



Understanding Latina/o Undocumented Parents' Engagement in Students' College Readiness: A Literature Review

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**Understanding Latina/o Undocumented Parents' Engagement in Students' College
Readiness: A Literature Review**

Qualifying Paper

Submitted by
Stephany Cuevas

March, 2016

they have no idea what it is like
to lose home at the risk of
never finding home again
have your entire life
split between two lands and
become the bridge between two countries

first generation immigrant- rupi kaur

Acknowledgements

As in everything that I do, this paper is for and thanks to my parents, my immigrant parents, who have made me who I am. *Mami y Daddito gracias por todo el amor y la motivación que me han dado en todo lo que hago. Gracias por apoyarme en mis sueños y en mis mas grandes locuras. Y por enseñarme lo importante que es soñar, amar, y confiar en el poder del amor por nuestras familias y comunidades.*

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It truly does take a village.

This work, my work, is dedicated to all the undocumented parents who risk everything they are and have to give their children a better lifestyle and to open opportunities for them.

I am because we all are.

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Abstract

It has been found that Latina/o immigrant parents set the foundation for students' higher education aspirations and achievement through moral, emotional, and logistical support (Auerbach, 2006; Hill & Torres, 2010; Zarate, Saenz, & Oseguera, 2011). Yet, this research often conflates the experiences of undocumented parents with those of documented parents. Undocumented status not only limits access to resources, but also adds a layer of distrust, discomfort, and fear of social institutions (Dreby, 2015; Enriquez, 2015; Gonzales 2010, 2011; Yoshikawa, 2011). This literature review explores the applicability of existing parental engagement frameworks to the experiences of undocumented Latina/o immigrant parents as they engage in their children's college readiness. Based on literature relevant to parental engagement in students' college readiness and sociological literature on immigration, specifically on "illegality," I argue for the need to reconceptualize parental engagement research and practice to consider that undocumented status presents a different and unique lens in which to understand immigrant parents' engagement in their children's postsecondary goals and aspirations.

Prologue

As immigrants with no papers, we thought that we had been lying to our kids. We keep telling them to do good in school, to push to go to a university, that it is for their best interest. We tell them that in the end it will all work out, that they need to have faith. But we feel bad when we tell them this because we know that without papers, they are almost nothing to this country, like us. But we still have them chasing that dream. And it hurts to give them that false hope. But now we know that they can go...it is going to continue to be hard, but if we keep pushing them, giving them the education they need and the love and support, they can do better for the family.

- Pedro, Undocumented Parent of High School Senior

As the Outreach Coordinator for the Raza Recruitment and Retention Center (RRRC) I was in charge of developing K-12 programming that would promote college knowledge and college readiness. The RRRC is a non-profit organization at the University of California, Berkeley, whose mission is to demystify the concept of higher education for Latina/o students and their families in hopes of increasing the enrollment of Latina/o students in institutions of higher education. As a first-generation Latina, daughter of Mexican immigrant parents, and Spanish language-native, engaging in this work was essential to my personal values. It was through my capacity as Coordinator that I first met Pedro.

Pedro was one of the parents who approached the RRRC asking for information to help his son get to college. Specifically, Pedro and the other parents wanted information in Spanish, as they were not comfortable with the programming their children's high school provided, since it was only provided in English. The parents explained that the school's counselors would indeed host a series of college-related workshops, covering topics such as financial aid and the different college options available to students, but that these were all held in English—at best, Spanish-speaking parents, who were the majority of the student population, were given loosely translated worksheets and were told that the school did not have enough money to hire a translator nor host separate sessions in Spanish. As such, the parents asked my organization to host a series of similar workshops, but in Spanish. The

RRRC gladly agreed and, after meeting with the parents and asking them what they wanted covered in the sessions, created a partnership with the school to provide college-related information to their Spanish-speaking families.

Discussing the content, structure, and goals of the sessions along with the parents gave me a particular insight into the way they were engaged in their children's education. Specifically, it helped me understand their college aspirations for their children. The majority, if not all of the parents I worked with were immigrants and constantly expressed their desires to have their children take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them in this country. They wanted their children to have better jobs than they did, to not have to worry about meeting ends met. For them, college offered this opportunity.

As my RRC interns and I developed the workshops along with the parents and created trusting relationships with them, many began to discuss with us the different worries they had in regards to helping their children get to college. Most noticeably, parents were concerned about the high costs of college and how they would pay for it. It was during these conversations that some parents, in a discreet matter, disclosed that they were undocumented. As Pedro's quote above exemplifies, undocumented parents like him were worried that their immigration status would somehow negatively affect their children's pursuit of higher education. Parents expressed a sense of guilt, as they believed they were not fully capable of helping their children get to college because they were limited by their immigration status.

I understood these fears. They were present in my own parents' worries about how they would put their daughters through college. They also surfaced in my work as a college advisor for students in the Oakland Unified School District. Through a growing number of such experiences I became more acutely aware of the ways in which undocumented status

not only financially limited families in the pursuit of college, but also framed the ways in which they viewed the college application experience. Parent engagement, I discovered, was a critical part of the equation if we were to move more children from mixed-status families into institutions of higher education. This notion sets the foundation for this paper.

Introduction

When first-generation Latina/o college students, children of immigrants, are asked what motivates and inspires them to pursue a college degree, students often respond that their parents shaped their postsecondary goals and aspirations. More than 77 percent of Latina/os ages 16 to 25 say their parents think going to college is the most important thing to do after high school (López, 2009). Nevertheless, only 15 percent of Latina/os ages 25-29 have earned a bachelor's degree or higher¹(Krogstad, 2015). Latina/o students often face an educational paradox: while their parents hold high academic aspirations and provide crucial support by shaping their postsecondary goals and aspirations (Auerbach, 2006; Hill & Torres, 2010; Zarate, Saenz, & Oseguera, 2011), their college enrollment and completion rates remain alarmingly low (Hill & Torres, 2010; Zarate, et al., 2011). Although there are many reasons why Latina/o students have limited access to higher education (see Portes, Salas, Baquedano-López, & Mellom, 2015; Valencia, 2011 for more), one of the relationships that is often overlooked by researchers and practitioners is the imperative role of parents in this process. Since students' lived experiences are shaped by their parents' lives, it is important to consider the situations Latina/o immigrant parents find themselves in.

¹ This proportion is significantly lower than for other ethnic groups, compared with 20% of African Americans, 40% of whites, and 60% of Asian Americans in the same age group (Krogstad, 2015).

² This research is often described as pertaining “marginalized populations” and my intention to move away from such deficit framing. Only when referencing literature that uses this term to discuss these populations as a whole, the term will be used in order to avoid a misrepresentation of the data.

Research on parental engagement has found that Latina/o immigrant parents engage in their children's education by drawing from their personal experiences, motivating their children to pursue education (Auerbach, 2006; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). While this research identifies both the obstacles Latina/o parents face when they attempt to engage in their children's education, noting that race, ethnicity, class, and immigrant generation shape these interactions, and the strengths and assets found within them, it often conflates the experiences of all Latina/o immigrant parents, including those who are undocumented with those who are.

Out of the estimated 11.1 million undocumented immigrants living in the US, it is estimated that 81 percent, or about 9 million, were born in Latin America (Passel & Cohn, 2009). When considering the experiences of Latina/os in the US, immigration status is salient to the experience of immigrant communities and in families. Constant worries of immigration raids and their consequences often shape the lives of these communities, as families often live in fear of deportations (Dreby, 2015).

Furthermore, there are an estimated 16.6 million people living in mixed-status families, or families where at least one parent is undocumented, with an estimated 4.5 million children with at least 1 undocumented parent (Dreby, 2015). This represents about 8 percent of all US children and 91 percent of these children are US citizens (Dreby, 2015). In K-12 classrooms, about 7 percent of students have one undocumented parent (Krogstad & Passel, 2015). Considering these numbers, the probability of a student being part of a mixed-status family is the same as a student belonging to a divorced household (Dreby, 2015).

Being undocumented and the repercussions that come with this identity influences parents' interactions with social structures, negotiations with and between the different cultures, and their sense of self-efficacy (Dreby, 2015; Enriquez, 2015; Gonzales, 2015).

Scholars have explained how being undocumented is a master status, where every aspect of their lives is shaped and influenced by the social and economic limits and emotional toll they experience as a consequence of their undocumented status; this status overpowers or “masters” other statuses, achievements, and identities (Gonzales, 2015). In other words, undocumented parents’ “illegality,” frames how they engage with their children’s schooling and education (De Genova, 2002; Dreby, 2015).

Existing scholarship shows that an undocumented status constrains immigrants’ access to social services and exposes them to unsafe and undesirable work conditions, how the consequences of this status are passed down from parents to children in the form of delayed early childhood development outcomes (Yoshikawa, 2011), and how it erects numerous barriers for undocumented immigrant students as they make adult and post-secondary transitions, such as limited job and college opportunities (Abrego 2006, 2008; Gonzales 2010, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011).

To date however, there is little known about how parents’ immigration status influences their engagement with their children’s higher education pursuits. When considering the engagement of undocumented Latina/o parents, an additional set of legal and socioemotional barriers compound the road to higher education. In order to begin to address the needs of Latina/o students being raised by undocumented parents and support them in their pursuit of higher education, it is important to consider the obstacles and limitations their parents face.

The goal of this literature review is to explore the applicability of existing parental engagement ideas to the experiences of undocumented Latina/o immigrant parents. Specifically, I review literature relevant to parental engagement in students’ postsecondary goals and aspirations, focusing particularly on the experiences of immigrant families and

families of color. Additionally, I examine the sociological literature on immigration, “illegality,” and the daily life experiences of undocumented people to illustrate the unique circumstances of this population. In doing so, I argue for the need to reconceptualize parental engagement research and practice to consider that undocumented status presents a different and unique lens in which to understand immigrant parents' engagement in their children's postsecondary goals and aspirations, one that has not been thoroughly explored by existing literature.

In order to meet the goals described above, this review is guided by the following questions:

1. What types of family engagement practices have been shown to be most effective in promoting Latina/o students' college readiness and matriculation to higher education?
2. What insights can we glean from other bodies of knowledge to help us understand how undocumented status might influence parental engagement practices in Latina/o students' college readiness and matriculation to higher education?
3. What are the practices unique to these families that they might draw on in supporting their children's college readiness and matriculation to higher education?

In what follows, I first present a description of this review's scope and limitations, followed by the conceptual frameworks that inform it. I then review the existing research on parental engagement in students' college readiness. I follow this with a review of how families of color, immigrant families and low-income families experience the college-going process. I then present literature concerning the particular barriers undocumented parents face due to their status. In this section, I also present literature that begins to reconceptualize parental engagement for undocumented parents. In the discussion section, I draw from the

reviewed literature to make the case that undocumented status, as a “master status” (Gonzales, 2015), should be integrated into our conception of parental engagement as it relates to the postsecondary aspirations of Latina/o students.

Notes on Terminology: Review Scope, Definitions, and Limitations

In serve to informing research and practice aimed at increasing the number of Latina/o students in higher education, this literature review asks the broad question: how are undocumented Latina/o parents engaged in shaping their children's college-seeking behaviors? In seeking an answer to this question, this review seeks to explore known parental engagement practices that support Latina/o students' college readiness and college-going processes. I purposely define “college readiness” and “college-going processes” broadly to encompass the different processes, supports, resources, and networks students encounter during all phases of higher education pursuits, from application to matriculation. These terms are used interchangeably. Additionally, since this review focuses on what parents are doing to support their children, I use the term “parental engagement” to refer to this relationship and dynamic. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that research and practice are now moving to reframe what at-home engagement entails and have moved to use the term “family engagement,” acknowledging that parents are not the only individuals that support students in their educational trajectories (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). But, due to the specific scope of this paper, I use the term parental engagement to look specifically at the parent-child relationship. In particular, I focus on the lived experiences of undocumented Latina/o immigrant parents living in the United States. Latina/os make up the majority of the undocumented population in the United States (Portes, et al., 2015). While the population's experiences are not representative of all undocumented people, focusing on undocumented Latina/o parents allows us to begin to understand how

undocumented status may influence parental engagement. Throughout this paper, the term “undocumented immigrant” will be used to refer to individuals who are living in the US without any form of legal immigration status (i.e citizenship, permanent residency, or refugee status).

For this review, I searched for scholarly articles that could inform an understanding of the experiences of undocumented Latina/o immigrant parents living in the US. The first body of literature discusses the ways parents are engaged in their children's schooling, specifically the ways that parents help prepare their children to matriculate into systems of higher education, including both 2-year and 4-year institutions. Within this body, there are subcategories of research that look specifically at the engagement of Latina/o parents, immigrant parents, parents of color, and parents of first-generation students. Due to the social location of undocumented Latina/o immigrant parents, who have similar characteristics to these populations, I draw from these subcategories to help create a narrative of how they may be engaged with their children's schooling. A second body of literature this review draws from is literature on the lived experiences of undocumented families. Since there is very limited literature on how undocumented status impacts parental engagement in education, I review literature that discusses the ways an undocumented status narrowly circumscribes legal options and everyday life, constraining decisions undocumented parents can make related to their children's education.

Conceptual And Theoretical Frameworks

Auerbach's Theory of Parent Engagement

Given the realities of contemporary migration, there is a growing need to reconceptualize current understandings of parental engagement in students' college readiness by incorporating the unique experiences of undocumented parents into existing theories.

Parent engagement theories have traditionally been derived from limited conceptions of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1977; Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Lareau, 1989). The sociological literature in this field tends to cite parental education, parental educational aspirations for their children, and parental encouragement for college as the main predictors of students' college enrollment (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). These dimensions of the parental role are often described as cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills passed from one generation to the next (Bourdieu, 1977). Accordingly, families who are unable to pass down to their children these non-financial social assets valued by schools, and who are unable to invest in the academic market, are placed at a disadvantage and their children are less likely to succeed academically (Bourdieu, 1977; MacLeod, 2009; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Coleman (1988) further expanded on this set of ideas postulating the importance of social capital to successful educational outcomes. Defining social capital as productive relationships that lead to advantageous behaviors or outcomes within a social system, Coleman reasoned that families that have well-established social networks are able to better guide their children in educational matters. Using these theories as a foundation, some parental engagement literature works under the assumption that the more educated parents are, the more likely they are going to be able to support their children in their college access aspirations (Choy, 2002; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005).

Expanding on this conception of parental engagement embedded in these traditional understandings of social and cultural capital, Auerbach (2007) introduced Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) concept of "parental role construction" to illuminate factors that lead parents to be actively engaged in their children's education. Part of their broader four-part model of parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler defined parental role

construction as parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to be doing, as parents, to support their children's education and the behaviors and actions they take in order to support these beliefs. For Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, parental role construction is the most important aspect of parental involvement in their children's education, followed by a sense of self-efficacy, child's invitations or demand for involvement, and teacher's invitations or demand for involvement.

Auerbach proposed that parental roles in education are: "(a) Socially structured by class and race but also (b) culturally mediated by particular cultural schemas and scripts as well as (c) psychosocially enacted according to individual psychosocial resources and relationships within families. (Auerbach, 2007, p. 254)" Further, she argued that parental engagement occurs at the intersection of the aforementioned dimensions, which reflect intersecting systems of structure (a social structure that tends to disadvantage low socioeconomic status (SES)/ minority students and their families, reproducing social inequality), culture (which is to be understood as a system of values and beliefs, and exists in a reality where the parents' home culture may be at odds with dominant culture norms), and agency (or parents' capacity to make change in their and their children's lives). By considering the context, consisting of structure, culture, and agency, in which parents are embedded in and how this context may impact their engagement with their children's education helps complicate what parental engagement looks like. This framing helps counter the notion that some parents may be more or less equipped to prepare their children for higher education, as it considers factors and dimensions outside parents' access to traditional understandings of capital and considers how different parents carry their own forms of capital.

Given their legal exclusion from the polity and their tendency to avoid institutions, undocumented parents are at a structural disadvantage accessing various forms of capital. Nevertheless, understanding the nuanced ways in which “illegality” frames their everyday lives becomes central to understanding how they might approach their children’s college readiness experiences.

Experiencing “Illegality”

A burgeoning line of research has moved away from the study of “illegal subjects” to focus attention on the ways in which immigration laws and practices frame the everyday lives of immigrants living in the shadows. As De Genova (2002) states, “‘Illegality’ (much like citizenship) is a juridical status that entails a social relation to the state; as such, migrant ‘illegality’ is a preeminently political identity (p.422).” Expanding on Coutin (2000), he goes on to explain that “illegality” is “an erasure of legal personhood—a space of forced invisibility, exclusion, subjugation, and repression that ‘materializes around [the undocumented] wherever they go’ (p.30) in the form of real effects ranging from hunger to unemployment (or more typically, severe exploitation) to violence to death—that is nonetheless always already confounded by their substantive social personhood (p.427).”

While immigration laws grant access to some groups, they also limit and restrict the movement of others, resulting in a hierarchy of legal immigration categories (Ngai, 2004). Legal status determines who has access to resources, goods, benefits, and rights (Chavez, 2007; De Genova, 2005). Additionally, media portrayals of the “good” and “bad” immigrants (Chavez, 2007) serve to criminalize undocumented immigrants, leading to highly punitive immigration policies, which, in turn, shape immigrants’ lived experiences and lead to systematic patterns of disadvantage (Chavez, 2007; De Genova, 2005). As Dreby (20015) states, “When the immigration system emphasizes enforcement over legalization, legal status

becomes the basis for social distinction in ways much like the effects of race, class, and generation on the lives of children and families (p. 16).” In other words, these laws also help determine how immigrants can or cannot access resources, social services, and other socializing agents that allow them to incorporate themselves into US society.

Connecting these theoretical strands together, Auerbach’s conception of parental engagement, in which she centers the importance of structure, culture, and agency, allows the consideration of the impact parents’ immigration status and “illegality” has on their engagement in their children’s education and access to capital, a lens that is often missing in this literature, as will be shown below.

Understanding the Influence of Parental Engagement on College Readiness

Parental Engagement in Student’s College Readiness

According to Paulson (1990) parental *encouragement* is a powerful intervening variable that may be more impactful to student educational outcomes than more absolute variables such as family SES or student ability. College readiness literature suggests that college-bound students and their families experience different stages when deciding to pursue college, beginning when students are in the seventh grade and ending with enrollment in an institution of higher education. As in similar models (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001; Perna, 2006), Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) propose a 3-stage process consisting of “predispositions,” “search,” and “choice”. In the predisposition stage (grades 7-9), students’ educational aspirations are developed, and early college-going plans are discussed (e.g. deciding what classes to take in high school, considering different extracurricular activities). Parental encouragement is the strongest factor in developing this early consideration of college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). The search stage (grades 10-12) consists of students developing an understanding of college requirements, interacting with

college representatives, visiting college campuses, and creating a list of the institutions they will apply to. During this stage, parents continue to encourage their children and are influential in the development of their college list, using their own college knowledge and experiences to help their children (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Finally, in the choice stage (grades 11-12), students, often along with their parents, take into consideration different factors (e.g. tuition, financial aid options, destination, intended major/career) in order to choose the institution they will attend (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

Each of the three stages presented by Cabrera & La Nasa interacts with one another in subtle and intersecting ways, with “particular and affective outcomes” that lead students to make certain decisions about their college education (p. 1). Throughout these college readiness stages, the role of parental involvement, specifically in terms of parental encouragement towards higher education remains central (Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). In this model, like in others, then, parental encouragement consists of two dimensions: motivational, when parents maintain high educational expectations for their children, and proactive, parents becoming involved in their children’s school matters, discussing college plans with their children, and saving for college.

Studies have found a strong relationship between high parent educational motivation for their children and high student achievement, aspirations, and college enrollment (Catsambis, 1998; Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Hossler et al., 1999; Paulsen, 1990). Studies have also found that students whose parents talked to them about college and future goals and encouraged them to meet their goals are more likely to enroll in college (Perna & Titus, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008; Savitz- Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). The relationship between student motivations and aspirations towards

higher education is “proportionally related to the frequency and consistency parents provide encouragement (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000, p.8).” For example, in their longitudinal study of 5,000 white and Black students in Indiana, Hossler and colleagues (1999) found that 64 percent of students with “strong encouragement” from their parents enrolled in four-year colleges after high school, while only 39 percent of those with just “encouragement” did. Similarly, Plank and Jordan (2001) found that “early and sustained discussions” about college with parents prior to senior year advantaged students to take the SAT or fill out college applications.

Parents' ability to be proactive in their children's college readiness process is closely linked to parental and familial social and cultural capital. In order to help their children reach higher education institutions, many parents depend on their own experiences, social networks, or pay for college access services to guide their children (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). High SES parents are more likely to be involved in ways that can be considered more “hands-on,” or proactive, by managing the process, including making sure they are enrolled in the required high school courses, helping students select competitive colleges to apply to, or developing savings plans for college. Hossler and colleagues (1999) propose a model of parents' role in the college enrollment processes consisting of *parent influence*, *parent encouragement*, and *parent support*. This model centers on parents' knowledge about the college process and their ability to talk to their children about this process: parent influence sends signals of parents' educational expectations for their children from an early age; parent verbal encouragement of college is important throughout high school for student achievement; and tangible parent support or action for college, such as saving money or visiting school is most important in late high school as it sends signals to students about the importance of college (Hossler et al., 1999).

Closely tied to parental SES status, throughout this literature, parents' ability to be engaged in their children's college readiness is based on the assumption that the more educated parents are, the more likely they are going to be able to support their children in their college endeavors. In other words, having college-educated parents advantages students not only through access to a higher family income and student academic aspirations and expectations, but through college-specific encouragement, direct help with the college application process, SAT/ ACT preparation, and college visits (Choy, 2002).

In the literature discussed so far, parents' ability to engage in their children's college endeavors is closely related to traditional understandings of cultural and social capital. Yet, as Auerbach points out, it is important to consider how the intersecting nature of structure, culture, and agency shape the experiences of low-income, immigrant, or non-college going parents. Since undocumented Latina/o parents are likely to share some of the characteristics of low-income parents, other parents of color, and immigrant parents, exploring the experiences of these parents and families may begin to shed light on how undocumented Latina/o parents engage with their children. The following section explores some of the barriers the aforementioned populations face and navigate when supporting their children in their college readiness processes.

The Parental Engagement of Low-Income Parents, Parents of Color, and Immigrant

Parents: A Story of Barriers & Assets

Barriers to Engagement for Low-Income Parents, Parents of Color, and Immigrant Parents

Extensive research has explored how structure, culture, and agency impact the engagement of marginalized parents², challenging the traditional models and conceptions of parental engagement, including in students' college readiness (Gandara, 1995; Hill & Torres, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; López, 2001; Moll, et al., 1992; Yosso, 2008). Like other exchanges with schools, studies have documented different barriers low-income families, families of color, and immigrant families face when they attempt to engage in their children's education (Auerbach, 2006/2007; Cabrera, & La Nasa, 2000; Perna, & Titus 2005; Savitz-Romer, 2012; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Zarate et al., 2011). These populations are also ones who are less likely to be college educated in the United States, and this can be seen as lacking the appropriate capital to support their children.

Across the literature, marginalized parents note that the primary barrier for their involvement is a lack of access to resources and information. When parents did not attend college, they lack the personal experience that their college-educated peers heavily depend on to support their children—parents are often unfamiliar with the requirements needed to apply to college, including high school courses and required examinations such as the SAT and ACT, and are unfamiliar with financial aid options, which may lead them to over or under estimate college costs (Cabrera, & La Nasa, 2000). This lack of information not only prevents parents from knowing how to proactively support their children throughout the processes outlined above, including the filling out the actual application, but may also create tensions in parent-children relationships and interactions (Perna, & Titus 2005; Zarate et al., 2011).

² This research is often described as pertaining “marginalized populations” and my intention to move away from such deficit framing. Only when referencing literature that uses this term to discuss these populations as a whole, the term will be used in order to avoid a misrepresentation of the data.

Parents who did not attend college or are unfamiliar with the application process often depend on K-12 schools to support their children throughout their college choice process (Perna, & Titus 2005). Yet, these families are also more likely to attend underresourced schools with limited access to scarce resources, including a shortage of academic and college counselors. Counselors often play an important brokering role for first-generation students, as they are able to provide students and their families the college knowledge necessary to apply and enroll (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; Savitz-Romer, 2012). When students attend schools where there is a shortage of such supports, they are placed at a disadvantage. Furthermore, studies have also found that the perceptions teachers and counselors have of students and their families impact students' access to in-school resources. For example, in his review of what he calls the "Mexican Americans don't value education" myth, Valencia (2002) found that when working with Mexican-origin students and families, educators have low academic expectations of them, limiting the support they provide to them. Valencia describes this as deficit thinking, or the idea that students, particularly low-SES students and students of color, do not perform well academically because their families have internal deficits that disrupt and/or impede the learning process (Valencia, 1997). Deficit thinking shapes low expectations of students and their families, which also translates into a lack of access to necessary college preparatory courses (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009) and resources that provide the necessary college knowledge. Studies have also documented how deficit perceptions of students and their families also influence how school personnel interact with parents, creating situations where even when parents reach out to the school for support for their children's college readiness, they may face unwelcoming, indifferent, or even hostile environments (Fordham, 1996; Gándara, 1995; Zarate et al., 2011).

Immigrant families face their own unique set of barriers. First generation immigrant parents often find themselves having to negotiate between their home country customs and values and those of the American society. Besides getting used to a new way of life when they migrate, they often have to renegotiate their relationships with their children's schools and the education system more generally, as there are often mismatches between parents and schools on values and role expectations (Hill & Torres, 2010; López, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Valencia, 2011). Furthermore, language barriers and work schedules add an additional layer of complexity for immigrant parents, as miscommunications between them and schools often occur or parents are unable to attend scheduled events due to their demanding work schedules. In their interactions with schools, immigrant parents are also often seen through a deficit lens, where teachers and schools staff sometimes perceive their culture as "backward," influencing how they interact with them (Valencia, 2009).

Similar to the parents of first-generation college-bound students,³ if immigrant parents did not complete their schooling in the US and are not familiar with college requirements, the college application and school selection process may be intimidating and overwhelming (Zarate et al., 2011). This lack of information, then, creates a process of misinformation where misperceived challenges and costs mystify the idea of higher education for parents and their children. Studies have found that this may lead immigrant families to disproportionately miscalculate higher costs of attending college than whites (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Olson & Rosenfeld, 1984; Tseng, 2004; Zarate et al., 2011). Additionally, family responsibilities and financial necessities often lead parents to question

³ "First-generation college-bound students" refers to students who are the first generation in their family to attend college in the United States.

whether college is the right choice for their children, noting that they would prefer them to work in order to help support the family (Rumbaut & Goinaz, 2010; Tseng, 2004). Taken all together, immigrant families' lack of information about college and the college process may prevent them from proactively supporting their students throughout the college going process.

While the barriers marginalized parents face as a consequence of school structures, unequal access to educational resources, and cultures that value white-middle class ways of parenting, may significantly impact their ability to engage in their children's college readiness process, this does not necessarily imply that they are not engaging in their children's education in the ways described above—the barriers they face make it more difficult for them to do so. Yet, even while facing these barriers, parents still manage to successfully support their children, using their lived experiences to motivate and encourage their children to pursue a higher education.

Navigating Barriers: Family Assets and Redefining Parental Engagement

Scholarship has pointed out that traditional sociological understandings of cultural and social capital may be limited in their ability to fully capture the experiences of low-income, immigrant, and families of color (Auerbach, 2001; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Moll, et al., 1992; Tierney, 1999; Yosso, 2008). Scholars are now moving away from implied deficit models of families who lack high-status forms of capital and re-framing the meanings of capital in the context of these families while highlighting their assets (Auerbach, 2001; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Moll, et al., 1992; Tierney, 1999; Yosso, 2008). Just as the K-12 family engagement literature has, as whole, expanded to consider the differential forms of parental and family engagement in education of low-income families, families of color, and immigrant

families (For more examples, see DeCastro & Catsambis, 2009; Epstein, et al., 2009; Moll, et al., 1992), the literature specific on parents' role in college readiness has begun to do the same. While parents may not necessarily have the college-knowledge required to help their children apply to college, they support them by discussing the importance of education and using their own lived experiences and stories of struggle to motivate their children. Within these populations, parents' role in developing their children's dreams and aspiration and providing moral support for their college readiness has been found essential for student success (Auerbach, 2006, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; López, 2001; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Zarate et al., 2011).

In order to capture the variety of responses from marginalized parents as they attempt to support their children's pathway to college, Auerbach (2007) develops a typology of parental approaches from her research on parents of first-generation college bound students: moral supporters, ambivalent companions, and struggling advocates. *Moral supporters* are parents who offer emotional and moral support to their children for college. They do this, for example, by discussing the value of education and hard work with them. While they allow their children to plot their own educational pathways, they are not passive—they create conditions to allow children room and space to be students. *Ambivalent companions* are parents who have a better understanding of the American educational system but know less about the college readiness process. They also offer emotional support, close communication, and occasional tangible help (indirect and home-based). While they are more assimilated to dominant American culture, they are also more likely to see college as a threat (risk changing the family dynamics) and they may struggle to let go of children. Finally, *struggling advocates* are parents who offer more direct support to their children, monitoring at home, and being advocates at school. They are also more likely to have college

knowledge and familiarity with the college application process due to the networks they belong to. While they are more informed than the other parents about the specifics of the process, they still face obstacles caused by their marginalized status (Auerbach, 2007).

As Auerbach's typology exemplifies, low-income, parents of color, and immigrant parents who may not have themselves experienced college or may not have the requisite college knowledge to support their children with the logistics of the college process, engage with their children in ways that help them accomplish their higher education goals. When parents are unable to personally help their children with the application process and figuring out requirements, they seek resources that will support their children. Parents reach out to schools and encourage their children to join college access programs (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Parents also engage in practices such as talking to their children about their future, sharing their own educational experiences or personal struggles, and helping them develop their student identities (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Parents may also implicitly engage in their children's college readiness by reinforcing the importance of earning good grades (even when they cannot directly help them with homework), offering them the time and space to study (e.g. assigning less chores, making study spaces, facilitating study time), scaffolding self-regulation skills (e.g. focusing, planning, organizing, and reflecting) and monitoring their school and personal behavior (Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012).

In the case of immigrant parents, studies have found that parents may use their lived experiences and stories of migration to shape their children's educational aspirations (Auerbach, 2006, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; López, 2001; Zarate et al., 2011). Parents convey to their children that they want something better for them than to struggle to sustain a family with a minimum wage job. Parents view education as a way to prevent this from happening (López, 2001). In a more indirect manner, the experiences of immigrant parents

can be a motivator for their children to pursue a higher education, in the absence of explicit communication—students interpret their parents' struggles as motivation and empowerment to their own lives, as they begin to realize they have access to opportunities their parents never had (Ceja, 2004; López, 2001).

Moreover, both immigrant parents and their children have been found to develop a specific form of consciousness that allows them to shape their environments to deal with outside pressures successfully (Ceja, 2004; Yosso, 2005). In other words, using their lived experiences, immigrant families have developed mechanisms that allow them to navigate and succeed in American society while still maintaining aspects of their home and cultural identities. For example, when looking at the parenting practices of Latina/o parents, Delgado-Gaitan (1994) found that parents rely on *consejos*⁴ to teach their children lessons based on their life experiences. Parents' *consejos* became a mechanism families used to navigate relationships with schools. Parents also set high academic expectations for their children based on these experiences by inculcating in them the importance of education, explicitly telling their children that they must do well in school in order to prevent having to experience their life struggles and barriers (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; López, 2001). Parents also couple this with the promotion of having a good *educación*, which revolves personal characteristics of being moral, responsible, respectful, and well behaved (Hill & Torres, 2010). Thus, through their use of explicit recommendations, narrative and storytelling, parents are able to cultivate a promoting environment for their children, helping develop their resilience and life and educational aspirations.

⁴ There is no direct English translation for *consejos*. Loosely translated, *consejos* are lessons learned through lived experiences that may be passed down generations.

Immigrant parents may also intentionally share their stories and experiences with their children as mechanisms of engagement. For example, when exploring parental involvement in migrant families working in California, López (2001) found that parents were intentional about the personal anecdotes they shared with their children. The parents in his study wanted to convey the importance of both hard work and education to their children, in efforts to inspire them to pursue higher education. The kind of motivation López observes is especially present in low-income and working class immigrant families who migrated to the US seeking economic and social mobility. These are the parents who are more likely to share with their children how their lives were in their home countries, the difficulties they experienced migrating, and the marginalization they sometimes experience as immigrants in the US. Suarez-Orozco (1989) explains that first-generation immigrant parents have a “dual frame of reference,” or an ability to position their previous life before migration in relation to their current life. Through this perspective, immigrant parents are able to encourage their children to take advantage of the opportunities available to them in their new nation.

Due to similarities in social positions that undocumented Latina/o parents share with immigrant parents and other parents of color, it can be hypothesized that they are engaged in their children's education in similar ways. Yet, the lack of immigration status is a unique barrier that must be taken into consideration separately, as it is highly determinative of the forms of capital undocumented immigrants have access to.

The Parental Engagement of Undocumented Parents: An Unfinished Portrait

Understanding ‘Illegality’ in Everyday Life

When considering the barriers Latina/o immigrant parents face when engaging in their children's education, immigration status plays a significant role. To date, however,

research on parental engagement as it relates to college readiness has not integrated a discussion of the impact of immigrant parents' status. As Auerbach (2007) states, "Similar to students, parents come to schools with unequal resources for pursuing educational goals and with complex raced/classed/gendered identities, cultural scripts, and family histories or dynamics that shape their relations with institutions (p.276)." Just as their racial/ ethnic and economic social locations shape their interactions with schools, it is important to consider the effects of undocumented status on these interactions. Undocumented immigrants live in a constant fear of deportation (Dreby, 2015). The ever-present threat of deportation leads them to live fearful, marginalized, and hyper vigilant lives. They may live in fear of being sent back to their home country, of being separated from their families, and of losing a financial contributor to their family unit (De Genova, 2002; Menjivar, 2011; Sigona, 2012). Due to the limitations they face as a consequence of their immigration status, undocumented parents experience and navigate structures, such as schools, differently from their documented peers, often having to limit their interactions with schools due to fears of being asked for identification documents (Dreby, 2015).

Undocumented immigrants have very limited access to social services⁵. Even though undocumented parents are eligible for social services, such as health services at local community clinics or legal consultation provided by immigration clinics, they are not likely to take advantage of these for themselves or for their children (Holmes, 2007; Menjivar, 2002; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). For example, Ortega and colleagues (2007) found lower rates of health care use and regular medical care among undocumented immigrants when

⁵ With the implementation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996, access to social services were further restricted to undocumented people—food stamps and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) were banned for most immigrants and limiting access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001).

compared to their documented peers. From their California study, undocumented Latina/o immigrants had 2.1 fewer physician visits per year when compared to their citizen counterparts. Also, overall, due to their social location, they and their social networks may just be less familiar with these resources, live in places where they are not located, and confront language barriers. Furthermore, even when they have citizen children who do qualify for services, undocumented parents are often hesitant and unwilling to access these, as they may not know about their children's eligibility or may fear that by accessing them, they may hurt their children's future (Shields & Behrman, 2004).

Just as undocumented parents are limited to other social services, they are also ineligible for government-subsidized housing. They are more likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods and to be living with other families in crowded spaces. This, then, has been found to have implications on family dynamics, as crowded spaces and limited privacy can increase parents' levels of stress and anxiety and slow children's development (Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). Studies have found that crowded housing can lead to students' lower academic achievement, raise their blood pressure, and increase their likelihood of behavioral problems at school (Evans, Lepore, Shejwal, & Palsane, 1998; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). Additionally, due to their limited job opportunities, parents are sometimes unable to provide to their children what they need in their everyday lives (e.g. appropriate meals, clothing, and school supplies). As a result, children of undocumented immigrants are more likely to experience food insecurity (Kalil & Chen, 2008), to have poor health (Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2009), and to live in less than ideal housing (McConnell & Marcelli, 2010; Painter et al., 2001).

Besides limited access to critical services, parents' undocumented status also limits their ability to enhance their children's social and cultural capital (Enriquez, 2015). Due to their fears of being apprehended by police and facing deportation, undocumented parents

are also less likely to travel beyond their home-work-school perimeters. Since they often feel restricted in the places they can travel to, undocumented parents are unable to provide their children access to developmental experiences some of their documented peers participate in such as traveling to different historical sites and learning from different museums. Traffic checkpoints also pose a barrier for undocumented parents. For example, Enriquez (2015) found that undocumented parents in her study were fearful of traveling from Los Angeles to San Diego, due to the city's close perimeter to the US-Mexico border and the heavy immigration vigilance in the area in the form of ICE checkpoints and an increased possibility of DUI stops. In her study, parents resented that their status limited access to new experiences and learning for their children.

In addition to the barriers undocumented parents face, studies have found that stress and anxiety can also be passed on to their children (Enriquez, 2015; Yoshikawa & Kholoptseva, 2013). Regardless of their immigration status, children with at least one undocumented parent must also learn to navigate this status. Parents often have conversations with their children about the possibilities of deportation and the implications this would have on their family dynamics (Dreby, 2015; Enriquez, 2015). In her study of undocumented parents with citizen children, Enriquez (2015) found that parents openly talked to their children about the threat of deportation in order to not only have a plan set for what needed to occur in case this happened, but also to ease anxieties, theirs and their children's. Furthermore, parents also reported that their children sometimes stated that they were willing to "self-deport" with their parents if needed, even though they themselves were citizens. Self-deporting themselves would further jeopardized children's wellbeing, as they would, in theory, experience the instability of moving to a whole new country (Enriquez, 2015).

When one or both parents are deported, the consequences are often disastrous for all parties involved. Since 1997, more than 4 million undocumented immigrants have been deported (Golash-Boza & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013). When parents are taken away from their families, children experience negative psychosocial effects, such as depression, anxiety, and social isolation (Yoshikawa & Kholoptseva, 2013). Their physical health also suffers, as changes in eating and sleeping patterns occur and the physical toll of stress become apparent in their appearance (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Chaudry et al., 2010; Dreby, 2012). Furthermore, children may also begin to deny their immigrant background, associating guilt and shame with the actions of their parents. This may lead to further tensions in parent-children relationships (Abrego, 2011; Enriquez, 2015).

Understanding how “illegality” plays out in the everyday lives of undocumented parents is important to understand how this status impacts structure, culture, and agency as they attempt to engage in their children’s college readiness. As mentioned elsewhere in this review, to date there is no research specifically on undocumented parental engagement in students’ college readiness. Yet, as the following section shows, there is some literature that begins to explore undocumented parents’ navigation of barriers, a navigation that may be helpful for students’ college readiness.

Reconceptualizing Parental Engagement in Student’s College Readiness to Consider Parents’ Immigration Status: Responses to Barriers

Similar to the circumstance of other populations (Dika & Singh, 2002; Jun and Colyar, 2002; Lamont & Lareau, 1998), undocumented parents may be disadvantaged in providing their children the forms of capital necessary to navigate educational systems. While the barriers undocumented parents face are significant and, as shown in the previous section, have implications for their children’s educational outcomes, undocumented parents

do support their children's education in important ways. Undocumented parents, like other populations, do, indeed, engage in practices that positively support their children's development.

Through their differential life experiences and expectations, consequence of their immigration status, undocumented parents may instill in their children important values and habits that support them in their pursuit of higher education. There is a small body of literature that begins to discuss the assets and strengths developed within mixed-status families, where parents are undocumented, which may support students' college readiness. For example in his three year study of undocumented Dominican, Mexican, and Chinese families, Yoshikawa (2011) found that some undocumented parents in his sample were able to develop their children's social and cultural capital with the assistance of their communities—when families migrated to close-knit communities, or ethnic enclaves, that were well connected with community resources (including organizations that advocated for immigrant rights) and multigenerational networks, they were able to find alternative venues to resources for their children.

Gallo and Link (2015) expand our current understanding of “funds of knowledge”, or the “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Moll, et al., 2001, p.133)” by proposing that children in mixed-status families also develop *politicized* funds of knowledge. Defining politicized funds of knowledge as “the real-world experiences, knowledges, and skills that young people deploy and develop across contexts of learning that are often positioned as taboo or unsafe to incorporate into classroom learning (Gallo & Link, 2015, p. 361),” the authors explain that for children with undocumented parents, learning to navigate their undocumented status becomes a fundamental asset. In their

ethnographic study of a mixed-status family living Pennsylvania, Gallo and Link found that a mother's engagement in community organizing and protest after her husband was apprehended by ICE helped to instill a political consciousness in her son. The authors argue that his school was not nourishing the skills and knowledge he developed in this situation, but rather they were developed within his family unit.

Academic scholarship has been slow in understanding the way that immigration status influences parents' engagement in their children's education. Yet, given demographic changes, including the growing numbers of children growing up in the United States with at least one undocumented parent, this type of research endeavor is critical for understanding both contemporary immigration *and* contemporary parental engagement. Additionally, immigration enforcement has accelerated to unprecedented levels in this current period, increasing public awareness of the number of undocumented people living in the US and their plight. Although not specific to college readiness, the findings in the Yoshikawa and Gallo and Link studies begin to allude to the ways that undocumented parents develop their own forms of capital as a consequence of their status to support their children's development.

Discussion and Future Directions

When considering how undocumented Latina/o parents are engaged in their children's college readiness it is important to understand how context—often determined by structure, culture, and agency—shapes these interactions (Auerbach, 2007). In order to respond to and account for the differential forms of engagement non-traditional, or marginalized, parents practice, parental engagement scholarship has had to redefine its theories and frameworks to account for differential experiences. Today, as this review has

highlighted, there is a need for further reconceptualization of the field in order to account for the experiences of undocumented parents.

When taken together, the literature reviewed in this paper allows us to hypothesize how undocumented Latina/o parents are engaged in their children's college readiness. Structurally, these parents are often disadvantaged, as their undocumented status prevents them from accessing services and supports while also undercutting opportunities to belong in American society. For undocumented Latina/o parents, their interactions with American social structures is not only shaped by the intersection of factors such as race and class, but also by the marginality and stigma created around an undocumented status. This becomes extremely important to consider in modern times as narratives of immigration are often racialized and conversations of immigration are often equated with *undocumented* Latina/o (often Mexican) immigration. This creates an exclusionary society and culture, where Latina/o immigrants are presumed to be "illegal" and underserving of a place in American society. Thus, undocumented parents must often develop parental practices in response to this culture of marginality, parental practices that reflect their own values, beliefs, and assets. This constant negotiation is also likely to influence their ability to make change in their children's lives. Considering these dynamics, it can be hypothesized that the parental engagement practices of undocumented Latina/o parents are fundamentally shaped by the consequences of their immigration status.

In this literature review I am not arguing that undocumented Latina/o parents are not already engaged in ways described in existent literature. Instead, I suggest that due to the significant impact undocumented status has on the everyday lives of parents, it is important to consider the additional barriers developed by this status and how these may shape their engagement. While research has explored the importance of family engagement in students'

academic achievements and has begun to highlight the differential forms of engagement of different populations, scholars and practitioners still lack a clear understanding of the impact undocumented status has on engagement in students' higher education aspirations. By highlighting this gap, this literature review supports further empirical research attending to the experiences of undocumented parents as their children pursue higher education, highlighting their resiliency and resourcefulness. More importantly, this new research will highlight the ways in which these families are resilient and resourceful, which is an essential counter narrative to our current understanding of undocumented Latina/o parents and their families. There is a necessity to move beyond an exploration of the barriers these families face and highlight the assets and strength found in them.

A deeper understanding of how undocumented Latina/o parents are engaged in their children's college readiness and a reconceptualization of parental engagement theories more broadly is necessary for three reasons. First, knowing more about the way undocumented status influences Latina/o parenting decisions and educational engagement helps us understand the unique needs of this particular population and reconsider what engagement means for them. Not only will we gain more insight about their particular barriers, but also about the assets and strengths they develop in their children. Doing so, then, may help improve family-school relationships. When teachers and other school staff make the effort to get to know parents and their personal stories and experiences and both parties allow themselves to find commonalities in these (e.g. college dreams and aspirations for students), relational trust develops. These partnerships ultimately benefit the educational outcomes of students, including increasing their numbers in higher education, as they see a direct connection between what their parents and teachers expect from them.

Second, in regards to college readiness, these perspectives and insights can further inform college readiness preparation and programming, both in and outside school settings. School institutions are becoming increasingly conscious of the differential needs of undocumented students. Similarly, they should also take into consideration the needs of undocumented parents, incorporating their support and engagement in this process is essential. For example, it is important to consider how schools can tap into students' politicized funds of knowledge in their curriculum and out-of-class programming. Additionally, schools and other out-of-school educational settings need to consider whether and how their programming may unintentionally be marginalizing this parent population. For instance, asking parents to show identification cards when entering a school building for a college knowledge workshop may push undocumented parents away. Educational leaders need to rethink how to restructure their programs and cultures to be more inclusive of undocumented parents.

Third, the sheer size of the undocumented population (or the large number of children with at least one undocumented parent) creates a necessity to not only understand the specific needs of this community but to also address them. Of the 11 million estimated undocumented immigrants living in the US, about half are adults who have children under the age of 18 (Passel & Taylor, 2010). Additionally, it is not only about understanding the obstacles undocumented parents face and helping them overcome these, it is also about tapping into their strengths and funds of knowledge and allowing ourselves to learn from them. Like all parents, undocumented parents want what is best for their children. How do we partner with undocumented parents to accomplish this? How do we make ourselves, as educators, researchers, and practitioners, visible allies to them? Beginning to explore these questions with the case of undocumented Latina/o parents begins to unpack aspects of this

phenomenon. This, in turn, will also inform future research on other undocumented immigrant populations. This knowledge is essential to our ability, as educators and as a society at large, to meet the needs of all our students and build from the strengths and assets their parents develop in them.

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