

Gendered and Racialized Labor

Ongoing violence fueled by national and international economic policies that profit from women's labor, such as *The Central America Free Trade Agreement* (CAFTA) of 2005,¹³ have dramatically influenced immigration North to Mexico and to the United States (Monzón, 2011).

¹³ The *Central America Free Trade Agreement* (CAFTA) extended the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) to five Central American nations, including Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. It was signed in May 28, 2004, and passed by the U.S. Congress on July 27, 2005.

All the women in the study attributed their families' reasons to migrate to extreme poverty and interlocking forms of state violence, including civil wars and femicide. Poverty and abuse have shaped increasing immigration patterns from Latin America to the United States since the mid-nineties (Passel, 2011). As a result of the ongoing colonial structure of capitalism, recent generations of immigrants, including numbers of unaccompanied minors from Central American countries, continue to cross multiple borders in their path to the United States (Passel, 2011; Pierce, 2015). Staggering numbers of unaccompanied girls, particularly those who have family members in the United States, have been increasingly migrating North to reunite with their families (Pierce, 2015), even at higher rates than boys during 2014 (Parra, 2015).

Although the workplace was not a central institutional context analyzed in the study. The ten Latina participants objected how immigrant women were paid less than Latino men despite shared authorized status. In the interviews, the women provided examples of themselves and their mothers with regards to gendered unequal pay. Being undocumented the women were also subjected to exploitation by their employers (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007). As it was previously described, all of the participants were vulnerable to sexual violence at work regardless of their racial social location. When some of the employers learned that the women were undocumented, they would engage in acts of sexual abuse and harassment, as previously noted.

The Latinx women also faced health issues in the workplace, including mental health, as a result of these interlocking sexual, gender, racial, and economic violences (Parra, 2015). Their jobs were gendered, as most Latinas were restricted to do care labor. Some of these jobs entailed taking care of the elderly, babysitting, or cleaning (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007). Professional hierarchies among the immigrant Latinxs prevented the women from achieving upward mobility.

DACA as a Multiple-Edged Sword

Findings from this study revealed that DACA stood as a multiple-edged sword, with multiple ends depending on the women's social locations. The *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* (2012) might seemingly reduce employment obstacles and provide access to better jobs for eligible undocumented young people (Batalova et al., 2014); however, for the Latinas in the study, as youth who were seeking to access career paths in the United States, their entry to higher education was constrained due to lack of financial support and social mobility (Muñoz, 2013). The women likewise struggled to go to college due to unavailable scholarship opportunities, from which undocumented youth have been typically excluded (Patel, 2013a).

DACA contributed to the marginalization and vulnerability of immigrant adults and undocumented participants who were excluded from being part of the program (Martinez, 2014). The women in the study, with the exception of Angélica who was ineligible to apply for DACA, argued that, as a result of benefitting from the program, they were able to access higher paid jobs. However, the women struggled to access high quality and equal-paying jobs. In other words, DACA was not sufficient to help the youth succeed in the United States political economy. Similarly, their DACAmented status did not protect the youth from being re-racialized in the United States, since undocumented Latinxs have been treated as second class. Therefore, DACA functioned as a double-edged sword allowing for controlled socio-economic benefits while posing different edges depending on the women's context and social locations.

Angélica did not qualify for DACA as a recently migrated youth. As a result, her life was circumscribed by continuities of state violence and exploitation. She also faced lack of protection in the workplace against sexual violence. Angélica contended: "*I feel like being undocumented has obstacles, and then when you have DACA is more like a privilege, because you have the*

opportunity, like legally, to work, drive, and just like it is something else you have, but I do not have it.” Her words echo social disadvantages related to DACA, but particularly legal citizenship supports.

In the previous quotation, Angélica exposed her understanding of the historically built legal hierarchies amongst immigrant populations, especially among youth and adults. This reciprocity reveals significant material benefits. Undocumented people become scapegoats of the system, being criminalized for crossing the border without papers and being blamed for economic hardship (Ngai, 2014; Patel, 2013a). Ngai (2014) refers to the creation of the non-citizen, or “the illegal alien” through negative racial stereotypes that brand these immigrants as dangerous, hence justifying violence towards them as well as their exclusion from social systems. Because Angélica did not cross the border as a child, and hence failed to assimilate to white normativity, she was not allowed to apply for DACA. Because gender and racial oppressions were overlooked under DACA legal stipulations, Angélica’s situation as undocumented placed her at higher social risks of exploitation than her Latina counterparts. DACA has been recently rescinded, so long-term legal protections cannot be guaranteed for any of the participating Latinas. Likewise, the nine DACAmented Latina participants encountered gender and racial discrimination in different institutions, particularly in the case of those girls who had dark skin; hence DACA failed to protect them from facing microaggressions.

The ten Latina participants regretted the failure to address racial issues more openly in DACA clinics, understanding how racial constructs played a central role in how immigrants from certain ethnicities and with specific phenotypes were racialized as law breakers or recruited as leaders in the movement. When asked about being gendered and raced systemically, the ten Latinx women described processes of racialization, meaning being ascribed negative social traits

depending on skin color, phenotype, and geographical locations. Similarly, the Latina youth with accents stressed the role of language in this racialization process in schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization. Therefore, DACA furthered the differential treatment racialized immigrant Latinas experienced in the U.S. labor and social systems. The ending of the program presents new challenges for undocumented young people to grapple with the multiple-edged dynamics of “illegality” in their interactions and negotiations with the U.S. nation state.

“Illegality,” Intersectionality, and Latina Mental Health

Intersections of gendered and raced “illegality” influenced the ten Latinx women’s mental health across the three institutional contexts. The women considered that their undocumented status exacerbated gendered roles and cultural codes, as they did not have freedom of movement. The participants experienced socio-cultural pressures to meet gendered expectations regarding maternal roles, the kinds of jobs and careers they could have access to, and the need to perform domestic chores across the three institutional spaces, which worked as sites for cultural reproduction. The Latinas also described feeling discouraged by their families from participating in community organizing endeavors. Their families were concerned that having a public voice could put them at risk of deportation. Gendered norms that stressed Latinas’ non-political engagements also contributed to this silencing. Because gendered and racialized “illegality” became internalized, the women conveyed a discomfort of addressing gender and racial issues in front of authority male figures, including relatives. The women reported mental health issues as a result of this silence. Through time, the Latina organizers gradually identified spaces where to discuss gender and cultural oppressions amongst women, building Latina solidarities that became liberatory. In addition, issues of racial oppressions were

raised by the women and some men of color in the organization at the intersection of gender issues. Undocumented status or “illegality,” and the particular ways it serves racist capitalist interests in the United States was recurrently cited as a cause of stress for the participating Latinas, whose daily lives were circumscribed by fears of deportation. To contend with these oppressive realities, the women envisioned their community organizing as a way to negotiate differences across institutional spaces, cope with stress, build networks, and counter intersecting systemic oppressions.

The Latinx women pointed out how the three institutional spaces did not welcome their points of view as immigrant women, especially the points of view of women of color with accents, who could not fit the white assimilationist and meritocracy stipulations (Patel, 2013a). With the raise of Latina leadership in the movement towards the end of the study, intersectional work became operationalized in the immigrant youth-led organization.

Latina Leadership

For the Latina participants, their “border” immigration experiences became an expression of their fluid self and resistance (Anzaldúa, 2012). The women described coming out as undocumented in early stages of their organizing. They declared having lost their fear to speak up through relationships with others, including varied oppressors, such as teachers and legislators. Through these processes of resistance, and coming out, the youth cultivated their self-esteem, which enhanced feelings of liberation. The women’s political presence helped them to stand up against gendered and raced oppressions, including sexual harassment. Challenging intersections of oppressions through their immigrant youth organizing, the women inspired other minoritized groups to join the movement and validate their experiences. The Latinx women

noted how through their organizing they were able to break gendered cultural norms and develop leadership skills and networks of solidarity.

Despite the impact of organizing in their lives, the women's leadership was challenged across institutional contexts, that is in schools, the state house, and the organization. It was particularly the leadership and public agency of the seven Latinas of color in the study that became undermined by some peers, legislators, and school staff. Gloria spoke of the need to conform to docile and submissive leadership roles as women in organizing, explaining how "*you cannot be loud and aggressive.*" Similarly, Lola pointed out how schools discouraged her leadership by penalizing her assertive behavior in the classroom. Lola's "*interest and excitement in learning*" was often mischaracterized by teachers as being "*loud, and not ladylike*" behavior—a "*challenge to authority*," in the case of teachers who pushed the youth to control her "*anger*;" thus, the teachers overlooked the socio-emotional issues this Latina faced due to her family's deportation.

Disrupting the white heteropatriarchal status quo was penalized in the case of young women of color who empowered themselves in schools (Bettie, 2003; Cammarota, 2004). When speaking back against male dominance, the Latina's leadership and institutional supports were compromised. The previous examples revealed the lack of gender and racial sensitivity in institutions as well as their compliance with oppressive views of femininity. These hold performative educational inequities, including unfair and inconsistent disciplinary practices for Black and Brown young women (Morris, 2007). This lack of culturally relevant supports offered by schools and organizations exposes the school-to-prison nexus, under which institutions form a nexus of dominance that serves the status quo, but hurts young people of color (Vaught, 2017).

The Latina participants perceived the limitations of a collective focus across settings on immigrant justice that did not publicly condemn gender and racial oppressions. During a focus group interview, the Latina participants discussed the internalization of gendered and raced relations, displaying a *mestiza consciousness* regarding intersectional struggles in DREAM Act movement. The women, for instance, acknowledged how white passing Latinxs were allowed to be more vocal in public arenas by other youth organizers who did not question their leadership. As a result, some participants did not feel comfortable publicly challenging gender and racial oppression across the three institutions, because they could potentially experience retaliation and lose social supports. For instance, Lola expressed to the group her discomfort addressing gender issues in front of a large audience in youth-led organizing during an event. She recalled: *“I was in charge of the social justice one to one for the organization, and I chose the topic of violence against Latina women. Facilitating that conversation and having men in the room, I was nervous, my voice was shaky. I almost threw up on myself, I was like, no one is understanding what I am talking about.”* Lola exposed the challenges to address a youth audience regarding gender violence, because of structures that promoted oppressive gendered roles and sexual harassment, which for her entailed being constantly surveilled and put down, and having to prove her validity as the organization’s core leader. Lola underscored the need to reassure oneself as a Latina organizer in these spaces of resistance. The women underlined the need to work through those concerns amongst themselves first, and some of the participants referred to the need of healing, before they could address oppression. Marta stated: *“I think it should start with us first, because if we are not comfortable with talking about it yet; it will be hard for us to go to the state house and bring up that kind of stuff or stories.”* All of the Latina participants declared to be inspired by previous generations of Latina leaders in their communities.

CHAPTER SIX: Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” in Schools

This chapter presents the main findings regarding the ten Latina participants’ experiences navigating intersections of gendered and raced “illegality” in the institutional context of schools. Considering their underprivileged education background, the Latina participants envisioned education as the means for upward mobility. However, the women navigated oppressive educational structures encumbering their schooling and opportunities beyond schooling. As a result, these young Latinas became systemically dispossessed as “illegal subjects,” similarly to other institutions that denied their dignity as human beings (Ngai, 2014).

Vectors of intersectional oppressions were analyzed in this chapter, focusing on the participants’ school-related experiences as both students and organizers. Findings related to this institutional context uncovered how educational structures disproportionately marginalized the seven Latinas of color through the exercise of purportedly gender and racial-neutral practices and academic standards held by school personnel, including teachers, principals, administrators, counselors, and peers who undervalued the women’s wealth of capital (Yosso, 2005). This chapter also discusses how the women engaged in multiple forms of resistance, which generated vital personal and social transformations.

This study drew on interview data to analyze the ten participants’ previous schooling experiences. Ethnographic observation data allowed for the theorization of the women’s involvements as organizers and students in educational arenas, albeit, school-related organizing was not the focus of the youth-led organization during the three-year data collection period. Therefore, the participants were not only observed in their positionality as students, but also as organizers for immigrant justice interacting with multiple stakeholders.

Background Information on the Latina Participants' Schooling

Based on the growing numbers of immigrant Latinx young women and men in the United States' education system (Gonzales, 2016), it is critical to understand how institutions serve, support, and connect with these immigrant young people throughout their schooling. This section offers relevant background information pertaining to the women's schooling. At the beginning of the study, some of the ten Latina participants were in their senior year of high school, whereas others had transitioned into college. Despite DACA's socio-legal benefits, with the exception of Angélica who was ineligible, the DACAmented participants complained about a lack of available scholarships, which hindered their higher education access.

Economic barriers to higher education were reported by the participants in relationship to their undocumented status. By the end of the data collection period, three of the Latina participants had graduated from college, and were working full-time jobs related to their studies (Lola, Gloria, and Carmen); four participants were still in school (Uxía, Esperanza, Tess, and Marta); two participants had postponed their college education and worked full time in order to provide financial support to relatives (Isaura and Yahaira); and the youngest participant, had to work full time and had been unable to initiate her college studies (Angélica). While in school, the women worked to provide financial support to relatives on both sides of the border. The ten Latina participants reported having worked full or part time in different low-wage jobs while completing their secondary education in order to financially provide for their families.

During the data collection period, the women who attended college worked at the same time as organizers in an immigrant youth-led organization. The most recently incorporated Latinas to the organization, such as Tess, collaborated as volunteers, and other women, such as

Lola, a central leader of the movement, had been working as a remunerated organizer with the organization.

Some of the women switched jobs, transitioned into paid leadership positions in the organization, or took breaks from organizing in order to work full time and save money to go to college and/or support their families. Gloria transitioned outside of the organization shortly before the ending of the study. She decided to move back to the state where her family lived, since keeping close family ties was her priority. In addition, Gloria discussed her responsibility to financially support her parents and sister as reasons to leave her organizing temporarily.

Similarly, Yahaira had to put her organizing and studies on hold to pursue a full-time job at a local restaurant following her parents' deportation, which happened a few years before this study began. At the beginning of the study, Yahaira was a part time college student, leading a local chapter of the DREAM Act movement. Towards the end of the study, the Latina leader had to work full time, and, as a result, she had to postpone her college studies. During the almost three-year data collection period, there were additional changes that took place in the women's lives, which were described more extensively in the participants' collective portraits presented in chapter 4. Overall, the ten Latinx women struggled to reconcile job and family responsibilities with organizing and school-related agendas.

Findings regarding Latinx women's experiences of "illegality" in schools emanated from ethnographic observation and interview data analyses using the intersectionality and borderlands theoretical frameworks. Observation data illuminated school structures that prioritized racist heteropatriarchy, and marginalized the seven Latinas of color differently from the three light-skinned Latinas, despite their shared social vulnerabilities as undocumented women from Latin America. Interview data displayed the nuanced experiences of being socialized in schools as

Latinx women without papers at the intersection of gendered and raced oppressions. These data illustrated the transformations that took place throughout the women's schooling, including their growth as community organizers.

Discussion of Main Findings in Schools

This section presents the main findings pertaining to the participating Latinas' experiences navigating "illegality" in educational settings. The ten participants' experiences in schools were complexly shaped by institutionalized gendered and raced practices and structures hindering their academic performance and overall flourishing. This institutional ethnography unraveled how gendered and raced norms were embedded in school structures excluding the youth, by thwarting their leadership, networks, and learning, as manifested in varying ways across the ten participants. Tellingly, personal and collective resistance emanated as a reaction to these pernicious institutional practices of exclusion.

All of the women placed special value in education as a means for social mobility (Gonzales, 2016; Patel, 2013a). Research shows that undocumented youth and their families hope that through the accomplishment of educational goals, they can achieve economic mobility, and eventually achieve citizenship (Gonzales, 2016). However, academic achievement and societal access are far from straightforward realities for undocumented young people (Patel, 2013a). During an observation at a local high school, but not the school where she had studied, Yahaira co-led a DACA clinic for teachers and educators regarding DACA benefits, risks, and application requirements. In her speech, the Latina organizer pointed out the role of education for undocumented youth whose lives and opportunities had been deeply constrained by socio-legal barriers. Seeking to motivate the undocumented students and teachers in the audience, the youth

emphasized: “*education is very important for undocumented students, because having knowledge is important, and once you find out, you feel more enlightened to appreciate yourself, and talk to others, and do things that you may be able of doing or overcoming*” (observation, October 20th, 2014). The participant underlined the liberatory role of education in immigrant youth’s lives, but not merely in economic terms; instead, education was perceived as a tool for personal growth and network development. Yahaira specifically referred to the power of constructing a socio-legal awareness, which led to interrupting patterns of social exclusion. According to Muñoz, (2015), having a *legal consciousness* helps undocumented youth to understand how “illegality” affects their daily lives. This awareness facilitates personal and collective processes that serve to contest institutionalized oppressions. Ten major themes emerged from the data based on intersectional and borderland analyses of the Latinx women’s experiences of “illegality,” as students and organizers in schools. Table 6 below summarizes these key findings.

Table 6: Main Findings (Schools)

Latina Career Dreams Deferred
Impossible Assimilation
Fears of Deportation
Gendered and Racialized Educational Outcomes
Challenges to Latina Leadership
Punishing Latina “Illegality”
Teachers’ Gendered and Racialized Biases
Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” in the School Curricula
Peer Intersecting Interactions
Latina Resistance against Gendered and Racialized “Illegality”

Latina Career Dreams Deferred

A recurrent theme across interview and observation data revealed how gendered and raced school structures influenced the ten Latina participants’ different aspirations and career

paths. In the context of higher education, the ten Latina participants interacted with students from multiple social locations; yet the women expressed a concern towards the ways schools kept differential expectations of academic performance among youth (Ogbu & Simons, 1998), as white peers were typically held to higher standards of intelligence and academic excellence (Gonzales, 2016; Muñoz, 2013).

When asked about their academic goals, the Latinx women expressed an interest in pursuing professional careers that would allow them space to continue their immigrant justice organizing. The participating Latinas reported aspirations to achieve “*dream professions*,” which aligned with their immigrant experiences. They conveyed dreams to become teachers, lawyers, social workers, psychologists, health care advocates, and policymakers, with community-oriented goals. Esperanza, one of the youngest participants in the study, aspired to become an engineer. She had an intention to build technologies that could contribute to the international development of underdeveloped nations, like Brazil, her country of origin. Uxía dreamed of becoming a lawyer and working transnationally, being able to return to her home country in El Salvador to support young women undergoing gendered violence. All of the Latina participants had hopes of continuing their organizing transnationally.

Although the women valued education as the means to pursue their career dreams and achieve upward mobility, multiple school rules and policies thwarted their educational aspirations (Cammarota, 2004; Muñoz, 2015). School life shaped the participating Latinas’ expectations for their futures and sense of belonging, showing how socio-legal exclusion does not merely represent a question of language difference but power difference through tracking (Oakes, 2005) and meritocracy practices (Patel, 2013a). Angélica, who had dreams of becoming a physician, was in her senior year of high school at the beginning of the study. She reflected on

her experiences as a bilingual learner and the challenges to pursue a career path in science. At the time, Angélica was a newcomer from Guatemala. During the initial interview, the youth undermined gendered and raced language expectations in the context of ESL classes, which negatively influenced her self-esteem and career goals. She conveyed: *“I always felt excluded, because you are put in ESL classes with these other students like me, and then you see the other students in the regular classes, and I am like, why I cannot be with these other students in these regular classes? The expectation is that I am in this other class because I don’t speak the same language or have an accent. Just because I needed support the school pushed me aside, and I knew I could never pursue the career I had dreamt of.”* Having access to ESL classes was meant to help Angélica to improve her English literacy, put her in contact with other immigrant Spanish speakers, and integrate her into educational and societal structures (Patel, 2013a). However, by being relegated to ESL classes throughout high school, Angélica became alienated from resources, peers, and highly academic and career paths; hence tracked into hegemonic societal roles. Her exclusion from mainstream English arts and AP (advanced placement) classes similarly worked to stigmatize the youth. Angélica was perceived institutionally as less intelligent and less deserving of high academic tracks (Oakes, 2005). Her intercultural belonging was compromised while assimilationist norms were harmfully framed as necessary survival goals (Camarota, 2004). In addition, Angélica internalized the myth of meritocracy (Patel, 2013a) blaming herself for not being able to achieve succeed academically.

Angélica lacked access to bilingual education resources that would enhance her self-esteem and academic standing. Bilingual education advocates denounce how English-only educational policies have failed to guarantee immigrant youth’s social mobility (Patel Stevens & Stovall, 2010), since the students’ native languages and heritages are systemically devalued,

leading to their institutionalized oppressions (García, 2009; Viesca, 2013). In contrast to Angélica's experiences in ESL classes, other participants like Gloria and Marta benefitted from transitional bilingual education (García, 2009), which allowed them to validate their dynamic bilingual and bicultural social locations at school.

The racialization that happens through language is often overlooked in school language practices (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Nieto, 2002). Unveiling the politics of language in the education of bilingual learners, Flores and Rosa (2015) expose how raciolinguistic ideologies permeate language policy, and in turn lead to cultural microaggressions directed towards immigrant youth. The authors maintain: "people are positioned as speakers of prestige or non-prestige language varieties based not on what they actually do with language but rather how they are heard by the white listening subject" (p. 160). Immigrant Latinx students with a non-standard English accent become criminalized as undocumented through linguistic practices. These students might not be overtly address as undocumented by school authorities; yet, they are excluded from achieving power positions through tracking and related exclusionary practices. Dominant linguistic notions of *standard language* or *academic language* are embedded in discourses of appropriateness, which constitute racialized ideological perceptions of intelligence rather than objective linguistic categories. When the speaker is an immigrant woman of color, heteropatriarchal undertones intersect with racial oppressions, as the previous example illustrated. Angélica's exclusion from powerful geographical locations within schools based purely on linguistic and citizenship grounds, furthered her social exclusion as an undocumented young woman of color.

These politics of exclusion and inclusion became nonetheless relational for the young women in the study. The Latina participants, particularly those who had recently migrated to the United States, become institutionally gendered and racialized as low achievers and struggling

learners in contrast to socially privileged students who are placed in advantaged educational tracks. These newcomers were also placed in lower tracks in contrast to a few participants in the study who were fluent in English, had light skin, and had good grades. Patel (2012) exposes the institutional “rules of engagement” in school contact zones for undocumented youth. Different institutionalized school rules have excluded racially minoritized youth of color who are in contact with more institutionally privileged cultures (native-born, middle to upper class, of European descent, fluent in standard English). Patel (2012) further elaborates how “schooling will work to societally dispossess low-income young people of color, as well as corresponding spaces of opportunity for privileged populations” (p. 338). By not being allowed to join her peers in an English mainstream class or take an AP (advanced placement) course, as Angélica desired, her school kept low expectations regarding her possibilities and capabilities. As a result, the youth was unable to access four-year colleges, and could not benefit from available scholarships, considering how these were severely limited for undocumented students without AP experience. It thus becomes vital for schools to reflect on gendered and raced gates of opportunity, which are shut for some students while opened to others.

Angélica decided to postpone her college studies, and work at a local bakery after graduating from high school. Working full time would provide financial support for her family and allow her to save money for college-related expenses, including tuition, as undocumented students were not eligible for in-state tuition in that state and federal financial aid. In his ethnographic work with undocumented Latinx students in California, Gonzales (2016) underscores how “elementary and secondary schooling affect the students’ opportunities for college and work” (p. 43). As Angélica’ case illustrated, her exclusion from advanced

placements in schools represented a gendered and racialized school structure preventing immigrant women, like Angélica, from reaching upward mobility.

In addition, Angélica's socio-legal rendering as a student without papers limited her chances to institutionally advocate for her needs and aspirations. In her ethnography of high school students, Oakes (2005) argues that, although tracking is typically justified by educators as a strategic response to student heterogeneity, the structure is undergirded by normalized beliefs about gender, race, class, and citizenship. Such practices of segregation within school domains not only perpetuate larger isolation patterns for undocumented students like Angélica, but at the same time reproduce educational inequities. The ten women in the study attributed their lack of access to higher education to gendered cultural norms that reinforced women's roles as mothers, contributing to their tracking and exclusion from political contexts. As Latinx women, they were expected by schools and families to engage in caring roles, supporting their peers, working to support their families, and eventually getting married (Muñoz, 2013). Lola underlined how: "*as a Latinx woman, you are expected to be quiet, not to have an opinion, and just be pretty.*" Lola's undocumented status was reinforced by oppressive cultural practices objectifying undocumented female bodies and capabilities to serve heteronormative interests. For the seven dark-skinned Latinas in the study, like Lola, these oppressive gendered roles were intensified by recurrent racial hegemonic relationships, which blocked their access to college.

The ten Latina participants denounced institutional deficit frames of undocumented Latina students' knowledge and capabilities. School life and deficit views of the youth's cultures and knowledges shaped the students' expectations about their futures and sense of belonging. The process of being rendered "illegal" in society was intrinsically connected to gendering and racialization practices promoted in school settings. During a protest for in-state tuition in the

state house, Marta addressed a group of educators regarding the need to challenge schools' raced biases towards immigrant students' cultures and epistemologies. The Latina leader pointed out to a group of *unafraid educators* how “*we have ideas and experiences that are not valued in schools, because we are seen as inferior to citizens*” (observation, June 16th, 2015). In her positionality as a student and organizer, Marta condemned her racialization being treated as inherently different from other students who were perceived as more deserving, which holds implications for the women's professional aspirations and larger societal opportunities. The organizer validated her knowledge while challenging teachers' linguisticism and racism (Nieto, 2002; Viesca, 2013). Following a Latinx critical race theoretical framework, Delgado Bernal (2002) recognizes Latinx women of color as holders and creators of knowledge. The author's epistemological argument calls for the development of racial identities that include academic success, rather than deficit frames that tend to pathologize racially minoritized immigrant Latinx (Patel Stevens, 2009). In the previous example, Marta problematized normalized hierarchies of raced citizenship in schools, denoting the power embedded in critical Latinx epistemologies.

The seven dark-skinned Latinas in the study condemned school personnel's biased deficit views directed towards their academic potential. Some school staff, including teachers and counselors discouraged the women from achieving opportunities of upward mobility, perceiving their undocumented status as a barrier, while invisibilizing gendered and raced structures. This lack of knowledge about undocumented students' needs, capabilities, and chances unveiled larger institutionalized educational structures that treat undocumented students as chattel in contrast to white U.S. born citizens who count with numerous institutional supports (Patel, 2017).

Another participant, Uxía, from El Salvador, who struggled academically and was discriminated in schools due to her phenotype and a non-standard English accent, addressed a group of teachers, and high school and college students during an event at a local college. She denounced teachers' academic expectations held for high achievers and low performing students. During a presentation to an audience of teachers and high school students at a local university, Uxía objected: "*they [teachers] treated me differently, because I was not considered a top-notch student. And you know, we are not the best because of other circumstances, and especially girls in single-mother household, we have many responsibilities, like cleaning, and then having to look after our mothers and ourselves*" (observation, February 13th, 2016). Uxía's reference to structural violence in and outside of schools, and teachers as perpetrators of that violence, illustrates how institutionalized oppressions affected her chances to gain institutional supports. During this co-led presentation, Uxía emphasized the intersections of gendered and raced expectations constraining her career paths and larger aspirations in the United States, since she did not fit "*the model immigrant student*," which has been historically perpetuated in the United States by the myth of meritocracy. Uxía also underlined gendered expectations shaping her career aspirations. Co-leading this presentation with Uxía, Esperanza, recounted conflicting school experiences being undocumented. In contrast with Uxía, Esperanza acknowledged how, as a result of her phenotype and having been raised in the United, she had been raced and gendered differently from other undocumented women during an informal conversation at the talk. The women developed a *legal consciousness*, which allowed them to contest constructed "illegality" from a critical lens (Muñoz, 2015). Both Latinas shared episodes of sexual violence in the United States with the audience, which contrasted with the exclusion of these organizing narratives in larger institutional arenas and discourses. It should be noted how this event

represented the first time intersectional counternarratives emerged during the institutional ethnographic data collection.

Muñoz (2013) conducted an intersectional analysis of Mexican women's institutional experiences in higher education. The scholar exposed how white academic norms contributed to the invisibilization of gender and racial oppressions shaping undocumented Latinas' different career paths and academic opportunities (Muñoz, 2013). Both Latina organizers shared contrasting and overlapping experiences of "illegality," which, powerfully allowed for the problematization of gendered and raced citizenship constructions as well as educational practices influencing undocumented youth's career paths. Immigrant and other minoritized youth of color, especially young women, who fall out of the normalized white standards of academic performance are often left to flounder by schools, as Uxía condemned (Chávez, 1998). Pressure to fit these academic expectations are manifested in distinctions of humanness that undergird how U.S. born students are conferred more educational privileges and rewards at the expense of marginalizing minoritized youth (Patel, 2013a).

Schools' lack of financial assistance for undocumented students in terms of scholarship and in-state tuition benefits led the Latina participants to be excluded from varied educational opportunities. Carmen described her dreams of becoming a physician, but due to financial constraints, she opted for a career in nursing instead. Carmen struggled to access higher education due to exorbitant tuition costs, and lack of federal financial aid. College-related expenses likewise truncated her career dreams of pursuing a medicine degree. Therefore, financial constraints represented an added stressor to the Latinx women's circumstances as undocumented, considering how they were only able to access gendered low-paying jobs and second-class raced career paths. Carmen expressed: *"it is very stressful being undocumented. In*

the past, I had a very difficult time to get into school, because if you are undocumented you are working to survive, you do not have money to go to school, so you have to take time off school to save enough money.” Although the participants visibly exposed the financial constraints constraining their career options, their overall wellbeing, and college access, they were still pushed to institutionally comply with the system.

Impossible Assimilation

The ten Latina participants’ schooling experiences were highly influenced by white normativity and assimilationist intersecting structures that made it impossible for the women’s humanity and dignity to be fully recognized in schools. During the interviews, the participating Latinas exposed how school’s gendered and raced expectations were embedded in white male-dominant nationalistic practices. Patterns of assimilation to white heteropatriarchal normativity influenced varying degrees of institutional supports, from which the seven women of color were more often excluded, in contrast to the three light-skinned Latinas in the study.

Results from this study unraveled racialization processes as a Latina ‘non-citizen’ being intrinsically connected to phenotype, language, and skin tone. Latinas with dark skin and non-standard English accents were criminalized as undocumented in school settings, and consequently discriminated against by school staff and peers, blocked from leadership positions, and excluded from certain social networks. Speaking to the risks and compromises of nativist citizenship, Marta challenged educational rules that treated undocumented students as second-class citizens. During an event for in-state tuition at the local state house, Marta argued for legislative measures that would facilitate undocumented youth’s access to in-state tuition and scholarships. Addressing an audience of teachers, students, organizers, and a few legislators in

the state house, Marta expressed her concern regarding the prevailing education and economic inequities affecting Black and Brown students in U. S. public schools. The Latina leader avowed: *“as an immigrant woman who has lived here, and has been in the public school system, I should have had the same opportunity, or the right to be able to get a higher education than my white peers had. And it is not that we [undocumented students] want a free education. No. We just want to be treated like human beings, we want to be treated like others. We want help from schools if needed, and financial support. We can pay back like other people do in the United States”* (observation, June 16th, 2015). Marta publicly exposed nativist constructions of citizenship that excluded undocumented youth, like herself, from higher education access through the denial of in-state tuition and scholarships on the basis of racialized citizenship.

At this organizing event, the Latina organizer advocated for equitable educational opportunities following assimilationist frames; however, that is, claiming citizenship rights as she had been raised in the United States. Marta’s demands for equitable access through a logic of assimilation while validly related to her experience, was problematic. Unlike Marta, some undocumented youth, including newcomers, do not grow up in the United States; hence, not all undocumented students and their families can claim equitable educational benefits on the grounds of assimilation. Marta’s linguistic switch to the first-person plural, “we” emphasizes her sense of shared oppressions and collective resistance with other racially minoritized students. However, a logic of assimilation does little to challenge pervasive practices and policies that subordinate immigrant young people across vectors of intersectional subjugation (Patel, 2013a). Such assimilationist logics are often reinforced and rewarded in school contexts. Under these coercive logics of belonging, racist and heteronormative structural caveats are invisibilized (Conchas, 2006; Olivas, 2012). In the *Color of Success*, Conchas (2006) contends how “Latino

students think social mobility is possible but requires adoption of majority cultural traits or ‘acting white’ and assimilation” (p. 68). Assimilationist discourses sustain the manufacture of educational structures rooted in capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy (Fine, 2006), which have historically constructed second class citizenry (Olivas, 2012). In the previous example, Marta positioned herself as “an immigrant woman,” critiquing the male heteronormative power granted to white male students, although she did not explicitly address intersections of gender and racial domination in her activist discourse. These gendered and raced nativist constructions render some students legal and others “illegal,” despite assimilationist claims. In addition, assimilation through schooling has historically contributed to the colonial erasure of Indigenous heritages (Patel, 2017). Educational policies have failed to address intersections of meritocracy, colonialism, and assimilation contributing to immigrant students’ invisibility (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). It should be noted how Marta, together with other Latina participants in the organization, expanded their ideas and theorizing about social change to include intersectional frames during the last year of data collection. Chapter 8 grapples with the women’s developing theories of change more in depth.

Another finding showed that Latina participants who self-identified as high achievers based on standardized testing were able to amass degrees of academic inclusion at the intersection of white phenotype and standard English proficiency. Although the ten participants encountered legal barriers to receive federal financial aid, the three Latinas in the study who were able to assimilate to white norms of academic success received varied forms of school support. When interviewed about the notion of assimilation and perceived differences among undocumented Latinxs’ schooling experiences, Gloria reflected on the institutionally reinforced link between assimilation and meritocracy in her school life. During an interview, she

acknowledged: *“I have been very privileged more than other women in the organization. It [assimilation] has to do with the fact that I do well in standardized tests. I picked up English faster than other people. I looked like, I have light skin, right? There was a lot of privilege that came with that. Not being questioned, and I always had positive reinforcement in school. I felt people believed in me, and then I started to believe in myself, so I had a really great experience and support system in school, which helped me to get a full bright for college.”* Gloria attributed her degrees of institutional privilege to her light-skinned phenotype, which allowed for the cultivation of vital school supports, mainly as she was not racially criminalized in contrast to other youth of color. Gloria’s institutional ability to navigate white norms of academic behavior and performance granted her important material concessions, despite legal barriers connected to her unauthorized status.

In contrast, the seven dark-skinned Latinas in the study faced a myriad of gendered and raced expectations, which made succeeding in school for them far from a straightforward matter. For instance, Uxía declared during an interview how *“the education system only wants smart immigrants, if you do not have a good GPA, you are not equally smart, and you cannot enter the higher education system. And that is how people see you.”* Uxía remarked how immigrant students whose academic achievement is below their peers endure institutional obstacles to access higher education. Jefferies (2014) exposes how the inability of schools to serve its undocumented students negatively affects the youth’s capacity to further their education and secure dignifying employment.

Findings revealed that multiple notions of immigrant youth’s intelligence permeated school spaces in relationship to normalized sexism, racism, and linguisticism. In the previous example, Uxía exposed the detrimental effects institutionalized white forms of assessment, such

as standardized testing, have on immigrant youth, particularly those of color who are newcomers, because of their abjection and racialization as “illegal” (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012). High-stakes testing as a structure rooted in white norms fails to measure the wealth of knowledge and abilities minoritized immigrant students, including undocumented youth, bring to school (Patel, 2013a). Reflecting on Gloria and Uxía’s patterns of intersecting oppressions, schools work as sites for cultural reproduction of white normativity in accordance to dominant cultural, linguistic, gendered, and raced norms (Camarota, 2004; Yosso, 2005), which constitute the vile legacy of settler colonialism (Patel, 2017). Even teachers with a social justice philosophy are coerced to comply with these colonial mandates; thus, being pushed to work as gatekeepers of academic success (Freire, 2000). Educational practices that bar undocumented students from access to school supports based on academic performance and gendered and raced perceptions of intelligence perpetuate dichotomies of worthiness among immigrant youth influencing their lives and opportunities (Jefferies, 2014; Pallaes & Flores-González, 2010). All Latina participants reported pressures to assimilate to white norms, as teachers urged them and their families to learn standard English and/or speak it at home, and work harder than their native-born peers in school, following the myth of meritocracy. Such forced assimilation is not only unrealistic, it also works to devalue immigrants’ heritage and agency, contributing to their dehumanization and consequent dispossession (Pallaes & Flores-González, 2010, p. 199).

Therefore, prevailing educational practices of cultural and linguistic assimilation as a tool for undocumented Latina students’ academic success collapse the youth’s nuanced experiences due to “illegality.” These educational discourses set assimilation as the ultimate educational goal for immigrant youth, but distortedly fail to unmask assimilationist frames in citizenship discourses; hence turning their schooling into a colonial enterprise (Patel, 2017). Despite the

urgency for assimilation towards undocumented youth's inclusion promoted by schools, their inclusion becomes impossibly attainable as a result of intersecting systemic oppressions.

Fears of Deportation

Findings revealed that the participating Latinas lived in constant fear of deportation in connection to their unauthorized immigration status, which influenced their mental health and schooling experiences. For the seven dark-skinned Latinas, their racialization as undocumented was exacerbated on the grounds of phenotype and linguistic backgrounds, which placed them at higher risks of discrimination and deportation. Yahaira, a young Mexican organizer of color, recounted her traumatic childhood as a result of deportation threats in her family and her criminalization as undocumented in schools and society due to her "Indigenous" phenotype. During an interview, the youth conveyed her fear and vulnerabilities to being criminalized in relationship to intersections of undocumented status, race, and gender. She articulated how: *"the greatest challenge was that I felt always afraid, and being seen as undocumented, I was treated as inferior because of my status, my gender, my race, my Indigenous ethnicity, and feeling that you are alone, that you are not able to seek a friend or an understanding person."* Her fears and trauma being re-racialized as second class in schools at the intersection of gender discrimination exacerbated Yahaira's isolation. Negrón-Gonzales (2013) explains that "fear is a reality of daily life for undocumented youth, ebbing at moments and subsiding at others yet distinct in its continual presence" (p. 1287). The author contends how undocumented youth who are navigating fear, shame, and stigma in association with their immigration status often experience a deep isolation, that is, an isolation rooted in a secrecy that protects them from exposure, but at the same time "makes it difficult to connect with other undocumented youth" (Negrón-Gonzales,

2013, p. 1287). This isolation was very much the experience of the ten young Latinas in the study before joining the youth-led organization. The tensions described by the author point out how undocumented youth's "illegality" often clashes with their beliefs that they deserved to continue their education and live their lives without the constant uncertainty and fear of deportation. Yahaira's childhood fears of deportation became real when both of her parents were deported back to Mexico after an immigration raid in the factory where they worked. At the time, the Latina was in tenth grade. As a result of her parents' deportation, Yahaira's mental health and academic performance were negatively affected. Rather than being supported by peers, teachers, and school staff, Yahaira was questioned about her citizenship status by school staff and peers all the way from high school into college. Yahaira's shortage of school supports sheds light on the raced and gendered discourses of meritocracy, which blame the individual rather than holding the educational system accountable for failing the most vulnerable. Meritocracy represents a gendered and raced structure sustaining white property rights under which white citizenship claims have been institutionally asserted to secure white hegemony (Patel, 2015; Vaught, 2014).

Following her forced separation from both of her parents, Yahaira had to look after herself as a young woman both financially and emotionally while lacking solid school and community networks. Some undocumented youth have key sources of support and encouragement in their lives that can help them navigate "illegality" and Otherness (Gonzales, 2016). Yet, others, especially those who experience higher risks of intersectional vulnerability undergo deeper levels of socio-legal inclusion, which urge scholars, and practitioners trying to dismantle these unjust educational structures and policies to address the power, stigma, trauma, and fear related to citizenship (Muñoz, 2015).

Being raced as undocumented in schools not only increased the participants fears of deportation, but it prevented the women from reaching out to others for help. Yahaira's feelings of constant scrutiny in schools made it difficult to seek out academic supports and build agency in this context. In contrast to Yahaira, the three light-skinned Latinas who were able to pass as white in the study were not criminalized as undocumented, hence, they were not questioned about the status, and felt more institutionally protected as a result. Tess, Gloria, and Esperanza, the three Latinas with white phenotype and standard English accents, acknowledged during the focus group interview their "*freedom*" now to be criminalized as undocumented when walking around school in proximity to peers, security guards, and other school staff.

Gendered and Racialized Educational Outcomes

The participants reported being pervasively dehumanized as second class at the intersection of gender and race in schools, which negatively influenced their educational outcomes. Findings revealed how intersections of gendered and racialized school expectations led to differences among the women's educational outcomes. Educational statistics show that Latino students are higher achievers than Latinas, although both lag behind their white peers (Cammarota, 2004; Marschall, 2006), especially in the context of high-stakes testing, school biases, and teacher accountability (Patel, 2013a). Yet, these statistics are based on standardized testing results, and, as such, they fail to account for immigrant youth's academic strengths and structural barriers in schools. Findings shed a light on institutionalized racialization practices that influenced in different and similar ways the ten participants' education outcomes. Specifically, the racialization of undocumented status in the case of the seven dark skinned Latinas entailed a constant shaming and scanning of their academic positionalities by school staff. The participants

of color described undergoing experiences of racism and sexism in schools and microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007), which negatively impacted their academic performance. For example, Uxía condemned school shaming practices at the intersection of gender and racial oppressions, which she considered to be responsible for her academic struggles. During an individual interview, she contended: *“being undocumented, I could not be really myself. I had to portray something or someone that I was not at school, and out of school. I struggled in school, in tests, but it was very hard for me to ask for help and tell people that I was undocumented, because society has taught us that being undocumented is something to be ashamed of, like my skin tone, my body, or my accent.”* Uxía described her low self-esteem in connection to internalized oppressions, which coerced her agency at school. Her words also hint at the hyper-sexualization and criminalization of Latinas of color in connection to their academic performance, which places them at higher risk of violence within the school-to-deportation nexus (Morris, 2016; Verma et al., 2017).

Institutionalized gendered and raced practices that undervalued her intelligence led the participating Latinas to experience feelings of non-deservingness. Since Uxía was not allowed to enter institutional spaces that validated her positionality, agency, and perspective, her academic performance suffered. Being dehumanized through assessment practices and relationships, Uxía faced additional educational barriers, in contrast to white-conforming peers, including some of the participants in the study (Martinez, 2014; Muñoz, 2015). School microaggressions towards Latinas of color, as Uxía recounted in the previous example, have been historically woven in white heteropatriarchal systems of erasure and dominance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

According to Vaught (2014), “the school acts as a neutral image, occluding established sexist and racist institutional practices that are endemic to the liberal state” (p. 159). The re-racialization undocumented young women endure in schools due to their non-standard English

accents and phenotype reveal their function as conduits for the myth of meritocracy, that is, the assumption that if immigrant students work hard they can overcome structural obstacles (Patel, 2013a). In the context of undocumented youth's schooling, meritocracy defines academic success using individualistic frames that overlook the role structural factors, such as racist "illegality," play in the politics of learning. The white neoliberal system of education in the current age of accountability and high-stakes testing discourages Latinxs' academic potential and leadership development. Normalized whiteness permeates school structures in ways that conflate intersections of gender, status, accents, race, and grades as dominant signs of intelligence (Patel, 2013a; Yosso, 2005). Uxía pointed out how being racialized, she was rendered from the outset as a low-achiever in the context of standardized testing, which represented a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that white peers did not face.

Findings showed differences among the ten Latina students' academic performance, while underlining gendered and raced oppressions in assessments, tracking, and teacher supports shaping the women's educational outcomes. The three Latina participants who had white phenotype and were identified by schools as high achievers, were racialized and elevated as exemplary *good immigrant* students in contrast to some of the Latinx women of color, particularly those who underperformed in high-stakes tests, as they were left to flounder. In addition, the three light-skinned Latinas did not report being questioned institutionally about their status by neither officers, teachers, nor peers. Hence, they were able to maneuver "illegality" in safer ways, despite shared legal constraints amongst the women.

Esperanza acknowledged how schools displayed preference towards "*promising*" immigrant learners, who had white phenotype, whereas low-achievers of color were institutionally excluded from school supports. During the focus group interview, Esperanza

unraveled these institutional oppressions, noting: “*I am basically American. I grew up here, have no accent, and have great grades.*” The Latina participant underlined intersections of gender and racial oppressions establishing hierarchies of intelligence among undocumented students in relationship to whiteness; thus, rendering Latinas of color particularly vulnerable to liminal educational conditions. Esperanza’s schooling experiences being undocumented can be contrasted to those described by Uxía, and despite shared legal educational barriers. These examples revealed both women’s complexly situated educational realities (Flores-González, 2002; Patel, 2013a). Underlining the role of social capital in spaces of resistance, Patel (2013a) argues that undocumented students “have to have the right connections, the right way of talking, looking, and acting to move up rungs on the ladder of social mobility” (p. 55). Rather than focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable learners across intersections of subjugation, schools perpetuate hegemonic social practices that exclude undocumented Latinxs, such as Esperanza and Uxía, and funnel instead material opportunities for the status quo. Latinx students who are non-white endure additional barriers as a result of gendered and raced “illegality.” In *Women without Class*, Bettie (2003) lays out the interconnection of gender, racial and class oppressions contrasting and comparing Mexican-American and white girls’ high school experiences. The author argues: “the greater salience of race over class in a society that lacks a discourse on class means that white girls’ mobility is less encumbered in some ways than for Mexican-American girls” (p. 163). Because, as Bettie writes, there is an interdependency between gender, race, and class in this society, whiteness provides multiple advantages for white students over racially minoritized learners, leading to soaring disparities in terms of upward mobility and emotional supports. It is apparent how property rights as measured by educational outcomes are linked to citizenship rights (Patel, 2017).

Despite gendered and raced educational outcomes, the previous examples revealed the participants' development of a *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 2012) regarding not only the impact of intersecting institutional oppressions, but also their agency to move beyond those as they became community organizers for immigrant justice. Through their shared solidarity and activism, the Latina participants publicly denounced educational practices that create deep racial and gender hierarchies among students.

Challenges to Latina Leadership

Findings revealed that the ten participants experienced different challenges in the validation and construction of their Latina leadership in schools. The women described different barriers to their agency and leadership in schools, in both of their roles as students and organizers. Educational structures rooted in heteropatriarchy and white racism shaped the women's inability to speak up against intersectional oppressions across institutional contexts. The Latinx women believed that the education system had failed to address undocumented issues from minoritized students' multiple perspectives, in the same way schools had failed to encourage immigrant women's civic engagement beyond gendered and raced roles. In fact, schools, at the secondary and higher education levels, often perpetuated these gendered and raced norms (Muñoz, 2013). Many teachers in the study, particularly white male educators, disregarded gendered and raced barriers the women faced at school and beyond. The participants grappled with a lot of responsibilities at home, having to take care of siblings, cleaning, and cooking, which gave the youth less time to complete school-related work. Critical education researchers argue how rather than actively advancing practices of authentic and liberatory learning (Patel, 2016), schools function as sites of cultural reproduction that reinforce the power

of the status quo (Yosso, 2005). Without a regularized immigration status, these women stand at an institutionally disadvantaged location when it comes to advocating against submissive gendered roles in schools and beyond. Even Latinas who participate in the political economy must comply with these gendered roles of caregiving in private arenas; whereas men are often exempted from these roles (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). In the case of undocumented Latinas, their caregiving roles at home is reinforced in school contexts, where young immigrant women are encouraged to support peers' academic and emotional needs in schools' attempt to build community (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007).

Findings showed that many teachers overlooked the Latina participants' capital and political agency in the classroom and beyond. Lola denounced teaching practices that silenced her political views and agency in the classroom; hence coercing her school voice and leadership. She stressed: "*I was not expected to have an opinion in politics, I was not expected to advocate for myself.*" Lola, like other immigrant women in the study, was schooled to conform to docile and submissive roles in favor of male authority at school. For Latinas with dark skin like Lola, the exclusion of their voices in school spaces is intrinsically connected to their larger institutional exclusion from public leadership roles (Muñoz, 2015). Uxía denounced how undocumented Latinas of color struggled to raise their voices in schools in part due to the ways they were socialized as dark-skinned women, and the internalization of that oppression. Schools' gendered and raced expectations entailed that the women had to be submissive and quiet in the classroom. This practice implicitly required that the youth conformed to white heteropatriarchy. During an observation at one of the organization's events, Uxía urged the teachers in the audience to address undocumented issues in their schools and practice, challenging white citizenship claims in the process. The Latina leader contended: "*we deserve to feel comfortable in our skin. We*

deserve walking the hallways in the school and not being scared we will be mistreated or deported” (observation, April 10th, 2015). Uxía’s intersectional discourse underscored how structural marginalization and abuse defined as well as confined her schooling.

Uxía participated in multiple school trainings collaborating with teachers, administrators, counselors, and high school youth towards making schools safer spaces for undocumented students. During an earlier observation in a high school (observation, October 20th, 2014), Uxía underscored the role *DREAM schools*, as supportive institutions, play challenging nativist conceptions of citizenship. She advocated: “*DREAM schools are places that do not shame students for being undocumented, so that everyone, the principal, counselors, teachers, are willing to learn about what to do with an undocumented person, you do not use words like ‘illegal,’ it is forbidden.*” These undocumented-friendly schools work as examples of structures decentering whiteness by problematizing oppressive rules of engagement (Patel, 2012), and breaking the silences of undocumented status in teacher practices (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014). *DREAM schools* stand as institutions openly supporting undocumented students through scholarships, programs, and their representation in student councils. *DREAM schools* can likewise promote immigrant students’ leadership and visibility through school practices that break historic patterns of racial and citizenship segregation (Muñoz, 2015). Although Uxía struggled financially to cover college-related expenses while financially supporting her mother, the organizer was able to develop important networks that allowed for the interruption of oppressive patterns experienced during her high school years. In fact, the youth managed to make it into a career in public policy despite layers of institutional exclusion. At her four-year university, she developed together with Lola, an undocumented *task force*, which aimed to support undocumented students through scholarships and spaces of leadership in college.

Furthermore, being an outspoken Latina of color conjoined with being socially constructed as devious female behavior, which schools tried to control through disciplinary practices (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). Practices of school neglect marginalized the women of color in the study, more often than the three white-passing Latinas who spoke English fluently. The seven dark-skinned Latinas were less frequently referred to resources and organizations by teachers, counselors, organizers in schools, who did little to encourage the women's socio-emotional development, networks, and leadership. However, some teachers, particularly teachers of color, worked as an exception, considering how some were more attuned to navigating institutionalized racist and sexist dynamics. These teachers for instance invited undocumented organizers to their schools, which facilitated processes of community engagement and personal growth. In fact, several Latina participants connected with the immigrant youth-led organization through teacher community networks (Conchas, 2006; Yosso, 2005). Examining structural and cultural forces shaping Latina youth's opportunities, Conchas (2006) emphasizes the importance of teacher networks to help these students to navigate interlocking structures of oppression. The author uses intersectional lens to explain how: "the relation of race and ethnicity to student success must be situated at the center of educational analysis through a comparative lens embracing a larger spectrum, including distinct student populations grouped in terms of not only race and ethnicity, but also culture, socio economic status, linguistic differences, gender, sexuality, and disability" (p. 1).

Punishing Latina "Illegality"

Findings revealed that the participating Latinas became recurrently criminalized as undocumented, even if they had white phenotype, when not complying with school academic

rules of “appropriate” student behavior. Lola strongly advocated, from a young age, for her rights as well as the rights of other immigrants at school, despite her agency being shut down in the classroom and larger school spaces. She was described by teachers as “*loud*,” “*annoying*” or “*disruptive*” in this institutional context. Thus, Lola was criminalized for publicly displaying her political views. During an interview, the youth acknowledged how she had been dissuaded from speaking her mind in class about immigration, albeit she resisted. Lola contended: “*most of the time, I was not afraid to share my opinion in schools, including my opinion about politics, but teachers did not expect me to have an opinion, and when arguing with peers about an issue, I felt like I was the one blamed for causing trouble.*” This example illustrates how teachers’ discipline practices coerced the Latina student’s agency and networks. Women, especially immigrant women of color like Lola, are not encouraged or even allowed to be politically active publicly. The previous example likewise shows how teachers metaphorically work as guards of the settler nation state (Vaught, 2017), tracking students into different academic paths, based on larger gendered and raced practices, which hinder their voices and opportunities (Richards, 2007). Similar to Lola, other young Latinas in the study alluded to gendered and raced discipline practices, when speaking up against injustice in schools. Male students, including immigrant Latinos were given more political agency in the classroom than women, because of heteropatriarchal practices that continue to value men’s voices over women’s (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). Similar to these findings, educational research confirms an alarming reality: Black and Latinx girls are disproportionately punished in school arenas as a result of white norms (Cammarota, 2004; Morris, 2007; Morris, 2016).

Microaggressions against Latina participants in schools entailed harsh discipline and shaming when the women challenged white nativist ideologies (Sue et al., 2007). During an

interview, Gloria recounted an incident in which she challenged a white male teacher's views regarding "illegal" immigration in her American government class. Gloria explained her response to the teacher declaring: *"As an undocumented immigrant, I am really offended when you use the word 'illegal,' and would prefer the word 'undocumented,' and everyone turned around and looked at me, and the school was very conservative so I knew they wanted to tell me slurs. There was a power dynamic. You cannot say anything because you can get kicked out of school. My teacher, he just growled and did not say anything and changed his train of thought. He pulled me to the side after class, and he was like, you know I would have felt better if you told me that during my office hours."* This teacher's concern with his safety and the safety of the whole class before Gloria's is highly problematic for multiple reasons. First, this white male teacher entirely overlooked Gloria's emotions and circumstances being undocumented. When discrediting her act of coming out in front of her peers, this teacher criminalized her behavior and constrained her agency. Gloria, despite her white phenotype, was punished in front of her peers as a result of challenging white nativism.

In the previous incident, Gloria's American History teacher's trespasses by illegally asking her to reveal her immigration status were unaddressed by the institution. It should be noted that teachers' requests of immigration status information from immigrant youth violate their code of conduct, and the legal protections put in place to safeguard these students from having to report their status. Inquiring into students' immigration status violates federal law holds implications for teacher preparation (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014). In the process of punishing Gloria's act of coming out and "illegality," the teacher centered white supremacist views in the classroom while erasing ongoing histories of oppression and resistance in the formation of U.S. citizenship. By being asked to talk to her teacher outside of the class, Gloria

was not solely criminalized, transformative opportunities to build restorative dialogue among peers were shut down.

Results noted how the seven Latinas of color struggled to raise their voices in schools (particularly prior to being organizers, but also after becoming organizers), because of interlocking school structures that oppressed their voices institutionally. Uxía recounted a dehumanizing incident in her history class, when the teacher challenged her agency to speak in support of undocumented immigrants. She described: *“this white teacher was making comments in class about undocumented people, that we take advantage of people, we take their socials, and so on. I told him, you know, that is not true because a lot of my family came here as undocumented people, and they are contributing to the economy, they pay taxes, I mean you name it, they are paying taxes in stores!”* The teacher did not expect his authority to be challenged in front of the class by a young woman of color. When Uxía, publicly undermined his racist ideology, the teacher asked her in front of peers whether she was undocumented, which, as previously noted was unlawful. Both previous examples illustrate how teachers, especially white male teachers, are rarely held accountable for their illegal trespasses. Teachers have historically worked as guards of the U.S. white settler state as mechanisms of surveillance and discipline controlling youth’s sexuality, and sustaining gendered and racial hierarchies, similar to white women who were hired as teachers to eradicate Native Americans’ Indigeneity during the nineteenth century (Vaught, 2017). Both Gloria and Uxía were criminalized and punished for speaking up against “illegality;” however, it should be noted how Uxía was differently raced as undocumented, which carried implications for her years of schooling. In addition, Gloria’s agency was suppressed differently as, being white, she did not endure recurrent re-racialization as undocumented in educational contexts.

In contrast to Gloria who had always advocated for herself, Uxía struggled to challenge white heteropatriarchal power. As a survival strategy, Uxía, like other Latinas in the study, initially resorted into hiding her status in schools (Cammarota, 2004). Her response to the teacher who questioned her immigration status entailed resorting into lying to protect herself. She declared: *“I was ashamed. They [teacher and peers] made me feel ashamed. I had to lie. And I told them that I was born here but that my parents sent me to live there with my grandparents, and I felt horrible, Rocío. Cause I felt like I was forced to deny who I was. I was made to feel like less than someone else just because of the place where I was born and a piece of paper.”* Uxía’s discrimination in school exposes how “illegality” permeates gendered and raced relationships, as immigrant women of color continue to be barred from successful academic paths and leadership positions. Her humanity became reduced to “a piece of paper,” and her hiding of status worked as a survival strategy. Schools’ presumably neutral politics influence teacher praxis, and exacerbate undocumented young people’s exclusion, silencing their experiences in favour of white heteropatriarchal power (Muñoz, 2013).

The intersection of heteronormativity, racism, and punishment becomes evident in how Black and Brown youth face constant surveillance and more retaliation in schools than white peers as early as kindergarten (Ferguson, 1999; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016). Punishing and suspension rates are significantly higher between non-white girls and whites (Bettie, 2003; Morris, 2016). In her multiple case studies of Black girls in schools, Wun (2016) argues that school structures function as “prison like” for racialized students, in that “school discipline policies and practices quell the girls’ abilities to assert their agencies and subjectivities as human, particularly within the context of the afterlife of slavery where they are structurally and institutionally rendered captive objects” (p. 191). The author deploys a multidimensional

intersectional framework to explain different categories of difference in Black female students' experiences in urban schools, considering how intersections of gender and sexuality in the lives of these young women have been underresearched. It should be noted how these categories of difference are defined as mutually constituted systems that work to marginalize Black and Brown women, including those in the Latinx diaspora. Despite educational policies claiming to support undocumented students, Latinxs and Black youth are still treated as deviant, as opposed to native-born white students (Cammarota, 2004; Morris, 2007), and discrimination is seen as an individual act rather than dominant socio-cultural practices taken up by individual members of society (Vaught, 2014). As long as schools continue to place more emphasis on discipline rather than knowledge, this institution will sustain its historical role of prepping youth of color for attending prisons (Vaught, 2017; Wun, 2016). To contend with this unjust punishment of immigrant and other racialized students, the Latina organizers discussed with their teachers the need to promote Latinx leadership in schools, by challenging teacher's biases on students' disruptive behavior. The participants' non-conforming actions stood as vital forms of intersectional resistance in this context (Morris, 2016; Spade, 2013).

Teachers' Gendered and Racialized Biases

Results from this institutional ethnography illustrated how teachers' biases negatively influenced the ten women's relationships and learning in schools. The Latinx women regretted the lack of safety practices and spaces in schools in connection to teachers' preparation, assumptions, and knowledge or lack thereof regarding immigration and undocumented youth. During an interview, Angélica exposed how that the majority of her counselors and teachers lacked knowledge about the role undocumented status played in Latinas' access to higher

education. She argued: *“I feel like teachers especially should know something about how undocumented students are affected, but I feel like not every teacher knows about it. And then it is hard to tell them, like people need to know about it, I mean, why is this not brought up in the school?”* It should not be undocumented students’ responsibility to have to “teach” their teachers, counselors, and peers about undocumented issues. Instead, schools and teacher education programs should actively seek to well-equip educators and administrators with critical organizational tools that help to deconstruct teacher biases and nativist constructions of citizenship. Because school teachers and staff lacked knowledge on undocumented issues, they ignored the participating Latina youth’s varied needs and constraints. As a result, teachers failed to disrupt educational structures that delineate gender and racial tracks among immigrant young people (Oakes, 2005). During the initial interview, Uxía conveyed deep pain related to some teachers’ anti-immigrant and anti-Black practices, which were unaddressed even when affecting the integrity of students like herself in the classroom. Uxía described: *“some teachers are pro-immigrants and want to help the students, and want you to go to college, but others do not want to change the policies and act as having to deal with undocumented people.”* Schools silencing of gender and racial violence and lack of accountability to address intersections of racial and gender oppressions perpetuated by teachers towards minoritized students have persisted even when discrimination policies have become institutionalized (Conchas, 2006; Vaught, 2014). As Conchas (2006) notes, “teachers can be both bad or good to address or perpetuate inequality” (p. 68). Because of their closeness to immigrant students, teachers hold a central role challenging nativist discourses of citizenship that bar undocumented youth from access to higher education and social services (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014). Their roles as activist educators need to be expanded to be sensitive to these social contexts (Picower, 2012).

The participants attributed their teachers' gendered and racialized biases to their lived intersectional oppressions in schools. Teachers' biases and expectations noticeably perpetuated gender and racial hierarchies among students, even amongst the Latina participants' themselves. Carmen declared how white male students received more often teachers' academic support than girls, particularly girls of color. Carmen expressed: *"I felt teachers treated me differently because of who I am. It should not matter if I am Black or white, if I am a man or a woman, straight or lesbian, you are someone in power and should show respect to everyone, so it is rather discouraging from a teacher to look down on you, because they are supposed to push you forward."* Intersections of racism and sexism in the classroom positioned undocumented students of color, like Carmen, at an academically disadvantaged point, while other students had their needs met and strengths encouraged. As a result, some of the students avoided to build relations with minoritized peers. Intersections of racial and gender oppressions work to sustain a racially stratified society, and school functions as a tool of the settler state socializing young people to internalize their different roles within the white colonial project (Conchas, 2006; Vaught, 2014).

Teachers' social locations have been identified as predictors for undocumented students' academic achievement (Cammarota, 2004; Patel, 2013a). In his ethnographic study of Latina students in a high school, Cammarota (2004) examined how teachers projected gendered and raced expectations onto Latina students, as manifested in discriminatory practices in the classroom. For instance, some Latinas' ideas were challenged by teachers more often than men's, and their experiences as women were obliterated from the curriculum when discussing issues of immigration. Cammarota (2004) contended that Latina students resisted their marginalization through strategic avoidance and conformity in order to academically succeed at school. Racial and gender biases are sustained in teacher training programs when unaddressed (Nieto, 2002;

Patel, 2013a). Normalized assumptions about immigrants and immigration (beyond monolingual biases) prevent teachers from getting to know their students' needs, strengths, and social contexts; thus, failing to identify potential support mechanisms, possibilities for higher education, and gendered and raced oppressions (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014). The participating Latinas' grades were used by their teachers to determine their capabilities and career choices. Marta recollected her struggles in a particular math class. She declared: "*my English in math would be bad, although my English grades would be good, but this teacher gave up on me.*" Marta connected her language struggles in this math class to her monolingual teacher's biases. Her racialization as a low-achiever across gender, race, and linguistic lines predisposed the youth to struggle on high-stakes tests, and thus be excluded from science contexts. Teacher neglect towards struggling learners is influenced by biased white normalized messages about intelligence and levels of success (Gonzales, 2016). Teachers and other school authority figures' neglect of struggling learners has to do with their more favorable regard of whiteness (Patel, 2015).

Findings from the study determined that teachers' social locations shaped their biases towards the Latina students. These biases were manifested in negative messages about the students' capabilities and performance, particularly in the case of struggling youth of color. White teachers were described by the participants as displaying racial biases towards the students more overtly than teachers of color. During an interview, Esperanza acknowledged how "*in general white teachers do not care about undocumented students,*" as an explanation for her fear of coming out as undocumented in schools when she was a child. During the two ethnographic observations in schools (observation, October 20th, 2014; observation, February 13th, 2016), even well-intentioned teachers overlooked the Latinas' heterogeneous backgrounds by making

assumptions about phenotype and “illegality,” the students’ migratory contexts, and undocumented parents’ educational engagements.

At a university talk regarding college access for undocumented students (observation, February 13th, 2016), Esperanza and Uxía shared their experiences as undocumented students with teacher and students in the audience. Both of the women recounted episodes of sexual violence on both sides of the border in their narratives. In particular, Uxía underlined her ongoing systemic sexualization and racialization as an adult. A teacher in the audience acknowledged her own lack of undocumented training, and by doing so, she displayed her gender and racial biases. She exposed her racial biases as a white woman discerning: “*I would never say you were undocumented,*” referring to Esperanza, whose accentless standard English and white phenotype granted her a degree of institutional privilege. At the same time, the white female teacher was implicitly racializing Uxía and potentially other undocumented young people in the audience as undocumented. The Latina organizers challenged this teacher by noting how some teachers project “*similar racial biases*” onto immigrant students, which discard their funds of knowledge or “*conocimientos*,” and warned educators to decenter whiteness as a practice, which racially minoritizes Latinx of color as well as non-Latinx students of color. Hence, both organizers from their varied social locations pushed the audience to think about “illegality” from an intersectional lens.

Teacher activism was accounted by the Latina participants as high predictors for their wellbeing in schools. Teachers as well as counselors who became supporters helped the women in the study to break patterns of institutionalized heterosexism and racism. During the previous observation at the university, Esperanza addressed the teacher audience recounting her transformative experience working with a particular teacher. She appreciated her Brazilian

teacher's support, with whom she shared important connections (both being from the same country, speaking the same language, and having been raced in the United States). The Latina youth conveyed gratitude towards his teachings and community supports. She expressed: *"he was very important to me, because he told me about my history, how history works, and radical ways of thinking, you know, he was there for me, because like once I built a relationship with him I told him, I am undocumented, because he wanted me to go into this trip, because we were a good class learning a lot, and he had us do, I think it was called, the way we face history, it was about abolitionist movement, and the lady that came in to observe us was like you did great, you should do an internship, and I told him that I could not do it. I had to explain to them many times that I was undocumented, and could not do it, but also because there are other undocumented students, not just me [...] The teacher introduced me to another organizer in the organization, and that day changed my life forever."* Esperanza was able to navigate structural challenges in her schooling through vital teacher supports. Her testimony accentuates the need to develop teacher networks and community outreach, not simply in terms of promoting authentic "learning," in contrast to "studenting" (Patel, 2013a, p. 52), but also in terms of validating immigrant youth's voices and cultivating their leaderships.

Positive messages from teachers about being part of a group, being committed to hard work, and high expectations encouraged the Latina youth both socially and academically. In that same ethnographic setting, a Latina teacher in the audience encouraged Uxía and Esperanza's leadership, connecting her story to the women's. She expressed: *"I feel so proud of you, to tell your story, because I could not tell mine."* This teacher connected her past undocumented experience to Uxía and Esperanza's in ways that validated the women's leadership against institutionalized white heteropatriarchy. In fact, teachers of color share dimensions of structural

oppression and resistance with minoritized youth, which allow for the cultivation of cultural connections and navigational capital (Gonzales, 2016; Patel, 2013a). In this institutional ethnography, teachers of color were predominantly more empathetic and supportive than white teachers.

Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” in the School Curricula

The ten Latina participants in this study referred to the school curriculum as a highly politicized field, which exacerbated their cultural, linguistic, and social marginalization. Whiteness permeates school curricula in ways that, the academic content that is taught to immigrant young people often obscures the links between citizenship status and racial identification as determinants of immigrants’ rights violations in the United States (Bartolomé, 1994). Despite the 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* policy, which upheld the constitutionality for undocumented youth to have access to public K-12 education, undocumented Latina youth’s native languages, cultures, and needs continued to be demoted in schools and policy (Muñoz, 2013; Patel, 2013a). Isaura, from the Dominican Republic described her experiences being racialized as an immigrant of color in relationship to the school curricula, as undocumented immigrants were criminalized and immigrant needs were silenced. During an interview, she declared: *“immigration, or being undocumented, has shaped my life, but I feel like the youth in school are not taught immigration issues, they are not being screened on that matter, and then everyone is clueless about that matter. And then as a woman, I am not even encouraged to ask questions.”* By discouraging conversations about immigration and immigrant identity, ongoing colonial relations are reinforced among different students and school staff. As Isaura pointed out, not only undocumented students have been prevented from learning critical information about

themselves and their histories, but also students who have been institutionally more privileged. Assuming education stands as a neutral enterprise entails denying a soaring reality, that is, how schools have historically configured highly politicized institutional spaces that reproduce the status quo, and how little has been done to address this form of institutional violence on Black and Brown bodies (Nieto, 2002).

The institutional denial of these cultural and social sensitivities hinders the advancement of cultural transformations (Bettie, 2003; Patel, 2013a). In her ethnographic study of Mexican-American and white girls in a high school in California's Central Valley, Bettie (2003) describes the complex identity performances of the Latina girls. The author unmask cultural practices in schools that are involved in the performance of class in relationship to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. The author argues: "the discourse of other students, teachers, and curriculum material worked persistently to make working-class performers feel marginal and reinforced an ideology of homogeneity that did not exist in reality" (p. 112). Because these immigrant Latina girls are perceived as lacking cultural capital, they struggle to achieve class mobility. Having their histories underrepresented, including not having Latina leaders as referents in the curricula hindered the growth of the women's political voice through their dehumanizing treatment as second class.

Bilingual education in relationship to the school curricula was described as a positive educational structure supporting the youth's academic and emotional growth. Yet, not all of the Latina participants benefitted from participating in such bilingual and dual language programs. Gloria described the significance of bilingual education in her life, having grown up in Milwaukee and studied in a dual language school. She argued: "*There should be more bilingual education programs around the country. I think it is beneficial not only to immigrants, but also*

like American children. I love my education, my bilingual education as a child, and I give it a lot of credit for being able to think in two languages, and being bicultural, and being comfortable in that bicultural, and I would love other people to have that experience.” This biculturality educational model has been traditionally discredited and underfunded in educational policies in favor of white monolingualism (García, 2009; Viesca, 2013). The banning of numerous transitional bilingual programs since the early 2000’s reveals the interconnection between capitalist economic structures that profit from “illegal” labor, racist educational laws, and assimilationist norms imposed by schools on immigrant communities for purposes of sustaining a racially stratified society (Patel Stevens & Stovall, 2010; Viesca, 2013).

The exclusion of undocumented Latinx students’ heritage languages and culture from the school curricula plays a central role sustaining the colonial logics of white citizenship. In their ground-breaking work about culturally sustaining pedagogy, Paris and Alim (2014) urge schools to discard “white, middle-class, linguistic, literate, and cultural skills, and ways of being that were considered the sole gatekeepers to the opportunity structure in the past” (p. 89). Critical pedagogies are advocated for in the curricula, understanding how addressing social issues in the classroom alone cannot undo existing power structures that perpetuate the reproduction of inequality (Picower, 2012). Hence, the need for teachers as cultural brokers to be involved in the community (Picower, 2012). Uxía opposed gendered and racial biases in the school curricula, describing her sense of pride, which was reinforced by her mother’s upbringing. She learned to value her Salvadoran community-oriented traditions and Indigeneity. During the focus group interview, Uxía reflected on her Indigenous heritage. She expressed: *“I am proud of my roots. I kept my culture and I am proud of my Indigenous roots, which is why I consider myself a hundred percent Latina.”* Sustaining her Indigenous heritage despite pervasive gender and racial

oppressions in schools empowered her persona. In *Ghetto Schooling*, Anyon (1991) encourages educators to get to know the students first, and then plan the curriculum accordingly as a way to challenge pervasive whiteness and heteropatriarchy. The participants underlined the need to build such emotional relationships with the teachers. They expressed, like Isaura noted, that “*at a time when I was so wounded that teacher showed me the light.*” Findings from the study expose how critical literacy and activist educators can contribute to the development of immigrant Latina youth’s leadership and self-esteem in schools and beyond (Bartolomé, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Peer Intersecting Interactions

Findings from the study revealed how peer support functioned as a form of societal capital (Negrón-Gonzales, 2015a; Yosso, 2005); however, the women also recounted multiple experiences of peer discrimination at the intersection of gendered and raced dynamics. Peer discrimination was exacerbated by school anti-immigrant and heteropatriarchal structures, especially in the context of higher education. Particularly, language discrimination was rampant among peers from different social locations, including students from different linguistic backgrounds. Uxía described her experience being re-racialized due to her non-standard English accent and non-white phenotype by her high school peers. During an interview, she recounted her experiences as a newcomer at school. She explained: “*back then my English was not perfect. I had a huge, strong accent. A lot of students would mock me, they would tell me that there is an online program called ‘breaking barreras to practice,’ or mock me, call me, like I am ‘an Indian,’ like from the forest, mocking my skin, mocking my accent, my clothes, my being, and you kind of have to take that as if it is ok. They do not know about undocumented people, they have*

been taught to think like that, they haven't thought about that there are other human beings, and you learn not to expect." The re-racialization of young Latinas of color through language stereotypes and phenotype association in schools serve colonial power endeavours, which erase practices of Indigeneity in the process. Because of this larger oppressive structures, young people, including some peers participate in discrimination towards minoritized youth. Rather than being taught to behave culturally sensitive, schools perpetuate divisions and hierarchies among peers, through the ruling of white normativity and its socially constructed notions of humanness (Bettie, 2003; Patel, 2013a).

Uxía underlined how clothing, physical appearance, and flawed ideals of beauty led to her peers' discrimination towards her persona. By appearance, Uxía did not fit the deeply flawed light-skinned beauty ideal. Similar to Marta, Uxía liked to wear make up and colorful clothes, and, as a result, became oversexualized and marginalized by peers, including female and male young people. Bettie (2003) compares the experiences of white and Mexican-American girls unpacking issues of physical appearance and makeup use. In her ethnography, the author showed how white female students, the "preps," who were described in her book as white, mostly wore plain clothes like jeans and tee shirts, and little to no makeup. In contrast, the *Cholas*,¹⁴ because of their strong personality, were perceived as a threat to male authority as well as white women's sexuality. Mexican-American *Cholas* would get belittled and suspended from school more often than their white peers. These gendered and raced dynamics created divisions among the students. Because white girls did not fit this description, teachers and authority figures treated them more favorably; in fact, these girls never had a bad experience or got in trouble for anything. Uxía was "mocked" by peers for not fitting highly oppressive white norms of appearance and intelligence,

¹⁴ The term *Chola*, the female counterpart of the *Cholo*, is a cultural identity marker referring to working-class, young Mexican-American women from the *barrios* of the Southwest with a very distinctive aesthetic, style, and resistance attitude (Bettie, 2003)

and the institution allowed such gendering and racialization. In the process, Uxía became institutionally sexualized and treated as disposable. In connection to undocumented status, non-heterosexual practices and identities continue to be stigmatized in schools and society, despite anti-discrimination policies (Vaught, 2014). Considering dress codes and physical appearance as markers of oppressions, for instance, Queer Latinx students and other gender nonconforming students who decide to wear clothing that does not match their sex, could receive disciplinary backlash for being seen as a “distraction.” These multiple oppressions can in turn lead to students doing poorly in schools, not attending classes, or even dropping out (Seif, 2014). In fact, being criminalized can lead to these students deciding that schools are not a place that would accept them. Latinx girls of color are oversexualized, and hence more vulnerable to experiencing gendered forms of violence (Parra, 2015). In addition, once schools label issues that affect a certain population as “inappropriate,” they shut down critical conversation about the topic, making it very easy for those who do not stand by that population to criminalize others (Rofes, 2005; Seif, 2014).

Intersections of institutionalized racist gender violence in schools were rooted in structures of gender and racial subjugation promoted by schools among peers. Under these cultural politics, immigrant women’s needs are subordinated to men’s (Ahmed, 2004). Isaura condemned cultural practices that perpetuated submissive roles of immigrant Latinx women in schools leading to microaggressions amongst peers. The participant explained: *“the school has a reputation of being sexist and racist with the students. The comments my peers make about women of color like we are weak. They say if women are weak let men take advantage of them, and I am like, no we are not weak, look at me!”* Isaura’s experiences being gendered and raced in schools entailed being attributed hyper sexualized attributes by peers and implicitly by the larger

school. Her words unveil the interconnection between undocumented status, sexual harassment, and heteropatriarchy. Being sexually objectified, Latinas who are undocumented become more vulnerable to being re-victimized by systems and individuals within those systems. The sexual policing of Latinx women's bodies likewise hinders their upward mobility (Bettie, 2003; Cacho, 2012), contributing not only to the school-to-deportation nexus (Verma et al., 2017), but also sexual trafficking (Morris, 2016).

From an intersectionality lens, Queer Latinas face multiple dimensions of disempowerment than gender-conforming students do not typically face (Seif, 2014). Two of the Latina women in the study self-identified as Queer, and they expressed having experienced interlocking intersectional forms of discrimination in schools as a result of heteronormative practices (Seif, 2014). The immigrant youth-led organization in the study became the only space where both women felt their sexuality was validated. Being UndocuQueer was in fact a shared social location with some males in the movement.

Even in their positionality as organizers, some Latina participants highlighted the role racism played in being sexually objectified and harassed by high school peers. Isaura explained: *“there were times in which I just felt weird, even in classes with Latinos, there were Latino boys that I was being beat up, like you are so cute, instead of I am here to educate you!”* The Latina leader was not taken as an authority by male youth in the audience. Because of the dominant rape culture and the practices of white heteropatriarchy that sustain it, young men, even in schools, are taught to feel entitled to disrespect women's voices (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2017). As a result, they often feel entitled to make sexual advances on young women. Uxía, described how she encountered sexual harassment by peers as an organizer in schools. She expressed: *“students made fun of me when I am like I am an organizer, why are you not taking me seriously, but now I*

do not care anymore.” Schools perpetuate these highly gendered and raced relations by failing to address sexual harassment concerns from intersecting lenses (Parra, 2015). Uxía’s words echo her *mestiza consciousness* and agency above heteropatriarchal racist power. She challenged the sexed construction of her body and skills by asserting her leadership as a Latina organizer. Through their leadership in schools, the women developed important networks and inspired other youth, including young women, to join the movement.

Latina Resistance against Gendered and Racialized “Illegality”

Despite interlocking barriers to their academic success and gendered oppressions, the ten Latinas in the study became increasingly politically engaged. In this process, they developed a critical awareness about systemic oppressions, and learned how to navigate these barriers. The Latina organizers felt empowered to counter social and cultural practices that marginalized them in and outside schools as a result of their “legal consciousness” (Muñoz, 2015). Because of their involvement in an immigrant youth-led organization, the Latina organizers collaborated with high schools and universities that showed an interest in addressing undocumented issues. They were invited, for instance, to lead workshops for teacher professional development and facilitated conversations with high school youth regarding the challenges of “illegality,” including barriers and possibilities of access to higher education. In some of the schools as well as outside school, the Latina organizers led DACA clinics, in which undocumented youth and their supporters could learn key information about the application process, the rights and limitations of the program, and the larger work led by organization.

The Latinx women used intersectional frames to unravel systems of racism and sexism preventing undocumented youth from building meaningful relationships. At the end of an

observation, two young women in the audience approached the organizers Esperanza and Uxía to thank them and at the same time share their own stories as undocumented women of color (observation, February 13th, 2016). This moment poignantly revealed Latina leadership's allowing for breaking the stigma of gendered and racialized "illegality" by disrupting white heteropatriarchal structures through Latina solidarity (Anzaldúa, 2012). By developing a *mestiza consciousness*, the Latinx women in the study validated multiple subjectivities in front of youth who were exposed to experiences of intersectional disempowerment, some of which they might not have endured.

The Latina participants collaborated closely with educators, counselors, administrators to influence changes in discourse and practice in schools, which contributed to their theories of change. Esperanza recounted her experience facilitating professional development in schools in terms of raising schools' awareness pertaining to undocumented issues. She described her encounter with a Latina department head and school teachers as transformative. Esperanza described: *"she was the head of the counsellor department, but also a high up administrator in the school, and I went in saying this is our organization, this is what we do, here is some facts about what DACA is and what we can do, some things you can do when undocumented students apply to college, like you should still be filling out FAFSA and write 000, and they were nodding their heads, and saying we should have a staff meeting and talk about these issues, and tell the students in classes, and teachers, and I think we should have a day, you know how we have a silence day, I think we should have a silence day in which we talk about the challenges of undocumented students, you know how we have a LGBTQ day, like an undocumented day, I was telling them how students have this fear, and schools do not help, and the circumstances they are living into create these barriers to education and go to college, it is because they lack the*

support, because teachers are unaware. I was talking to them about this, and the head of the counselors wanted to work closely with me, so we created this chapter, which became part of the organization inside the school.” First, this exchange illustrates Esperanza’s *mestiza consciousness* living in the borderland of different social locations; thus, being sensitive to intersectional struggles. In addition, this example proves the efficiency of the advocacy endeavours of some socially committed principals and teachers towards decentering whiteness through the construction of liberatory structures in schools, and the prioritization of counternarratives by socially minoritized youth, including undocumented students. All in all, building on intersectional organizing frameworks, data from this study showed how despite institutional challenges to Latina leadership and higher education access, collaborations among students, teachers, organizers, and institutions disrupted patterns of intersectional oppression, allowing for equitable educational practices.

Chapter Conclusions

Findings presented in this chapter uncovered how teachers’ biases, the school curriculum, and teaching practices continue to sustain white normativity, and as a result negatively influenced the ten Latinx women’s school experiences. Gendered, raced, and classed expectations configured multiple obstacles for the Latinas of color in the study; and the Latinx women’s leadership was often institutionally subordinated to men and white women’s power. Yet, the women’s counterstories challenged unjust schooling structures and discourses of immigration, while urging teachers, counselors, and school personnel to work actively and collaboratively towards the dismantling of nativist citizenship and the inclusion of immigrant youth in school, following intersectional frames in educational policies and teaching praxis.

Therefore, the 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* educational law, rather than addressing undocumented issues, promoted instead nativist discourses of citizenship embedded in structures of white racism and heteropatriarchy. Assimilationist frames in educational practices and policies affecting the women in the study failed to address pervasive discrimination towards the students at the intersection of racialized oppressions. Assimilationist calls in schools promoted by administrators, teachers, and peers marginalized the Latina students who did not fit certain socially constructed categories. As a result of assimilation, discrimination, and penalized “illegality,” the women’s leadership, multiple needs, and varied experiences were not validated in schools; thus, silencing the educational inequity that persists between Latina youth under unauthorized status and their peers. Sadly, the development of transformative cultural relationships among peers became hindered in this colonial educational process.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” in the State House

This chapter presents the main findings regarding the ten Latina participants’ experiences navigating “illegality” in the context of their organizing in the state house. The women, often accompanied by male leaders in the organization, negotiated policy reform with local state legislators and governors. This institutional ethnography analyzed structural and cultural aspects of legal institutions and the field of policymaking relevant to the Latina participants’ multiple experiences in the context of the state house. Findings from interview and observation data shed a light on the participants’ interlocking oppressions and forms of resistance in the realm of policymaking. Legislators promoted policies, spaces, and nativist views of citizenship that held differential material and social implications for the Latinx women. Before delving into the discussion of the main findings related to this institutional setting, relevant institutional concepts are introduced in the following sections. During the data collection period, the state house represented a major institutional focus of the immigrant youth-led organization all the participants were part of.

The White Settler State House

As a symbol of white settler colonial power, the state house functions as a legal mechanism defining the rules of citizenship engagement. Citizenship in the United States has been fixedly defined in relationship to national borders and nativist discourses, which have historically dehumanized people of color in order to maintain white settler rights (Glenn, 2015; Patel, 2017). The term citizenship within a democratic society includes its legal definition where one person either is or is not a citizen of the country as geographically demarked by borders, and where all citizens should receive equal treatment and opportunity. Yet, certain immigrants have

been historically excluded from citizenship rights for purposes of global exploitation (Cacho, 2012). In the case of undocumented Latinxs living in the United States, the birth right under current nationalistic configurations of citizenship overlooks their civic engagements, global economic relationships, and their rights to land (Anzaldúa, 2012). On the grounds of “illegal” immigration, the young Latinas in this institutional ethnographic study faced interlocking obstacles to societal security and upward mobility, as this chapter discusses.

Through their organizing in the state house, the Latinx women contested legal structures and practices that thwarted their access to social benefits, including quality education. In the context of the white settler state house, the Latina participants were forced to comply with racist heteropatriarchal legal authorities, who sought to silence the women’s political voices and demands. The state house, as a symbol of the U.S. state policymaking, thus reveals the intricate negotiations of power, self-agency, and compromises, the ten Latina organizers had to navigate in order to influence socio-legal transformations.

Latina Legal Consciousness

The Latinx women in the study developed a *legal consciousness* in the process of making sense and intellectualizing their undocumented status together with other organizers, supporters, and different relatives across borders (Muñoz, 2015). In their organizing in the state house, the women spoke directly to the U.S. nation state following a collective immigrant discourse, despite their different social locations. Using intersectionality theory, Muñoz (2015) examines DREAMers’ legal consciousness in their public discourses. The Chicana scholar argues that a *legal consciousness* helps young organizers to address the constraints of anti-immigrant legislation, as they engage in multiple processes of resistance. Similarly, Negrón-Gonzales

(2013) discusses a double-vision in regard to DREAMers' organizing. The author explains how "operating in a constant context of otherness and extra-legality allows undocumented students to assume a removed and more critical location from which to contest societally-accepted truths about the inevitability of inequality" (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013, p. 1289). Because of their "illegality," the women are in a unique position to counter practices of injustice; nonetheless, the U.S. government ignores their perspectives.

However, there might be different, sometimes contradictory truths, which should be unpacked when countering socially constructed "illegality." Patel and Sánchez Ares (In Tuck & Yang, 2014) underline how undocumented youth's resistance is institutionally contained, especially in the space of the state house, since coming out as undocumented entails assuming several risks and compromises in negotiations with others, such as playing within the white settler state's assimilationist logics. Thus, "resistance is never wholesale positive or negative, or even merely teleological. It is, instead, a form, location, permeable container for negotiations of power, identity and inclusion" (p. 139). While advocating for immigrants' rights in the state house, the Latinx women engaged in a dialectic relationship between discipline and resistance, which entailed flattening some of their needs and experiences related to their gendered and raced locations in order to benefit the larger group's, and thus achieve institutional and legal supports in policymaking processes. In addition, the ten participants developed an intersectional understanding of undocumented issues in collaboration with other women and men in the organization, which significantly led to the creation of their *mestiza consciousness*, by which Latinx women's awareness of institutional oppressions, realizing their agency to transcend those conditions and galvanize socio-cultural transformations (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 109).

Latina Citizenship in the Borderlands

The concept of “borders” has been historically woven into policymaking for the creation of the U.S. nation state (Cacho, 2012), hence promoting gendered and raced notions of citizenship that marginalize immigrants of color (Negrón-Gonzales, 2015b; Patel, 2017). These imagined borders mirror the structural formation of cells or social divisions of power following the Foucauldian concept of the *panopticon* as an instrument of institutional surveillance (1975). Following an intersectional framework, these cells or socio-legal divisions along gendered and raced lines have created unrest and socio-legal vulnerability for immigrant women under unauthorized status in the United States. Historically, immigration and education policies have perpetuated dehumanizing discourses about immigrants based on the gendering and racialization of borders, leading to the construction of “illegal subjects,” (Ngai, 2005), which predisposed Latinas who were undocumented to endure interlocking vulnerabilities, including their exploitation and exclusion from safety nets (Eckenwiler, 2011; Marietta, 2006; Merry, 2009).

Latina Organizing in the State House

The Latina organizers in the study mobilized change in the state house sharing their testimonies with different supporters, including teachers, policymakers, members of the media, and other young people. The immigrant youth-led organization had established rapport with a few policymakers that supported in-state tuition campaigns, but their votes were not sufficient to legislate the DREAMers’ claims. These “ally” legislators, as defined by the participants, publicly supported the undocumented youth’s access to higher education. The legislators were at times present during the youth’s speeches inside and outside of the state house. Other times, the Latinx women and other organizers met individually with anti-immigrant and other non-supportive

legislators as part of the youth's lobbying efforts for in-state tuition and federal financial aid. Arranging meetings with these legislators became extremely challenging for the organizations, and often times politicians did not show up for these meetings without giving previous notice.

This lack of institutional support unveils the disregard on the part of the state to engage with immigrant young people's agency, particularly disregarding immigrant voices of color (Milkman & Terriquez, 2014). Other times, when the Latina participants visited legislators' offices, the women were greeted by legal aids who took their paperwork and proposed pro-undocumented education bills. These legal aids promised to pass the organizers' messages along to the targeted legislators, but often this action could not be guaranteed. As detailed in the field notes, legal aids did not simply remain neutral in this space; instead, they functioned as gatekeepers of opportunity. They took notes of the organizing Latinx youth's concerns. Other times, they remained silent, listening, without notetaking. At times they were asked by the youth to take notes for the legislators, and later the youth followed up with a phone call.

Main Findings and Discussion

Three main findings emanated from analyzing data intersectionally, revealing differences and similarities across the ten Latinx women's experiences as undocumented in the state house.

Table 7 below discusses the major findings for this institutional context.

Table 7: Main Findings (State House)

Latina Leadership against the Settler State House
Challenges to Latina Leadership
Compromises of Latina Organizing

Latina Leadership against the Settler State House

The Latina participants described their organizing in the state house as a collective attempt to undermine U.S. anti-immigration policies, specifically educational policies negatively affecting undocumented students. Marta publicly challenged a legislator's claim about democracy and immigration at a meeting with legislators in the state house, arguing "*if we are in a country that is so democratic, how are we giving certain freedoms to some people that we are not giving to others?*" (observation, February 20th, 2015). The Latina organizer directly exposed the state legislators' failure to support the in-state tuition bill, which had been proposed by DREAMers locally, and passed in twelve other states. Marta uncovered how under the name of democracy, some students were granted more freedoms and mobility than others, challenging functionalist views of democracy in education (Freire, 2000). While institutional structures may claim to be democratic, such as the rule of law in the United States, their normalized racist and sexist practices uphold the authority of the status quo at the expense of dispossessing undocumented communities, including women, and denying them access to resources, while exploiting them as chattel (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Glenn, 2015). For Latina immigrants, like Marta, and other women, their freedom of movement and upward mobility as undocumented were highly constricted by the liberties and materiality conceded systemically to whites and people profiting from whiteness. In the previous exchange, Marta's self-advocacy challenged anti-democratic notions of citizenship in the face of legislators as holders of power, and in the process, she reclaimed citizenship rights.

The course of coming out as undocumented in the state house was defined by the Latina participants as empowering, despite several barriers to their leadership and organizing, which will be discussed in the next sections. Esperanza expressed a sense of pride positioning herself as

a central leader in conversations she had engaged in with policymakers and the local state governor. During an informal conversation in the state house, Esperanza declared: *“it is not easy to talk to these men, but I feel empowered when I share my story, because I can hold them accountable for issues of discrimination. They do not like being called racists publicly, especially if the media is around”* (observation, June 16th, 2015). After this lobbying event in the state house, the Latina organizer accounted for uneven power dynamics in her exchanges with legislators and the local governor, describing how: *“it is a power thing. You need to go there and remember why you are there, so I saw him and I opened myself to him.”* Esperanza challenged herself to speak to the governor directly in a shared political space, considering his position as a powerful political figure.

During this brief meeting for in-state tuition, Esperanza, together with other organizers, held the governor accountable for his anti-immigration policies, emphasizing his responsibility *“to serve all citizens in the city.”* After this meeting, Carmen, who accompanied Esperanza, underlined the interlocking challenges Latina organizers encounter to be taken seriously by predominantly male governors and legislators. The Latina organizer shared her impressions of that meeting, as detailed in the field notes. She declared: *“accountability is very difficult. Even when we get state representatives that say they will support us, and they will give us their votes. The court system, the way it is set up is set up to make decisions in favor of whites, not immigrants.”* Carmen’s words following her encounter with the governor exposed the unquestionable power that white male politicians hold in policymaking due to structures of heteropatriarchal whiteness that fail to hold these figures accountable for racist and sexist biases, and instead further victimize minoritized populations.

For Latinx women in the study their act of coming out of the shadows or transitioning into community organizing was closely related to their fluid roles in the DREAM Act movement. The women's leadership development entailed transitioning through different roles in the immigrant youth-led organization. The ten ethnographic observations pertaining to the women's organizing in the state house shed a light on shifting gender and racial dynamics. Towards the end of the data collection, increasing numbers of young Latinas of color stepped into public speaking roles in the state house. Earlier in this study, the same women had been relegated to less public speaking and gendered roles, which entailed leading small actions in schools, fundraising, and setting up training events. The seven Latinas of color increasingly acquired core roles in the organization during the three-year data collection period. Lola and Marta were the exception, since despite challenges to their Latina leadership, both women of color occupied core organizing roles throughout the study.

As both interview and observation data illustrated, the ten Latinas usually started to volunteer or work in the immigrant youth-led organization occupying non-public speaking advocacy roles, particularly in the state house interacting with legislators. Instead, their organizing focused on fundraising or giving small talks to youth and teachers at local schools. As the women developed their leadership skills and networks, they increasingly participated in institutional meetings with representatives and elected officials in the state house. After a protest that took place outside of the state house, Isaura discussed her impressions for having publicly shared her testimony for the first time in this institutional setting. As noted in the field notes, Isaura described her enthusiasm for having established her agency in this context for the first time. While reflecting on her leadership development, she perceived: *"this time I felt part of the membership, part of actual organizing. I did not feel I was stuck in my fundraising corner. I was*

not asked to go around with like petition forms, but I was able to speak up” (observation, May 25th, 2016). Isaura drew connections between her membership in the immigrant youth-led organization and her inclusion in public speaking roles. At an institutional level, her voice problematized one-sided stories of immigration in the DREAM Act movement.

During the first years of data collection, interview and observation data revealed the Latina participants’ struggles to undermine gendered and raced roles in organizing activities, as a result of male dominant heteropatriarchal practices that excluded the women from leadership roles. In the previous example, Isaura’s inclusion as a leading figure in the state house became the result of progressive internal re-structuring in the organization, which took place during the final year of data collection. Women of color in the organization started to strategically assume public roles at the forefront of protests and campaigns in the realm of policymaking. By addressing intersections of gendered and raced oppressions in the state house, the Latina participants were able to raise their multiple voices within an institutional context that historically tried to silence them (Milkman & Terriquez, 2014; Muñoz, 2015). In fact, the Latina participants considered that directly addressing legislators as women of color became more challenging than engaging with young people and teachers in schools. Chapter 9 describes cross-institutional similarities and differences that unpack these nuances.

Findings revealed that the ten Latina participants had to navigate gendered and raced practices in the state house as their leadership was devalued. Yahaira contended how, “*when I walk in I know I am going to be seen as inferior because I am a woman of color.*” Aware of her racialization by white legislators, the Latina organizer displayed her disposition to insert her story into policymaking in meetings with legislators. The Latinx women’s ability to live in danger and uncertainty fits Anzaldúa’ (2012) concept of *la facultad*; an awakening state in which

Latinas make meaning tapping into their assets and strengths to heal from the wounds of colonization, which culminate in the development of a *mestiza consciousness* in borderland spaces. In her book chapter “Entering into the serpent,” Anzaldúa (2012) chooses the ancient Aztec goddess of life, death and rebirth, Coatlicue, as the archetype through which regeneration and change occur, and argues: “I will have my serpent’s tongue - my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence” (p. 98). Through Latina resistance to institutionalized oppressions, the women in the study developed an understanding of their immigrant conditions as influenced by intersections of white heteropatriarchy; thus, developing their *mestiza consciousness*. At the same time, they constructed forms of intersectional resistance through collective actions and cultural transformations (Spade, 2013), as reflected in their increasing political agency in the state house and the organization.

Challenges to Latina Leadership

Despite the development of their leadership skills and roles in the DREAM Act movement, the participating Latinas experienced multiple challenges to their leadership in the context of the state house. Challenges to Latinx women’s leadership in the state house were complexly situated and rooted in gendered and racialized relationships with multiple others. The four ethnographic observations in the state house exposed the white heteropatriarchal practices of exclusion the women faced in relations with legislators. Findings from the study showed that the seven Latina women of color specifically endured overlocking forms of marginalization regarding their gendered, raced, and socially constructed “illegality” when interacting with policymakers, legal aids, and governors. Young male immigrant voices were favored in interactions with policymakers. In the second individual interview, Lola, a young woman of

color from Brazil, and a founding leader of the immigrant youth-led organization, denounced how, despite her decade of organizing, policymakers continued to show preference for engaging with undocumented Latino organizers' voices during meetings. Lola declared, *"they [policy makers] look at some other men that are in the room as if they are supposed to be leading the meeting, and that is hard. When they do not even look at you when you talk. They do not pay attention to women, and I feel when a man talks there is more attention than for a woman, especially if you are a woman of color like me."* Despite her positionality as the core organizer in the organization, and her varied years of experience in the DREAM Act movement, Lola's expertise and leadership were recurrently undervalued in policymaking. The legislators' silencing of Latinas' voices in legal arenas and their privileging of men's voices unveil the pervasive white heteropatriarchal lens permeating policymaking in the United States (Glenn, 2009). Field notes taken during the four ethnographic observations in the state house accounted for these subtle hegemonic practices of exclusion, as male legislators seemed more comfortable addressing the men in the room to discuss immigration issues, rather than engaging with the women of color. Legislators' biased gendered and raced practices illustrate the role intersectionality plays in the politics of inclusion and exclusion in policymaking (Dodson, 1991; Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Hartry, 2012).

Similarly, Marta communicated her frustration when a white male legislator discarded the youth-led organization's proposed bill for in-state tuition on the grounds that undocumented students had been already granted multiple legal benefits (observation, May 25th, 2016). During this observation, the Latina leader was noticeably upset when a male politician discarded her question, and instead moved to answer her Latino counterpart's. Following this meeting with the legislator, Marta described her perspective about the exchange with the legislator articulating: *"I*

realized that it was because he did not like it [the question she had asked him], because I was challenging him, and he felt uncomfortable, and I am like, you are supposed to do your job and listen to me.” For Latina organizers like Marta, the underlying expectation to be submissive to male political agendas shapes the women’s interactions with male authorities (Milkman & Terriquez, 2014; Muñoz, 2015). Latinx women need to navigate legislators’ biased preference to engage with male concerns in conversations about policy. If the women speak back against their subjugation to male power, their organizing agendas would most likely be discounted institutionally. Policymakers serve to represent the different people living in the same locality, which explains Marta’s call for embracing a multiplicity of citizenship concerns. For young women of color, who, like Marta, are positioned as undocumented in the state house, the challenge to be heard is even greater, as legislators dehumanize their narratives and treat the women as second class. By ignoring Marta’s question about the financial constraints undocumented youth and their families endured, this male legislator operated within the pervasive gendered and raced practices in policymaking (Hardy-Fanta, 1993).

During the initial individual interview, Yahaira reported experiencing discrimination as a woman of color when talking to policymakers in the form of racial and gender microaggressions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The Latina youth described: *“it is subtle, you know, like I feel I am being seen as inferior to the other organizers, including men because of my skin color, and my status, but no one says that, the representatives just ignore you.”* Yahaira expressed a concern that policymakers “did not care” about her migratory story, because, as she put it, it was marked by her parents’ deportation, and the law criminalizes adult undocumented Mexicans. At the same time, the Latina leader underlined the importance of challenging the racialization of her experience as an immigrant Latina of color by positioning herself at the forefront of immigration

debates. Similarly, Marta acknowledged undergoing discrimination in this institutional context in the form of male control over what narratives were shared in the state house. During an interview, she described in depth these microaggressions from policymakers. She conveyed: *“you just feel it. You just feel that you are not even noticed, many times, you know, the focus is more on men that are talking and then, they lead the conversations, they would put more effort on conversations on politics like politicians when they are talking to men. Then in general just their looks, like, they look at me like are you serious?”* The Latina organizer denounced how these legislators showed preference for male leaders’ testimonies, and how in the process the women’s concerns were overlooked through dehumanizing processes aimed to put down women’s agency and political power.

Other young Latina organizers of color in the study described their fears and pressures to speak publicly in the state house. Sometimes the Latina youth encountered opposition from their families who feared their daughters would be exposed to deportation threats. Following up on her first intervention during a campaign in the state house, Angélica, a young Guatemalan woman without DACA, reflected on the fears related to speaking up in the state house, in contrast to other participants who were DACAmented. She conveyed: *“I did it, but it was very hard, it was the first time I did it.”* When asked if she could expand her reasoning regarding the challenges of sharing her story as a non-DACAmented student in the state house, Angélica added: *“it was hard because you are being vulnerable to people, strangers and friends, and people that just do not believe in you. I felt good afterwards, but not much better, because we try so hard, and I am like why cannot be there a change? Legislators are against us, so they do not pass the bills.”* Angélica’s frustration about the inability of the state to legally support undocumented communities reveals the interlocking challenges of coming out as undocumented.

Lacking DACA, Angélica was placed in a vulnerable social position. She was excluded from legal considerations, due to established gender and racial hierarchies among undocumented youth. In the previous example, Angélica reflected on her experiences in the state house, and expressed her discontent with the lack of attention to undocumented Latina's issues in organizing, and the flattening of students' experiences, especially low-achievers when talking about educational policy. The youth struggled to access non-exploitative jobs, and conveyed feeling legally unprotected from exploitation and other forms of gender violence.

Another finding revealed how the participants' experiences of sexual violence and the lack of legal protection women faced were often discarded by state legislators. During an action in the state house (observation, October 18th, 2016), a Latina mother publicly shared with legislators her daughter's story as a survivor of rape, which had happened while the mother was visiting her husband in the deportation center, and her daughter was left alone at home. One white male legislator asked the media to stop recording, demanding, as noted in the field notes: *"do not record, do not record."* When asked about her impression of the legislators' responses to the mother's testimony, Esperanza conveyed feelings of frustration as most male policymakers ignored the woman's plight. Reflecting on this exchange afterwards, Esperanza contended: *"the male (policymaker) got very uncomfortable, and then this was all being recorded by the media, and it could be something that made people realize why immigration reform is important, but he kind of tried to make the camera shut down."* The male policymaker's discomfort to discuss Latinas' experiences of sexual violence indicates how gender and racial oppressions continue to be overlooked in immigration policy due to predominantly white heteropatriarchal biases, which deny how "women bring to office important perspectives and priorities that are currently underrepresented in the policymaking process" (Dodson, 1991, p. 34). Such ongoing legal

invisibilization of gender violence in immigration policy exposes the women to further institutionalized victimizations.

During the final interview, Esperanza described the need to present undocumented narratives that can effectively draw on intersecting vectors of dominance, displaying a development in her theory of change to include intersectionality frames. The youth expressed a concern about gendered oppressions being underrepresented in undocumented youth's narratives. She contended: *"that is why I chose to share my part of the story, how I was sexually assaulted with legislators, and at first I thought it had nothing to do with the fight we do, but then I realized it has everything to do with it."* Esperanza, who had been sexually assaulted twice in the United States, was inspired by other immigrant women's stories to share her own. Her voice echoes other critical voices of survivors whose testimonies are overshadowed by the U.S. dominant rape culture (Parra, 2015). By ignoring immigrant women's intersectional narratives, legislators perpetuate systems that uphold gender violence across borders (Merry, 2009).

To contend with these racist and sexist politics of legal exclusion, the Latina participants relied on multiple supporters including pro-immigration legislators, teachers, youth, organizers to share their voices in the realm of policymaking. Thus, the women were never by themselves in this institutional space. At a protest happening outside of the state house (observation, May 25th, 2016), three "ally" legislators (two men and one woman) publicly shared their arguments in support of the youth-led organization's in-state tuition bill at the state level. The three policymakers supporting the organization's mobilization in the state house exposed very brief arguments. These politicians shared their intention to vote in support of the bill, arguing that *"all students should be treated equally,"* as a white female policymaker contended. This legislator

used a “*justice for all*” discourse, which although bringing equity concerns to the table, it overlooked how undocumented youth are differentially gendered and racialized.

In addition, the three policymakers favored immigration reform and immigrants by using racialized coded language and discourses. For instance, a white male legislator among the three that were present at the event, shared how some of his relatives were immigrants from Ireland, and thus he “*can understand the struggle*” undocumented youth face. His reference to his Irish immigrant heritage as a now-white man discarded historical and cultural differences amongst immigrants, and the contextualized struggles of Latinx immigrants in the United States. In *How the Irish Became White*, Ignatiev (1996) draws a powerful connection between white supremacy and Irish success in 19th century U.S. society. Irish immigrants endured racist discrimination during this time; however, they were conferred societal privileges through time that were historically withheld from people of color in the United States. Latinx immigrants today, particularly those who are undocumented, have different historical, economic, and political realities, which reveal the cultural and structural complexities disproportionately affecting the Latina diaspora (Hardy-Fanta, 1993). As illustrated in the previous example, this “ally” legislator’ pro-immigrant discourse overlooked the political distance that ethnic whites traveled to become white, and therefore his institutional power as a white male citizen. Many immigrants have been able to racially assimilate to the United States through their participation in normalized whiteness and anti-black racism (Cacho, 2012). Others, however, continue to be legally excluded and consequently exploited.

At a meeting in the state house for in-state tuition, a few Latina participants interacted with the governor trying to gain his support for in-state tuition. He responded to Lola’s claims expressing: “*you are really great, your story is amazing, but you’d be really great if you brought*

a young Irish man to come to talk immigration with me.” (observation, June 16th, 2015). Lola challenged the governor replying: *“why an Irish man? I am not an Irish man.”* He did not reply, hence silencing her perspective as a Latinx woman of color. As long as racism and gender inequity persist, as long as “illegality” continues to subjugate immigrant Latinx women to marginal societal positions, women who are undocumented and their supporters will need to continue unpacking intersecting gender and racial agendas in policymaking. As Lola pointed out during an interview, *“having an external shared goal that people see we are pushing for is good, then we can put our power together and push that but I don’t think it does anything to dismantle these systems.”* Crenshaw (1991) describes intersectional activist goals in women’s organizing as a form of “political intersectionality” (p. 1251), arguing for the development of inclusive agendas that fall into different societal groups usually in conflict with one another. Calling for reflexivity regarding organizations’ political agendas, Spade (2013) draws on intersectional lenses to question coalition frames that flatten the varied vulnerable conditions of minoritized women in policy reform. Both of these scholars speak to the risks and compromises of Latina organizing for policy reform in the state house.

Compromises of Latina Organizing

The Latina participants acknowledged having to compromise their multiple needs and gendered and raced experiences in the context of policymaking to benefit the whole group’s interests. One of such political compromises entailed being sexually objectified in the context of the state house. Speaking up against racist gender violence entailed being sexually objectified and re-victimized by legislators. For instance, Uxía described microaggressions in the form of sexist and racist encounters with staff in the state house. She was sexually objectified when

sharing her story in front of predominantly white male legislators who victim-blamed her by belittling her. As some women came through the doors, even guards made sexual advances on them as the youth were perceived as second class.

A recurrent finding showed that women's organizing entailed compromising their emotional wellbeing for purposes of advancing immigrant justice. During an observation, a legislator responded to the the Latina leader in a side conversation, expressing: "*you should not have exposed yourself crossing [the border]*" (observation, October 18th, 2016). During this ethnographic observation, Uxía's discourse moved many members of the audience. She could not contain her tears when recalling how she had to drop out of school, because she and her single mother could not afford paying for tuition fees. At the same time, Uxía had to quit her job, as the result of having been sexually harassed by her employer (observation, October 18th, 2016). This kind of public display of pain both embodied benefits and costs, as the participant managed on the one hand to bring attention to her vulnerabilities across borders; on the other hand, her act of resistance entailed she proved her victimization, by criminalizing undocumented men, in order to gain material concessions, such as temporary relief from deportation under VAWA (Salcido & Menjívar, 2012).

Uxía was aware of the compromises related to sharing her story publicly in the state house. She declared during an informal interview: "*I understand what is going on, they (policymakers) are sexist and do not care. But they are not going to be upfront about it, you want to call them out, but you do not want to ruin the relationship with them.*" Uxía encountered exclusion in the state house not just for being undocumented, but also as a woman of color. Tellingly, legislators' disdain towards her pain as well as immigrant women's threats to gender violence showed the legal system's lack of empathy and concern to change the law to benefit

women, especially women of color whose sexuality is deemed as disposable (Parra, 2015).

Uxía's testimony revealed the emotional sacrifices Latina young organizers often make to have political supports and bring public attention to their struggles.

A recurrent compromise had to do with playing within the logics of the nation state to be granted legal benefits in the state house. Some of the Latina participants deployed narratives that played within the myth of meritocracy or being the *good immigrant* student (Patel, 2013a) in their discourses engaging with legislators. Thus, a few women described their institutional power having earned scholarships because of their good grades, which facilitated their access to higher education. Yet, women of color with non-standard English accents who struggled academically rarely shared their testimonies in front of legislators and supporters. Therefore, struggling undocumented young people are not only left to flounder, but they are also blamed for their social and educational struggles under an umbrella of racist and sexist frames of meritocracy and exceptionalism (Patel, 2017).

Later in the study, findings showed the women started to challenge assimilationist frames. For instance, Esperanza reflected on the problem of using assimilationist logics as a compromise the organizing Latina youth made towards in-state tuition and scholarships for undocumented students. The Latina leader declared: *"I am the gold star DREAMer, and sometimes it just feels horrible that when I share my story, and what I went through, I feel like I am excluding other people, and so I always try my best to address that, even when telling my story, and they are like you did everything right, and I am like no, there are other people that deserve it [access to higher education] too. I feel like I am saying the narrative that excludes other people, so I try not to tell my story, there are so many different experiences, so many of us, that deserve everything just as much."* Esperanza's solidarity with other undocumented students

who were systemically excluded from material rewards, including higher education access revealed the organization's discursive shift to include undocumented youth's voices that challenge the myth of meritocracy. In the *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1991) argues "in the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values" (p. 43). In their negotiations with the state, the Latina participants were placed across deserving/underserving structures that disadvantaged the Latinx women to benefit the status quo. To contend with this exclusion, Esperanza strategically removed herself from publicly sharing her educational story of success and perseverance with legislators at the expense of silencing those of peers who struggled academically, like Uxía.

Tellingly, the Latinx women together with some men in the organization increasingly grappled with the risks and compromises of undocumented organizing in the state house. During the focus group interview, Tess acknowledged: "*a lot of policy issues are overlooked, especially when it comes to gender and LGBTQ lenses, because the people about policy change are men, but if we had women and gender non-conforming issues people speaking about these issues, I have no doubt that our policy objectives, and the way we would operate from an intersectional lens would be inclusive and stronger about the issues that impact Latina and immigrant women at large.*" Tess underlined an intersectional lens in immigrant youth-led organizing pointing out the need to include multiple perspectives concerning immigration. Coming together to tackle different undocumented concerns can in fact strengthen community ties and more effectively impact policy change.

During the focus group interview, Lola added: "*we need to challenge ourselves to recruit and help those populations in the movement that need more visibility, and take over more*

leadership. I am talking about the membership, which will then influence the staff and leadership, which will influence who will represent us in the media, in negotiations, in policymaking, so that these people can speak more acutely to marginalization from a gender and racial lens, from this intersectional lens.” The Latina participants increasingly assessed undocumented concerns in DREAMers’ organizing from an intersectionality lens towards policy reform goals. These issues of representation in the state house speak to the nuances of organizing, and the challenges to address a multiplicity of concerns in relationship to “illegality.”

Chapter Conclusions

The multiple experiences portrayed in this chapter revealed socio-legal structures that perpetuated white heteropatriarchal normativity in the state house to alienate gender violence issues, and the voices of Latinx women of color in their struggle for comprehensive immigration reform in the state house. The state house functions as a symbol of policymaking, societal protection, and the larger U.S. settler state apparatus. As such, its structures have paradoxically worked to advance and protect some people’s rights while at the same time sustaining socio-legal obstacles for certain immigrants, and other socially minoritized communities. The state house’s courts, buildings, and policies are reminiscent of Foucault’s (1975) panopticon, “a cruel ingenious cage,” (p. 195) establishing mechanisms of punishment and discipline through dehumanizing policies and hierarchies. As the panopticon, the state house produces “homogenous effects of power” by de-individualizing it, not so much at an individual level, but as a concentration of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes, and arrangement of structures (p. 202). It is ironic that the state house claims to represent a democratic public establishment serving its citizens equally, when in reality historically marginalized populations, including undocumented

young women of color, continue to be excluded from policymaking positions (Hardy-Fanta, 1993). Although no citizenship is required to enter its wall, the state house still operates as a herald of the prison, controlling who is granted social mobility on the grounds of heteropatriarchal whiteness, and who is put in the school-deportation nexus (Verma et al., 2017).

Numerous DREAMers have increasingly come forward to reclaim their dignity and press for institutional responsiveness within the larger U.S. social and legislative apparatus, since the early 2000's. Many have lobbied in the state house meeting with legislators, members of the media, and building momentum around the DREAM Act (Muñoz, 2015). Despite multiple challenges, the Latina participants in this institutional ethnography increasingly managed to assert their agency and intersectional narratives at the center of policy discourses and the DREAM Act movement. They aspired to interrupt practices of white heteropatriarchy, which have historically rendered their bodies as disposable. The cultural transformation these young women are leading must be visibilized across institutional structures.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” in the Organization

This chapter presents the main findings regarding the ten Latina participants’ experiences navigating intersections of gendered and raced “illegality” in the institutional context of the immigrant youth-led organization. The women shared their leadership in the organization with male youth who were mostly from Latin American countries. On the one hand, the ten Latina participants described the transformative role the organization played in their lives, breaking the stigma of “illegality,” developing social networks, and interrupting patterns of socio-legal exclusion. On the other hand, the Latina participants noticed how the organization perpetuated gendered cultural practices challenging their leadership. By the end of the study, the immigrant youth-led organization had shifted considerably, in terms of its leadership, theory of change, and organizing foci, as this chapter examines. Uneven power dynamics within the DREAM Act movement were increasingly addressed in the organization. Before analyzing the findings relevant to this institutional context, the next sections provide an overview of the immigrant youth-led organization as well as the significant transformations it underwent during the three-year data collection period.

An Overview of the Immigrant Youth-Led Organization

Under the slogan *undocumented*, *unapologetic*, and *unafraid*, the women in this institutional ethnography shared with other undocumented leaders their goals towards dismantling “illegality.” The ten Latina participants took on multiple roles in the immigrant youth-led organization throughout the course of the study. During the data collection period, most of the Latina participants were involved simultaneously in national and local campaigns for immigrant justice. The immigrant youth-led organization examined in this study was affiliated

with the *United We Dream* network, which represented the largest national undocumented youth-led organization in the United States. Some of the goals of the organization in the study overlapped with those pursued by *United We Dream*. Their shared objectives included the following: legal reform for the DREAM Act and in-state tuition; immigrant youth leadership development; anti-deportation campaigns; and legal consciousness raising. In this study, the Latinx women's organizing entailed working towards the advancement of community education, such as creating safer and informative spaces for undocumented youth where they could learn about their rights and access to higher education. The Latina organizers contributed to the development of college guides and co-led know-your-rights workshops. The participants expressed a preference for using the term *community organizer* instead of *activist*, considering its grass-roots emphasis.¹⁵

Changes in the Immigrant Youth-Led Organization

At the beginning of the data collection period, young men, mostly Latino, occupied central leadership positions in the organization, with the exception of a few women who were positioned in those power roles, such as Lola and Marta. Increasing numbers of Latina youth who were undocumented began to step into leadership positions in the organization since early 2015. By the end of the following year most of its core leaders were women. This gender shift in the organization's leadership advanced the visibility of Latina youth's agency and concerns in undocumented spaces of resistance. As a result of this internal shift in the organization's demographics, increasing numbers of young Latinas who were undocumented joined the organization's trainings, marches, and actions, advocating for intersecting calls. It was in this

¹⁵ For additional details refer to the glossary in the Appendix A.

dynamic and multi-faceted institutional context of the immigrant youth-led organization where the ten Latina participants met, learned, and supported each other. They negotiated their roles as organizers with multiple others, intellectualizing their experiences as undocumented, and hence co-constructing their *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 2012).

Main Findings and Discussion

Immigrant youth organizing emanated in this study as a fluid, complex, highly gendered and racialized field. The three major findings discussed in the following sections exhibit the intricate ways the ten Latina participants navigated “illegality” in the context of the immigrant youth-led organization. Based on intersectional analyses of interview and observation data, this study disclosed how organizational practices of racist heteropatriarchy permeated the organization, which influenced the women’s leadership and wellbeing. These hegemonic practices were interconnected with structures of manifested nationhood, family, work, and education. Table 8 below captures these findings related to the immigrant youth-led organization.

Table 8: Main Findings (The Organization)

Challenges to Latina Leadership
The Development of Latina Leadership
Latina Resistance and Theories of Change

Challenges to Latina Leadership

The youth in the organization originally displayed a model of top-down leadership having to do with internalized models of heteropatriarchy and citizenship. Findings from the study underscored how oppressive gendered and raced roles permeated organizing circles, despite the multiple ways the immigrant youth-led organization contributed to the Latina participants’

leadership and personal growth. A related challenge to the ten women's leadership had to do with the lack of institutional acknowledgement granted to organizing young women who are undocumented. Thus, organizing against "illegality" was manifested differently across the ten participants, and despite their shared location as undocumented. During an interview at the beginning of the study, Gloria discussed a few challenges to Latina leadership in the organization, and the DREAM Act movement at large. She stated: *"sexism is everywhere, even in organizing circles. Men think they are the gods of the world doing this organizing, and they are not, the women also go out and talk to the community and do a lot of things, and the immigrant rights power is in the women, they are the ones that hold the relationships, and at least from my perspective, the men just sit around and talk about the brilliant things they do. The people actually doing the work is women, and they do not get credit for it."* Gloria named intersecting vectors of domination being undocumented, being a woman, and being Queer, which stand as experiences that cannot be detached from each other. The Latina leader likewise pointed at her gender exclusion being part of minoritized groups in organizing, revealing the need for intersectional analysis of power and powerlessness in the context of this institution.

Uxía explained how Latina women's leadership was recurrently challenged in the organization at the intersection of racism and *machismo*. As an Indigenous woman, Uxía denounced the challenge of accessing leadership roles due to male leaders' subtle opposition, especially at the beginning of the institutional ethnographic study. Uxía argued: *"men in the movement are always like trying to think for you, so I have not actually joined anything, because there was a national lead position open, and a lot of people thought I was great for it, and I was going to apply, but one of the male members in (name of the organization) said, I do not think she is good for that, I think she would be good for basically the board."* The previous example

illustrated how women's voices, experiences, and even thoughts were contained by some men in the organization. Uxía's choice to apply for a central leadership position was discouraged by the male leadership who had the power of assigning what roles better suited the Latina leaders; thus, re-establishing men's authority in the movement. Some Latina organizers also played a role in perpetuating heteropatriarchal oppressions, judging other women's physical appearance and organizing abilities and outcomes. Thus, it was not only men who displayed heteropatriarchal biases towards women's political agency. Because some of the men in the movement were Queer, sexual orientation became a more highlighted oppression by all the organizers than intersecting issues pertaining to racism and heteropatriarchy.

The ten Latinx women expressed a concern that their leadership and achievements were undervalued by larger audiences. Lola had been leading an *undocumented chapter* at her university together with other undocumented youth for a few years, when the first interview took place. She complained about the lack of institutional recognition towards her leadership and achievements in comparison to male leaders in the organization and the larger DREAM Act movement. Lola recollected her experience in a project describing: "*I have been working on a scholarship for undocumented students, and I went to an event. These three guys were with me, but they did not work specifically on this project, and when they [audience] acknowledged the work that I did, they gave credit to the three men that were with me, and then the person looked at me and said oh, and [name of participant], but the three dudes that were with me had not worked in this project at all, like zero work in this particular project. It is not that these men did not work on other things, but I was the only person working on that project.*" Lola conveys her frustration for women's labor being invisibilized in institutional organizing spaces. To gain recognition, undocumented women of color had to prove their intelligence and dedication to

undocumented causes more often than men, whose work and commitment were taken for granted by multiple others, including other organizers (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). In the previous example, Lola points out how for young men, because of heteropatriarchal racist ideas of who should be an effective leader, it is easier to enter leadership positions without being questioned by relatives, peers, and authorities.

Also receiving less public recognition, Latina organizers of color in the study were scrutinized and disciplined more frequently than men and light-skinned Latinas. During an interview, Marta reflected on the intersections of racist heteropatriarchy in her leadership. She declared: *“there is a certain expectation as a woman in the leadership role that you have, I think you are scrutinized a lot more as a woman of color. And I did not realize how much I was scrutinized and how much pressure there was on me, and how much questioning about my leadership until I kind of took a step back and started to work on something different.”* Marta unveils how Latina leaders of color are recurrently put down by other organizers and audiences paradoxically in justice-oriented arenas. She critiques Latino leaders’ *machismo* when challenging Latina leadership in the movement, especially behind curtains, taking over prominent leadership roles. Marta realized how female organizers had to carefully frame their commands to men, in order to avoid being deemed as *“too bossy and controlling.”*

During the focus group interview, Marta underwent challenges to her authority being gendered and raced by male peers. She expressed: *“I have experienced it myself, men telling me I am too bossy. A lot of men in the organization instead of being seen as bossy, when they are trying to take charge they are just seen as being a leader.”* Marta actively challenged hegemonic practices within immigrant youth organizing. *Machismo* permeated in organizing structures due to gendered and raced practices. Thus, males were seen as responsible for protecting the family,

and women expected to nurture the families and be submissive to male authority. The wish to become strong leaders pushed the women to take on many responsibilities, including emotional work, whereas men in the organization seldom engaged in this kind of unrecognized labor.

The participating Latinas underlined their resistance to heteropatriarchal domination in the immigrant youth-led organization. During a fundraising event at the end of the year, which brought together organizers and supporters from all over the state, Lola publicly contested heteropatriarchal practices in the movement. She unveiled uneven power dynamics, while emphasizing the centrality of Latina leadership in the organization. At the time, Lola was transitioning outside of the organization after years of core leadership and after having recently graduated from college. At this celebratory event, Lola communicated to her audience: *“it has been an honor to be one of the founders of the organization together with other women, even though women do not get the same type of public acknowledgement as men do”* (observation, November 10th, 2016). Lola’s political speech challenging men’s power and women’s subordination in undocumented spaces of resistance reflected her agency and solidarity with other women and the undocumented movement at large. Young Latinas’ intersectional discourses, community engagements, and varied networks hold power to contest racist heteropatriarchal structures (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012; Muñoz, 2015). In their research about gendered roles in immigrant youth organizing, Milkman and Terriquez (2012) argue how “calls for gender equality do not figure centrally in the movement’s public claims-making repertoire, yet women leaders do promote women’s rights inside movement organizations” (p. 743). As a political strategy, the Latina participants had to split one’s political energies between two sometimes opposing groups, which became a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confronted. Latinx women’s specific gendered and raced

locations as undocumented, although intersectional, can define as well as confine the interests of the entire group (Muñoz, 2015). Intersecting gendered, raced, and language structures configured the women's public speaking roles in the youth-led organization. For instance, women who like Isaura, Marta, or Uxía spoke with a non-standard English accent, rarely shared their stories publicly in the state house during the first years of data collection, as previously analyzed.

Another gendered and raced structure challenging the Latinx women's leadership in the youth-led organization had to do with reconciling different family, academic, and organizing commitments. For instance, Angélica, from Guatemala, who was in her senior year of high school at the time of this study, struggled to reconcile multiple obligations. She conveyed: *"it is challenging because I am working [organizing], and I have to go to school and now I am in the college process, so I barely have time, but I have to keep going, because I feel if I stop no one else is gonna do it, and I want to at least in my school right now. I want to keep the space that I am trying to make for undocumented students to stay there after I graduate."* The more hours the Latina youth worked, coupled with familiar responsibilities, the less time she could devote to being civically engaged (Pérez et al., 2010). Angélica regretted not being able to allot more time towards her community organizing, realizing the significant personal changes she had underwent as a result of her organizing engagements.

Another finding regarding the women's challenges to their leadership in the organization had to do with leading recruitment events. The Latina participants struggled to build connections during recruitment with male youth. Recruiting young men represented a huge challenge due to men's sexualization and gendering of the ten women's skills and bodies. Latinx women's struggles to recruit members to the organization were reported to be due to internalized heteropatriarchal biases. At an ethnographic observation during a camp event with

undocumented youth, the organization facilitated, for the first time, workshops about gender oppression among young people (observation, May 10th, 2016). At this workshop, the young participants were asked to split into small groups, and women and men were invited to join conversations about women's interlocking oppressions; regrettably only a few men opted to join these groups. The Latina leaders facilitated the conversations among the women, whereas the male leaders in the movement discussed these implications with the male youth who chose to attend the talk. Tellingly, only a few young men chose to be part of the discussion, in contrast to the many women who attended their group. During the final individual interview, Gloria reflected on her previously shared ideas at the beginning of the study. Revisiting her views of racist heteropatriarchy in the organization, Gloria commented on the first interview's transcript saying: *"first I read the themes you shared with me, and I thought oh yes, and they were amazing! It is exactly all the themes we talked about years ago. And then talking about sexism in organizing spaces, the fact that we do not talk about it even to this date is kind of, like we do not really talk about it, it is more women talk to other women about it, but it is not a conscious conversation with men or men with women."* Gloria critiqued how gendered and racialized relationships permeated the organization as a result of heteropatriarchal practices promoted by young men and women. Despite positive changes to grapple with uneven power dynamics in the movement, it was still primarily women who initiated intersectional conversations, and pushed these agendas into the organization.

Another finding from this study related to the challenges of recruitment had to do with forms of sexual violence the women encountered in their interactions with undocumented youth who participated in the organization's workshops and clinics. Lola exposed how young men in the movement, not just in the organization, sexualized her body and challenged her leadership

during recruitment processes. Lola articulated how: *“there were times in which I just felt weird, even speaking in classes with Latinxs, there were Latino boys that were making sexual moves on me, instead of seeing me like I am here to educate you, they were just telling me, you are so cute, and they call you princess. They have your number and they call you, ‘hey princess!’”* Lola expressed a concern for having to navigate sexism in organizing arenas with other young people who came supposedly to learn about their rights and grow as future leaders. Because of heteropatriarchal socializing practices, young Latinx men felt entitled to treat Latinx women’s bodies as sexual objects for their consumption (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). At the beginning of the study, Gloria condemned the objectification of immigrant women’s bodies for male voyeuristic consumption, underlining how women’s attire was equated with less professionalism in organizing circles. Gloria regretted: *“there are times that other women are not taken as seriously because of the way that they dress or behave, and I think it is totally unfair, but we never talk about it.”* Her words underscore the silencing of gender violence in youth-led organizing arenas. During the focus group interview, Marta more explicitly uncovered sexual harassment in the context of the organization describing her hesitation to address it collectively. She noted: *“the thing why we do not talk much about it in the movement is because we do not know how to talk about it, and we have not processed it. For me it was like, when I came into the movement, I thought this space was for me and people would respect me and take care of me, but I was much younger, and that was not everyone’s intention, like we are still women and seen as objects, like there were leaders grabbing my butt or being sexually explicit with me, sending me messages, and insisting, it was really frustrating, and it is hard for us to process. We felt like when it was happening we could not go to someone, and if we did, there was the assumption that, why are you putting down a man of color, like, ‘what are you doing this man is oppressed?’ I think a lot*

of us were scared, I was scared because I did not want to put everyone on the spot.” Marta’s concern to jeopardize other undocumented youth’s integrity entailed sacrificing her own safety as a woman of color. In the previous event, Marta chose momentarily not denounce experiences of sexual harassment in the movement to protect men who might have been criminalized otherwise. This situation shows the need to encourage Latinx populations (women and men) to question their cultural frames, and how those shape their relationships, through a critical examination of intersecting sexist and racist practices (Coe et al., 2013).

In contrast to the struggles to engage young men under their leadership, the ten Latina leaders were able to successfully recruit young women while leading actions towards the advancement of intersectional issues. During an observation at a university, Uxía and Esperanza shared their different stories of immigration to a large audience of young people, teachers, and other school staff (observation, February 13th, 2016). At the end of the presentation, a couple of young women of color approached both organizers to thank them for sharing their power and testimonies, and later exchanged some of their own struggles. These students, both of whom were not Latinx, asked questions to the organizers pertaining to college access and domestic violence supports, since they or their mothers were in position of heteropatriarchal violence.

The Development of Latina Leadership

A central finding of the study revealed how the ten Latina leaders moved through different roles in the organization, which contributed to their growth as organizers. The Latina participants’ involvement in the organization was described as empowering by the protagonists. Based on early interview and observation data, some of the Latinx women assumed more public political roles than others who instead, remained behind the scenes, organizing fundraising

events, leading small organizing groups at the organization's trainings with undocumented youth, and taking care of related logistics. While these gendered roles entailed the development of vital organizing skills, they could also be constraining when enhancing racist heteropatriarchy (Milkman & Terriquez, 2014).

The Latina participants described their development of legal subjectivities as a result of their engagements in the immigrant youth-led organization. After being involved in the organization for approximately a year or two, each Latina leader went on to individually lead an *undocumented chapter* in their schools, whether high schools or local colleges. The women assumed leadership roles in their schools to address undocumented issues, including access to higher education and scholarships, breaking the stigma of "illegality," training school staff, and conscientizing youth. Hence, the women moved from collective leadership and training to lead individual chapters in their schools while engaged in larger legal actions. Angélica conveyed the process of building her confidence as an organizer in connection to grappling with her multiple subjectivities as an undocumented young woman of Indigenous descent. As a recently migrated young woman, she alluded to the transformative process of becoming a Latina leader in the organization. She declared: "*I felt insecure at first, but then I started going to meetings, and then protests, and then I am like, I grew as a leader, and I did my little project.*" The Latina youth developed critical networks and leadership skills, being able to assert her own voice in undocumented spaces of resistance. As discussed in chapter 6, women of color's political agencies were discouraged in schools, similarly to their initial experiences in the immigrant youth-led organization. Angélica was able to develop knowledge and support mechanisms that validated her transnational citizenship and experiences as a result of her long-term involvement in the organization. In addition to developing an advisory club for undocumented students in her

high school, Angélica later received school support to implement her own advocacy project on undocumented issues, which she described as “*a group that is called undocu-artists, and we do art-related stuff, and I wanted to make our group for undocumented students, like a space for them to make art and come and express themselves in art.*” For undocumented students, the development of art-based projects holds therapeutic implications when it comes to grappling with the stigma of “illegality.” The use of techniques has been documented by educational scholars to advance critical counterstories (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Freire, 2000). Art forms in the study, such as theater and photography, were perceived as tools to collectively express and negotiate experiences of interlocking forms of discrimination during workshops or undocumented groups in schools. Angélica proudly pointed out during the interviews how undocumented youth’s art works were displayed in the hallways of the high school. By the end of the study, most of the Latina participants were leading undocumented chapters in their respective high schools or colleges, holding educational institutions accountable for tackling the varied needs of undocumented students, which included psychological and academic supports, college access and preparation, and community engagements.

Public speaking in organizing was relegated to men in early observations, but increasingly throughout this research, the women transitioned into public speaking roles politically engaging different audiences. At an annual camp event with undocumented youth across the state (observation, April 10th, 2015), all of the participants co-led know-your-rights workshops with other youth to address pressing undocumented issues, which at the time focused on raising awareness about the programs *Deferred Action for Unauthorized Children* (DACA) and *Deferred Action for Unauthorized Parents* (DAPA). The Latina leaders shared their multiple stories of immigration and provided individualized support to young people who had legal

concerns and questions about DACA. At this camp event, Isaura led an activity encouraging other youth to share their experiences as DACAmented or non-DACAmented. Isaura motivated the youth to stay together, despite the newly created undocumented hierarchies promoted by the DACA program. This episode represented the first time that Isaura led other undocumented students into organizing. Significantly, in her speech she noted intersecting issues beyond DACA status, subtly noting how gender and racial divisions within the DREAM Act movement can undermine their political power as a collective. Isaura's experience in this organizing context first revealed how Latina leadership has contributed not only to the establishment of women's political power, but also to the conscientization and motivation of future young leaders. In addition, Isaura's words mirrored burgeoning attempts on the part of the organization, particularly the women, to advance intersectional discourses.

Similarly, Marta challenged gendered norms at an anti-Trump rally in the state house (observation, October 18th, 2016). She took over the role of chanting, which had been traditionally led by male organizers in the movement. She motivated the audience at the protest to raise their voices, asking: "*what do we want? Justice,*" while encouraging them to sing along "*undocumented, unafraid!*" The young men in immigrant youth-led organization passively followed women's leadership at the protest, which constituted a shift from initial protest dynamics. This later political shift in the central roles of the organization were the result of internal dialogues happening amongst the organizers regarding power imbalances. At first, Marta seemed nervous to raise her voice to motivate the audience. Yet, her performance served to challenge oppressive gendered and raced roles, while displaying the multilayered possibilities of Latinx women's leadership. However, the Latina organizers, with the exception of the lead coordinator, were still in charge of serving the food and handing informative flyers at the event.

Tellingly, the men were never undertaking these logistical roles. Such complex political roles in undocumented organizing expose larger intersectional challenges across institutional spaces.

Another finding concerning the development of the Latina participants' leadership in the study, had to do with the development of a *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 2012), as Latinas' critical awareness regarding intersections of systemic oppression in borderland arenas. This critical consciousness allowed the women to cultivate their agency undermining heteropatriarchal discourses of power and powerlessness, and redefine the role of Latinx and Chicanx women and men in borderland spaces. The women in the study reinvented themselves through inner reflective processes regarding their fluid identities, as well as their political evolution in the public scene. Lola explained the development of her *mestiza consciousness* in the organization based on her Latina leadership development, which led to her grappling with dynamics social locations. During the final interview, Lola recalled an exchange among organizers regarding these intersectional issues. She described this change as a collective and individual process. She articulated how: "*we (organizers) talk about it with each other, but at first we did not. We started uncovering things that happened three years ago or so, and I was like, 'oh my God,' that happened to you and this happened to me, and other women friends in the movement talk about it a lot, and we also feel guilty because we did not do anything about it, and I am pretty sure it happened to other women in the movement.*" In this example Lola revealed her inner grappling with intersecting oppressions as well as the changing power relationships in the movement as a result of a *mestiza consciousness*. This awareness interrupted patterns of racist heteropatriarchal dominance in the movement through the development of vital solidarities among the youth.

Latina Resistance and Theories of Change

Despite challenges to their leadership, the ten Latina participants resisted gendered and raced constructions of citizenship, breaking traditional gendered roles and leading cultural transformations (Seif, 2008). According to Seif (2008), “women who are unaccustomed to speaking publicly beyond their extended families develop leadership skills that they later bring to male-dominated public arenas” (p. 85). The women’s leadership was profoundly rooted in mobilizing multiple others at colleges, communities, and the state house. At the same time, the participants engaged in cultural practices that entailed negotiating gendered and raced roles, as they co-led workshops, retreats, policy meetings, fundraising parties, coming out events, and other socializing activities. One of the central principles of the Latina youth’s leadership relied on challenging traditional gendered roles based on their development of a *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 2012), grappling with institutional challenges, but also building individual and collective strengths. During the focus group interview, Carmen described Latina growing resistance to heteropatriarchal oppressions in the movement, declaring: “*so even though there is a pressure and stigma of being a good housewife and providing children, and do, x, y, and z, it comes down to being strong, and being faithful to what you know is right.*” The Latina organizer exposed oppressive gendered norms in the movement, arguing for the reconciliation of immigrant women’s power, needs, and skills.

The Latina organizers resisted heteropatriarchal violence in organizing through the development of women’s networks and solidarities. Although the Latina protagonists encountered heteropatriarchal opposition to their leadership, they were still able to both amass significant forms of capital and lead sociocultural transformations. Uxía underlined the importance of immigrant women’s leadership in the struggle for racial and gender justice. She

accentuated: *“I like politics. I like women in politics. It should not always be the men making change happen. One day. Right now, I am a human being, I am a young woman. I have dreams of a perfect society. And I have so many [...] like another thing is that I want to go back home and challenge my government, I want to go back home and build schools for children in El Salvador, there are kids there that cannot even go into sixth grade, because they just cannot. And I want that so much, but right now, I do not know where to begin. I feel like I am in the right place. Being an organizer for immigrant justice. And I feel so passionate about it, and it has affected me, and it has affected the people around me. And I will keep being an organizer, I will keep doing this work.”* Uxía’s involvement in the organization facilitated the development of her social capital in the form of multiple networks (Yosso, 2005), which enabled her to effectively navigate institutionalized oppressions through her work with the youth-led organization. Uxía’s arguments illustrate how silencing women’s issues in undocumented movements does little to dismantle systems of racist heteropatriarchal oppressions, which explains why the youth reclaimed Latinas’ political leadership in immigrant justice arenas.

A major finding of the study had to do with the women’s reformulation of their shared theories of change, as a result of their varied experiences and networks. Initially, undocumented youth’s theory of change in the organization entailed primarily providing counternarratives to the colonial domination of the state (Corrunker, 2012; Seif, 2011). However, “theories of change tend to be plural—the same actors often have multiple theories of multiple changes appropriate for their multiple modes of engagement with colonial modernity” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 121). DREAMers have primarily deployed civil disobedience and direct-action tactics, including brief occupations of public institutional spaces (Zepeda-Millán, 2014a). However, undocumented youth’s discursive strategies have traditionally resorted to counter-storytelling using

assimilationist frameworks in order to be heard by the state (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). These assimilationist frames run the risk of criminalizing undocumented adults (Gallo, 2014), and at the same time marginalize vulnerable populations across immigrant groups, including non-students, non-DACAmented youth, adults, among others (Seif, 2008). Thus, “youth are aware that they are constructed by broader discourses as illegal and often as criminals, yet they perceive themselves as good, moral individuals” (King & Punti, 2012, p. 246). The women’s theories of evolved to challenge such criminalization.

As a result of their resistance to structures of white heteropatriarchal domination, the Latinx women developed intersectional theories of change, which were negotiated with multiple others during the data collection period. These theories of change shifted in relationship to the youth-led organization’s political foci. Isaura explained her changing theory of change regarding gendered and raced immigration reform during the final interview. The Latina leader articulated: *“I just do not want only men involved but also women, not men voting on women’s bodies, not just gender but also racial issues. It makes sense to have the whole community involved.”*

According to Isaura, social change organically unfolds when members of a minoritized social group allow for the leadership of the most socially vulnerable to flourish, and thus addressing multiple injustices simultaneously. The Latina youth in the study resisted injustice in multiple, sometimes simultaneous and contradictory, sometimes self-injuring, sometimes triumphant ways. To advance positive cultural changes, it is vital to grapple with deeply ingrained contradictions at multiple levels ensuring that the liberation of different individuals is met (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012).

The Latina participants referred to the power of counternarratives to mobilize others, particularly other undocumented youth as one of their focal audiences. A recurrent strategy used

by DREAMers in the dialogic act of coming out involved sharing their immigration stories (Muñoz, 2015). Trying to motivate other young women to speak up, Uxía noted the importance of an intersectionality lens in organizing discourses saying “*you need to tell stories from the women’s perspectives, it is often not like that, it is often from the men’s perspectives.*” Her argument is vital to advance the use of intersectionality theory in social movements, moving from a focus on one vector of oppression to multiple ones as a way to challenge the immigration system. These Latina organizers relied on epistemological effects of story-telling to bring about social change (Patel & Sánchez Ares, In Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 143). Counter-storytelling has been described as powerful “instruments of critical race commentary and community resistance” (Tuck & Yang, 2013, p. 132) as young people who are undocumented try to portray compelling narratives about national belonging to mobilize others.

The participants asserted Latinx women’s leadership in public political discourses through storytelling. Esperanza argued how: “*storytelling or rebellion is not enough, we still need that, but we also need to infiltrate in positions of power so that things can get redistributed to us, so we are working on it.*” In her organizing, Esperanza envisioned story-telling as one way to undermine the status quo, since not all stories were given the same attention, and consequently had differential levels of impact. She underlined the need for women to be granted access to higher positions of political power. At the end of the study, Esperanza was in her first year of college under a full scholarship at a prestigious university, pursuing an engineering and sociology dual degree. She, like other participants, developed an intersectional framework around sexism and racism grappling with undocumented status throughout years of involvement in the organization, which became a driving force used to impact policy reform and cultural transformations. In the aftermath of Trump’s presidential election, Esperanza shared her political

agenda at a fundraiser event. She underlined the need for the immigrant youth-led organization to pursue deeper intersectional work (observation, November 10th, 2016). She conveyed to an audience of mostly youth, organizers, and other supporters the following message: *“if we focused on those intersectional issues we would be more successful in what we are trying to achieve.”* Based on these intersectional conversations within the organization, the Latina youth developed strategies that were inclusive of intersectional experiences, and most importantly challenged interlocking systems of dominance.

During the final interview, Uxía reflected on her evolving theory of change based on her epistemological growth in the movement. She asserted: *“I think I have a clearer picture now than years ago, when you asked me the same question, Rocío. I do not want it to be an immigration reform, like a way of giving a person a paper is not enough, and I do not want to be called undocumented.”* Uxía critiqued the language that collapsed her experiences as an immigrant woman of color living in the United States, while at the same time reclaiming her equal rights. Greene (2010) challenges tropes in undocumented advocacy discourses that delegitimize claims of other groups within the movement, explaining how these categories have been historically created by a white settler state to keep the subjugation of women of color. Uxía underscored the dangers of the legal discourse criminalizing unauthorized communities, and remarked how having papers would not end their socio-legal exclusion.

The participating Latinas engaged in forms of resistance that entailed building social change from below, including the development of so-called *identity groups* that addressed issues pertaining to minoritized populations within the movement (Collins, 1998). Angélica commented on her growth as a result of engaging in multiple forms of resistance, including the *identity groups*. The organizer reflecting on these changes underlining: *“I definitely see there is more*

female leadership, what I will say next is positive and negative. We started doing identity groups, like the women's collective, or undocuqueer, and like it is good because these are all groups of people being marginalized, and it gives them a space they feel they can talk about their issues, and ultimately develop an agenda to educate all members for the organization to address the issue in the larger sense. It is really difficult for them, because they are Black or they are women, to feel they are safe." Angélica's description of *identity groups*' purposes as far as raising intersectional awareness about racism and sexism in the movement represented a significant shift in the immigrant youth-led organization. This shift seemed to be connected to the presence of Latina leadership in the organization and the development of a horizontal model of organizing. Primarily, it was the young women who led these cultural spaces. Angélica perceived the challenges to build safety in these spaces of resistance due to internalized racist and gendered biases, which shaped organizing structures and relationships.

Lola likewise stated her intentionality to emphasize gender and racial issues in her organizing discourses. She intended: "*when talking to other students I have been trying to include those things in my story, but it cannot just be me, it needs to be others in the larger movement to work on those things as well.*" Lola's theory of change promoted grass roots mobilizations to address intersectionality concerns beyond the individual or *identity group* levels. That is, for instance, men should also engage in the struggle for gender equity, and at the same time facilitate spaces for women's leadership. During an observation in the context of organizing undocumented youth, Lola argued that to successfully address these intersections, "*it needs to start with us [women] first*" (observation, May 10th, 2016). Latinx women, as Anzaldúa (2012) underlines, employ their *mestiza consciousness* to challenge the power of the status quo. From their shared location as *nepantleras*, these Latina organizers reclaim their political power to push

men and other individuals to be mindful and debunk uneven power dynamics. After gathering Latina collective power, the women are able to lead cultural transformations and reframe the politics of inclusion and exclusion, blurring the borderlands.

Chapter Conclusions

This chapter presented the major findings of the women's experiences of "illegality" in the context of immigrant youth-led organizing. Results showed how the Latina participants developed their leadership and theories of change, while navigating several challenges to their leadership. The structural concerns expressed by the Latinx women in relationship to their organizing ranged from facing sexual harassment, having to assume gendered roles, and collapsing their undocumented experiences in activist discourses.

In addition, this chapter underlined the structural changes underwent by the immigrant youth-led organization during the data collection to become more inclusive of intersectional frames and Latinx women's leaderships. Women of color who had non-standard English accents originally struggled to assert their voices in the organization with other youth, organizers, legislators, and other authority figures. All of the women encountered forms of sexual harassment in this context, which re-victimized them considering previous experiences of gender violence. Yet, through multiple solidarities and their development of a *mestiza consciousness*, the Latina protagonists were able to challenge others, and assume political power positions in the movement; thus, the women transformed oppressive aspects of the organizational culture that hindered their intersectional resistance (Spade, 2013).

CHAPTER NINE: Conclusions and Implications

This chapter summarizes the study's methodology and key findings regarding the differences and similarities in how the ten Latina participants navigated "illegality" across highly gendered and raced institutional spaces, which included: schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization. Findings across the three institutional contexts revealed how being rendered undocumented held multiple, sometimes conflicting implications for the Latina participants, due to interlocking practices of white racism and heteropatriarchy. Gendered and raced structures played a role in how the Latinx women perceived themselves as transnational citizens. In addition, this concluding chapter offers recommendations pertaining to policy, teaching praxis, interdisciplinary research, and immigrant youth-led organizing. It closes with a discussion of the limitations of the study.

The institutional ethnographic methodology allowed for the mapping and analyzing of gendered and raced constructions of citizenship that shaped the ten women's daily lives in three geographical locations. This institutional ethnography drew on interview and observation data to investigate the participating Latinas' experiences of "illegality," as described by the women themselves. It also examined pertinent policy and media documents through the lens of intersectionality theory.

The main theoretical lenses of the study allowed for a deeper understanding of the ten Latina participants' institutional experiences as undocumented. Intersectionality theory in connection to the institutional ethnographic methodology facilitated analyses that rendered visible cultural practices inflicting different gendered and racialized harms on the ten Latinas; thus, shaping their multiple experiences as young women without papers. The connection between the methodology and the intersectional theoretical framework thus elucidated socio-

cultural relationships at the intersection of racism, sexism, and capitalism. The institutional ethnographic methodology together with borderlands theory allowed for an investigation of how the women's organizing entailed taking education out of the classroom and into the community, which challenged notions of who can be a purveyor of knowledge and who can have access to that knowledge (Anzaldúa, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2002).

The ten Latinas navigated simultaneously multiple institutional contexts as students, workers, and organizers, considering their fluid social locations. Despite having grown up under the shadow of "illegality," the women still managed to educate themselves and many members of the community on structural problems. Therefore, the institutional ethnography methodology combined with the use of intersectionality and borderlands theories exposed, from the Latinx women's multiple points of view and social locations, interlocking systems of oppression and resistance.

Research Foci

This institutional ethnography analyzed the varied ways access to citizenship rights was operationalized across institutional arenas, as a form of normalized violence towards Latinx young women. So that the various factors influencing the participating Latinas' experiences could be examined systemically, this research accounted for vectors of oppression affecting the women individually and collectively. The major areas of analytic focus included: dominant practices and policies coercing the lives of the women; cultural approaches employed by schools, the state house, and the youth-led organization to address undocumented issues; and the ways the Latina participants resisted unjust structures and oppressive cultural practices.

Research Question

The primary research question of this study was: *What are the experiences of Latina youth navigating gendered and racialized constructions of “illegality” in schools, the state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization?*

First, this chapter recapitalizes the main findings of the study by institution (chapters 6, 7, 8). Then, it analyzes the findings across the three major institutions.

Recapitalization of Findings per Institution

This section summarizes the major findings for each of the three institutional ethnographic sites (schools, the state house, the immigrant youth-led organization), and relevant to the ten Latina participants in terms of how intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and citizenship took shape differently and similarly cross-institutionally. The following themes recapitalize the major findings per institution.

Becoming Gendered and Racialized in Schools

Latinas of color witnessed how their educational trajectories narrowed as they sought upward mobility and higher education access throughout their schooling (Cammarota, 2004; Muñoz, 2013). In contrast, the immigrant youth-led organization promoted the women’s higher education access, which worked as a way to challenge the women’s exploitation in the workplace. Among the ten Latina participants, seven youth identified as women of color, and the other three acknowledged being able to pass as white in different cultural structures, including the family, the state house, and the youth-led organization (Dreisinger, 2008). In the interviews, the participants discussed the implications of raced social locations referring to how being a

light-skinned woman granted some of them institutional privilege typically denied to dark-skinned Latinas, and despite the women's shared legal barriers. While the women shared a few institutional challenges related to their undocumented status, significant divergences emanated in how the ten Latinas navigated those challenges, considering how they were gendered and raced differently at school. The Latinas of color, including those who spoke with a non-standard English accent, were re-racialized in teaching practices that prevented them from accessing academic opportunities, cultivating confidence, developing networks, and building leadership skills. In the context of schooling, whiteness permeated implicit biases held by school staff and peers, which led to the criminalization, dehumanization, exclusion, and internalized low self-esteem of the seven Latinx women of color.

Because of their racialization as undocumented, the women feared that school staff and peers would learn about their unauthorized status and put them at risk of deportation. Light-skinned Latinas, although still afraid of deportation due to their unauthorized status, described a degree of safety from being questioned by peers, police, teachers, and other authorities as a result of white phenotype and English proficiency. The seven dark-skinned Latinas were racially profiled in similar ways Black and Brown young men are profiled and criminalized by schools and their law enforcement officers as deviant; although these women were additionally treated as disposable subjects (Wun, 2016). The women experienced layers of gender and racial violence that undocumented men did not encounter in school spaces, including sexual harassment by peers. Therefore, phenotype and race as social constructions interfered with ability, language, gender, and immigration status to marginalize the participating Latinas in different ways, showing how "illegalization" entails a deeply contextualized intersectional process.

Findings illustrated how teachers and counselors can stand as positive or negative support mechanisms when it comes to being knowledgeable, raising awareness about undocumented issues, and connecting the school with community organizations and initiatives. Although the schools had the potential for the women's liberation, they worked more often to constrain their upward mobility due to structures of institutionalized racism, linguicism, sexism, embedded in school cultures driven by high-stakes, standardized testing, as "the managerial counter-revolution" in education (Freire, 2000, p. 76). When looking at test scores as the sole measure of youth's intelligence, or what Patel (2013a) defines as "studenting," rather than promoting authentic learning in the classroom, schools systemically exclude certain knowledges in favor of whiteness (p. 54). Gendered racial teacher practices were reported to create hierarchies among students in relationship to white citizenship. Whiteness conceded important property rights in terms of material access for the three light-skinned Latinas in the study who were able to pass as white in certain contexts (Patel, 2017). Being gendered and raced in schools entailed differential access to networks, career paths, leadership positions, and financial supports. In their relationships with teachers, the three light-skinned Latina participants who also spoke with a standard-English accent, were treated as role models for other immigrants by teachers who encouraged them to support each other in the classroom through translanguaging practices (García, 2009); thus, the three women were able to pass as white, and other times raced depending on the context and the positionalities of the people with which they interacted (Dreisinger, 2008).

Findings revealed that the three light-skinned Latinas were separated from dark-skinned immigrant peers who struggled to build supports in the classroom and beyond through practices of forced assimilation. Hence, creating hierarchies of worth amongst immigrant youth. The three

light-skinned women were not questioned by teachers about their skills and capabilities, although their ideas, especially when those countered the status quo, were at times challenged by school authorities. As a result of certain degrees of institutional privilege, these three Latina students amassed more material concessions and public speaking roles than the seven dark-skinned Latina students. The three Latinx women with white phenotype were able to develop school networks, validated as outspoken in class, and included by teachers in school initiatives. In contrast, the seven Latinas of color reported being questioned about their status, feeling isolated, excluded from AP tracks, and criminalized due to phenotype and a non-standard English accent by peers and school staff.

The following cases juxtapose the experiences of two participating Latinas in order to illustrate intersecting forms of institutionalized racist gender violence in schools. In chapter 6, this study described the case of Gloria, a young Mexican woman, who was able to pass as white due to her light-skinned phenotype, standard English accent, and excellent grades in high-stakes testing, which constituted proxies for whiteness. As Gloria reported, administrators, and other school staff displayed empathy towards her immigration story and needs. Being an “*all A’s student*,” Gloria’s academic performance was used to promote the myth of meritocracy by schools and legislators (Patel, 2013a). The Latina youth was upheld institutionally as an example of the *good immigrant* student, while other young immigrant women of color, especially those who struggled academically, had non-standard English accents, or sat quietly in class, were disregarded by school staff and peers. This was the case of Uxía, from El Salvador, who feared speaking up in class due to the re-racialization of her tongue. She was shy to publicly contest discrimination when biased teachers referred to “*illegal immigrants*.” Yet, she sometimes challenged these teachers’ biases in front of peers and teachers in the class. She chose to hide her

unauthorized status when publicly supporting undocumented people in the classroom as a survival strategy. For Uxía, her impossibility to assimilate to white norms subjected her persona to intense scrutiny and intersecting forms of gender and racial violence, which shaped her childhood and opportunities in the United States. Uxía was questioned about her immigration status at times by white and non-white school staff and peers, which was assumed to be related to her non-standard English accent, low academic performance, and Indigenous phenotype. In this process of racialization, Latina students with non-standard English accents were perceived as less intelligent by teachers and peers. As research points out, non-dominant accents have been culturally and institutionally perceived as marks of intelligence in comparison to white monolinguals' standard English (Golash-Boza, 2006; Nieto, 2002). In contrast to Gloria, Uxía was re-racialized by teachers and peers who made assumptions about her ethnicity, immigration status, and capabilities.

The previously juxtaposed examples illustrated the permeability of gender disparities and anti-Black racism in educational spaces in connection to normative constructions of white citizenship. Immigrant Latina youth's voices and experiences (in their heterogeneity) are coerced and undervalued, while nativist constructions of citizenship reinforce a racially stratified society and the fallacious logic that Latinas who are undocumented should be exploited as white property (Cacho, 2012). Settler colonialism as an ongoing structure perpetuates racial and gender inequities in the educational system (Patel, 2017). Despite the legal advances of the *Brown v. Board of Education* landmark case to desegregate public schools, segregation and displacement have continued to permeate educational spaces (Anyon, 1997). As an exclusionary property regime, the U.S. educational system has been influenced by the privatization of public education leading to increasing obstacles for undocumented youth to access citizenship pathways and

higher education due to measures of intelligence being reduced to numbers, accents, and raced social locations (Patel, 2013a). Many teachers in this institutional ethnographic study participated in colonial structures that met the interests of whiteness to secure their institutional power, as reflected in some teachers' biases towards the participants, and the silencing of sexism and racism in the school curricula.

The ten participating Latinas described the need to develop their agency against oppressive educational structures, which led to their community organizing engagements. Their intersectional resistance (Spade, 2013) entailed protecting themselves and each other in schools and universities. Their resistance did not mean only publicly challenging oppressions, but more specifically empowering themselves emotionally and academically, while exposing harmful school practices that gendered and racialized their opportunities and career paths (Cammarota, 2002; Muñoz, 2013). For instance, working diligently in schools, despite intersectional challenges and different academic performances, was perceived as a form of resistance by the ten participants. In his study of Latina students' patterns of resistance in high school, Cammarota (2004) argues that these students typically encounter interlocking forms of racial and gender subjugation; yet at the same time these women resist interlocking oppressions through avoidance as well as familial and community supports that help them to resist coercive social and cultural processes in schools (p. 55).

Reaching out to supportive teachers, relatives, and community organizers facilitated processes of liberation and access to social capital for all of the women in the study, although more often the seven Latinas of color had to take the initiative to seek out teacher support (Muñoz, 2013). Writing beautifully about the dilemmas, stressors, and motivators that Mexican women who are undocumented face in higher education, Muñoz (2013) explains how "Latinas

embody a heightened consciousness about the social, economic, political, and environmental realities facing their communities and employ an activist spirit to remedy these issues in their schooling and everyday lives” (p. 236). U.S. high schools in the study were perceived as failing to include Latinx women’s multiple ways of knowing and being. Despite these institutional challenges, the women developed a *legal consciousness* regarding systemic oppressions, which allowed for their development of social networks (Muñoz, 2015).

Becoming Gendered and Racialized in the State House

The young women in this institutional ethnography identified structures of white heteropatriarchy operationalized in the context of the state house, which were designed to relegate them to powerless political positions. Coming out as undocumented organizers in the state house entailed interacting with legislators, legal aids, and other authority and political agents. The women’s political relationships held different material implications. As undocumented organizers, the women experienced exclusion by white male legislators, particularly when sharing experiences of gender violence, as their narratives were undervalued. Results showed that microaggressions towards women of color likewise permeated this context and interactions with legislators who raced the women’s discourses, arguing they could not understand their points or simply ignoring their critical questions.

For instance, Marta, who was originally from Colombia and Venezuela, was noticeably upset during an observation in the state house when a white male legislator ignored her question about sexual violence in the case of undocumented Latinas without DACA, and instead acknowledged her male Latino counterpart’s question regarding the financial limitations of *Deferred Action* (observation, May 25th, 2016). During an informal conversation reflecting on

this exchange, Marta articulated: *“I realized that it was because he did not like it [the question she asked], because I was challenging him, and he felt uncomfortable, and I am like, you are supposed to do your job and listen to me.”* Marta’s exclusion from policymaking conversations was connected to her intersectional political arguments about “illegality,” since that she had brought up the topic of sexual violence publicly. Her discourse was openly rejected by the male legislator, and consequently overlooked in policy, including DACA. Other organizers in the same space likewise failed to support Marta’s intersectional call, which reveals the permeability of racist heteropatriarchal practices in institutional arenas (Milkman & Terriquez, 2014). It should not just be women speaking about women’s needs and calls for gender equity, but also men. The ten Latina organizers were expected to be submissive to heteropatriarchal legal priorities.

These intersections of domination shaped the women’s interactions with legislator, and at the same time mirrored larger male-dominant systems, including the pervasive global rape culture (Parra, 2015). Glenn (2002) argues for the need to challenge uneven power dynamics in the politics of organizing. The author contends: “to understand race and gender we must examine not only how dominant groups and institutions attempt to impose particular meanings, but also how subordinate groups contest dominant conceptions and construct alternative meanings” (p. 17). By ignoring Marta and privileging instead white male concerns, the legislators in the previous example dehumanized her story and implicitly victim-blamed her. This intersectional dimension of political disempowerment demonstrates the gendered and raced nature of lawmaking, which defines as well as confines the possibilities of immigrant women’s leadership in the U.S. white settler state (Glenn, 2009).

Findings from this institutional ethnography exposed the invisibilization of the political links between immigration, gender violence, and capitalism in policymaking processes (Cacho, 2012). As analyzed in chapter 7, interview and observational data revealed legislators' preferential treatment for male young leaders was connected to supremacist heteropatriarchal control in policymaking. White male legislators interacted more comfortably with other men, who did not apparently pose a threat to their systemic hegemony. This interactional approach in lawmaking demonstrates the role intersectionality plays in the politics of institutional inclusion and exclusion (Patel, 2013a). According to Patel (2013a), the politics of inclusion and exclusion are operationalized in institutional spaces to exclude some voices based on merit, which represents an institutionalized structure codifying whiteness. Immigrant youth and organizers who are high achievers and fluent English speakers are rewarded systemically when conforming to assimilationist colonial ideals rooted in practices of cultural erasure (Patel, 2013a). Those who in contrast challenge systems of oppression are often relegated to the margins.

Through structures of legal erasure, the women developed an intersectional awareness in the context of the state house. For instance, Esperanza challenged white male policymakers' exclusion of the topic of sexual violence from policy. During an action against deportation policies in the state house, Esperanza raised her voice to support a Latina mother who shared the story of her daughter. She had been raped at home by a neighbor while the mother was visiting her husband in the deportation center. Esperanza, who had been sexually abused in the United States, felt infuriated as the male legislator ignored the woman's plight. Esperanza expressed: *"the story of this mother shows why immigration reform is important for women like me"* (observation, October 18th, 2016). The white male legislator attempted to stop the camera from recording the incident. His discomfort to engage in a dialogue about immigrant Latinas'

experiences of sexual abuse exposes how gender and racial violence continue to permeate socio-legal structures, and treat women as disposable objects.

Becoming Gendered and Racialized in the Organization

Findings from this institutional ethnography showed the women's cultural and social awareness regarding the risks and compromises in organizing for immigrant justice. The Latinx women's resilience in the face of interlocking vectors of oppression mirrored Anzaldúa' (2012) concept of *la facultad*, which the author describes as an analytic ability displaying Chicanx and Latinx women's strengths. During an observation in a local university, Esperanza was asked by a female student about the risks she faced as an undocumented organizer (observation, February 13th, 2016). In her response, Uxía underlined fears of deportation for her undocumented mother, since Uxía was in some ways a public figure and her positionality could compromise her mother's safety. The youth also acknowledged, how despite fear of legal retaliation, her mother was proud of her activist work, the learnings and supports that emanated from her organizing, and the varied forms of capital her daughter had attained. Following a Latinx critical race theoretical framework, Yosso (2005) created a cultural wealth approach, which included different forms of capital (social, linguistic, familiar, resistant, navigational) to focus on the strengths of minoritized Latinx communities. The author thus challenges deficit views of marginalized people to advance transgressive epistemologies and institutional structures. Through her organizing and related-community engagements, Uxía, was able to develop vital skills that helped her navigate contexts of institutionalized oppressions.

A major finding from the institutional ethnography underscored gendered roles and expectations described by the ten Latina organizers, which entailed their subjugation to male

leaders and white peers. It also took more time for Latina leaders of color than men and white Latinas in the movement to develop vital community supports and networks. These social and community networks across institutions were developed through time and facilitated processes of confidence building as the women increasingly assumed public speaking roles, developed strategies of intersectional resistance against white heteropatriarchal control, and collaborated with multiple others in the development of an intersectional theory of change.

The participating Latinas described how undocumented young men in the immigrant youth-led organization received more public consideration and recognition than they did when facilitating workshops, being praised for their work, receiving awards, or accomplishing important tasks, even when women were leading the work. For instance, the seven Latinas of color were relegated to a second place when addressing policymakers in the state house, particularly at the beginning of the study, as if only male leaders were able to engage in policy conversations. The women denounced how initially public speaking was generally attributed to men or light-skinned Latina organizers, whereas women of color had initially performed less publicly visible roles, such as fundraising, food set up, event organizing. These gendered and raced tasks became invisibilized labor that treated the women as second class even in the context of immigrant youth-led organizing. As a result, their knowledge, *mestiza consciousness*, and leadership skills were undervalued in the larger DREAM Act movement. Lola, a dark-skinned Brazilian organizer who was one of the founders of the organization, repeatedly challenged gendered and racialized dynamics in her position as the core coordinator of the immigrant youth-led organization. She spoke on behalf of other women of color unraveling intersections of sexism and racism in her interactions with other young organizers.

The participating Latinas reported facing sexual harassment in the organization across their different social locations. Some immigrant Latino youth who the women tried to recruit had made uninvited sexual advances. Such microaggressions were rarely addressed by the larger group of youth organizers. In fact, young men who sexually harassed the women faced no retaliation, other than being told by the women how their actions were not appropriate. Being sexually objectified and not being taken seriously by young male leaders, and even other women, intensified the participants' socio-legal condition as undocumented.

It was mainly the women rather than men who pushed for the inclusion of gender violence topics increasingly in undocumented youth-led organizing, such as workshops with other undocumented students. Lola, one of the founders of the organization, strongly advocated for the creation of multiple spaces where intersecting oppressions in and outside of organizing could be addressed collectively. She also pointed out her struggle to facilitate these workshops on gender violence in male-dominant undocumented spaces.

The immigrant youth-led organization underwent significant leadership changes to become exclusively led by women towards the end of the study. In the aftermath of Trump's election, which coincided with the last month of data collection, new leadership structures and organizational strategies were burgeoning to address intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in undocumented counternarratives and political agendas. By the end of the study, the organization was almost entirely run by female leaders. The organization's initial single-axis frameworks for organizing based on *identity politics* (Crenshaw, 1991) failed to address conditions of violence that intersectional resistance, as Spade (2013) explains, seeks to legally and culturally transform. Overtime, the Latina leaders initiated what they called *identity groups* to address intersectional matters in undocumented spaces of resistance. The ten Latinas created a

women's group; an *ethnic group*; an *undocuqueer group*; and an *undocu-artist group* in the organization. They developed undocumented *task force* programs in their respective schools and colleges. The configuration of identity-based groups of resistance became connected to a desire for undocumented students in the movement to move across groups, and further their understanding of intersectional challenges and possibilities. Different leaders gravitated among these groups, and conversations about the intersections of gendered and raced subjugation began to unfold among them. Engaging in conversations about multiple oppressions developed forms of intersectional resistance, which disrupted colonial discourses imbued with white heteropatriarchy. Spade (2013) demands a kind of institutional change, which “aims at the root causes of these problems place these issues in the context of genealogies of racialization that link the foundational violences of the United States to today’s conditions and reject legal framings that obscure intersectional analysis” (p. 1051). What became clear based on results emanating from the study was that the youth-led organization’s orientation based on a shared single identity overlooked the dynamics of social constructed “illegality.” The women’s resistance to oppressions through their organizing challenged their roles as victims, as they positioned themselves as survivors, and helped culturally transform organizing arenas.

Recapitalization of Findings across Institutions

This section analyzes the ten Latinx women’s experiences regarding intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and immigration status across the three institutional contexts. Intersectionality theory facilitated analyses of the multidimensional pulls and push of racist sexism across borders (May, 2015, p. 3). These cross-institutional analyses of the women’s experiences revealed how systemic structures of heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and racism

permeated school settings, policymaking in the state house, and organizing in the immigrant youth-led organization. The combination of institutionalized oppressions affected the Latinx women in varied, sometimes distinct ways.

Sexual Violence

The Latina participants reported incidents of sexual abuse and sexual harassment across the three institutions analyzed in the study, and beyond. Malignant conceptions of Latina citizenship and Blackness in the schools, the local state house, and the immigrant youth-led organization, were deployed to legitimate acts of sexual violence towards the ten Latina participants. Their undocumented status furthered their sexual objectification and and victimization across these institutional arenas. As a result of their legal vulnerability as undocumented, the women struggled to seek justice in the context of sexual violence in policymaking, for fear of retaliation. Yet, other highly gendered and raced institutional structures at the intersection of legal status impede the women's protection from sexual threats.

The participating Latinas reported incidents of unwanted male sexual trespasses by male peers in schools and male youth in organizing during recruitment initiatives, although not by core male leaders in the organization. In the state house, the women were similarly sexually objectified by peers and legislators. For instance, two dark-skinned Latinas who attempted to engage in conversations with legislators were asked by other leaders in the organization to monitor their clothes and make up, so that legislators “*would take them seriously.*” These logics of heteropatriarchal compliance worked to normalize sexual violence towards young Latinx women of color. Women were re-victimized as a result of their phenotype, make up, and clothes by men and even other women across the three institutional settings. In fact, heteropatriarchal

compliance protected men who some women accused of sexual trespasses in contexts of schools, the state house, and the youth-led organization.

The Latina participants found the most support to address sexual violence in the youth-led organization, mainly as a result of their established solidarities with other women in the movement. The participants also counted with the support of a few male organizers to tackle sexual violence concerns in and outside of their shared community-oriented work. The realm of organizing increasingly attempted to address gender violence issues, including sexual violence primarily through spaces where the women's voice could be heard during meetings. In contrast to changes developed by the immigrant youth-led organization to address gender violence issues, educational sites and the realm of policymaking did not take actions against the sexual objectification of immigrant Latinas' bodies. The varied undocumented experiences of LGBTQ and transgender immigrants, who have been historically placed at higher risks of experiencing sexual violence (Parra, 2015), were invisibilized across institutions as well.

DACAmented and yet Undocumented

Despite DACA's legal protections from deportation, the program does not open pathways for citizenship. Thus, the nine participants who were DACAmented still self-identified as undocumented. They noted divisions among immigrant communities as a result of the program. Angélica, the only participant in the study without DACA, regretted her circumstances due to lack of legal protections in the workplace. The youth addressed DACA's limitations and constraints regarding its protections for women and men, emphasizing how without DACA, undocumented youth faced additional legalized vulnerabilities to being exploited. In their speeches, the ten Latina organizers defended the rights of those who were non-DACA recipients

explicitly; thus, challenging hierarchies among undocumented communities. Lola, for instance, pointed out the failures of the program.

In contrast to the organization, high schools, for instance, lacked basic training for staff on the topic of DACA which led some teachers to assume that DACA, represented a pathway to legal status and inclusive of all undocumented students. Interview data showed how some teachers had not heard any information about the program's benefits, and often assumed counselors would take responsibility addressing these legal nuances. Teachers' disregard and unfamiliarity with undocumented issues underscores the unresponsive efforts on behalf of schools to support undocumented youth; hence validating U.S. nativist and anti-immigrant sentiments. U.S. high schools and colleges have in fact failed to develop institutional initiatives that ameliorate undocumented youth's educational conditions, including access to *know-your-rights* workshops (Muñoz, 2015).

Even when DACA support was offered by organizers, legislators, and school counselors, the gender and racial implications of losing DACA were not addressed at the institutional level in the organization, the state house, and schools. In the context of the state house, undocumented Latina organizers advocating for immigrant justice were dehumanized regardless of DACA, and as a result of gendered and raced expectations. Under the program, the women, as other men, were rendered less human by the state; thus, not being at the same socio-legal playfield as whites when it comes to theorizing about policy. Legislators' exclusion of the women from policymaking emanated in contrast to the context of the immigrant youth-led organization, when women's points of view regarding education reform were more openly embraced by other organizers, and despite DACA claims.

Labor Exploitation

Prior to becoming organizers in their late years of high school, the Latina participants conveyed feelings of isolation and stigma attached to their unauthorized status. Despite DACA, the nine participants under the program struggled to achieve societal upward mobility, as they still worked in low-wage jobs. The women still encountered sexual harassment in professional settings. Angélica, who was not DACAmented, also faced fear of deportation as a result of not benefitting from DACA. Thus, being legally barred from citizenship rights became a proxy for lacking property rights, in terms of economic and social mobility as well as gender rights. All of the Latina participants described schools as sites of institutionalized oppressions for women who were undocumented workers, as their economic needs and conditions were unaddressed by teachers and school staff.

The women were constrained by the shadow of “illegality” and economic violence in the workplace and schools, but not in the immigrant youth-led organization, where salaries were equally distributed, albeit leadership positions remained highly gendered and raced. Most of the Latina organizers had initially engaged in gendered roles, such as fundraising, and had a heavier workload than men, who, leading less work, often received more institutional credit than the women, as the findings of the study illustrated. The cultural works the ten Latinx women led in the movement were often invisibilized across institutional arenas as well.

Resisting Gendered and Racialized “Illegality”

Despite interlocking obstacles, the ten women displayed their agency to undermine exclusionary practices of heteropatriarchal citizenship across the three institutional contexts. The participating Latinas were able to achieve increasing political authority in their organizing as a

result of their *mestiza consciousness*. Schools, similar to the youth-led organization, worked in some instances as sites of institutional resistance to heteropatriarchal and racist dominance, in cases of teacher and peer support. Findings revealed how the women's organizing promoted their civic and political engagements. The Latinas transcended gendered and raced invisibility in schools and policymaking by actively and publicly seeking justice within the context of the immigrant youth-led organization. At the end of this study, major organizational changes, which have been previously described were connected to larger political changes in the United States government (the transition from Obama to Trump's administration). Some public schools and colleges across the country brought public attention and support towards undocumented youth. In contrast, Congress, the federal government, and local governments distanced themselves from undocumented communities by intensifying the militarization of the border, supporting sexist and xenophobic crimes, and banning or blocking progressive immigration policies and programs.

The Latina participants demanded a righteous space in the three institutions through their collaborations with other Latinas. Together, they tried to make sense while resisting gendered and raced "illegality." As a form of leadership building, the women were actively recruiting other youth as future leaders of the organization. These Latina organizers had increasingly reached out to non-DACAmented communities by the end of this study. The women's theories of change were clearly displayed more intersectionally in the context of the immigrant youth-led organization, and more and more in their political discourses in both schools and the state house.

Schools lagged behind organizing spaces promoting the leadership of young immigrant women of color; however, some schools in this study collaborated with the Latina leaders, once they became organizers, for creating *undocumented task forces*, raising awareness about undocumented issues amongst school staff and students, and facilitating professional

development with teachers and counselors. Some schools had welcomed or invited the Latina leaders to facilitate workshops and presentations with administrators, teachers, and high school students concerning undocumented issues outside the data collection period. Therefore, most of the women were able to come back to their schools to lead institutional changes. In this way, the Latina participants managed to give back to their communities, as they transcended layers of institutional liminality experienced in earlier school years.

Challenges to Latina Leadership

In the process of developing their agency and leadership, the Latinx women in the study faced multiple challenges across the three institutional contexts. The seven women of color in the study were often undermined by males and white women as agents of change, and particularly in their public speaking roles in the state house. Yet, as youth organizers, the ten women's leadership and knowledge as organizers especially were more valued by school staff than in their interactions with legislators in the state house.

The participating Latinas described their racialization as undocumented despite having DACA in schools and the state house to different degrees depending on axes of systemic oppressions. Women of color were more often dehumanized by peers, teachers, and policymakers, and thus discriminate against and excluded from power positions. Racist gendered perceptions that sustained heteropatriarchal whiteness across the three institutions were imbued with notions of intelligence. The seven Latinas of color were recurrently racialized by peers, teachers, and lawmakers as less capable when it came to leading social change and facilitating conversations regarding immigrant justice. These gendered and raced exclusions stem from the threat that Latinx women's political voices pose to racist capitalism (Glenn, 2002). The

institutional expectation for these Latina leaders was that they remained silent in schools and in policymaking. The perception that the women lacked strength to lead change was used to justify the validation of male leadership, especially white males across the three institutions. In the context of the state house, for instance, male legislators' exclusion of the women from conversations around policy and gender violence revealed a major difference with schools and the immigrant youth-led organization, where the women's leadership as organizers was more welcome. In the context of schooling, the women's agency as organizers was appreciated; paradoxically, these schools had not promoted the Latina youth's leadership at the time they were students.

The lack of immigrant women's authority in policymaking in contrast to immigrant youth-led organizing shows the permeability of institutionalized whiteness in policy, and how their leadership is coerced. The participating Latinas' overall political exclusion was more noticeable in the realms of policymaking and schooling, especially in their high school years. Speaking up against racism and gender violence did not facilitate some legislators' support for in-state tuition policy, which initially promoted the organization's silencing of gender and racial issues. Legislators appreciated instead discourses that promoted assimilation to white male norms, and often directed their speeches and interactions towards male youth. Similarly, some teachers likewise struggled to grapple with racist heteropatriarchy as practices embedded in "illegality."

In the immigrant youth-led organization, the Latina participants were able to develop and negotiate their leadership with others, while learning and unlearning transformative lessons of resistance. Yet, gender and racial hierarchies were visibly displayed among immigrant leaders in relationship to whiteness. Undocumented youth, including women, were minoritized in the

movement as most organizers were Latinx and light-skinned. The difference with other institutions was that the organization eventually assumed responsibility acknowledging this underrepresentation, and as a result tried to fix it by reaching out to ethnically diverse undocumented communities. As previously described, the immigrant youth-led organization promoted women's inclusion in public speaking roles for women of color purposefully towards the end of the study. Therefore, under the current heteropatriarchal colonial system, it becomes acceptable for a white male educator to challenge a Latina student in front of the class arguing that being "illegal" is something to be ashamed of. Or it becomes acceptable for a state governor to use white Irishmen as citizenship models and *good immigrants*, when a Latina of color seeks to advocate for in-state tuition in the state house. Or it becomes acceptable for young males to feel entitled to sexually victimize Latinas who try to teach them something about their rights.

Compromises of Latina Organizing

The ten Latinas made different compromises as leaders across the three institutional contexts. Overlapping compromises differed across the women's social locations and institutional contexts. The word 'compromise' was recurrently used in the study by the participants to refer to strategic choices or conscious decisions, and to prioritize certain roles or needs over others depending on the institution. As part of the compromises the women had to make for immigrant justice, the Latina leaders sometimes had to give up a part of who they were in order to advance the larger political goals of the DREAM Act movement. This practice entailed not directly addressing sexual harassment in organizing spaces protecting men who could be at risk of deportation and exclusion. Other times, the women had to collapse their immigration stories in dialogues with policymakers. At the school, the women's leadership was

challenged by male students, similarly to the state house where their leadership was questioned by white male legislators primarily.

A recurrent compromise the women had to make across the institutions had to do with perpetuating undocumented counternarratives that played within the logics of a white settler colonial state in conversations with legislators, teachers, and youth. Individualistic and assimilationist frames, such as those of the DREAM Act, promote hierarchies among undocumented communities and fail to challenge racist white citizenship (Patel & Sánchez Ares, In Tuck & Yang, 2014). DREAMers' narratives used to conflate their transnational experiences, and the role of the state perpetuating transnational violence focusing on the rights of undocumented students. Under these *identity politics*, (Crenshaw, 1991) the participating Latinas acknowledged strategically omitting experiences of gender violence in their undocumented narratives in order to be heard by policymakers and be conceded material access. Gloria acknowledged conflicting issues in their organizing. She exposed how initially: *“when we go to talk to legislators we do not explicitly talk about gender issues, and how we are escaping gender violence in Mexico, or Brazil, or Latin American where women are killed in the streets and no one cares, and we are not talking about race either.”* Gloria pointed out the challenge of using an intersectionality framework in the realm of policymaking in a system that mostly supports white heteropatriarchal interests.

In addition, the ten women had to juggle different responsibilities pertaining to school, work, and organizing, as they struggled to protect their relatives' anonymity. Families had been originally excluded from youth organizing discourses, but undocumented parents' experiences and voices became increasingly embraced in the organization, contributing to DAPA.

Bringing complex gender and racial issues to policymaking refrained white male policymakers from considering the legal objectives of the undocumented movement in terms of access to higher education and citizenship pathways. The state thus criminalizes undocumented youth as a monolithic entity whose interests and needs should be underprioritized. This study showed that a lack of intersectional framings regarding undocumented issues contributed to the systemic invisibilization of sexism and racism permeating policy (Salcido & Menjívar, 2012). The same omission permeated schools in the study as interview data revealed. In contrast, the women found in the immigrant youth-led organization a space where to develop their intersectional resistance, despite multiple challenges to their leadership in this institutional context.

Coming out of the shadows as undocumented held different implications for women and men in terms of compromises, respect, and access to power across these three institutional contexts. The seven Latinas of color in the study had to navigate structures of racism, which became a dimension of intersectional marginalization white organizers seldom confronted, as they were able to pass as white. Yet, all of the women recounted intersecting episodes of gender violence in the three institutional contexts. Findings from this study revealed how gendered conceptions of undocumentedness and Blackness thereby legitimized acts of gender subjugation by male and female politicians, legislators, and teachers against the young women. Although the ten Latinas were all legally blocked from achieving upward mobility, the Latinas of color had to additionally navigate racist structures that dispossessed them from access to resources, networks, and leadership positions across the three institutions. In the collective process of advocating for immigrant justice, their multiple experiences as undocumented became flattened. The women's

resistance to advocate for more complex needs at the intersection of undocumented status revealed their cultural works and power to advance policy, practice, research, and organizing.

Recommendations for Policy, Practice, Research, and Youth-led Organizing.

Based on the main findings of the institutional ethnography, this section offers some recommendations for policy, praxis, research, and youth-led organizing. This study argues for interconnected supports that challenge draconian laws and practices around gendered and raced constructions of the undocumented Latina subject in the reformulation of a global model of citizenship, that is, a model that promotes opening pathways for citizenship, and validates the different needs and reasons behind Latinx women's immigration and conditions as *forced migrants*. This study likewise advances intersectional analyses of hegemonic laws, assumptions, and practices that have historically harmed Latinx women's dignity, power, and human rights. According to Patel (2017), "settler makings of citizenship unendingly seeks its authoritative writing, leveraging binaries of legality and illegality to distort the more sophisticated desire for parsed people" (p. 64). Overall, the following recommendations for policy, praxis, research, and organizing urge educators, scholars, organizers, and policymakers to collaborate with immigrant women and their communities in the reconceptualization of legal and pedagogical tools, which are sensitive to the complex realities of both local cultures and a globalized world.

Recommendations for Policy

Based on the findings from this institutional ethnography, this study proposes three major recommendations for policy and policymaking.

Dismantling Gendered and Racialized Constructions of Citizenship. Findings from this study undermine the permeability of white heteropatriarchal norms in larger hegemonic constructions of U.S. national identity. These dominant ideologies of belonging naturalize historically built U.S. hierarchies of gender, race, class, and sexuality. The rule of Western law has always been a conduit for whiteness as property and the exploitation of Black people as chattel (Glenn, 2015). For the ten Latina participants, citizenship represented a fluid dynamic act transcending borders and uni-national identification. The seven self-identified women of color in this study were more prominently excluded in schools and the state house, being racialized as non-whites. In his book *White by Law*, López (1996) describes how U.S. immigration laws have historically legalized racialized meanings to physical features and ancestry in order to institutionally sustain oppressive racial and gender hierarchies in the economy. The author contends that legal ideologies that ascribe racialized meanings to people of color have been institutionalized and accepted. As this study illustrated, these raced narratives can in turn perpetuate uneven material conditions for the most vulnerable immigrants. For the women in the study, phenotype and their complexions influenced how they were treated as students and organizers, based on the institutional practices that denied their humanity, residency, and heritage. The forces of the global economy configure the racist and sexist construction of the *immigrant Latina* under nationalistic banners of dispossession (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Patel, 2017; Viesca, 2013).

In the context of schooling, findings from this study revealed that to tackle issues of multiculturalism and inclusion in schools, it is not enough to use ideologies of educational quality and equity (Viesca, 2013). Instead, educational policy needs to follow decolonizing frames aiming to decenter whiteness in schools through anti-racist practices and structures. The

Latinas in the study, particularly, the seven women of color, faced interlocking barriers to their learning despite social justice claims promoted in school policies due to gendered and raced constructions of citizenship. Thus, education laws need to assert the right for inclusion and equal opportunity among its citizens, students, and workers considering the systemic nuances of their social locations. This institutional ethnography argues for citizenship pathways and the development of anti-discrimination policies in order to protect the rights and wellbeing of immigrant young women. Action-based policies should be likewise developed to interrupt nationalist concepts of citizenship in order to facilitate undocumented youth's citizenship pathways by advancing global citizenship discourses, which can ultimately undo institutionalized racism and sexism (Negrón-Gonzales, 2015a; Pallares & Flores-González, 2010; Patel Stevens & Stovall, 2010).

Intersectional Frames. Policymakers should embrace a cultural intersectional framework in immigration and education policies. Findings from this institutional ethnography revealed gaps in immigrations policies, such as DACA. Despite offering temporary relief from deportation to eligible youth, policies such as DACA and TPS have been insufficient to support all undocumented young people, including those who did not qualify, and those who were vulnerable to sexual violence across borders (Pierce, 2015). Implications from this study urge policymakers to engage with immigrant organizations supporting undocumented young people at the border, to challenge gendered practices and laws, which have for instance separated mothers from their children at the border, making the youth vulnerable to human trafficking. These laws have likewise dissuaded young women from having an abortion. Since the beginning of his administration in 2017, Trump's anti-immigration and refugee campaigns have promoted racist

and sexist policies, such as the *Muslim Ban*, and federal budget cuts in *Title IX* sexual assault law, both of which have re-victimized survivors of sexual violence and exonerate to an extent the perpetrators. From an intersectional lens, these policies continue to sustain white heteropatriarchal capitalism by overlooking the protections of women due to male-dominant economic power. To contend with this, policymakers must develop immigration and education policies that deploy intersectional approaches to dismantle legal structures and cultural practices that have normalized racism and heteropatriarchy in ways that immigrant women can flourish and have their voices validated when grappling with societal issues.

Considering the underrepresentation of immigrant women of color as state representatives or educational administrators (Glenn, 2002) as well as the gender and racial exclusion the ten Latina participants faced across institutions, this study advocates for the inclusion of immigrant women as stakeholders in policymaking. Findings revealed that the Latina participants, from their different positionalities, held vital lessons about democracy to teach legislators. Immigrant Latinx women's voices, experiences, and leadership must be positioned at the center of policymaking processes in order to address more effectively interlocking factors influencing their wellbeing (Anzaldúa, 2012). Anzaldúa (2012) used the term *nepantla*, and women being *nepantleras*, to validate Latinas' resistance by challenging the gendered and racialized creation of U.S. borders. Instead, the author underlines the concept of *in-betweenness*, or the capacity to shape and be shaped by multiple worlds. Anzaldúa upholds Chicana and Latina women's agencies and connections to land and underlines their capacity to navigate multiple worlds and transfer cultural and spiritual values of one group to another (p. 100). It is precisely in these inclusive borderland arenas where Anzaldúa invites different women to re-write stories of shifting national identity and identification, which can ultimately decenter

white imagined borders of nationhood. The author also underscores issues of cultural hybrid, which hold policy implications as well. For instance, it is necessary to address the lack of multiracial voices weighing in on many educational and immigration policies. Biracial young people, like some of the women in the study, conveyed how it can sometimes be tedious to have to divide out certain aspects of one's personality into *white aspects* and *Black aspects* in order to fit neatly within certain frameworks. Policies affecting immigrant youth must likewise adopt Anzaldúa's notion of *in-betweenness* to grapple with the nuances and fluidity of citizenship.

Intersectional frames could advance citizenship pathways, which in turn could provide significant levels of safety and security to women who have been historically rendered undocumented. Yet, citizenship arguments for undocumented students must underline, rather than a pragmatic goal, a humanizing endeavor (Merry, 2009). Despite being U.S. citizens many Black, African American, and Muslim populations have historically encountered interlocking forms of systemic oppressions (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Sue et al., 2007). This study asks larger questions regarding what it means for immigrants to reclaim citizenship on Indigenous lands, considering the European white settlers' invasion. At the same time, this research argues for a redefinition of citizenship that grapples with issues of inclusivity and re-representation of minoritized immigrant populations in policy, which represents a deep humanizing endeavor. Considering how the current globalized world is marked by porous borders, transnational communities, intercultural communication, concepts of citizenship based on purely nationalistic frameworks are clearly iniquitous and anachronistic.

Anti-Discrimination School Policies. Findings from this institutional ethnography illustrated how school structures imbued with white constructions of success and citizenship

promoted intersections of sexism and racism, as the dark-skinned Latina youth were more often discriminated against by peers and teachers than white students and the light-skinned Latinas. As a result, the Latinas of color in the study struggled to develop networks in schools, access higher education, and be academically validated by teachers and peers in the classroom. Based on these findings, this study urges schools to interrupt white settler logics that perpetuate racial and gender hierarchies among students, and in relationship to land, immigration, and exploitation (Patel, 2015). Schools can engage in justice initiatives that actively address intersections of gender and racial oppressions through anti-discrimination educational policies and practices. In addition, the inclusion of the students' voices in such policies must be at the center of policymaking processes (Cammarota, 2004; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). For instance, educational institutions must dismantle school structures, such as detention practices, monolingual biases, microaggressions, which disproportionately discipline youth of color, and perpetuate discrimination towards undocumented students. By developing anti-discrimination policies that follow intersectional frames, schools can guarantee immigrant youth's safety and dignity, and hold not only perpetrators accountable, but also the institutions (Vaught, 2014). The silencing of undocumented issues in schools goes hand in hand with the invisibility of undocumented students' heterogeneous experiences. Even teacher preparation programs and universities that aim to support undocumented students do so *in the shadows* (Jefferies, 2014). What is needed instead is increased training and accountability programs directed towards school staff addressing undocumented issues, and anti-discrimination school laws for the protection of immigrant students against institutionalized oppressions; thus expanding the *Plyler v Doe* legislation.

Furthermore, schools need to effectively address the material constraints undocumented youth have historically endured. Due to their unauthorized status, the women in the study lacked access to in-state tuition, scholarships, and were unable to participate in out-of-school programs, such as attending fieldtrips outside of the state. Some of the participating Latinas joined out-of-school programs and internships that did not economically reward them for their work, unlike peers who were U.S.-born citizens. Some program directors regretted the impossibility of paying undocumented students for their work, since funds came from the federal government's grants. These programs, including university-based initiatives, must avoid perpetuating logics of assimilation and compliance, by finding alternative cultural practices that challenge the status quo, while undermining exploitative relationships. Instead, institutional initiatives can advance policy interventions geared towards providing venues to materially and academically support, rather than unequally treat, immigrant students who fall outside of the myth of meritocracy (Patel, 2013a).

This institutional ethnographic study recommends the implementation of anti-racist and anti-sexist policies and programs that are sensitive to the needs of minoritized students within the context of their institutional struggles, and challenge teachers' biases in the process. Teachers' political biases should be challenged in this context. Due to these biases, the women of color in the study reported being dissuaded from pursuing traditionally white male career paths, such as engineering, medicine, and politics. Because immigrant Latinx women are underrepresented in STEM-related and political fields (Tong et al., 2014; Montoya, Hardy-Fanta, & Garcia, 2000), schools must develop racial and gender-sensitive policies for women's leadership in science and math, as well as scholarships for women who struggle to access male-dominant careers.

Recommendations for Praxis

Based on its major findings, this institutional ethnographic study proposes several recommendations for the teaching praxis. Freire (2000) defines praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). According to Freire, teachers have a critical role in the struggle for liberation. To free others and themselves from biases and structures of domination, teachers must acquire a critical awareness of oppressions, and act in solidarity to transform these oppressive realities through critical praxis. The following recommendations for praxis are grounded on the ten Latina participants’ perceptions of (in)effective educational practices. Intersectionality theory shed a light on vectors of oppression permeating learning, curricula, and teacher education, and it illuminated spaces for growth, solidarity, and liberation.

Intersectional Curricular Practices. The ten Latinas in the study endured layers of oppression and microaggressions as a result of curricular practices rooted in white male normativity and English linguistic supremacy. The women’s multiple histories of oppression and resistance were often overlooked across content areas by teachers and schools displaying gendered and raced biases towards immigration and undocumented immigrants. To contend with these curricular practices of erasure, this institutional ethnography advances critical curricular practices that embrace intersectional frames, and thus can meaningfully support immigrant youth through the use of bilingual education programs, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and undocumented-friendly spaces (Nieto, 2002; Paris & Alim, 2014). Critical pedagogies and curricula should be rooted in the realities of the students who have been historically marginalized, such as undocumented young people. What’s more, critical curricula should contribute to the debunking of nativist models and narratives of U.S. citizenship, and embrace global, intersectional, and

transnational lenses. For instance, schools can challenge “illegality” and nationalistic notions of citizenship, and, instead, embrace global citizenship in the curricula, which can interrupt normalized school cultures (Marietta, 2006). Through an intersectional frame, the curricula should teach all learners about immigration issues, challenging biases, privilege, and notions of citizenship within a globalized world (Pallares & Flores-González, 2010). At the same time, schools need to value immigrant youth’s heterogeneous cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds (Nieto, 2002) vis-à-vis their complexly situated social locations.

Because the participants in the study felt their agency and leadership were discarded in schools, immigrant young women must be exposed to citizenship education and political participation early on (Muñoz, 2013). The women in the study emphasized how systemic oppressions were exacerbated in schools by lack of critical frameworks to discuss immigration as well as biased curricular practices, that uplifted colonialism, such as the celebration of *Columbus Day*, and the omission of Latina leader, such as Dolores Huerta in history readings about immigrant movements, such as the *United Farm Workers*. Thus, critical literacy practices must be infused through the curricula. Patel Stevens and Stovall (2011) urge schools and teachers to challenge racist curricula aimed at reifying the white nation state. The authors argue for critical literacy frameworks that challenge sexism and xenophobia, since: “in the face of state-sanctioned xenophobia and policies that provide pathways for institutionalized discrimination, some literacy educators engage directly with these texts and work with their students to interrupt the rollout of discrimination” (p. 297). Failing to engage in a critical praxis, as Freire describes it, allows white supremacy and sexism to course through curriculum, personnel, pedagogy, and assessment. Rather than contributing to liberation, schools implicitly comply with the realities of white racism and heteropatriarchal domination, which condition immigrant women’s lives and

opportunities. To counter these oppressions, white settler and sexist perspectives need to be decentered in both the school curriculum and teaching praxis. Schools must rethink the way teachers have historically framed civics and democracy, and offer a broader view utilizing a critical pedagogical approach that can equip educators with tools to navigate complex issues around immigration and citizenship. Following Paris and Alim's (2014) curricular model of *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, teachers must encourage criticality around civic engagement among all learners while promoting the leadership of immigrant and other minoritized youth in their classroom and beyond. Thus, undocumented issues cannot be taught in isolation from gender and racial power imbalances. The development of intersectional sensitivities via critical pedagogical approaches can validate the strengths and funds of knowledge different students bring to schools. In addition, more teachers of color and bilingual school staff should be recruited to the teaching praxis.

Challenging Intersecting Oppressions in School Socialization. Several Latina participants critiqued how some counselors, teachers and other school staff paid less attention to their needs than their male and even other female counterparts.' Sometimes the youth were counseled away from science and math careers due to tracking (Oakes, 2005). Specifically, the women of color in the study struggled significantly to benefit from school supports. Ladson-Billings (1995) exposes schools' racial and gender biases showing how students of color's "grades do not translate into advantages in college admission and/or the workplace" (p. 51). Schools must engage in catalyst processes regarding their roles in the socialization of young people of color (Ferguson, 2001; Patel, 2013a). Findings from this study exposed the multiple socializing ways in which schools reinforced, and/or challenged prevailing notions of the *good/bad immigrant* in terms not only of

criminalizing undocumented status, but also sustaining gendered and raced oppressions. The seven Latinas of color described higher levels of exclusion in their relationships with school staff and peers as a result of institutionalized heteropatriarchy and racism. The intersectionality framing of the study illuminated dynamics of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation permeating school structures and practices, which socialized all the students into adopting dominant white norms, and disproportionately punishing young women of color. In contrast, mainstream youth were socialized to feel entitled to receive teacher support, good grades, and financial aid in opposition to minoritized peers, including undocumented young people. Against functionalist views of education, Freire (2000) challenges dominant socialization patterns happening in schools, noting how, “perception needs to be followed by critical intervention” (p. 50). Schools are doing a disservice to all learners when failing both to challenge hegemonic relationships and to address immigrant youth’s social and legal realities.

The Latina participants experienced “illegality” differently as a result of gendered and raced norms and expectations promoted by teachers, which were manifested in distinctions of humanness that undergirded how the women of color were poignantly dehumanized. Teachers have a critical role perpetuating and interrupting oppressive gendered and racialized socialization processes (Bettie, 2003; Freire, 2000). In fact, teachers have the responsibility to stand up against injustice when they see it, rather than being compliant with the settler state (Patel, 2013b; Picower, 2012). As Patel puts it, (2013b), “while tensions, contradictions, and unsavoury priorities in the social contracts for education are not new phenomena, with each instantiation, there is opportunity for awareness and action rising out of shifts in the intended roles for educators” (p. 318). Frameworks of teacher activism underline the need for teachers to embrace an activist positionality in and outside of schools (Picower, 2012). Here, teachers’ different,

sometimes conflicting social locations cannot be overlooked (Nieto, 2002). Because oppressive school practices determined the Latinx women's leadership, mental health, academic performance, and career paths, this study urges educators and schools to focus on addressing student emotional wellbeing, creating spaces in which immigrant students can express themselves freely and feel valued for who they are and seek to become (Espín & Dottolo, 2015). This study also encourages schools and *unafraid educators* to challenge the material ways that coloniality works hand in hand with white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in their praxis through a critical examination of their positionality and praxis (Patel, 2017). Similarly, this institutional ethnography urges teacher education programs to train teachers intersectionally, so that they do not become compliant with oppressive socialization practices.

Promoting Latina Leadership. Another recommendation for practice based on findings from this study entails the promotion of Latina youth's leadership and civic engagement as tools to undermine societal exclusion. Findings from this study revealed how immigrant Latina experiences of "illegality" as well as civic engagements were overlooked in schools. Their funds of knowledge and social capital were likewise undervalued (Yosso, 2005). There has been an institutionalized tendency to underestimate the incredible resilience, wealth of knowledge, and lived experiences Latina youth bring with them to the classroom (Cammarota, 2004; Yosso, 2005). Through their organizing in the immigrant youth-led organization, the women in the study were able to develop intersectional consciousness and actions for liberation against gendered and raced constructions of citizenship in their multiple collaborations with others. This study encourages schools to promote Latina students' leadership by including their voices in conversations and actions about culture, society, and politics.

A related recommendation for practice has to do with critical consciousness raising in the teaching praxis. The ten Latinas developed a *legal consciousness* regarding undocumented issues based on community and institutional relationships (Muñoz, 2015). First, schools should assume their critical role in challenging nativist ideologies at the intersection of gender and race, denouncing how undocumented youth are portrayed as less human than white students. Second, schools, including teachers, should closely collaborate with parents and community members to dismantle codes of behavior that perpetuate white hegemony. Numerous studies have underlined the role of parental involvement in schools contributing to the youth's learning, leadership, and emotional growth (Marschall, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). In her survey of parental views of schooling, Marschall (2006) establishes the importance of consciousness raising in schools regarding parent-school collaborations. The author argues for the accommodation of cultural differences while dismantling hegemonic cultural structures through the proper training of teachers, who might hold biases about parents' role in their children's education, and overlook opportunities for their school involvement. Therefore, to holistically address undocumented issues in schools and promote Latina youth's leadership, it becomes imperative to create community-based spaces where immigrant youth, their parents, organizations, universities, and schools can work collaboratively, exchanging their knowledge, experiences, and resources.

Challenging Market-Driven Educational Systems. High-stakes testing promoted teacher practices that overlooked some of the Latina students' multiple needs and capabilities, especially those of newcomers and women of color. The participating Latinas' academic performance was measured through English proficiency and test scores, which for some of them hindered their academic potential, career paths, and upward mobility. The Latinx women experienced teacher

pressures to perform well academically following white standards and test scores. At the same time, the youth underwent multiple exclusions, which hindered transformative relations at school. This study follows the critical educational scholarship that demands a radical reform in the current U.S. neoliberal and market-driven educational system (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991). Latina students who are undocumented have been historically situated in this context of reform, teaching, and learning at a disadvantage point from their peers, due to interlocking exclusionary practices that promote their subjugation and exploitation (Cammarota, 2004; Patel, 2013a). This institutional ethnography seeks to engage activist teachers in an intersectional practice of inquiry that dismantles axes of oppression influencing immigrant Latinx students' academic performance, looking at economic and cultural structures that discourage the youth's possibilities of engagement. An intersectional teaching praxis can advance decolonizing narratives that challenge the nativist construction of the *good/bad immigrant* student based on gender, phenotype, English fluency, English-standard accents, and test scores (Fine, 2000; Patel, 2013a). For instance, some activist scholars and *DREAM schools* have worked to share this critical knowledge and wealth of perspectives with teachers and students through critical conversations, service learning, and community engagement (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012).

Intersectionality in Teacher Education. The Latina participants regretted teachers' lack of preparation to address dynamic undocumented concerns in their classroom. During observations in the state house and schools, teacher advocates acknowledged their lack of training on undocumented issues in teacher education programs as well as professional development in schools. As previously analyzed, Esperanza and Uxía led a workshop at a local university in which many teachers in the audience noted their lack of preparation to tackle undocumented

issues; thus, leading to doubts, frustration, and ineffective teacher practices and advice (observation, February 13th, 2016). The Latina participants emphasized how teacher and peer support significantly operated as positive factors in the youth's academic performance and enhanced their institutional opportunities. As a result of peer support, teacher education programs should equip teacher candidates with the tools to fully tackle undocumented matters grappling with issues regarding gendered and raced practices, institutional biases, and nativist citizenship (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014), and to do so in close collaboration with other school staff, parents, students, and community organizers, as previously noted (Gonzales et al., 1995; Muñoz, 2013).

Therefore, intersections of teachers' knowledge, praxis, and social locations must be addressed in teacher education programs from an intersectional lens (Picower, 2012). Joining forces with undocumented students and their immigrant communities requires that schools, staff, including teachers embrace a public activist positionality as *unafraid educators* in support of immigrant youth (Muñoz, 2015). What is more, as Freire (2000) argues, such activist teacher praxis needs to move into action in the struggle for multiple liberations. Teacher education programs must thus follow a critical pedagogical praxis, which can make possible for teachers to tackle intersecting systems of oppression, while at the same time allowing for the agency, knowledge, and wellbeing of their most vulnerable students to flourish.

Recommendations for Research

Based on major findings regarding the Latinas' experiences of "illegality" in schools, the state house, and the organization, this study proposes two recommendations for research.

Addressing Educational Dilemmas Intersectionally. Findings revealed how schools overlooked the role that intersections of sexism and racism played in the participating Latinas' experiences. The recurrent lack of intersectionality framing regarding undocumented issues in teaching and teacher training has been connected to the underrepresentation of undocumented Latina students' varied perspectives and experiences in educational research (Muñoz, 2015). This scholarship needs to grapple with the pervasive racialization and gendering ebbed in institutionalized citizenship discourses to avoid falling in a deeply colonizing enterprise, rooted in vague social justice claims.

Based on the findings of the study, this institutional ethnography advocates for the advancement of decolonizing research in the field of education, which challenges ongoing colonial structures in schools. Instead, educational research needs to validate the voices of historically marginalized populations, fight for the re-distribution of academic resources, while challenging white settler logics of citizenship (Patel, 2017). Based on gaps in the educational literature pertaining to intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and immigration status, education scholars are urged to assess whether teachers' practices and proposed interventions to working with immigrant youth, including those who are undocumented, can improve their educational outcomes. At the same time, teachers must be pushed and held accountable for challenging assimilationist practices and structures coercing immigrant women's liminality (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007). Such intersectional frames in research undermine deficit perspectives regarding immigrant Latinas' educational experiences and intelligence, while questioning the status of those who benefit from immigrants' exploitation and subjugation. Ultimately, this research can advance more just school structures for immigrant young people and their communities.

In addition, the educational scholarship needs to reframe undocumented research problems, the formulation of research questions, which can challenge normalized white structures through the inclusion of counternarratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of critical race theory in educational research (Yosso, 2006) has advanced counternarratives to white normativity, and created anti-racist educational policies and pedagogies from non-dominant epistemologies following intersectional frames (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Based on the Latina participants' counternarratives in their activism, education scholars can include these narratives to undermine the swampy pond of human capital theory, and neoliberal ideologies that link undocumented students' educational achievement to economic profit, and to focus instead on their humanness (Patel, 2014). However, merely incorporating the perspectives of historically marginalized women in educational research is not enough. In other words, breaking historical silences is insufficient to advance systemic change. Instead, educational researchers need to fully recognize the humanity of women and people of color who are not heterosexual white men, and interrupt harmful gendered and raced practices embedded in hegemonic structures.

Educational scholars should likewise theorize the racialization that happens through immigration law and grapple with its connections to chattel logics, and the import and exploitation of foreign labor, which represent central pillars of white settler colonialism (Patel, 2015). Educational researchers for social justice can follow the groundbreaking scholarship led by decolonizing scholars who have written extensively about decolonizing frameworks from Indigenous peoples and Black women's perspectives (Glenn, 2015; Smith, 1999). At the core of decolonizing educational research lies more than the drive for critical analysis to undermine the hegemonic social order (Smith, 1999), but the relentless intent to transform such social order through a reflection on uneven dynamics of power, epistemologies, and relationships to land

throughout the decolonizing research process. Similarly, ethnographic researchers ought to approach their study namely with humility, and in such a way that recognizes, and lifts up the knowledge within the community (Patel, 2017). For instance, Smith (1999) explains how researchers need to be accountable to different stakeholders not just in the research community, but in communities outside academia. From a decolonizing theoretical perspective, education researchers can defend the humanity and fundamental rights of undocumented youth in schools and beyond, while challenging the very construction of white citizenship.

Based on major findings of the study as well as the scant attention the educational scholarship has paid to intersections of sexual harassment with other forms of bullying in schools (Rofes, 2005), this institutional ethnography argues for intersectional analysis of racism and heteropatriarchy in education (Bettie, 2003; Wun, 2016). It is not merely sufficient to state that violent heteropatriarchy abounds in educational structures. Scholars committed to anti-racist and anti-sexist education should attempt to unveil the policies and cultural practices that sustain oppressive colonial education systems. Research must interrogate the politics of inclusion in educational research (Patel, 2013a), which create divisions among immigrants across gendered, raced, and sexualized social locations. Ideologies of inclusion are connected to the myth of meritocracy, which has been used systemically to codify whiteness in educational policies and research (Patel, 2013a).

The multiple experiences of the ten participating Latinas highlighted a pressing research question: how can immigration and educational policies be reframed to address the simultaneous factors working against undocumented Latina youth of color, especially when it comes to changing the structures and practices that flatten intersectional lived experiences? This institutional ethnographic study makes a research call to take various social, historical, and

political processes into consideration. Approaching educational dilemmas from an intersectionality lens can support a wider range of immigrant youth while challenging white settler logics that erase immigrant young people's language and heritages (Patel, 2013a). Researchers can theorize how the school curricula, and its underlying assumptions, all learners are exposed to in the classrooms account for or fail to meet immigrants' multiple realities. In this process, researchers need to critically reflect on their fluid positionality. From a decolonizing research lens, Patel (2016) encourages scholars to challenge their assumptions about non-dominant youth throughout the research processes in conversation with multiple others, including teachers, parents, youth, and school staff. Educational scholars that include exchanges amongst multiple voices to address educational dilemmas intersectionally can visibilize structures of domination that attempt to subordinate certain immigrant groups, and at the same time illuminate spaces of resistance against dominant values, which construct alternative meanings (Collins, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Intersectional Interdisciplinary Research. The interdisciplinary scholarship should adopt an intersectional lens to unpack Latinx women's experiences of "illegality," avoiding oversimplifying the different socio-legal structures and discourses shaping what it means to be undocumented in the United States. This study showed that the ten Latina organizers' experiences were complexly woven across structures of colonial hegemony. As a result, this research pushes interdisciplinary researchers to utilize more inclusive research frames to investigate interactions of difference and identity, understanding that intersectionality can shed light on specific institutional places of vulnerability in immigrant students' experiences beyond their identities being gendered and raced. More studies like the present one can unearth the

experiences of undocumented immigrant women in the context of the school-to-prison nexus (Vaught, 2017), and the school-to-deportation pipeline (Verma et al., 2017), in which the socio-economic security of some entails the oppression of othered individuals.

Social and political changes must be theorized from the perspectives and experiences of Latinx women by addressing not just the effects of gender-based violence, but also the racist policies and practices that perpetuate violences locally and globally. Hurtado (1996) exposes feminist relationships in research processes by which white women in power can examine, yet often overlook, the intersections of “oppressive conditions they do not have to experience” (p. 129). Similarly, Collins (1998) alludes to forms of *epistemic violence* in positivist research noting that constructions of white heteropatriarchy prevail in the depiction of immigrant women’s realities across disciplines. Collins’ argument raises ethical questions concerning the nature and utilization of interdisciplinary research, and the knowledge derived from varied fields of study when addressing undocumented concerns. The incorporation of immigrant women’s subjectivities into research processes with clear social and cultural change goals can undermine racist heteropatriarchal coloniality in policy and praxis (Glenn, 2015; Tuck, 2009). Participatory Action Research (PAR) and critical Youth-PAR methodologies configure an alternative to positivist research as PAR engages with Latinx women’s perspectives about justice and immigration (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Lykes & Hershberg, In Hesse-Biber, 2012). Here, it is vital to conduct interdisciplinary research that investigates Latinas’ forms of resistance across disciplines and beyond protests, strikes, and public spaces, to also consider interpersonal and institutional domains.

By uncovering patterns of intersectional oppressions and resistance in the three institutional contexts, this study advocates for the development of intersectional interdisciplinary

studies that explore connections among structures of education, policy, and organizing in relationship to socially constructed “illegality.” Scholars are urged to theorize about the ways that citizens can meaningfully learn and unlearn from immigrant youth (including organizers and non organizers) when it comes to resistance, collaboration, and policy reform. Institutions committed to the eradication of injustice should likewise be informed by this interdisciplinary research, and seek out the collaboration and experiential knowledge of grass roots organizers throughout the research process. In this collaborative community endeavor, nativist citizenship can be debunked as power fluctuates horizontally shaping a radical theory of change, one that is rooted in local and transnational epistemologies.

Recommendations for Youth-led Organizing

This section poses two recommendations for immigrant youth-led organizing, based on the major finding of the study regarding the participating Latina youth’s knowledge and community engagements.

Multiple Voices. The Latinx women’s experiences as undocumented as well as their varied public discourses account for the need to validate multiple perspectives in youth-led organizing. In their conversations with policymakers, the women’s points of view and experiences were recurrently undervalued over young men’s. Institutionally, young women’s leadership is discouraged in schooling experiences from early ages (Muñoz, 2015). Their agency, however, represents a vital platform for cultural and social transformations, as findings from the study illustrated. Latinx women in the study interrupted patterns of racist gender violence

permeating institutions as the participants were able to critically collaborate with others, develop intersectional discourses, and impact policy development.

Challenges to the women's leadership and knowledge were more evident in the context of the state house, as legislators ignored their narratives. Youth-led organizations serving undocumented students must promote multiple voices to challenge these uneven power dynamics in policymaking. Thus, Latina leadership in youth-led social movements must be reaffirmed in the state house and in political exchanges with legislators. If legislators in state house are not going to value immigrant Latinx women's voices, then, youth-led organizations must locate spaces of resistance that uphold minoritized women's agency in this legal institutional context.

In addition, multiple spaces for critical discussions concerning gendered and raced citizenship and civic engagement should be established from the outset in youth-led organizing. This study suggests that different organizers and organizations seeking to advance immigrant justice must carefully include the too-often minoritized voices of Latina leaders, reaching out to women and men from different ethnic backgrounds, and other underrepresented groups in the process as well.

Youth organizers must undermine hegemonic power relations from an intersectional lens in their counternarratives. Adichie (2009) explains the dangers of telling a story one-sidedly.¹⁶ When only one story about undocumented Latinxs is told publicly, it is assumed to be the only one happening. As long as these organizing discourses and practices continue to oversimplify the experiences of Latinas of color who are undocumented, the global forces that hurt them will uninterruptedly continue to widen structural gaps. Focusing on a single undocumented youth narrative marginalizes people who do not fit the dominant narrative, and as a result, their

¹⁶ Reference to Adichie's Ted Talk "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009).

political power becomes contained. A plurality of immigrant youth's counternarratives in organizing arenas can instead counter normalized stories about undocumented people. These narratives should likewise aim to challenge the institutionalized construction of the term "undocumented" used to dichotomize immigrants. Through forms of *intersectional resistance* in their narratives, the young Latinas in the study challenged recurrent colonial educational and political structures, which hindered their access to material gains and political power. For instance, the participants were able to impact organizational changes during the data collection period to develop intersectional practices and paradigms of engagement within the movement.

This institutional ethnography shed light on multiple, complex organizational cultural practices disproportionately affecting women of color avoiding to fall into the binary *white* vs. *Black*, understanding how racialization stands as a fluid process intertwined with other forms of systemic subjugation. This institutional ethnography urges immigrant justice-oriented organizations (and larger institutional spaces) to engage in forms of *intersectional resistance* as a way to promote equal opportunities for women to be leaders in policymaking and larger organizing (Spade, 2013). Learning how to become an organizer from an intersectional lens would entail more than leading community outreach, but bringing the knowledge back to the community. In fact, it should be the community itself that evaluates the resources available or what is described as "building power with instead of power over" (Lykes & Hershberg. In Hesse-Biber, 2012).

In addition, male organizers need to challenge their socialized behavior by questioning oppressive cultural practices and their male authority, while taking responsibility for their trespasses. For instance, the Latino organizers that undermined the women's leadership in the movement, or young men who sexually harassed the Latina participants must be held

accountable by multiple agents, not just by the women, and engage in collective practices of reparation and conscientization. Within the movement first, intersectional anti-discrimination actions need to be advanced to challenge larger racist heteropatriarchal practices through an examination of masculine tendencies that perpetuate oppression towards organizers from minoritized social locations. It should be noted that women can perpetuate racist heteropatriarchal violence as well; thus, their assumptions and impact on women of color should be similarly exposed.

In youth-led community organizing arenas, there cannot be merely one-dimensional space to theorize about social change, but instead, there should appear different spaces where to tackle organizers' multiple skills, needs, and perspectives including issues around sexual harassment, which Latina leaders from different social locations faced in the case of this study. In addition, there should be spaces where young women can speak up against injustice on their own behalf. All in all, immigrant women's leadership should be equally valued, promoted, and their accomplishments institutionally validated (Coe et al., 2013). As the women transition into adulthood, their community engagements beyond the youth-led organization should be likewise encouraged.

Policy Advocacy Implications. In terms of policy advocacy, an individualistic approach to address intersecting vectors of "illegality" among young organizers does not suffice, since other stakeholders need to be involved in interrogating gendered and raced structures, such as immigration. This study advances multiple collaborations among teachers, researchers, policymakers, and immigrant youth to create an intersectional framework in policy development and political power. Because one overriding purpose in youth-led organizing can blur other

possible and needed goals, social movements for immigrant justice need to connect with previous and/or ongoing social movements, such as *Black Lives Matter*,¹⁷ similarly to the civil rights protests of the 1960's, and considering how all social movements are interconnected, and one cannot succeed without the other's success.

Based on findings that showed the significance of an intersectional framework in organizing, youth-led organizations should question *identity politics*, since issues of legalization and access can veil complexly woven gendered and raced hierarchies. Crenshaw (1991) undermines the notion of *identity politics* as a political strategy, and instead introduces the topic of *political intersectionality* to highlight how “women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (p. 1252). In relation to Crenshaw's critique of *identity politics*, the Latina organizers in the study had to compromise their multiple needs in favor of the larger group's, especially during conversations with policymakers and school staff. The increasing female leadership in the youth-led organization brought significant changes to its political agendas in the last months of data collection. This gender shift in the organization's leadership advanced its strategic agency and theories of change.

In this process of coming out of the shadows as women of color without papers, the participating Latinas did not only achieve self-worth and respect, but at the same time increasingly attained political power and momentum. During the *United Farm Workers* movement in the 1960's, for instance, the specific Latina workers' experiences and needs were publicly erased from the activist narrative. Their experiences of rape, sexual violence, and

¹⁷ The *Black Lives Matter* movement founded by two Black women in 2013, following the murder of Trayvon Martin, became a national coalition to challenge policy brutality and structural violence against Black people.

exploitation in the fields were often overlooked at the institutional and organizational levels. These women could not speak up nor organize at the time due to lack of legal supports. Chicana organizer Dolores Huertas, not without meeting major male resistance in and outside of the *Farm Workers'* movement, inspired Latina farmworkers to come out of the shadows, and speak up against interlocking racist heteropatriarchal violence. Although her voice has been invisibilized in society as well as in the school curricula, Huertas' conceptualization of women as the "true makers of history" shows the power of intersectionality to unveil interlocking systems of domination in policy advocacy.

There were multiple theories of change in the movement simultaneously happening towards the end of the data collection process in the study, from a focus on legislation (legal actions) and law enforcement (ICE, being vigilant), to a need for so-called *sanctuary actions*, which entailed protesting and building community by going back to grass roots organizing following intersectional frames. Related to this finding, a practical purpose of this institutional ethnography had to do with the development of a guide for young organizers to address intersections of systemic violence in organizing circles. Drawing from data across the three institutional contexts, activities about intersections of dominance and resistance were created to bring forward minoritized narratives of "illegality" in collaboration with the Latina participants. Such activities can be co-facilitated by different immigrant leaders. Humanizing and material analyses of power differentials would likewise be encouraged with the purpose of building empathy and intersectional political alliances in advocacy arenas (Spade, 2013). Training immigrant youth from varied backgrounds to become organizers needs to entail an intersectional understanding of undocumented issues. In fact, uncovering articulations among different racisms

and sexism represents more effective bases for creating cross-group alliances (Glenn, 2015) or *political intersectionality* (Spade, 2013).

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study had to do primarily with navigating the ethics of the institutional ethnographic research in institutional contexts. In interactions with the IRB, I was asked to prioritize institutional interests over those of the participating Latinas who expressed an interest on having their real names used in the study. The IRB considered that, being undocumented, the young women were at risk of compromising their safety. I was similarly concerned that this research could compromise in any way the women's circumstances as undocumented, particularly Angélica's, who could not benefit from DACA. Yet, I was also concerned that their agency to publicly state their names was not being taken into consideration. The nine DACAmented recipients in the study had already stored their personal information in governmental databases, as part of their application process to the program. In fact, most of the women had previously participated in university-based research projects, interviews for local and national newspapers, and even documentaries, which included their real names. Yet, the IRB urged me as the primary researcher to keep confidentiality. Following IRB demands, I mindfully erased personal information that could identify the ten Latina participants; and hence a part of their narratives and political power in society. Rather than a limitation of the study this erasure was an example of working within the constraints of Western objectivity and liability concerns in critical ethnographic research. I balanced these dynamics with open conversations about the IRB process with all of the Latinx women at different stages of the study. All the women had agreed to keep confidentiality by the time the study was initiated. It should be noted how they openly

disclosed to people in the community, including the university, their participation as *research subjects* in this institutional ethnography. Hence, their confidentiality was not fully maintained.

A limitation of the study had to do with being unable to devoting the same amount of time observing all of the participants in the three institutions; thus, some participants' experiences navigating "illegality" were documented more in depth than others.

In addition to being subjected to the IRB demands, this study aimed to be accountable to all of participants in the organization through short memos being shared with them after each formal observation. Despite some women not being observed at particular events, all of the participants still had an opportunity to follow the research process, as I was electronically keeping research updates and discussing future research goals with all of the women. I shared a report of the main findings of the study with all of the participants, and later with the immigrant youth-led organization both personally and via e-mail. Smith (1999) urges community researchers to be accountable to different stakeholders throughout the research process. I was committed to address multiple obligations to undocumented communities I collaborated with both during the study and afterwards. During the research process, I shared data analyses with the ten Latina participants, while being transparent about my research purposes and accomplishments. I was also supportive throughout political turmoil, such as the aftermath of Trump's election. Engaging the ten Latina participants in data analysis processes entailed sharing codes of the analyzed data, both via e-mail and in person, so that the women had agency over the data. This process also held me accountable for written representations of their different experiences and theories of change. Yet, as a limitation, I was unable to meet with all women for the same amount of time to reflect on my data analyses; hence some women had more control or say over the analyzed data than others. Some of the participants had highly hectic schedules, for

which I cannot attest they were able to read through the e-mails with research updates. As a result, the women might not have had the time to ask questions, share ideas, or challenge uneven power dynamics. I actively sought to navigate these dynamics during individual in-person meetings with the women in which we discussed the codes as well as their ideas and/or questions regarding the data. Because trust had been established between most of us prior to this research, I assumed that if some women disagreed with some of my data analyses and interpretations, they would have communicated those impressions to me. However, due to uneven power dynamics among us, I cannot fully verify this claim. During the final individual interviews, the ten Latina participants were asked about their participation in the study. The women discussed how they had shared their personal stories due to shared trust from the outset, which was critical for their participation in the study. Isaura argued: *“I participated because I knew you. You are awesome. I trust you and I don’t know if I would have said yes to anyone else.”* Trust in this study was closely connected to accountability as one of the Latina participants, Gloria, with whom I was not as close in terms of previous collaborations, explained. Gloria disclosed her interest in participating in the study articulating: *“I trusted you because I knew you knew others in the organization, and I know you are going to be bringing these ideas back to the community.”* Gloria reclaimed her ownership over the research as a central participant. Her vision regarding the utility of the research became a key tenet of accountability. The Latina organizer emphasized the need for the knowledge gathered in the study to be returned to the community. She referred to the youth-led organization and the larger undocumented organizers as the community that were holding me and the research accountable. Gloria’s words worked as a reminder of how the study did not belong to the institution, and me, exclusively. Instead, her words showed how the study was perceived as a larger grass-roots process of inquiry to advance social change.

Collaborating closely with the community demands internal grappling with issues of representation, benefits, and implications of community-based research (Tuck, 2009). As a result of the study, I was able to gain personal and institutional benefits, being able to complete my dissertation, publish related manuscripts, present central ideas at conferences, and contribute to the ongoing grass-roots theorizing about immigrant justice. The women individually benefitted from using this research to reframe the politics of undocumented organizing, come closer as Latina leaders, break silences around gendered and raced oppressions, expand their institutional networks, and collaborate in the creation of an organizing guide, which deployed intersectional frames. After the study was completed, I planned to continue collaborating with the organization, and inviting the women to co-present at conferences, co-writing articles when working on the themes of this institutional ethnography, and co-facilitating workshops. I also expressed my availability to support the organization in any action I could be of help. Our collaborations had moved beyond this research, which enhanced the process of accountability. As a community researcher, it became imperative for me to give back, as Gloria stressed, to the immigrant community that had supported my research and personal growth, and had been the most powerful leaders for immigrant justice.

Although I asked the Latinx women a few questions about uneven power dynamics throughout the institutional ethnographic research, none of the participants shared concerns regarding tensions or inaccurate themes from the analyzed data. Yet, as a limitation of the study, it might be challenging for the participants to convey issues when trust has been established through organizing. Some of the participants were interested in discussing how my positionality as white and documented represented a barrier to analyze their complex realities of “illegality.”

Hence, they underlined the need for collaboration, and showed appreciation for the questions about power imbalances and institutional biases throughout the research.

Furthermore, I decided to make changes to my methodology to exclude interview data from three Latino men who were originally configured as secondary participants, and hence interviewed twice (at the beginning and at the end of the data collection). While I originally aimed to analyze Latino organizers' experiences of "illegality" to unravel their points of view regarding racist heteropatriarchy, I later chose to focus on analyzing the ten Latinas' experiences as undocumented from their own perspectives, not from the men's, which created an atmosphere in which the participating Latinas could feel knowledgeable and unquestioned by not being compared to men's views and experiences. This methodological shift not to include the men as participants was also a concern that emanated from some of the Latina participants who wanted to avoid tensions among different organizers in the organization, and the larger DREAM Act movement. I had also discussed with my committee an interest in including men as participants in the study to juxtapose experiences of "illegality," and understand the men's perspectives about gendered and raced oppressions across institutions. Once I started to analyze the initially gathered interview and observation data, and shared some of the codes with the Latina participants, my committee noted how the women's experiences were being related to men's very frequently, rather than understanding women from their own points of view. For all of these reasons, I decided to adjust my methodology to exclude the men's interview data from the study, and to slightly modify my semi-structured research sub-questions in ways that did not solely tackle differences/connections between women and men focusing on gendered dynamics, but instead grappled with women's experiences as standing alone; in other words, what the Latina women were by themselves and not in relation to male leaders in the immigrant youth-led

organization. I planned to use the data from the three men's set of individual interviews in future writings, as I communicated to them.

Another limitation of the study had to do with the possibilities of operationalizing the ethnographic methods considering the immigrant youth-led organization's priorities. Since women's organizing at the time focused primarily on campaigns for in-state tuition, most of their collective actions took place in the context of the state house and the immigrant youth-led organization. Observations were chosen purposefully in the context of youth-led organizing to privilege the women's activist agendas. I did not request observations of the Latina participants as students at their respective universities, because schools did not represent their organizing focus during the data collection period. Instead, I relied on interview data to gather details regarding the ten women's schooling. I conducted observations of all the Latinas as organizers, mostly in the state house and the youth-led organization. Two ethnographic observations took place in schools (one high school and one university). Because of the different amounts of time spent at each institution, the study presented a view of the women's schooling experiences highly influenced by interview data, which allowed for the examination of the women's past and present experiences navigating high school and college. Despite the limitation of collecting observation data in schools, I decided to still include schools as a major institutional site, since I was interested in how the women made sense of their experiences as both students and organizers. The two ethnographic observations in schools revealed interlocking challenges to the participants' leadership and schooling. In this context, I was still able to observe the Latina participants interact with other youth, teachers, counselors, and other school staff.

Another limitation of the study had to do with my positionality as an *insider/outsider* representing a strength and a liability. As previously noted, I had previously established different

levels of trust with the Latinx organizers in the immigrant youth-led organization as a supporter before the research. However, I was not undocumented; thus, I lacked the understanding of structural and cultural factors interconnecting racism, sexism, capitalism, and colonialism. I actively engaged in reflexivity individually and collectively throughout the research process addressing *insider/outsider* roles across the three institutions, particularly in relationship to my larger organizing and research within the context of the immigrant youth-led organization. My social location as a light-skinned, cisgender Latina who was trained institutionally to interpret reality from the point of view of the dominant Western culture might have brought into my analyses unanticipated biases. I actively sought to interrogate these biases by engaging in critical conversations about power with the Latina participants (both individually and collectively). I challenged my positionality in person by sharing analytic observations, codes, and a final report of findings with the participants. In addition, I engaged in reflexivity about uneven power dynamics in the research with friends, faculty, and other mentors. Yet, I was concerned my reflexivity endeavours were insufficient, and that experiences I chose to emphasize from an intersectional theoretical lens, and the experiences that I kept out of the findings, might have not fully captured the complexity of the ten Latina participants' experiences as undocumented. For instance, two of the Latina participants self-identified as Queer, but this study did not delve into intersections of sexuality and status. I struggled not to collapse women's identities into binaries of *white* and *Black*, obscuring the fluidity of the women's multiple and shifting locations, when grappling with racial differences among the three light-skinned Latinas and the seven Latinas of color. This issue was not a limitation of intersectionality theory, but rather a limitation of how I used the framework, and what I might have overlooked in its potential benefits.

Final Remarks

The border crisis in the United States mirrors the journeys of millions of refugee women and children who flee violence in the Middle East and across the Mediterranean Sea into Europe. One cannot other these realities when benefitting from global economic relationships between Western nations and the Global South. In this regard, the white heteropatriarchal constructions of the border function as a political territory (Negrón-Gonzales, 2015b). The United States' foreign policies as well as other European nations' have led to millions of deaths, and the ongoing struggles of children, women, and men on the move (Parra, 2015). The increasing militarization of the U.S.-Mexican border exposes interlocking forms of violence using women's bodies as disposable. This study was concluded during the time a young Indigenous woman from Guatemala was assassinated crossing the border by a border patrol agent, despite the woman being unarmed. At the same time, children were being separated from their parents in the border, and all of them were victimized in detention centers. This research honors the lives, strengths, and sacrifices of immigrant populations. By doing so, this study condemns racist heteropatriarchal violence directed towards the most vulnerable human beings without holding the state and its perpetrators accountable for human rights violations.

This institutional ethnography elucidates how immigration systems configure a nexus with larger systems of heteropatriarchal violence operationalized in societal spaces and cultural practices, which still permeate policy, teaching, research, and organizing. As this study revealed, it is impossible to talk about gender, race, and immigration without talking about women's relationship to land, a key resource in white settler colonialism (Glenn, 2015). Because settler colonial logics shape institutional and social arenas, including schools, workplace, and homes, it becomes crucial to interrupt these colonial discourses and acknowledge how immigrant women's

experiences are intertwined with our own in shared spaces or borderlands. Our knowledge is deeply shaped by a settler colonial structure, and we must actively seek to collaboratively undo its teachings, and related practices and structures.

This institutional ethnography made use of the ten Latinx women's perspectives and experiences in order to document the women's agency to disrupt institutionalized forms of gender and racial hegemony. Findings unveiled poignant narratives of victimized self and resistance. Thus, it becomes urgent that immigration and educational policies apply a gender perspective that is inclusive of dynamics of racialized and classed systemic victimization. For instance, before a policy is implemented, an analysis should be made regarding its effects on women and men respectively. The implication of this definition is that gender and racial equity cannot be achieved if legislators fail to consider the gendered and racialized ideologies and consequences of laws. A gender and race-based reflection on power relationships can anticipate obstacles to the exercise of immigrant women's rights, and the eradication of all forms of violence against women (Beijing Platform for Action, 1995)¹⁸.

Findings from intersectional analyses of the Latina participants' varied experiences navigating "illegality" in three institutional contexts underscored the power of combining an intersectional framework and institutional ethnographic methodology to unpack differences, and thus unmask relationships of resistance and domination. The women's agency entailed a reclamation of their humanity against their subjugation as property in the United States' prison industrial complex and their low-wage and related vulnerable social locations as *forced migrants* (Ngai, 2005). The ten Latinas inserted their voices into debates over immigrant rights, and border

¹⁸ United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action*, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 27 October 1995. It can be accessed online at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3dde04324.html>

governance in order to theorize about immigration as a cultural and economic structure across the American continent. The women engaged in marches, human rights caravans, hunger strikes, and political campaigns to defend the most fundamental elements of personhood and democracy. By doing so, these Latina leaders asserted their rights in ways that directly contested supremacist citizenship as the anchor for social belonging by insisting on access to safety, livelihood, integrity, and cultural autonomy. Therefore, the participating Latinas' political engagements urged educators, policymakers, and researchers to critically examine the relationship between exclusion from citizenship and the political representations Latinas who are undocumented display through practices of transnational citizenry.

The ten Latina participants referred to this research as one of the multiple determining factors influencing their reframing of immigration narratives, knowledge co-construction, and organizing practices in and outside the immigrant youth-led organization. Towards the end of the study, these Latina leaders started to explicitly narrate intersectional stories in different institutions, as women who were originally from Latin America, and who had encountered and resisted interlocking forms of violence. This discursive shift in the politics of immigrant youth organizing entailed splitting their political energies between two or more opposing groups, which is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confronted. These differences can explain why Latino men in the movement, for instance, less frequently addressed intersectional struggles or participated in intersectional forms of resistance. Some men became supporters of intersectional causes, and some women still struggled to engage in this conversation by the end of the study. Some Latinx women reported experiences of sexual harassment or rape on both sides of the border, in contrast to men who seldom faced this violence. Similarly, the varied experiences of LGBTQ and transgender immigrants, who are at

higher risks of experiencing sexual violence, need to be addressed across institutions (Parra, 2015). The Latinx leaders' intersectional discourses accentuate the urgency of a comprehensive immigration reform that addresses institutionalized racism and sexism, while establishing a pathway for citizenship through intersectional legal frames.

The ten Latinas in the study developed an intersectional understanding of their subjectivities (how they were seen and saw themselves) as undocumented. These were not the same young women who had left their home countries to arrive in the United States. As they grew older, they looked at each other's realities with new critical eyes, developing a *conciencia mestiza*, gaining political power, becoming more open to different points of views, experiencing and making sense of what it means to be gendered and raced in global capitalist arenas, while actively seeking to debunk those systems. The women shared and sometimes exchanged memories of what it meant for them to be Latinx, imagining themselves back in their home countries, at times, a blurry space in their minds. They always followed a sense of connection to the native land, smells, and images of history. From this shared shifting understanding, they realized, as Anzaldúa articulates: "If feeling at home is denied to me then I will have to stand and claim my own space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture" (p. 76). This institutional ethnography aimed to contribute to the consolidation of immigrant Latinas' leadership, hoping to build bridges, rather than borders, in accordance with the fluid, complex realities of global economies, local cultures, and transnational citizenry. The ongoing restatement of intersectional interventions in DREAMers' organizing implores imagining ways of life that can ultimately eradicate heteropatriarchal whiteness in praxis and policy; that is life without borders, life

without gender and racial violences, life without poverty and capitalism, and life without human
“illegality,” so that we can truly free ourselves by loving more complexly.

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Appendix A: Glossary

- *Capitalism*: a global economic system that has been reproduced in the sociocultural ethos of imperialist and colonial power.
- *Chicana*: a woman who was born in the United States or migrated to the United States from Mexico. A Chicana woman maintains cultural and linguistic contact with two cultures, and, at some point in her life, experiences the “crossing of borders,” as described by Anzaldúa (2012)
- *Community organizing*: a concept that describes people who are intentionally and actively part of a movement, and deeply involved in improving the conditions of marginalized communities. The Latinas in the study positioned themselves as organizers rather than activists in the organization. To privilege their choice of words, this study used the term “organizer” to describe their grass roots experiences in the context of the organization. The term “activist,” as a few participants pointed out, holds a more individualistic stance.
- *Counternarratives*: the use of grass roots stories to interrupt majoritarian deficit-informed perspectives towards racially underprivileged populations, including undocumented Latinxs.
- *Cultural practices*: the norms, both implicit and explicit, which define all levels of behavior and relationships among individuals in a particular context.
- *DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)* program in 2012: temporarily granted relief from deportation to eligible undocumented students; hence: allowing the youth to temporarily work in the United States, apply for a driver’s license, and possibly renew their DACA permit every two years. Currently rescinded under Trump’s administration.
- *DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors)*: proposed legislation in 2001 by varied organizers, which would enable eligible undocumented students to access higher education and would open pathways for citizenship.
- *Femicide*: is a political term. It encompasses more than femicide (the killing of females by males), because it holds responsible not only the male perpetrators but also the state and judicial structures that normalize misogyny.
- *Gendered and raced “illegality”*: biased legal policies and discourses that perpetuate the subordination of one sex and racial group over others.
- *Globalization*: a set of fundamentally constitutive social, cultural economic processes that promote unequal models of gendered and raced relations.
- *Heteropatriarchy*: a heterosexual male dominating system that seeks the subordination of women to men’s power.

- *Illegality*: a socially constructed term in its opposition to (white) citizenship.
- *Institutional Ethnography*: research method that allows for the exploration of social relations structured in historically marginalized people's everyday lives. Instead of solely focusing on cultural practices, as traditional ethnographic research does, an institutional ethnography focuses on analyzing institutions from the point of view of marginalized populations, like the Latinx women in the study.
- *Intersectionality*: a theoretical framework used to analyze interlocking systems of domination pertaining to gender, race, class, sexuality, status, and ableism, etc. Its focus is on systems of oppression and resistance, more than individual identities.
- *Hispanic and Latinx*: terms used interchangeably in American English, but they are not used as identical terms in this study. In 1970, the term "Hispanic" began to be used in the U.S. Census Bureau. Hispanic is the term more commonly deployed in governmental publications and reports. The gender-neutral term Latinx has been increasingly used to refer to people of Latin American descent. The Pew Hispanic Center (2009) notes that Latinxs between ages 16-25 prefer to identify themselves by their families' country of origin.
- *Latina*: a woman who was born in a Latin American country, including Mexico and the Caribbean and migrated to the United States. The Latina diaspora encompasses heterogeneous heritages and complex lived experiences.
- *Latinx*: it is a political term, the gender-neutral alternative to Latina, Latino, and Latin@. It is increasingly being used by scholars, organizers, and journalists. The term "Latinx women" was recurrently used by all of the participants, which triggered its inclusion in the study.
- *Minoritized*: groups that are socially and institutionally marginalized or "othered" along gender, race, class, sexuality, and other social locations, such as immigration status.
- *Neoliberal political agendas*: privatization of the common good, eliminating public services/responsibilities for the benefit of the status quo and the exploitation of minoritized people.
- *Political economy*: (Marxist term): institutional development in socioeconomic systems striving for control of the means of production.
- *Racialized and raced illegality*: biased legal policies and discourses that perpetuate white supremacy by ascribing negative ethnic or racial identities to peoples of color. I use the terms "raced" and "racialized" interchangeably in this study in accordance to their use in the literature.

- *Resistance*: organized efforts rooted in oppositional consciousness that seek to challenge legally established policies and the dominant order of power relations.
- *Settler colonialism*: a historical outing of native populations and expropriating their land on the grounds of race, national-origin, religion, class, dis/ability, sexuality, gender, etc.
- *Sexism*: any type of sex-based prejudice, it is typically associated with the devaluation and subordination of women to men's control.
- *Sexual abuse*: a term defined by the American Psychological Association as "an unwanted sexual activity." This concept was used in this study to refer to cases of sexual harassment, threats of sexual abuse, and rape.
- *Sexual violence*: an all-encompassing term used broadly in this study to structurally criminalize sexual harassment, rape, and sexual abuse within dominant rape cultures.
- *Social location*: a sociological concept that points at the socially constructive nature of identities in order to create hierarchies among individuals defined by their gender, race, class, ability, age, religion, sexual orientation and geographic location.
- *Social structure*: a term referring to the institutionalized allocations of power and networks, or informal and informal relationships shaped by these power differentials.
- *Structural violence*: the systematic ways in which social structures harm and pathologize socially disadvantaged groups or individuals.
- *Transnational*: extending or operating across national boundaries.
- *Transnational racist heteropatriarchal capitalism*: reference to male-dominating global economic systems anchored in historically built systems of racist gender violence.
- *Undocumented*: a dehumanizing social construct, but more apt, according to the women in the study than the derogatory term "illegal," which criminalizes immigrants lacking authorized immigration status.
- *White supremacy*: a term that explains white people's racist attitudes and underscores their privileged systemic opportunities.
- *Youth*: the American Psychological Association describes youth as young people in early or late adolescent stages of development, and who are between the ages of 17-24. The participants in this study fit this youth category, particularly as students.

Appendix B: Interview Protocols and List of Tables

Below the reader can find the interview protocols that were approved by the IRB for the development of the study. The protocol was semi-structurally followed during the research process. A list of tables relevant to the study can be found at the end of this Appendix.

Protocol for Individual Interview 1

Part 1: context

- Can you talk about where you come from and how long have you lived in the United States?
- Do you consider yourself a Latina? Why? Why not?
- Are you a DACA recipient? [If DACA applies], how has your life change with DACA?
- What does the ideal immigration and education reform look like in your opinion?
- What are your priorities as far as education and immigration reform?
- What are some of the challenges you have faced in this society, such as in school, as a Latinx young woman who is undocumented?
- Do you see yourself as an organizer contributing to policy reform? If so, can you tell me a story that will communicate what that looks like and feels like for you?

Part 2: organizing

- What brought you to the immigrant youth-led organization?
- Can you tell me a bit about what working organization means to you?
- How has the organization changed you? Can you share an example with me?
- Have you experienced any challenges? Can you share an example with me?
- How do you feel when you go to the state house? How do policy makers treat you? Are there differences and/or similarities with how they treat others? Can you share an example with me?

- What have your experiences been like going to schools to talk to teachers about the rights and needs of undocumented students? Do you have any concerns? Do you have any positive experiences? Can you share an example with me?
- What have your experiences been like in the organization's DACA clinics, camp events, and larger activities? How do other youth and organizers treat you? Do you have any concerns? Can you share an example with me?
- What are your thoughts and hopes regarding your future in the immigrant youth-led organization?

Protocol for Individual Interview 2

Part 1: questions

- How old are you at the time?
- Do you consider yourself a woman of color?
- What reasons you and your family had to cross the border and come to the U.S.?
- Despite shared experiences, do you consider that there are differences between undocumented youth who came out of the shadows and undocumented youth who haven't come out of the shadows publicly?
- What is your opinion of immigration status being the focus in youth's organizing for policy reform, prioritizing status over gender and racial issues, for instance?

Part 2: reflections on changes

- Has your immigrant status changed since our first interview? Do you consider yourself undocumented? Why? Why not?
- In what organizing endeavors have you been involved since the initial interview? How do you feel about the in-state tuition bill you are trying to pass?
- Have/has your role(s) in the organization changed?
- Have you witnessed any positive changes in the organization?
- Have you witnessed any negative changes in the organization?
- Have you seen any changes in your organizing in schools and the state house?

Part 3: reflections on power

- What drew you to participate in the study?
- What would you like to see happening as a result of the study?
- Do you have any questions about this interview and/or the study? Do you have any expectations?
- Do you have any concerns about the study that you'd want to share with me?

Part 4: sharing of themes

- *Before meeting:* E-mail the ten women individually the tape recordings and transcriptions of the first interview (to be e-mailed one week ahead for them to have enough time to read/listen to their ideas). Ask that they read/listen to the recording/transcription before coming to the final individual interview.

- *Shared analysis:*

Part 1) individual interview 2: based on the transcription, Rocío to check in with each participant to see what the women remember about the study, such as some highlights, if they want to add anything, if they thought of anything about what they had initially said, if there is something they wished they had said, or if anything has changed since the first interview.

Part 2) Rocío to ask a series of questions from the interview protocol 2. For each Latina participant, ask different clarifying questions based on the experiences/ideas previously shared during interview 1.

Part 3) Rocío to tell the women how as a researcher, she conducted the analysis of the interview data. Then, Rocío to go over main codes she found. Then, Rocío and each participant will discuss what they think regarding the themes/ideas shared in the first interview. Follow up on next steps.

Protocol for Focus Group Interview

Part 1: organizing

- What can you say about the relationships developed amongst yourselves and other youth in the organization? And between yourselves and the men connected to the organization? Can you share an example with me?
- Are there differences among you in relationship to “illegality”?
- From your varied points of view as Latinas, how have you personally influenced social change?

Part 2: institutional experiences

- How has the social construction of “illegality” influenced your lives as Latinx women? Can you provide specific examples?
- What do you think of education and immigration policies in the United States?
- From your perspective, how are immigrant Latinx women portrayed in these education and immigration policies?
- From your perspective, how are immigration and education policies gendered? And racialized? [*how do these policies perpetuate sexism and racism?*]
- Do you address gender, racial, class, and sexual orientation issues in your organizing? Can you share an example with me?
- Can you tell me of a time you perceived racial or ethnic conflicts? Any gender conflicts? How were these resolved or not? How?
- Can you tell me of a time you had to do or were asked to do something differently than other leaders?
- How do you feel other undocumented youth outside of the organization perceive you?
- How do you feel other undocumented youth inside of the organization perceive you?
- How do you perceive undocumented youth inside of the organization?
- How do you perceive undocumented youth outside of the organization?
- How do you feel policy makers you interact with perceive you? How do you perceive them?

- How do you feel teachers or school staff in schools you interact with perceive you? How do you perceive them?

Part 3: resistance

- In what ways do you resist interlocking forms of domination (gender, class, sexual orientation, race) inside of the youth-led organization? And outside of the organization? Are there differences amongst individuals?
- What are some personal strengths that you developed through your organizing? Can you provide examples with me?

Part 4: reflections and concerns about the study

- What motivated you to participate in the study on gendered and racialized “illegality” in institutional contexts?
- Do you have any concerns pertaining to power imbalances throughout this research that you would like to address or discuss together? [*you can ask me any time*]
- Have you experienced any challenges at any time during the research? Are you confused or have questions about any issues related to the study or me as the researcher that you want to address together?
- Do you have any questions about this focus group interview, the study, and/or our overall collaboration in the study?
- Are there any questions you have?
[Thank you for all your support]

List of Tables

Table 1. Research Design

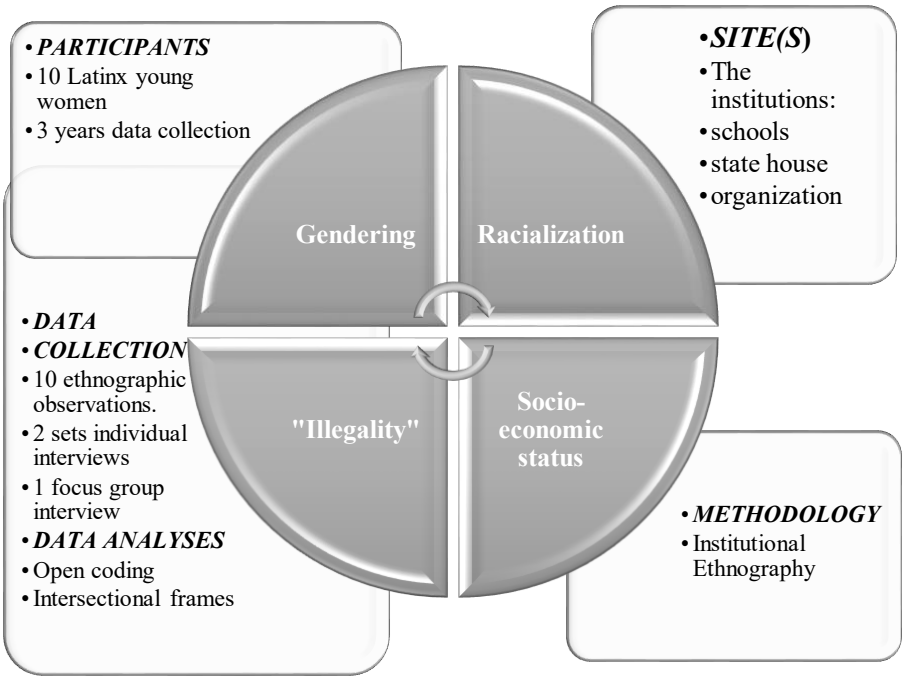


Table 2: Study Participants

NAME	AGE	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	STATUS	FIELD OF STUDY	WORK	FAMILY IN USA
1) Lola	25	Brazil	DACA	Public policy	Full time organizer	No *deported
2) Isaura	22	Dominican Republic	DACA	Business	Full time organizer	Yes
3) Esperanza	18	Brazil	DACA	Engineering/ Sociology	Part time organizer	Yes
4) Uxía	23	El Salvador	DACA	Public policy	Full time secretary at University	Yes
5) Marta	22	Colombia/Venezuela	DACA	Social work	Full time Legal services	Yes
6) Tess	20	Colombia	DACA	Psychology	Part time babysitter	Yes
7) Carmen	25	Uruguay	NO DACA initially > DACA	Nursing	Part time Health services	Yes
8) Gloria	23	México	DACA	Political Science/Education	Full time Consulate	Yes
9) Yahaira	22	México	DACA	Business/Theater	Part time Health services	No *deported
10) Angélica	18	Guatemala	NO DACA	Art/ Photography	Part time Bakery	Yes

Table 3: Data Sources

DATA TYPE	DETAILS/TIMELINE	PURPOSES
<i>2 rounds of semi-structured individual interviews</i> with the ten Latina participants (1 hour)	One semi-structured individual interview at the beginning of this research in March 2014. A second interview at the end of the research late November 2016, which was configured as a reflection on the initial interview.	The purpose of the individual interviews at different times lied in examining the ten women's experiences of "illegality" in their experiences and engagements with others overtime. Bringing the transcription of the initial interview allowed the women to have ownership over their own narratives, as an opportunity for member check.
<i>1 semi-structured Focus group interview</i> (1 hour/15 minutes)	One semi-structured focus group interview with the ten participating Latinas. One woman missed the interview. The focus group interview took place in the middle of the data collection process in the summer 2015 at an organizational site.	The purpose of the focus group was to facilitate a Latinx inquiry space where to reflect on Latinx women's experiences of gendered and racialized "illegality" and theories of change. Coming together in the focus group interview, the women were able to negotiate their experiences, risks, and compromises from their fluid social locations.
<i>10 ethnographic observations</i> of the ten Latina participants in their engagements with policy makers, teachers, and other immigrants. (Not all of the ten Latinas were in the same space at the same time). (1-2 hours each observation)	Observed the Latina participants in know-your-rights workshops on undocumented issues, which they co-facilitated with other leaders. I observed the ten Latinas in three institutions, interacting with teachers, youth, and policy makers in public arenas.	The purpose of these ten observations was to analyze gendered and racialized "illegality" practices as experienced by the ten Latina participants. The focus relied on the women's descriptions of their social conditions and organizing, examining their institutional interactions with legislators, teachers, organizers, and other youth.
<i>Document analyses</i> , including media items, such as newspapers; policy reports; and immigration and educational policy documents.	Analyzed media and policy documents influencing Latinx youth who are rendered undocumented. The women expressed a concern about the role the media played criminalizing immigrants.	These different documents were analyzed to shed a light on gendered and raced ideologies that shape policies affecting Latinx youth who are rendered undocumented. These sources revealed how narratives of "undocumented life" were socially constructed.

Table 4: Ethnographic Observations

Institution	Date	Participants	Goal of Action	Audience
1. High School	Oct 20 th , 2014	Four participants (Angélica, Uxía, Yahaira, and Esperanza)	Organization's DACA clinic	Students Principal Teachers Administrators
2. Community Center (cannot disclose name)	(cannot disclose date due to confidentiality)	Two participants (Lola and Marta)	President Obama's talk in support of Democratic candidate	Obama Democrat supporters Media Organizers (youth)
3. State house	Feb 20 th , 2015	Six participants (Tess, Marta, Yahaira, Isaura, Lola, and Carmen)	Dare to Dream action for the DREAM Act	Media Policy makers Youth Different supporters.
4. Organization's "Camp event" at a union office	April 10 th , 2015	Ten participants present at the event	DACA clinic led by organization	Youth Different supporters
5. Organization's "Congress" at a local university	May 10 th , 2015	Ten participants present at the event	Meeting with new board; in-state tuition action	Media Policy makers Youth Different supporters
6. State House	June 16 th , 2015	Seven participants (Uxía, Esperanza, Isaura, Marta, Carmen, Lola, and Tess)	In-state tuition action	Media Policy makers Youth Different supporters
7. Local College	Feb 13 th , 2016	Two participants (Uxía and Esperanza)	Talk with high school youth who participated in a <i>College Bound</i> program at college	High school youth Teachers College staff
8. State House	May 25 th , 2016	Six Latina participants (Uxía, Esperanza, Tess, Marta, Angélica, and Isaura)	In-state tuition action	Organizers Youth Different supporters Legislators
9. State House	Oct 18 th , 2016	Seven Latina participants (Uxía, Esperanza, Tess, Marta, Angélica, Isaura, and Carmen)	Anti-Trump rally	Organizers Youth Different supporters
10. Organization's fundraiser event at a local restaurant	Nov 10 th , 2016	Nine Latina participants (but Gloria).	Annual fundraiser	Organizers Youth Different supporters

Table 5: Consistent Findings Across Institutions

Sexual Violence
Gendered and Racialized Labor
DACA as a Multiple-edged Sword
“Illegality,” Intersectionality, and Latina Mental Health
Latina Leadership

Table 6: Main Findings (Schools)

Latina Dreams Deferred
Patterns of Resisted Assimilation and Intersecting Oppressions
Fears of Deportation
Gendered and Racialized Educational Outcomes
Challenges to Latina Leadership
Punishing Latina “Illegality”
Teachers’ Gendered and Racialized Biases
Gendered and Racialized “Illegality” in the School Curricula
Intersections of Peer Discrimination
Latina Resistance against Gendered and Racialized “Illegality”

Table 7: Main Findings (State House)

Latina Leadership against the Settler State House
Challenges to Latina Leadership
Compromises of Latina Organizing

Table 8: Main Findings (The Organization)

Challenges to Latina Leadership
The Development of Latina Leadership
Latina Resistance and Theories of Change

