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Documenting the Undocumented: Understanding Identity and Displacement Through U.S. Latinx Experiences

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DOCUMENTING THE UNDOCUMENTED: UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY AND DISPLACEMENT THROUGH U.S. LATINX EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Undocumented migrants are a part of our daily lives, yet we rarely hear their stories or know who they really are; the word “undocumented” can have a negative connotation both within and outside the Latinx community and is often associated with criminals and various other negative stereotypes. This study aims to understand how identity is affected by documentation status and how that affects the undocumented and documented Latinx community, the experiences of Latinx people of different documentation status with connections to illegal immigration, and how they navigate through those experiences in the United States of America knowing that they are putting themselves at risk.

There is not enough representation of undocumented Latinx people and their role in society; it is important to understand the undocumented Latinx community and give them a voice because undocumented people are one of the U.S.' backbones in cultural and socio-economic terms. This investigation will provide more insight into their experiences and the identity struggle within the Latinx context through a series of interviews and an in-depth literature review of other publications sharing undocumented Latinx individuals' oral histories. It aims to shine a positive light on the community and contribute to future research on similar topics.

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INTRODUCTION

The earliest European depictions of Latin American people were not pleasant. When we look back at the expansion of Europe that started in the fifteenth century, it is perceptible that the Europeans were not so interested in documenting history accurately but based on their impressions of their findings in America. A practical example of this is the volumes of Theodore de Bry's *America* (1590), where he illustrates the encounters with Brazil's native Tupi people based on Hans Staden's story of his encounter with them. Although de Bry had never been to Latin America, he felt he had enough knowledge to portray what he had learned about this indigenous population through Staden's representations and decided it would be appropriate to document its native people. The images are disturbing and offensive. De Bry's illustrations communicate the feeling of repugnance and horror. Much like colonial times, White people have been actively illustrating what Latinx immigrants look like through negative representations in the media, once again using the privilege they have never lost to speak over marginalized groups of people.

Understanding the Latinx experience has proven to be difficult since there is no single definitive experience. Latinx identity is still being forged (Acha, 1975); that is why it is important to hear about as many experiences as possible. In *Does Latin America Exist?*, Darcy Ribeiro speaks of the harmony and disharmony created by various ethnic groups that challenge the framework that makes up Latin America (1976). Ribeiro questions why differences among particular cultural identities are relevant if Latin Americans might not know the distinctions themselves. Guillermo Gómez-Peña talks about the different cultural landscape between Latinx people and Latin American people (1990); however, Ivo Mesquita argues that Latin Americans does not exist under a single identity (1993).

Latinx is an umbrella term that was officially put in the Miriam-Webster dictionary in September 2018. it also experienced a rise in online searches after the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, in 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2020). The term was initially created to be more inclusive of gender nonconforming folks but has adopted a more pan-ethnic meaning. According to a survey conducted in December 2019 by Pew Research Center, only 23% of U.S. adults who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino were familiar with Latinx, and 3% use it to describe themselves. Additionally, the term is more prevalent amongst predominantly English speakers or bilingual Latinx people born in the U.S. than it is with mainly Spanish Speakers or Latinx people born outside the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Terms such as Hispanic, Latino, Latin@, Latinx, and other derivatives used to label this population or labels regarding nationalities have been significant to the period in which they began and serve as historical examples of the identity struggle Latinx people have experienced in the United States. In *Finding Latinx*, Paola Ramos addresses the prolonged debate on properly addressing the community and emphasizing the story behind some of the terms. For example, Xicano or Xicana replaces Chicano/Chicana to indigenize the word and decolonize it. In contrast, Hispanic is a term that derives from "Hispania," a region in the Iberian Peninsula during the Roman Empire, and whitens the community by connecting it to its colonial history, in effect erasing African slaves, mestizos, and indigenous people (Ramos, 2020). According to Yara Simón of *Remezcla*, an influential media brand for Latino Millennials, when asking Latin American people what term defines them there will be a variety of answers: "there are some who will criticize these words for promoting a panethnic identity that erases their countries and does not necessarily result in real camaraderie among people of Latin American descent" (2018). Latinx focuses on experiences of migration and syncretism, leaving behind identity, gender, race,

nationality, sexual orientation, and other notions that have been dividing the community (Ramos, 2020).

How do factors such as ethnic labels and the struggle to find where one fits into those labels affect identity in a deeper context with the cultural diversity found in Latin America and the U.S.? The answers can be detrimental to the perception one has of themselves and others within their community. Alán Pelaez Lopez, an Afro-indigenous author and interdisciplinary artist who was undocumented for nearly seventeen years, explains how they struggled to understand how their Blackness intersected with their undocumented status. They had to understand what being Black meant in the U.S. compared to what being Black meant in Mexico and found themselves feeling excluded from art created in response to the undocumented movement since it never adequately reflected how they saw themselves (2016). Already in Latin American culture, identity is a confusing and tantalizing subject. Colonialism contributed to the long-lasting effects of colorism in the culture and has affected how identity is viewed. Black and Indigenous people are marginalized and have suffered the most even in their native countries; the apparent separation of social classes is also a consequence of colonialism that ties back to race. This study explores such themes by focusing on undocumented individuals and individuals with familial ties to illegal immigration. As someone with undocumented family members, coworkers, and classmates, representation is important to me because they are not properly acknowledged for their efforts in the U.S.. Their only reward is that they get to remain in the country because they have not been caught. This research is for people trying to gain as much insight into the community as possible, for those who are willing to listen to others and try to understand them through the experiences. It is also for undocumented folks to see themselves reflected in others' stories and see that people are willing to hear, see, and recognize them. Storytelling allows us to

gain insight into previous generations' wisdom and allows us to continue those legacies by keeping them alive. I aim to contribute to the collection of stories by sharing oral histories and retelling what has been shared with me. Access to more stories allows there to be more dialogue on the subject. When curators and students analyzing a topic unite, new generations of curators will preserve and add to these discussions (Sotheby's Institute of Art, n.d.).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United States has a long history of defining what is "American" based on European ideals, and indigenous people were the first to suffer through selfish acts of imperialism in the country. The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 caused Mexico to lose 525,000 square miles of land to the United States after the Mexican-American War; in return, Mexico received $15 million and offered the former Mexican citizens American citizenship (History.com Editors, 2020). Their history is explicitly interesting because they are a borderland community; Chicano/a's history is an example of reclaiming their past by shifting the nationalistic approach that views the white settler as a pioneer but instead focuses on subjugation and annexation (Ngai, 2014). How does a government steal land and then protect its borders from the people it once belonged to? How does a nation guard something that is not theirs initially? And how can this same exclusive society teach the convention that it is a "nation of immigrants" promoting inclusion when history proves otherwise?

According to David Gutiérrez, migration statistics between the 1840s-1900s are "notoriously inaccurate because of inconsistent enumeration techniques, changing ethnic and racial classification methods in the U.S., and the fairly constant movement of uncounted thousands of undocumented migrants into and out of U.S. territory" (n.d). Although studies have shown that the Latinx population is slowing in growth (Pew Research Center, 2020), they are the youngest demographic, with ten in six Latinx individuals being millennials or younger and one million turning eighteen every year (Ramos, 2020). However, these numbers only include those with documented status, leaving an unaccounted-for undocumented population. One in seven U.S. residents is an immigrant, one in six U.S. workers is an immigrant, while one in eight residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent (American Immigration

Council, 2020). How many of those immigrants are undocumented? The numbers differ according to the methodology used. There is also a lag within the estimates because it takes time to acquire accurate information (Kanarck and Stenglein, 2019). As mentioned previously, understanding the Latinx experience is difficult, but understanding the undocumented Latinx experience is even more challenging due to the gap in data.

Imposing pejorative labels on undocumented immigrants is not only dehumanizing but inaccurate. Calling them illegal aliens, criminals, and other terms is not representative of the community. When looking at the definition of the term "alien" in American law, it is defined as someone who is not a citizen; correspondingly, "an illegal alien is an alien who is unlawfully present or who otherwise commits a deportable offense" (Ngai, 2014). One example of this is the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act). Although it was created with the intention of serving the community, it is problematic. The label "DREAMer" is used to describe children of illegal immigrants brought to the States "unwillingly" before they had a say and deserve a chance to be active members of society. This definition criminalizes these children's parent(s), further emphasizing that illegal immigrants are selfish and a burden when they could not leave their children behind in most cases. The pre-conditions for the act were that undocumented youth had to either join the military or pursue a higher education. Previously they were allowed an option to do community service; however, that was revoked and left them with fewer pathways to citizenship (Lopez, 2016). Although this legislation brings greater social and cultural inclusion, in the end, the recipients remain without legal status. They are withheld from having life experiences indicative of adulthood, such as voting, obtaining a driver's license, becoming

employed, traveling abroad, opening a bank account, and other accomplishments that citizens often take for granted (Ngai, 2014).

Through activism, undocumented youth were able to gain access to higher education; however, the current objective for activism is immigration law reform to obtain legal status. The movement has seen exponential growth that by 2013, seventy-five state and local organizations and two nation-wide networks were formed (Ngai, 2014). Embracing a legislation such as the DREAM Act can cause more harm than good because the reasoning behind the creation of these terms is not representative of these communities' realities (Lopez, 2016). This is important to note because it is a form of oppression that is silencing the voices of these migrants by justifying their migration incorrectly when in reality, undocumented migration is a product of physical, emotional, psychological, and historical violence (Lopez, 2016). Latin Americans are not safe from discrimination in their home countries. In an article on discrimination towards Indigenous women, Luis Felipe López-Calva, the UN Assistant Secretary-General and United Nations Development Programme Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, shares a study in Mexico that reported how skin color affects inter-generational mobility in different social classes and the findings suggested that among the poorest class, upward mobility is constrained by skin color (2019). The article states that "on average, in Latin America, indigenous people report much higher rates of discrimination than non-indigenous people of all genders and ages" (López-Calva, 2019). Discrimination is not only unjust and harmful but has consequences on development. When discrimination occurs in the labor market, it limits adaptability because it inhibits certain individuals from generating income and actively contributing to growth López-Calva, 2019.

Advocating only for the youth encourages the exclusion of all undocumented migrants, which creates a barrier within the community. It is true that the DREAM Act gave the younger generation of undocumented immigrants the opportunity of participating in society more visibly, but at whose expense? Immigrants make up the fabric of our society and contribute to it, and despite the facts, they are not recognized for their efforts or properly represented to the people leaning right in existing media (Vargas, 2018). Even though information that contradicts a stereotype can be presented, it is futile to eliminate or alter stereotypes because of their establishment. Thus, continuing their purpose of dividing society. For example, Donald Trump said that Mexico was sending their worst citizens, consisting of criminals and rapists, to the U.S. when the truth behind most migrations is escaping violence and poverty. Even if stereotypes are positive, they help emphasize the negative stereotypes of other groups (Ngyuen, 2015).

Race topics are sensitive in Latin American households because of generational colorism and Latin Americans' early struggle with identity; racial mixing has also taken a toll on how Latinx culture views identity. Because of practices and the beliefs brought over from Europe, many customs and traditions have been lost, manipulated through transculturation, or added to their respective culture. Nationalism in the 1900s in places like Brazil and Mexico played its part in the pride and embracing of the diversity Latin America had to offer (Chasteen, 2016); however, Latin America has not fully embraced its nonwhite inhabitants. A racist and hostile culture, reluctant to equality between the classes and the need to fit into colonial society, grew and continued to develop since the conquest, which determined the future of Latin America's behaviors towards race, social class, etc. once the colonial period had ended (Mantilla, 2015).

In *Our America*, Jose Martí takes pride in Latin America's adversity in its lands; he exalts the people of Latin America and their diversity but critiques the systems of power in place that

allow people who lack the public's knowledge to be in charge. The lack of appropriate government reflects itself in the economy and social structure of Latin America. Martí states, "Republics have paid with oppression for their inability to recognize the true elements of their countries" (1891). When looking at other texts such as Ribeiro's, Ribeiro refers to Anglo America as "Rich" America and Latin America as "Poor" America (1976). In Latin America, a division in classes is evident; typically, the people who live in wealthier neighborhoods and have more access to education are White or have a lighter complexion, while more impoverished areas are made up of mostly Black, Indigenous, and darker toned people. As a result, classism plays a significant role in Latin American society because of the unstable political climate; their opportunities for development are limited. Because of Latin America's need to claim its place in history, its presence in the political and cultural scene is distinguished by the "urgency of its political, social and economic situations, and by some stereotypes regarding its strong and varied cultural traditions" (Mesquita, 1993).

In Latinx society, colorism is a topic that is taboo and therefore ignored by the media and society as a whole. Although there are ways in which Latin Americans praise darker and mixed skin tones, i.e., piel canela, piel morena, piel oliva, there is also a rejection behind claiming African roots. This is a product of the caste system that focused on "pedigree" in the eighteenth century to exalt Whiteness in racial mixing (Chasteen, 2016) An ongoing joke on social media and a perfect example of this is the many black Dominicans claiming they are not black but Dominican. It may be an uncomfortable conversation to have, but discussions of race should be happening more openly in Latinx homes since it is a problem that is not always addressed in school and impacts society's structure both in the U.S. and in Latin America. Not talking about such subjects can lead to harboring self-hate and causing displacement within society. That is

part of why there is very little accurate representation of the people who make up the Latinx population. We can find examples of this lack of representation in the media where most of the people represented are White Latinx and Latinx with a lighter complexion; media standards like choosing white actors can be harmful because they contribute to the notion of colorism and create dialog for racism because of media bias that can cause racial tension in society (Kulaszewicz, 2015). The lack of representation in the media and race conversations happening at home affect how Latinx youth view and identify themselves; most of the time, the race conversation is introduced to them through demographic surveys handed out in school systems. It also does not help that the history they are learning is designed to portray Western history as heroic, patriotic, and innovative; many of the atrocities that affected people of color have been altered.

While researching, I realized my own bias toward who makes up the undocumented Latinx community and how it stems from my experiences. Even though this study was done with good intentions in retelling undocumented Latinx people's stories, I wrote this thesis exercising a privilege they do not have. I realized this privilege upon reading an article on how to be a better ally to the undocumented community titled "*3 Things I Regret Not Asking From Allies and My Community As An (Un)documented and Queer Activist*" by Alan Pelaez Lopez, the artist mentioned previously who is also the creator of "latinidad is cancelled." In that article, Alan talks about how they sometimes felt uncomfortable when asked to share their story at events and felt as if they could not say no. Alan shares that they have extreme PTSD and that sharing their story has often caused them secondary trauma. They also mention that many people want to hear undocumented peoples' truths but not compensate them for their time. In this case, everyone who participated in this study gave me their consent; however, asking questions about people's

migrations stories can trigger PTSD by reminding them of their painful journeys causing them to relive traumatic events (Lopez, 2015). Latinx individuals are least likely to seek psychological help because of the stigmatized view regarding mental health that affects both the older and newer generations. According to the American Psychiatric Association, older Latinx adults and youth are more susceptible to psychological stresses associated with immigration and acculturation (2017). Religion also plays a prominent role in most Latinx households as most countries practice Christianity or Catholicism, and this influences their view of mental health. Faith and prayer can provide security and be used as a shield for mental health; however, they can also deflect the severity of the issue by claiming things such as demons and lack of faith (Mental Health America, nd). There also exists "la vergüenza". This term refers to the sense of shame spoken about in Latinx households, which mainly puts pressure on adolescents in their formative years, which should always be present in the back of the mind not to bring shame to your family. In an episode of Latinx therapy, a podcast for Latinx mental health hosted by Adriana Alejandre, a Trauma therapist, Zeahlot Lopez is invited to talk about what shame means in a Latinx household. Lopez talks about her experiences with the term and its use as a shaming tactic that did not let her fully become in tune with herself. She mentions how Brené Brown's research in shame helped her understand shame within Latinx culture and that "shame is created when we are brought down, but we don't share our story" (2018). Because of this, fewer people seek treatment, but through sharing these stories, a greater sense of community will be formed because of shared experiences (Latinx Therapy, 2018). Lopez also talks about the lack of resources and psychoeducation and Alejandre states that some families do not necessarily ignore mental health issues on purpose but rather find themselves in tight financial situations, and high worth ethic requires their full attention (Latinx Therapy, 2018). A study on the stigma behind

mental illness reported that Latinos confessed feeling shame or embarrassment about having a mental illness or alcohol abuse problem than non-Latino Whites. A considerable proportion felt that others would think differently of them if they sought treatment. Latinos also disclosed having more certainty in discussing their mental health issues with their primary care physicians (Int J Geriatric Psychiatry, 2013). In the charts shown below, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration shows the number of people with serious mental illness among young adults and depressive episodes among the Latinx community.

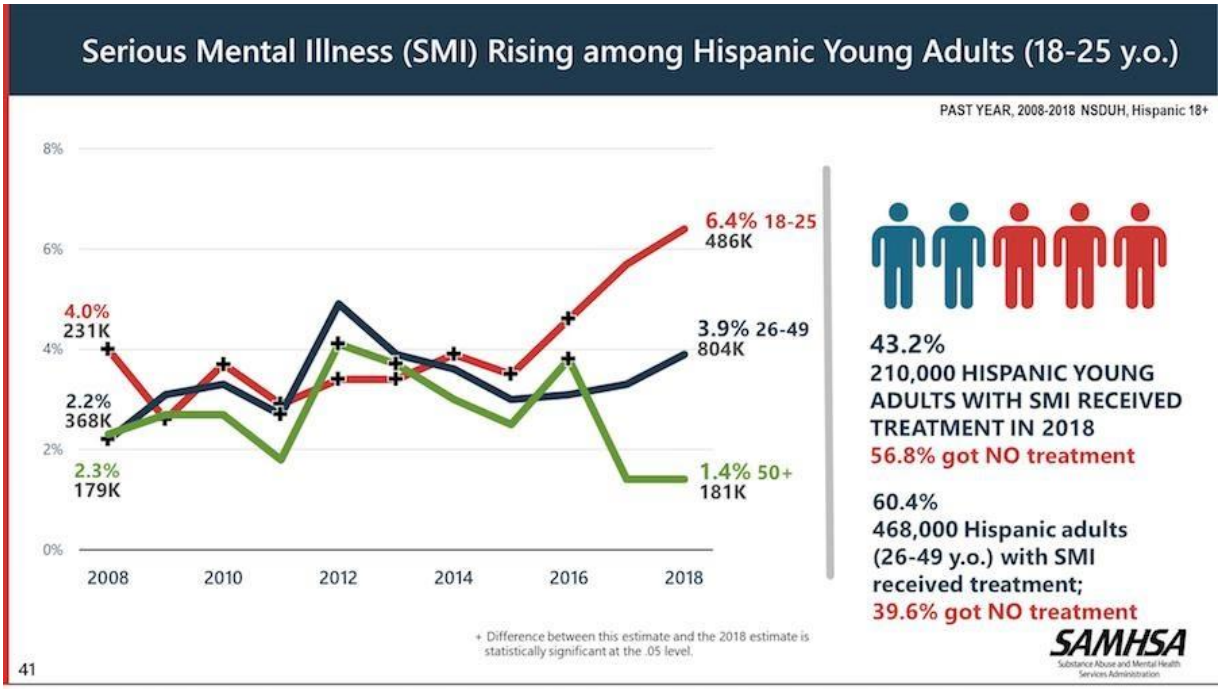

Figure 1: Serious Mental Illness (SMI) Rising among Hispanic Young Adults (18-25 y.o.)
Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Hispanics, Latino or Spanish Origin or Descent

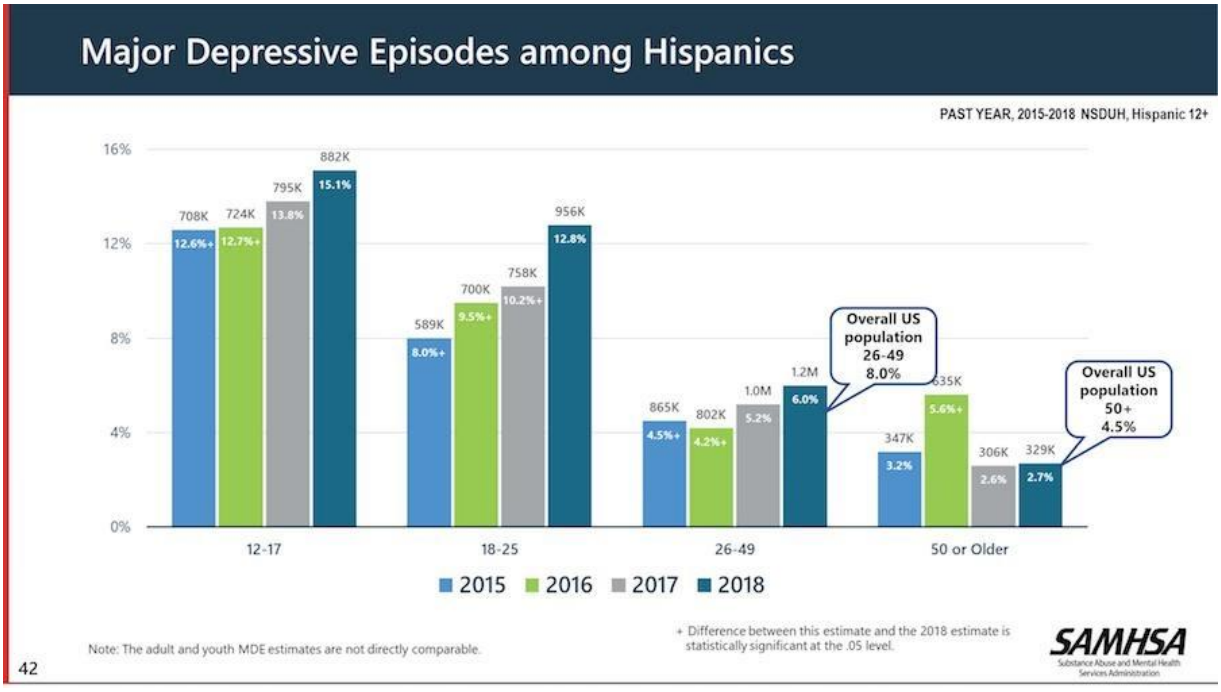

Figure 2: Major Depressive Episodes among Hispanics
Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Hispanics, Latino or Spanish Origin or Descent

THE "AMERICAN DREAM"

In Western cultural representations, Latin America is framed as folkloric, exotic, and innocent while simultaneously existing as a place of political unrest, social uprising, and economic instability (Mesquita, 1993). As an immigrant, I have always heard of "The American Dream" and how so many people, like my family, come to the United States to achieve it. This ideal is defined differently by many but draws undocumented immigrants here for the same reason; they are fleeing from poverty, institutional corruption, and abuses of the government, all of which are just a few of the problems in their native countries (Garni, 2010). Although the United States encourages the idea of a "better" life, the individuals who come to the country to pursue it have many other things to consider that worry them, such as deportation, absence of health care, amongst other things. This begs the question, who is the "American Dream" made for?

After World War II, when many Euro-Americans started to claim their identity as "American," the idea that immigrants make up an exceptional part of America's history was embraced by society (Ngai, 2014). In previous texts on Immigration history, the concept that Euro-American immigrants possess "ethnic" identities and not ones pertaining to "race" and therefore did not suffer from racism, but instead, nativism was prevalent, marginalizing race relations when referring to assimilation (Ngai, 2014). In the podcast *At a Distance*, Lizania Cruz talks about the fallacy of the American Dream and how the immigration narrative is very monolithic (2020). She mentions that there is a distinct difference between assimilation and integration. Still, because of the unwavering assertion that immigration stories are uniform, it is taught that in order for immigrants to integrate into a different culture, assimilation needs to happen; with integration, there is a way to acknowledge differences and work through that

acknowledgment (2020). Unfortunately, at the same time, the struggles of the integration process are often downplayed because another narrative that is forced about communities of immigrants is that they can handle and overcome any type of adversity. The construct that, because of America's democratic nature, the nation is entirely inclusive towards immigrants with room for them to leave behind cultural differences and assimilate proves false when we look at how categorically excluded they are from the national community (Ngai, 2014).

The knowledge we have about undocumented immigrants is limited to how much they contribute to social security and taxes. Their resolve to achieve their own "American Dream" and build a better life allows them to continue rising above the adversity presented. This notion keeps them at the forefront of the economy and many other political, economic, and social aspects. For example, through the age of social media, we have seen a flood of undocumented youth use several platforms to take political stances and unapologetically announce their legal status (Wong, Garcia, and Valdivia, 2019). Undocumented workers pay billions of dollars in sales and property tax, even if they rent, and would earn and pay more if they had some form of legal status (American Immigration Council, 2016). The Social Security Administration (2013) has also expressed that these workers' presence has positively affected the Social Security program's financial status. Mae M. Ngai (2014) notes, contradicting the idea that most of the Latinx population is undocumented, that more than half are native-born, and nearly 75 percent of them are U.S. citizens, either by native-birth or naturalization. One should ask if the United States government will ever fully support the community that is both a part of and affected by the undocumented narrative they have created?

Due to COVID-19, many amongst the Latinx community were left disillusioned. Their view of the American Dream shifted because of the tremendous financial impact it has had on

their lives and because of the government's handling of the pandemic. In two observations on the "Hispanic Paradox" written by the New York Times a decade apart, the reporters exalt the Latinx community for having the highest rate of longevity and think it is time to learn from the community. The Latinx community has demonstrated resilience in times of COVID, given that it has been one of the most impacted communities. According to the CDC, more than twice the 18 percent of its population was diagnosed with the virus (New York Times, 2020). Reporter Nicholas Kristof accredits this to their "greater 'social capital'", family bonds, home region or religion, and states they appear as models of civil society (New York Times, 2020).

The virus is also affecting the undocumented community detained in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody; the conditions in detention and processing centers are questionably severe. Now, the virus is a variable to the treatment received upon arrival to the U.S. While individuals are going through their immigration proceedings, they are unable to meet with their families. They are kept in uncomfortable conditions, such as a small immigration cell known as "the hielera" or "the cooler." Immigrants gave the cell the name because the AC is on at its coldest temperature and has caused mental and physical health problems among immigrants who live through that experience. Older immigrants often develop bone-related issues that shorten their lifespan and youth complex PTSD (Lopez, 2016). At the end of the 2020 fiscal year, CNN reported that ICE custody deaths were the highest in the last 15 years. Although ICE argues that they take the utmost precaution in assuring their detainees are safe and healthy, especially in times of COVID-19, more than a third of the people tested positive for the virus. The pandemic is not to blame for this outcome; immigration rights advocates have spoken on the deteriorating and flawed detention conditions. Silky Shah, the executive director of Detention Watch Network, told CNN that these numbers prove that this system should not exist and calls

attention to its effects on mental health and the medical neglect that takes place inside the facility (2020).

Last year, the Committee on Oversight and Reform released their findings of an investigation conducted in 2019 of the Trump Administration's mistreatment of detained immigrants. They received documents from the internal Department of Homeland Security examining detainees' death in private contractors' facilities. The Committee observed two dozen detention facilities in Arizona, California, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, and "in some cases, conditions were so poor that Committee staff warned contractor officials during their visits about deficiencies" in detainees' treatment (2020). The information the Committee obtained uncovered that immigrants face severe risks due to poor sanitation, handling of infectious diseases and revealed the failure to provide basic medical attention to detainees with severe and chronic medical conditions, along with critical medical staff shortages (2020).

John Amaya, former deputy chief of staff at ICE, talks about how the government should be more explicit about properly seeking citizenship; he also contrasts the legal way with a phrase he deems as indescribable, "the right way" of entering the United States (Immigration Nation, 2020). It is presumed that a legal approach should be taken and not one that involves sneaking in; however, even if people properly present themselves at the border, which is a legal approach to receiving legal status, the chances are they can be neglected. TRAC Immigration reports that at the end of the 2019 fiscal year, a quarter of asylum applicants waited almost 4 years, and 69 percent of asylum seekers were denied asylum or other relief; the number of rejected asylum seekers rose in the initial months of the Trump Administration (2020). In June 2018, denials began to increase after Attorney General Jeff Sessions claimed that domestic abuse victims or gang violence no longer qualified for asylum and would be denied upon arrival. Most applicants

who were not represented by an attorney and could not present a compelling case for themselves were declined faster than those with proper legal representation; these cases make up a significant proportion of the Immigration Court's workload (TRAC Immigration, 2020).

In 2017, a report by the Pew Research Center claimed that legal immigrants applying for and gaining citizenship were at its highest, and Mexicans, behind green-card holders who can apply from abroad, are least likely to be granted naturalization in comparison to other immigrant groups (Pew Research, 2017)

INTERVIEWS

The shift in beliefs surrounding the openness one should have on this topic is evident through the different generations; the Latinx community built some unspoken walls to maintain a safe space while being in the U.S. illegally. These walls are silently and rebelliously getting torn down each day. While discussing legal status is taboo amongst older generations, there has been a wave of people announcing their status on social media and using it as a platform to promote change; when did the discussion become this open? Another example is the "coming out" of undocumented youth with signs that read "undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic" at marches and acts of civil disobedience (Ngai, 2014).

The participants I interviewed all had very different responses to being asked to form a part of this study, their responses are insightful and significant to note to what each generation experiences. Cristiano, who has been here from a young age and 23 now, was excited by the idea and immediately agreed by replying with "Fuck the man!" Also age 23, Cristal, whose family is undocumented, decided to be interviewed in place of her mother, age 50, whom I had initially approached about interviewing, which she declined out of fear. Lastly, the individual who is a 30-year-old undocumented mother of two children, was thrilled to be able to contribute to my research because it gave her a sense of dignity. She believes that every story is different, important and should be told. My research will support the idea that not all the experiences of undocumented Latinx citizens are the same. Disclosing one's legal status is something that can casually be brought up when having a conversation. Yet, if you are a minority and an immigrant in the U.S., there is this self-consciousness that follows you by merely being a person of color. Unless you are White passing, there is a racial awareness that Latinx people live with whether they are documented or not. Just because there are many stories written, that should not mean

that the other stories left to write about do not matter; we should not get to make that decision when they cannot make that decision themselves. Who are we to decide that reading these stories is tiring, repetitive, or excessive? While there are millions of stories with many similarities existing, there is no conclusive migrant story.

Before each interview, the participants were given a consent form, were informed that they would be given pseudonyms, and were told that they did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. I used convenience sampling to gather participants. There were no set criteria that I was looking for in the candidates; being undocumented and willing to participate was enough. However, while looking for participants, I reflected further on how the undocumented experience involves the people around them. I thought it necessary to include how undocumented immigration affects people who have undocumented family members or friends to create a space for another perspective. I asked friends and family members if they knew of anyone who would be willing to participate in the study, and interviewed five individuals of various legal statuses; the interviews were held either by email or over the phone, depending on the participant's choice. I The purpose of this research was to study the undocumented Latinx experience from different points of view. The participants consisted of a DACA recipient, an undocumented person who has been in the United States since his infancy, a citizen whose family is undocumented, an undocumented worker who has been in the U.S. for 8 years, and an undocumented newcomer to the country with two documented young children.

I chose the questions based on what I questioned while reading previous similar works during my literature review, questions that I found relevant to the current political climate, and questions from my perspective as a documented immigrant. Because my father had lived in the U.S. illegally twice and has always shared his migration story and experience with me, I also

thought about details of his story that might be interesting to contrast with the experiences of others to ask more thoughtful questions. The questions given to the participants varied on the progression of the interview and the nature of their circumstances; the interviews were held in both English and Spanish. The purpose of the questions was to better understand the interviewees stances on socio-political subjects and who they are as people, their values, and beliefs.

Stephanie

Stephanie is a 30-year-old mother who has two children Jason and Samuel, ages 3 and 5. She fled to the United States because her partner in Honduras, Derek, was murdered upon being released from prison. Derek was not a gang member, but he was not leading a just life and was infamous in the neighborhood; he was incarcerated because he stole someone's car, and it is said that someone set him up to get caught. One night, while Stephanie was pregnant with Jason, she and Derek went with Samuel, who was 3 at the time, to pick up Stephanie's mother, Karen, in her father's taxi from the casino. Derek was driving with Stephanie in the passenger seat, and Karen and Samuel were together in the back. On the way home, crossing a bridge, they were met and blocked off by two motorcycles, one in front of the car and one in the back. The two motorcycle drivers had guns and told them to get out of the car and lay on the ground behind the car with their hands in front of them. Upon laying on the ground, Derek was shot in the head 5 times; after he was dead, one of the people sent to kill him was yelling at the other to kill Stephanie when she started begging for her life and saying she was just a passenger and not affiliated with him at all. They spared her because they believed her plea since they were in a taxi and not a regular car. After she heard them leave, she ran to the car, yelled at her mother to grab Samuel, and they ran all the way home, leaving the car and Derek behind. She met Derek while she was a

high school student, and he was 20; because she was impressionable and oblivious to his way of life, she fell in love with him and decided she would date him. They dated for a long time after she graduated; she was still unaware of his lifestyle because he hid it well, but after discovering he was a delinquent, she left him. After a few years, she dated Samuel's father for about 5 or 6 years but because he was not ready to be a father, they separated upon finding out about her pregnancy. Derek heard they separated and took the opportunity to tell her he is no longer involved in any illegal activities and begged for her to come back to him, she accepted because he continued to be her first love, and she lived with her family. He was arrested a few months after and became aware that she was pregnant with his child. She saw it as her responsibility to visit him despite his untruthfulness because she still loved him. After Derek's murder she felt hopeless, stressed, and feared for her life. She knew that things were difficult for her already and that moving to the United States would be even harder. Nonetheless, it was a decision she was willing to make. She had been to the United States previously on a visa with her parents to visit her aunt, and she would visit her sister that lived in a different state.

Samuel and Jason were born in the U.S. because she planned her visits according to her pregnancy's due date and wore bulky clothing, so she would not appear as if she were 8 months pregnant; there were no problems, and she gave birth successfully. She never thought she would move to the United States but wanted her children to be born here because she wanted them to have more opportunities in the future; they were also the driving force in her decision to move to the United States. She resolved she would travel alone to save money until she could afford to bring her children and look for a place to stay with them; she stated that, "I may not be ok, but they are, and that is all that matters to me." During her first 4 months in the United States, she

would see families and feel sad, she questioned why she was here and thought to herself: “What am I doing? Is my family taking care of my kids properly?”

Like many other undocumented immigrants, Stephanie overstayed her visa. The Department of Homeland Security reported that the U.S. Customs and Border Protection estimated 497,272 overstays in the fiscal year of 2019 (Department of Homeland Security, 2020). She is not familiar with immigration laws, but she understands why they are in place and thinks they are necessary because if not, there would be chaos. Stephanie says she does not think about other immigrants coming to the U.S. illegally, but it depends on the person's attitude. While being here, she has met undocumented immigrants that are irresponsible and do not work towards a better future, and she wishes they would be better people so that they can defy the stereotype. She also mentioned that she has encountered many immigrants with legal status and are sometimes even more racist than the White Americans she has met. She believes that being undocumented limits her voice. Still, she would be willing to participate in acts of activism if they are peaceful. Activism is important to her when she sees the possibility of change. Stephanie is grateful that some people are protesting for the undocumented immigrants in the country. The only time she has encountered the law personally was for a traffic violation; even though she has a driver’s license, she was terrified she would get deported. Thankfully, she was only given a ticket, which she had to pay at the court. This scared her because she might get caught up in something bigger by stepping into a government building. Before going, her friend explained that it was a quick process and that they do not expect much besides payment. She was relieved once she paid the ticket and is now extremely cautious while driving. Besides being at work, she does not feel like there is a role she needs to play in society. No one has asked her

about her documentation status, so no one knows she is here illegally besides her boss, who is also her friend.

One afternoon during her lunch break, a customer came in and said he had left his phone at one of the tables in the restaurant where she works. The waitress in charge of the table assured him that she did not see the phone and the other waitresses helped her look; the customer understood and left. The customer kept returning to say they lost their phone there and yelled at the waitress, accusing her of stealing his phone. Because Stephanie and two other waitresses were having lunch with her, they told the customer that they told him repeatedly that the phone was not there and that he had to leave because his behavior was inappropriate. The customer started to curse at them and threatened the waitresses for defending their coworker. The restaurant manager called the police on the customer, but the customer was gone by the time they arrived. Stephanie was scared because she was concerned that the police officers would believe the customer. After all, he was American and questioned her and the other waitress, which could lead to her getting deported. She feels threatened by the legal system because she is helpless against it. If she gets a ticket and fails to pay it due to lack of funds or any other reason, the court has her information. If she gets caught in a situation like the one she experienced at the restaurant and has no one to vouch for her, she fears being deported. Lately, she has been wanting to travel to visit the sister that lives in a different state but is afraid of getting caught for being here. She mentioned that "other people do it all the time, and nothing happens to them, but I fear the consequences too much." The hardest time she said she has gone through was her first end-of-year holidays in the United States. It was the first time that she would not spend it with her family, and in Honduras, the holidays are a major occasion, and everyone in the family spends those days together. It was also the first time she would be working on Christmas and the New

Year. She worked late hours at the restaurant, so she did not get to speak to her kids to ask about the time they had, the gifts they had received, or wish them a happy new year. When asked about the effects she thinks it will have on her children's mental health, she says that Samuel and Jason are both aware that she is undocumented, but they are too young to understand. When they first arrived, they felt sad because they could not play outside, and Jason was anxious and had trouble speaking until recently. She thinks that Jason anxiety and behavior are an effect of the trauma she experienced during her pregnancy from the incident in Honduras. He was really attached to her, and she worried it would become a problem upon entering school. Now, he communicates more, and is excited about going to school although he still has problems pronouncing certain letters. Both of her children receive excellent comments about their behavior because they are sociable, polite, and have good grades, so she is very proud of them and relieved to know that they have finally adjusted. Sometimes, Samuel will try to act up if he sees another child act that way but overall he is a very good child and understands his behavior is bad. He will also sometimes ask her when they will visit Honduras and see their family, but he does not understand that she cannot travel. Because her children are citizens, she feels life will be a lot easier for them and she hopes that they appreciate everything she has done for them in the future. “Pay attention to the things people do,” she repeats to them. She wants them to grow up without discriminating against anyone; she tells them that many people suffer coming to this country and that they have not suffered at all, so it is important to be mindful of other people and grateful for the things they have. She feels most at home when her parents visit but thinks that this is the best decision she could have made, the fear she experiences here is different than what she felt in Honduras. She lived with a sense of fear in Honduras because the country is not safe and

anything can happen to you there, but here, the only thing she has to worry about is being deported.

Stephanie's definition of the American Dream is having a better life. She thought it would be an easier life, but it is, nonetheless, a better one. She believes that anyone can achieve the American Dream because "if someone looks for something, they will find it". If someone is undocumented and wants to work, they will find somewhere willing to hire them, but if they do not put in the effort, they will not find a job and continue to struggle. The pandemic did change her view on the American Dream because even legal residents are not receiving that much support during these hard times. She does not care to receive legal documentation; owning a house and seeing that her children are successful is her dream. She is working towards it slowly and believes she will achieve it. She mentioned that she has not had it as hard as other immigrants and is grateful for everyone that has helped her along the way. She declared that contributing to the study has made her feel empowered, and it is important to hear and understand others' stories because, through them, there is an opportunity for growth and understanding. She also believes that sharing one's story as an undocumented immigrant is important because one can let go of all the anger, sadness, and resentment one might feel based on one's experience.

Cristal

When I started looking for participants, Cristal was the first person I was referred to by a friend because her mother was undocumented. Since her mother declined, I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to try and take a different approach by asking Cristal to join the study. As the daughter of someone undocumented, she could enhance my research by describing how this specific situation affected her life. Cristal was born in the U.S. and still lives with her

undocumented mother, Maria. According to the website *Define American*, more than eight million U.S. citizens live with at least one undocumented family member, and 3 million undocumented Americans live in homes their families own (n.d). Cristal's mother and father came to the United States because her uncle, her mother's brother, lived here and worked as a pilot to send money to his family in Guatemala; there were seven kids, including him. They originally came to the United States so that her uncle would not be alone. The other family she has in the United States consists of two aunts, an uncle, and a grandmother on her mother's side. Her father was undocumented, but he married a citizen. One of her aunts also married an American citizen, and her uncle, the pilot, is also a citizen though she is not sure how that happened. Cristal's mother is a white Guatemalan, so her mother did not experience discrimination in Guatemala but grew up poor. Like most Latin American countries, Guatemala's racial structure is such that white and mestizo Guatemalans have privilege over Indigenous and Black Guatemalans. Upon arriving to the United States, Maria understood immediately that having legal documentation status was important because of job opportunities. Cristal thinks it was easier for her mother in the state she lived in previously because she could have a driver's license without being a citizen and still had her passport. Once they moved, Maria's IDs slowly started to expire, and she became more undocumented. Luckily, it was not as much of an issue in the beginning because they could get an apartment while her documents were still valid. They have lived in their apartment for over 15 years, but now that her passport has expired and the embassy is shut down due to COVID, she has not been able to renew it. This means they can't get a second car they desperately need; they can't qualify for a mortgage they can afford, and Maria can no longer travel. Cristal thinks this is the push that has made Maria finally start the legal process again. Maria believes immigration laws are necessary, but she

wishes they were more equitable. In contrast, Cristal shares that her own political belief is that the laws are abhorrent. She declares, “If you look at the history of how the United States acquired land from Native Americans, it was straight up thievery, massacres, and breaking of treaties. As a result, I think the United States should not exist, much less deny citizenship to people from countries where it has actively caused the material realities that cause people to migrate in the first place. In Guatemala, for example, the United States caused a coup in 1954 that removed our second ever democratically elected leader and then continued to fund dictators, culminating in the genocide and civil war that caused many to leave, either directly due to conflict or the lack of financial opportunity.” This is one of the many military, economic and political interventions the United States has had in Central America. Another example of these interventions occurred during the Reagan era. *The Encyclopedia of U.S. Military Interventions in Latin America* explains that Honduras received a significant boost in military aid because of the United States' interest in overthrowing Nicaragua's presidency; despite political instability and the economic depression happening, Honduras remained loyal to the U.S. due to the country’s dependence on American Aid (McPherson, pg 293, 2013). Military presence continued to increase through the 1980s as Honduras became a crucial pawn in the United States' plan to get rid of Nicaraguan Sandinistas; after the regime was gone, U.S. aid dropped drastically, leaving the country with an economic crisis (McPherson, pg 293, 2013).

Maria shared that activism has impacted her tremendously, but she is not exactly an activist. Cristal says that her mother used to warn her against being too politically active because that was something that could get you hurt in Guatemala during the war. Now she is used to Cristal being involved in protests and has driven her and her sister to places to participate. Maria mentioned that she feels she needs to play the role of the citizen and seem less Latina, to not

draw suspicion to herself; it makes her feel disconnected both from here and Guatemala. Cristal shared that she is unsure if her mom feels connected to Guatemala in a political/nationalistic sense because she sees no hope for the corruption and inequality taking place there. Still, culturally she thinks Maria loves the food and has fond memories of places and geography. Cristal does not think that having an undocumented mother makes her less American because she does not feel any nationalism or patriotism towards the United States, and because she has been exposed to the anti-immigrant aspect of America through her mom. She stated that she has always been more Guatemalan than American, barring obviously being raised and encultured with "American" values. She feels disconnected from her culture because she cannot relate to the people in the United States and does not have the ability to easily visit beautiful places and eat great food like they have in Guatemala. Cristal does not personally remember when she was told about her mother's status, but it has always been something she has been aware of. Her mom is here by overstaying her visa, but her aunts, youngest uncle, and grandmother crossed the border without visas. She is unaware of the details of their journey to the U.S., but from her understanding, it was traumatic. Especially for her youngest aunt, who was a teenager at the time, and was separated from her grandmother for a month. Her aunt had to cross the desert while protecting her uncle.

Maria is constantly thinking about her legal status in the back of her mind because everything requires an ID that she does not have; she avoided getting the COVID vaccine when she first had the opportunity as a healthcare worker because of her status. Maria has no non-work friends, so she has to keep her documentation status a secret from her friends, who are also her coworkers. It is difficult because they always suggest to her to do things she is unable to, like visit her home country. She has gotten a traffic ticket before and once had a terrifying experience

where police pulled them over for an expired tag and driving without a license. The women were scared that he would ask for her papers: “it took an hour for him to let us go with a warning, but we couldn’t drive our car out of the lot, so we had to ask a coworker to pick it up”. Knowing that her mother is undocumented gives her a lot of anxiety, especially since they will submit her application this month. Cristal has also become very frustrated because they were supposed to do this over a year ago, and she had to be on top of her to do it. “I had to keep badgering her.” She understands that her mother is scared of things getting worse and changing the way things are now. However, Cristal feels that if things are getting worse, this is something that they need to do. This has become a source of minor conflict at times. When asked about the sense of security while being in the United States in contrast to that of Guatemala, Maria mentioned that she left Guatemala when there was a civil war; she was largely shielded from the violence because she lived in the capital. Cristal stated that even Guatemala today is very different than it was then, so it might not be the same as before. Regarding Maria's opinion on other Latinx immigrants, her words were, “why Cubans and not us?” Cristal personally believes it has entirely to do with U.S. foreign policy; the U.S. sees Cuba as an enemy, therefore it benefits from the image of saving Cubans. Cristal is applying her mother for citizenship through her since she is a citizen, and the attorney seems hopeful and thinks it will be a relatively easy case, but she is still afraid that someone will find her out or that she will be rejected. For Maria, the American Dream is to live in peace and freedom. Cristal, does not have an American dream. Rather she wants a decolonized America that provides for everyone regardless of citizenship status or income and strives for justice and equity. She does not think she or her mother will achieve the American Dream.

Cristiano

Cristiano is the only member of his family without legal status; all his family are residents. Before his parents officially moved to the U.S., his mother lived here while pregnant with him, and his dad was living in Ecuador. She did not want to raise him here alone, so she went back and birthed him there. Growing up, his documentation status is something he remained conscious of, but does not let it dictate how he lives his life. He says that if he had his papers, he would be involved in more trouble: "in high school I would do wild shit, but with a filter, it's always been in the back of my mind." He fell into drug addiction after graduating and has been clean for a year now. He is 23, and thanks God for getting him out of the state he was in. For as long as he can remember, soccer has been a part of his life. When he did not get the soccer scholarship he wanted, he felt that nothing mattered and quit playing; he rebelled against it by doing drugs. It made him feel in control of his decisions. There was a time when he was doing Xanax with some friends during the entire night. During this session, one of the boys also consumed alcohol, which he added was a hazardous mixture if not done often or not having a high enough tolerance. Cristiano says that he and his friends thought that the boy was experiencing an overdose, and they were scared because they had just graduated high school. They were thinking of dropping him off in front of a hospital and leaving, but thankfully the boy sobered up, and there was no need. Cristiano stated that the worse thing about doing Xanax is that you do not remember anything when you wake up. If you take enough of it, you are blacked out while you are on the drug, but you can still function as if nothing is happening. "If the cops show up, I don't know shit", he affirmed. There were times where he almost got caught. He believes God was looking out for him in many of the situations he found himself in. He talks about a house where he and a group of friends would go to. They knew the house was abandoned

because someone in the friend group knew the person that used to live there, they went there to do drugs and have fun. One day they had agreed to go to the house and meet up with another one of their friends, but after hanging out with his friends the whole day, he wanted to go home because he felt tired and said he had spent enough time with them. That night the police had shown up to the house and arrested two of his friends for possession of marijuana, and he avoided getting arrested even though he was riding with one of them because he to walked home earlier. He feels blessed. When asked about his political perspective on immigration laws, he does not really have a point of view. He says he is not that into politics and does not want to dwell too much on it because it depresses him. At the peak of the Trump administration, he would get scared because of uncertainty. He wanted to protest for the Black Lives Matter movement and Trump DACA rallies, but he decided it was better if he did not since anything could happen. As mentioned, he sometimes forgets he is undocumented because he has been in the United States all his life. He does not recall when he first realized he was undocumented; however, he remembers it was some time in middle school. All the schools he had gone to had a very small population of white kids, so it is something he never really thought about. He is more scared of something happening to his family than happening to him. His friends and loved ones know he is undocumented. Cristiano mentioned that when he has told people about his status, they think he is not undocumented and do not believe him; he does not talk about it freely, but if you really know him, you know because he will talk about it openly. He stated that he thinks about his documentation status 50 percent of the time when making big decisions, but life itself is a risk. He said he will never feel 100 percent American or Ecuadorian. Language acts as a barrier between feeling connected. He grew up speaking English, so he does not feel comfortable speaking Spanish and rarely does so with his family. His parents have always loved music and

would listen to a lot of music in English, including rock bands like Kiss. The first song he remembers listening to was "Break Free" by Queen, and says that English has always been a language he heard in his household, whether his parents spoke it or not. Since soccer has been such a large part of his life, he always roots for Ecuador in any global sporting events but never the U.S. "I wouldn't root for them even in sports," he affirmed, even though he feels more American culturally. When asked about the American Dream and if he believes he will achieve it, he responded, "Anything is possible. Anything is possible anywhere in the world, but not like America. Anything is possible here. What you dream of becoming is what you'll become. Hope is the only thing you have in life. Until I'm dead, anything is possible." He regrets nothing more than quitting soccer and thinks about the days he used to play; he wishes he was still playing on a travel team and recognizes he was a stupid teenager but believes everything happens for a reason. He is grateful he was strong enough to leave that lifestyle behind.

Hector

Hector was only 2 years old when he arrived to the United States. He thinks that just like anyone else, his parents' reason for migrating was that they imagined a better life from the life they knew. He has many family members in the U.S. Most of his adult family is undocumented, but the new generation of children are citizens. He became aware that he and his family were undocumented in the 5th grade but realized that documentation status was important around the 7th grade. His parents gave him a constant reminder; it did not affect him too much but instead motivated him to do better. He knows everything about their journey because they always tell him about it. Regarding immigrants in general, he says, "I feel just like them, I know what they're going through, and I know what it's like." The only times he really feels discriminated against is when he goes to eat somewhere expensive or goes shopping at certain stores. When

asked about his knowledge of the legal system and if he thinks that being undocumented limits his voice, he said that he knows his rights for the most part, but would like to learn as much as possible. Thankfully, he has never had any encounters with the law, but he would like to be prepared if that day were to come. He believes many things have improved; however, he still finds some of the laws unfair. He stated: "I feel like nothing has stopped me, I voice myself whenever I can whether it is online or in person. I never fear that activism would put me in a bad situation, and even if it did, it is for a good cause. I do feel like I've done a lot, but I'm definitely going to do more." The role he feels he needs to play in society is to be a hard worker. To provide his family with a better future. It positively affects him; he works hard and keeps himself busy to stay out of trouble. Because Hector is a DACA recipient, he felt the most fear when President Trump was in office because he was worried that the Trump administration would tear down everything that had to do with the act and start deporting the people. He and his family make sure to live a more careful life, they drive safe and they stay out of trouble: "I think it just leads us to have a more anxious life or a paranoid feeling. Especially when there's a cop driving behind you or something, you just feel like they're going to call I.C.E on you." In high school and now, he feels that it is unfair that he cannot go on trips out of the U.S. He does not think that his legal status makes him any less American because he was raised here: "I know English more than Spanish." His only concern is that he feels his status keeps him from really experiencing his homeland. Even though he is cultured about his heritage, he feels more American than Mexican because he has never experienced Mexico. Still, his family keeps their culture alive here in the States. They celebrate Mexican holidays and preserve traditions. Although he has never visited the country, whenever those come around, it feels like Mexico; even when his family hosts parties, they feel the same way. He connects to his culture through the music and food more than

anything. Both the music and food are outstanding: “The music you feel the passion behind it and the food you can feel the love that went into making it”. When it comes to violence, he is aware that it is more dangerous to live in his home country, so being in the U.S. provides a sense of security for him and his family: “In the States, being illegal, you really only fear getting in trouble with the law and getting deported. Either that or coming across a racist person.” Hector does not doubt that he will be able to earn his citizenship, but he knows it takes time. He wishes it did not take so long. Hectors' definition of the American Dream is being able to provide, have your family set for generations, and never worry about not having money. He does not believe his parents have achieved the American Dream in the way they want to, but all that is left in his eyes is that they receive citizenship. Hector pointed out that he felt good after completing the study and said it was nice to know that someone cared and was willing to listen.

Martin

Violence in Honduras is due to gang violence, impunity, drug trafficking, poverty, and corruption (Association for a More Just Society, 2020). Everyone is affected by violence in Honduras because it is a widespread issue and murder rates are among the highest globally (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Martin is from Honduras, and while he lived there, he worked doing maintenance for hotels and was a business owner. Around that time, delinquency was starting to rise. The reason he came to the U.S. was due to the murder of his father-in-law. Since then, more acts of violence were directed towards him and his family, such as a bomb being thrown at his brother-in-law's business. His sister-in-law was kidnapped, his brother-in-law's neighbor was murdered, and Martin and his family were threatened by the people causing these acts. They broke into his house to steal and kidnapped his daughter. The thieves asked Martin for $15,000 and left her unharmed. A few months later, she saw the thief who had kidnapped her

again on the street, and he asked her to pull over on the side of the road to which she declined and sped off. This was the breaking point in their decision to flee the country. Their family lost a family inheritance, the house, car, and business due to delinquency. There was nothing else left for them to do, so the only option he saw was to move to the United States; they sold what was left of their belongings, including a lot Martin had in another part of Honduras, and decided to leave. When Martin was living in Honduras, he had the opportunity to have a contract in the U.S. to be the Honduran representative for a Spaniard company that sold industrial washing machines since he had a specialty in electricity. He worked there for 6 years, so he already knew what working in the States would be like. Because he had a good standing economically and his own business, he and his family were approved for visas immediately, so they could travel without a problem; they had also already been to the United States for tourism, and Martin had traveled to the U.S. several times. Their visa was for 10 years, and the six of them arrived in 2013 before its expiration. At the time of travel, his youngest child was 8, and his oldest was 22; because they were older, they understood why they needed to leave and were willing to set new goals for their lives in the U.S., so their displacement did not greatly affect them. Almost all his family are United States citizens on his mother's side, but on his father's side, there are two undocumented family members.

When asked about his knowledge of immigration laws, Martin says he understands and knows the U.S. as a country characterized by its laws, so he respects them and believes that laws should be in place. He thinks undocumented people have many benefits, such as paying taxes, having access to free public education, and to medical services due to institutions that offer healthcare subscriptions. He also believes that no one can deny him the right to rent a home just because he does not have legal documentation. His encounters with the law have been when he

has been pulled over and has not had a license, and once while renewing his electrician license. During the process of renewing his electrician license, his visa was still valid, so when they asked him to present a social security number, he did; however, while he was waiting, a police officer approached him and said that the number had already been in use by someone else. The social security number was his; he did not know that he had become a victim of identity theft and was detained for a day until they could prove that the number was his. He said they took his fingerprints, but it was quick and they treated him well because, from the beginning, they believed him. Because they proved he was not falsifying documents, they assigned him a certain amount of community service hours and asked him to pay a fee. The only time he has ever feared for his well-being was in 2014, not because Obama was deporting people but because he wanted to be a contractor and he did not have documentation. It was going to be difficult to finance the business because banks run an applicants' social security and check credit when taking out a loan. At the time, business was going so well for him that he was offered a contract by a hotel chain to oversee the maintenance of every hotel in his state. Since he had experience with hotel maintenance already in Honduras, he saw this as a great opportunity. The only option he saw was to marry someone who was American to get legal status, so he retained a lawyer, found someone, and had the paperwork in order; however, his wife was unwilling to give him a divorce, and his plan fell through. He says it resulted in a waste of time and a misunderstanding between him and his wife; he intended to file for his children to receive papers after his marriage and have his oldest child file for his mother to receive them so that they could all receive legal status. Martin does not speak English, but he says that it has not affected him that much, and a great advantage is that many Americans speak Spanish in his state. He has been able to succeed because of his knowledge and experience with his work. He has had only one negative

experience while having his own limited liability company due to envy which has led him never to want to work as a contractor again. He had many employees, his contracts were always successful, and he followed all the correct procedures. In 2017, one of his contracts was suddenly terminated. He was threatened to get the police called on him by the company he was going to do a job for if he showed up at the property, and was fined $50,000 for the cancellation, which he is still paying to this day.

In regard to activism, he believes that because the United States has a good democracy. There are many opportunities for activism that are important and have made progress; he mentions rights movements for women who have been raped while serving in the army, gay rights movements, a more recent movement that is happening in the state he lives in, and the movement to protect children that travel illegally to the U.S. by themselves. He thinks activism is important and necessary and that whoever can participate in acts of activism, they should; he mentioned the United States does its part by allowing these movements and making changes. Martin talked about the change in abortion laws and same-sex marriage, which are illegal in Honduras. The Human Rights Watch reports that "Abortion is illegal in Honduras in all circumstances, including rape and incest, when a woman's life is in danger, and when the fetus will not survive outside the womb. Under the new criminal code, women and girls who terminate pregnancies can face prison sentences of up to six years. The law also sanctions abortion providers." They also report that "Several United Nations agencies working in Honduras have noted that violence against LGBT individuals forces them into 'internal displacement' or to flee in search of international protection" (2019). Martin does not have negative views on anyone in the undocumented, and the general immigrant, community because hard-working people and business owners have always surrounded him. When asked if he has ever felt as if he were in

Honduras or has been in an atmosphere that reminds him of it, he mentioned that he sometimes helps his cousin that owns a cargo company to pick up boxes from people's houses that are being sent to Honduras and sees how some people are living. Seeing how they carry themselves, their mannerisms, and the way they cook reminds him of being in Honduras; he says that sometimes people will live as if they are still there and not take care of their homes here, and thinks to himself, “these people are in the United States, but they are acting as if they are still in Honduras.” This disappoints him. He further mentioned that this is a nation of immigrants and that even a president has come from a generation of immigrants. Martin says that he has claimed government assistance only twice, and sees no reason for him to receive it. He believed that there were other people are in more need who are not employed during his time in the States. The only time he has been injured was during a job, and he was even encouraged by his boss to sue because the money would not come from his pocket but workers’ compensation and because he appreciated Martin. He did not sue because he felt no need, and he did not want to be put on a blacklist for future job opportunities. He disclosed that the only time he has felt like he has been taken advantage of is while buying a car because they always sell him faulty vehicles; he has had issues with several cars, and every time he tries to to return them, he ends up losing the money because the dealer has scammed him of the deposit. He declared that he does not really think about his documentation status when making major decisions and has had a good experience when making them. For example, when starting his own business, he thought that the bank would not be able to help him but says that the opposite happened because they oriented him in what the process would look like for him and even told him all the places he needed to visit to get started with everything. He has been able to get by using his passport to pay for tickets and

rent; he is also signed up for libraries with his address and taken GED and English courses at the community college without a problem.

Martin's definition of the American Dream is being able to have an idea and accomplish achieving it. He states that in countries like Honduras, it is hard to get ahead because if you have an idea for a business or a product, it will get rejected, copied, or it will be too expensive, so people will get easily depressed and are not able to realize their dreams. In the United States that is not a problem. Anyone can succeed if they try hard enough because there are people and companies that are willing to help you. While Martin was a contractor, he came up with an idea for a tool he felt would make life easier and jobs quicker to finish. He went to an institution to propose his idea, but they told him to make sure to copyright his idea and register the product. He asserted that the American Dream is someone having an idea and accomplishing it, whether it is a business or self-realization but seeing that it gets accomplished. Martin is still working towards the American Dream but says he still lacks motivation and enthusiasm. Despite that, he at least knows what he wants to do; he hopes that he will be able to accomplish it at any given moment. At the end of the interview, he stated that his story is one among many and that every story is different; none of them are the same. He shared the stories of 3 of his friends and said that everyone's experience is different.

RESULTS

I was particularly inspired by someone I trained while working at a restaurant; her name was Lulu. She had just come to the U.S. and only spoke Spanish. For months, we worked sharing funny stories and greetings until one day she came out to me as undocumented. I received this information with shock because I felt as if I knew so much about Lulu and even made plans to hang out outside of work. I had not known that her name was not actually Lulu and that she was not actually from Mexico but Ecuador, and that she had a son whom she could not visit and had to leave behind with his grandmother. There were so many aspects of her life I did not know that she revealed to me cautiously and trusted me enough to let me into her life a bit more. I became someone she could rely on and felt safe speaking to. I left the restaurant just a few months after she shared that with me and still communicate through social media, but that interaction was so impactful that it made me start to think about the reticence that characterizes undocumented immigrants' articulation of their experiences. I have undocumented family members and have gone through this before, but because it is something that I have kept going through, I felt a call to action. I have lived with the fear of losing loved ones because of deportation and have seen how unfairly undocumented people have been treated. These are experiences that I have lived through the lenses of my high school classmates, coworkers, and family. Many citizens do not realize that citizenship is a privilege because they are not denied housing based on proof of immigration status, can travel in and out of the country without having to worry about being allowed back in, and fearing being deported because of a call from their employer, amongst many other concerns undocumented people have (Lopez, 2016).

There were various limitations to this study, such as COVID-19 restrictions and a small sample size; nonetheless, even with recurring themes, every story was different. For example,

Martin's story and Cristiano's story share no connections besides both of them being undocumented. Being from different age groups and their circumstances plays a major role in the differences in stories. Cristiano's story of addiction and the memories he has with his friends are similar to that of any reckless teenager. In contrast, Martin's painful story of violence targeted towards his family is similar to that of many illegal immigrants fleeing their countries. All of the participants had their version of the American Dream, and the underlying meaning in all of them is that anything is possible in the United States if one wishes to accomplish it. The reason I highlighted the American Dream in each of the stories is because ultimately, it is one of the major motivations for immigrants in this country. Whether they believe in it or not, everyone has their own definition for what it means to them, and it is something immigrants will keep defining.

For many of the participants, legal status has its limitations, and it is evident that they fear having themselves or their family being deported. Yet, it does not stop them from wanting to accomplish their goals. None of the individuals in the study arrived here through a coyote, a person who is paid a large sum of money to smuggle immigrants across the border but simply overstayed their visas. In most cases, when one thinks of illegal immigration, it is common to only think of a long journey, but a lasting trend has been that most illegal immigrants arrive by plane legally (Define American, n.d). When it comes to the facts on the undocumented community, the media has not provided accurate information. Although not representative of the entire community, this study has shown Latinx individuals' experiences with different documentation statuses through different perspectives. At the end of each interview, I asked the participants how they felt. They all felt that their contribution to the study was meaningful as it provided a new perspective to the lives of undocumented Latinx individuals, added to the

experiences shared by others interested in the community, and provided a sense of dignity. I believe this research shows the diversity that can be found within Latinx identity and contributes to other undocumented individuals' already existing stories. It has allowed new voices to be heard and seen. It is understood that every individual will have different experiences navigating through life and offer a different perspective. It is imperative to document those who are facing adversity because they offer future generations hope and wisdom. It reminds them that they are not alone on their journey and that there will be many more journeys to come. I am curating these stories to make them useful to others by offering interpretive comments.

As someone with citizen privilege, I want to contribute to the storytelling aspect of immigration if I am given the opportunity. Curating stories and storytelling is important to me because it is definitive of the Latin American culture. Traditions, heritage, and culture are learned and carried on through storytelling. This study would contribute to the people seeking to learn more about the experiences of undocumented Latinx people and a community who would like to see themselves represented as more than a stereotype. The stories gathered here are only five, among countless others. I do not believe this research provided any drastic shift in belief or data; however, these stories are important because they provide non-traditional examples of experiences the Latinx community can have. Their stories help break down the stereotypes that all Latinx immigrants are either criminals or suffering, hard-working people who cross borders and live life in the shadows. My main goal was to contribute to the destigmatization of the undocumented Latinx community in academia and beyond. Future work will include a more diverse population of Latinx people such as Afro-Latinx and more Latinx members of the LGBTQ+ community. It will investigate how their experiences contribute to forming their identity in the U.S. and how that affects their perspective on citizenship. I will also study more

thoroughly how surveys on ethnicity and race given to children in public schools affect their identity and how that carries on throughout different generations. As an immigrant, I hope to share these stories as an ally to the community that has also had their experience with undocumented immigrants and immigration in the United States. As an ally who has struggled to put my thoughts into action, I hope that I can inspire other allies or even members of the community to contribute to research on this topic. Being Latinx is something I claim pridefully and hope to work towards being more inclusive.

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