Undocumented Latinx College Students: Sense of Belonging from Orientation, Transition, and Retention Experiences

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Undocumented students navigate higher education in an uncertain and hostile immigration climate. Using a sense of belonging framework, I analyzed data from a nationwide study collected from semi-structured interviews with five undocumented college students. The research questions that guided this study were: What are undocumented Latinx college students' experiences with orientation, transition, and retention (OTR) efforts on campus? How do undocumented students perceive their OTR experiences relate to their sense of belonging on campus? Findings reflected the importance of OTR in facilitating a sense of belonging, and implications include incorporating family in OTR, connecting students to identity-based resources, and facilitating social support with peers and educators.
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Undocumented college student experiences are shaped by hostile and uncertain sociopolitical and campus climates (Nienhusser et al., 2020; Shelton, 2019). As a result, they may face challenges such as microaggressions and fear of immigration status disclosure (Nienhusser et al., 2016), stigma, shame, and discrimination in higher education (Pérez et al., 2010). Undocumented students may also perceive institutional programs and support services as lacking regarding contributions to their persistence, particularly related to institutional support systems (Alanis et al., 2021). In addition to these broader realities, a small base of literature highlights undocumented college students' experiences particularly relevant to orientation, transition, and retention (OTR), ranging from parental involvement (Salazar, 2021) to multilingual parental support, culturally relevant content, and a focus on community, family, and connectedness (Witkowsky et al., 2020). Additionally, research has indicated that undocumented college student OTR also needs to include the incorporation of identity-based centralized services and resources, which are elements of undocumented student resource centers (Cisneros & Rivarola, 2020; Tapia-Fuselier, 2022).

These experiences are shaped within broader realities such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which was announced in June 2012 and provides temporary deportation protection and work authorization for youth meeting certain qualifications regarding age of arrival in the U.S., educational attainment, and lacking a serious criminal conviction (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2022). Scholarship has detailed the evolution of DACA, including a critical analysis of the Obama and Trump Presidential administrations (see Shelton, 2018). In June 2020, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) issued an opinion against the Trump administration's previous decision to terminate the DACA program, which meant continuing to accept new DACA applications (*Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California*, 2020), thus impacting an estimated 649,070 DACA beneficiaries and their families (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2022). Though the SCOTUS decision is a temporary win for college students with DACA, it was still under threat as it reached its tenth anniversary in 2022 (Chishti & Gelatt, 2022). Postsecondary educators, including student services professionals and faculty, are vital to supporting undocumented students who face these identified challenges (Luedke & Corral, 2021; Shelton, 2020). Given that undocumented college students face these realities at campus and national levels, there is a need to better support this marginalized student population, particularly at the critical juncture of their transition to higher education.

This study aimed to understand how orientation, transition, and retention (OTR) experiences may influence undocumented Latinx college students' sense of belonging on campus. The research questions guiding this study were: What are undocumented Latinx college students' experiences with orientation, transition, and retention efforts on campus? And, how do undocumented students perceive their orientation, transition, and retention experiences to relate to their sense of belonging on campus? Given the temporary and precarious nature of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Shelton & Thompson, 2023), and in reflecting on recent Higher Education/ Student Affairs (HESA) scholarship (see Cisneros & Rivarola, 2020), we use the term "undocumented students" for students with and without DACA. We use the term "Latinx" to indicate gender inclusivity and people of "Latin American descent" (Salinas & Lozano, 2019, p. 2), which reflects the broad spectrum of geographic backgrounds of participants who identified as Mexican and/or Latinx. Also, given the current study focus on OTR, which often falls within student services (Komives & Woodard, Jr., 2003), we use the term "HESA" throughout to encompass all postsecondary educators "who are dedicated to the growth and development of students outside of the formal curriculum" (Schuh et al., 2017, p. xxvii).

Within this HESA scope, providing insight for postsecondary educators exploring ways to support undocumented college students reflects the NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education: Orientation, Transition, and Retention Knowledge Community (OTR KC) vision by providing a resource regarding a specific minoritized population "to understanding our collective roles and responsibilities in supporting students as they transition into, through, and out of college" (NASPA, 2021, para. 2), and the OTR KC values related to "education and knowledge, inclusion and community, and collaboration and support" (para. 3) via a sense of belonging framework. Similarly, study implications directly address the imperative from a recent Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and College Student Educators International (ACPA) joint statement highlighting "deep concern over the exclusionary policies and practices that have prevented higher education access and success of undocumented immigrants (with and without DACA)" (Nienhusser et al., 2020, p. 12).
These calls from professional associations set the foundation for the current study that seeks to inform OTR educators of the experiences of undocumented college students as an avenue to better serve this student population. Participants represent multiple regions and institutions, which speaks to the pervasive nature of the challenges these students face and commonalities in student experiences and how to support them. The current study contributes to a pressing scholarly conversation by providing student-centered information on how OTR educators can support undocumented students navigating higher education in an uncertain and hostile U.S. immigration climate.

Literature Review

In this literature review, the authors summarize scholarship about the experiences of undocumented Latinx college students in the United States, best practices for and benefits of college and university orientation, transition, and retention (OTR) initiatives, and the intersection of undocumented college student experiences and OTR initiatives.

UNDOCUMENTED COLLEGE STUDENTS

In 2021, an estimated 472,000 undocumented students, 181,000 of whom are eligible for DACA, were enrolled in higher education colleges and universities across the United States (New American Economy, 2021). Latinx students comprise the largest subpopulation of undocumented students in the United States (New American Economy, 2021; Shelton, 2019), many of whom are first-generation students from low-income backgrounds who attended under-resourced high schools (Shelton, 2019). Current literature about undocumented college students often focuses on exclusionary financial aid policies (Thangasamy & Horan, 2016), conflicting family obligations (Salazar, 2021), and marginalization (Shelton, 2018). Much of the scholarship is centered on students' experiences in California, New Mexico, and Texas, all of which have large undocumented populations (Dougherty et al., 2010).

Within the literature on the experiences of undocumented college students, scholars have emphasized the importance of institutional agents in supporting undocumented students (Nienhusser, 2018; Shelton, 2020) and for educators to increase their undocu-competence, or ability to serve, support, and advocate for these students (Tapia-Fuselier, 2022). Institutional actors, such as boards of trustees and presidents, are also vital in acting at the local level to reduce financial barriers for undocumented students who face "among the strictest cost barriers to higher education in the United States" (Thangasamy & Horan, 2016, p. 113). Overall, undocumented college students face a range of structural barriers that contribute to their marginalization, and professionals can serve in supporting roles to navigate these realities.

ORIENTATION, TRANSITION, AND RETENTION (OTR) INITIATIVES

Since the mid-1990s, more importance has been placed on retaining and graduating students at U.S. colleges and universities (Mack, 2010). OTR initiatives are strategically designed to aid students in their college journey. As orientation programs have formalized and evolved since originating in the 1880s, stakeholders from all areas of campus have demonstrated an active interest in helping new students learn about resources during orientation (Mack, 2010). The Association for Orientation,

Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA) was organized in the late 1940s and chartered in 1976 to spread effective practices about orientation activities (Mack, 2010). Orientation programs across the country are unique; some institutions facilitate overnight orientation programs where students, and sometimes parents, experience life on campus (see Gentry et al., 2006), while other programs, especially in the post-COVID-19 era, have been offered entirely online through modules and videos (see Lerner Colucci & Grebing, 2020). In addition to understanding this trajectory of OTR, scholarship has covered the effectiveness of types of OTR efforts and possible student outcomes.

In their foundational book, Beal and Noel (1980) sought to understand effective programs and initiatives for undergraduate student retention. After analyzing 947 institutions and their student retention efforts, the authors found multiple-action programs to be the most successful. The authors also found that initiatives designed for and driven to "high-risk" student subpopulations, such as new students, students with undeclared majors, and academically low-performing students, could be highly impactful (Beal & Noel, 1980). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reported that new, traditionally-aged college students enter the academy at a developmental crossroads and found a formal academic and social introduction to the college or university beneficial for student transition, acclimation, and success. Modern orientation programs often aim to help students understand their institutional role, expose students to available resources, aid students in forming an early sense of belonging, and set expectations for students about conduct, academic integrity, and responsibility (Mack, 2010). Mann (1998) emphasized the importance of orientation as a retention mechanism via parents who have positive orientation experiences and students who left with positive feelings about their upcoming college journey. Overall, OTR engagement opportunities are important milestones for college students.

LATINX STUDENTS, UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS, AND OTR INITIATIVES

There is a dearth of scholarship at the specific intersection of undocumented students and orientation, transition, and retention efforts. Therefore, we examined relevant literature on Latinx college students, as well as undocumented college students, to build this study that seeks to fill this gap. This approach aligned with the reality that many undocumented students in the United States identify as Latinx (Shelton, 2019) and that the current study participants all identified as Latinx. In their work on using student development theories in transition and orientation, Rode and Cawthon (2010) mention that prominent social identity theories, including Ferdman and Gallegos' (2001) Model of Latino Identity Development, can be used to serve new students at orientation programs by pointing these students to identity-specific resources on campus. However, undocumented students are not specifically

mentioned in the work of Rode and Cawthon (2010). In contrast, Cisneros and Rivarola (2020) focused on undocumented students and identity-based spaces as they reviewed trends and best practices from 59 undocumented student resources centers (USRCs) across the United States and found they are important sites of centralized services and resources. Tapia-Fuselier (2022) added to this scholarship by using an exploratory qualitative study to understand the roles of USRC professionals and found that these educators are highly committed to their complex roles and, ultimately, to their students and colleagues.

The literature illustrates that DACA/undocumented and Latinx students often have strong family ties and high levels of parental support while pursuing college aspirations due to their collectivist culture (Salazar, 2021; Witkowsky et al., 2020). Salazar (2021) found parental involvement to be a vital support structure for undocumented students entering and persisting through college, even though some families of undocumented students were less likely to engage in "traditionally valued forms" (p. 4) of involvement, including meetings and tours. This study also reported that the impact of a college degree on the family of an undocumented student, who is also likely to be a first-generation college student, is a key motivator for student persistence in the face of hardships and recommended not ignoring the value of undocumented students' familial support system (Salazar, 2021).

Witkowsky and colleagues' (2020) exploration of the influence of Spanish language parent and family member orientation programs on parental student involvement is also important. Orientation programs delivered to Latinx parents and family members in the Spanish language generated institutional trust, eased uncertainty and fears about the college transition, and enabled parents and students to build relationships with Spanish-speaking staff on campus (Witkowsky et al., 2020). Witkowsky et al. (2020) recommended that HESA practitioners planning orientation and transition programming for Latinx students and families provide Spanish language options, include culturally relevant content, and focus on the community-building aspect of college life, as it strongly relates to the concepts of family and connectedness in the Latinx culture.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the sense of belonging framework, which impacts students' learning and social lives (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and is a key component for student success, especially for minoritized students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging relates to students' perceptions of attachment and connection to the campus community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012) and to students' perceptions of social support related to connection, mattering,

and "feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). In contrast, lacking a sense of belonging means exclusion related to isolation, alienation, loneliness, and invisibility (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is important, as it relates to positive outcomes such as persistence and happiness (Strayhorn, 2012). A sense of belonging has also been connected to college transitions and success (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging concepts directly informed wording used in the semi-structured interview protocol and created attentiveness to related concepts in data analysis. The framework also led us to be alert to study implications related to the importance of a sense of belonging via creating opportunities for connection to the campus community, cultivating inclusion and welcoming spaces, and providing social support for students to feel they matter, are cared about, accepted, respected, and valued.

Methodology

Below, we describe the participant selection process that led to five participants, and the subsequent data collection and analysis processes utilizing general qualitative methods. We also highlight reflectivity and positionality considerations in addition to study limitations. The use of "the PI" below indicates first author roles in the participant selection and data collection stages, while the use of "we" below indicates joint work completed in all subsequent stages.

PARTICIPANTS

The PI used purposeful snowball sampling to identify participants who held specific characteristics related to the research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The characteristics participants had to meet were being a member of the undocumented community and being enrolled for at least one semester at any U.S. institution of higher education within the past academic year. Participant selection began by the PI using an internet search for Latinx and undocumented student groups on college campuses. The PI emailed the study invitation to students and gatekeepers, such as advisors, with emails listed on institutional websites. This led to the additional use of a purposeful snowball sampling technique (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to identify additional students recommended by initial participants. The PI then emailed interested students the informed consent documents outlining the study as well as a short demographic questionnaire. After receiving these documents, the PI used email to schedule participant interviews. At the conclusion of each interview, participants received a thank you e-gift card to honor their time and energy.

All five participants identified "Mexican" or "Latinx" as their race and/or ethnicity, and all participants were DACA recipients. Little Johnny and Mayte attended college in the mid-south, while Eddy, Esmeralda, and Samantha were college students on the West

Coast. At the time of data collection, our participants had an anticipated graduation year of 2021, and one graduated in 2022. Majors included sociology, kinesiology, business economics, social work, and higher education. We intended to speak with only undergraduates, but we had a graduate student referred to us by another participant whose story we chose to incorporate as it contributed to the richness of student experiences. Samantha was pursuing her higher education master's degree and was a 2019 sociology graduate.

Table 1

Participant self-identified profile summaries

Name	Anticipated Graduation Year	Major	Race and/or Ethnicity	Region	DACA Recipient
Eddy	2021	Sociology	Mexican	West Coast	Yes
Esmeralda	2022	Kinesiology	Mexican	West Coast	Yes
Little Johnny	2021	Business Economics	Latinx	Mid-South	Yes
Maytate	2021	Social Work	Latinx	Mid-South	Yes
Samantha	2021; 2019	Higher Education (masters); Sociology (undergraduate)	Mexican	West Coast	Yes

DATA COLLECTION

The study included one round of 75-minute audio interviews (Zoom or phone) that took place in winter/spring 2021. We used general qualitative methods to explore participants' construction, interpretation, and meaning-making of experiences in context and to understand their sense-making of their lives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). General qualitative methods are the most common type of qualitative research in applied fields like education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and "generic" qualitative inquiry allows for practical and skillful use of open-ended questions to learn from people in real-world settings to make a positive difference (Patton, 2015, p. 154). The current study included elements of general qualitative design with meaning-making, understanding the researcher as an instrument, inductive data analysis, and providing a rich description of the findings (Biddix, 2018). General qualitative methods were appropriate for this study as we used open-ended questions to learn about participants' perceptions of their experiences. Directly hearing student stories was important, as Students of Color are often silenced and invalidated regarding their experiences as sources of legitimate knowledge (Solórzano et al., 2000).

DATA ANALYSIS

We followed data analysis procedures for a basic qualitative study by identifying recurring patterns that are ultimately findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The PI reviewed interview transcripts with a constant comparative method of data analysis that is inductive and comparative to develop common themes via categories or themes that reflected research questions and guided coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which the PI did by hand. Next, informed by the second author's full literature review, the PI looked for overall themes that emerged related to the sense of belonging framework, such as social supports, feelings of connectedness and mattering, care, acceptance, respect, value, and feeling welcomed. Both authors conducted independent data analysis before we held research team meetings to discuss themes. Reviewing patterns became thematic findings highlighted by participants' direct quotes, which allowed for centering the rich, thick description found in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout, we focused on issues of dependability, consistency, and external validity or generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These efforts included the use of the following procedures: transcript checking, maintaining consistent coding, and peer checking; using rich, thick descriptions; clarifying the bias we brought to the study; presenting information that fell outside of the major themes; and maintaining an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) used in a log of personal notes.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Remaining attentive to reflexivity throughout the study meant reflecting deeply on The PI's privileges as a White, U.S.-born citizen who has retained permanent citizenship status throughout my life. These reflections extended to the PI's positionality as a higher education scholar who is likely viewed by participants as someone in a position of authority. Given these majoritized and privileged outsider experiences and identities, resultant power dynamics likely impacted participant disclosure levels during data collection. The PI also engaged in memoing and peer debriefing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with education colleagues. The second author identifies as a White, U.S.-born citizen who shares privileged outsider experiences and identities with the PI and worked directly with the PI to become familiar with her work in this area and the related paradigm which rejects false objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that attempts to erase the realities of one's identities and the resultant power and privilege dynamics that influence the research process. Critically reflecting on our identities and connecting with participants has continued the goal of informing practice for serving undocumented college students.

Limitations

Despite a call for participants that did not specify any particular undocumented sub-population, all participants identified as Mexican or Latinx, and all participants had DACA. As such, the study does not reflect the broader diversity within the community regarding race/ethnicity or non-DACA recipients. These additional student stories are also important to learn from in striving to support the broader community. Also, varying levels of researcher relationships with gatekeepers and limited pre-existing relationships with participants likely limited the desire for participation. We also relied on remote audio interviews, which may have hindered developing rapport, although this added confidentiality, allowed for a nationwide sample, and upheld COVID-19 safety precautions. Participants reflected on their experiences prior to COVID-19, and a pandemic-centered analysis was beyond the scope of the current study.

Findings

Findings from participants' stories reflected the importance of OTR in facilitating a sense of belonging through significant experiences that fell into the emergent interconnected categories of incorporating family into OTR efforts, connecting students to identity-based resources, and facilitating social support with peers and educators.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Participants reported the need for family considerations in OTR and that some practices were culturally irrelevant by not considering how various cultures were left out of these traditional efforts. For example, participants emphasized the importance of involving families in orientation, including having support for non-native English speakers. Esmerelda's orientation had a unique component of inviting students' parents to stay on campus overnight to learn about the campus and resources as well. Samantha had a similar experience but cautioned that overnight stays on campus could be frowned upon for many Latinx cultures. Samantha navigated family expectations regarding attending overnight orientation. She noted, "So at the university we're required to stay overnight…My parents are strict…and so sleeping anywhere else was not okay." She convinced her family that the overnight orientation stay was required, and she enjoyed the experience, especially in getting to know other incoming students, including her assigned roommate, whom she is still friends with today. Eddy had a positive experience with having translators for families at orientation events. However, Little Johnny recalled that at orientation, his dad was "happy to be with me, but I could tell that he in no way connected to any of the process" and "I remember multiple times finding him sitting by himself because there was nobody doing the outreach with him in different portions of the orientation, and it honestly made me angry."

Little Johnny highlighted that ongoing parental outreach is his "number one suggestion" for OTR educators, especially since institutions "… can't do anything about the legal status, this is something that can facilitate public transportation, different events on campus that you can come to, to check in on your student, just to show your student that you are involved." This is particularly important, as he explained, "A lot of times, the Latinx community gets criticized for not participating in school functions, but I also place that blame back on the system and the institutions because they don't do any outreach." Similarly, Eddy urged educators to include parents in student events, including having translators, since "My parents would definitely appreciate someone who spoke Spanish and who had a sense of understanding of the community. Especially if they were coming from a Latino background to be able to talk to…" This desire for culturally relevant parental outreach was evident in all participant stories.

IDENTITY-BASED RESOURCES

All participants noted the importance of OTR outreach through identity-based campus spaces in either a general multicultural center or an undocumented-specific resource center, which helped expose them to the college environment and available campus resources so they could envision themselves belonging and on campus. Although they all got involved on different timelines and via different avenues ranging from a connection at orientation to faculty or peer recruitment, these identity-based spaces were key aspects of their success personally and academically in college. Samantha noted her multicultural center became her "home away from home." Esmerelda highlighted the importance of ongoing opportunities for identity-based reflection. She said these opportunities on campus "really helped me appreciate who I am and be more open to talking about my identity, who I am, my struggles, my different identities." Similarly, Eddy noted the campus Dream Resource Center offered "…that sense of community there and knowing that I wasn't alone and knowing that there were other students like me who felt the same way, who had stories of their own to share about what was going on…" These identity-based spaces were key for participant belonging.

Participants had positive experiences with OTR programs that were framed as for first-generation college students, Students of Color, and/or low-income students. Esmerelda noted the positive impact of a free, first-generation college student-focused one-week campus visit during her junior year of high school, which introduced her to the campus multicultural center. She shared, "We got to know the campus, what to expect on the daily day at college..." and that it was mainly student-run, and "Some of them were Dreamers just like I am. I got to hear an actual person who is very similar to me talk about their experience...and how…they got to manage college." This moment was significant because "that was something that forever stuck to me because it was the first time someone who was a Dreamer ever talked to me." The identity-based

aspect of these programs was important for participants since the outreach and resources were tailored to others from similar backgrounds. Eddy was involved in a summer program for Students of Color from under-resourced communities, and that "really shaped my whole view of going to school and that really changed that mindset of maybe school is in the cards for me." However, Eddy wished for earlier outreach from other identity-based campus and community organizations, as "…I was really hesitant myself to reach out to the opportunities at first, and what was there available to me…I would've realized a lot sooner how important and how supportive the organizations and the community was towards me being undocumented." Interacting with individuals of shared social identities sparked a sense of belonging in participants that further supported their ability to see themselves in college.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

All participants mentioned the significance of social support via OTR, including connecting students early with a campus educator. Eddy and Samantha both noted that OTR programs connected them with college educators who served as resources, and Samantha noted the importance of that support, as "I got a mentor because no one in my family has pursued an education." Beginning this mentoring relationship even as early as the application stage is important. As Eddy noted, "…some folks out there who don't know they're undocumented until that [college] application process starts… it's really unfortunate for them to be hit with that news like that, so suddenly." To support students in this situation, Eddy suggested: "…just knowing if there's a point of contact, maybe a resource center or a place where just a lot of resources about undocumented and what that means in going to school." Intentional efforts at connecting incoming students with people from similar backgrounds were important in students' transition experiences.

Samantha found an ongoing connection with the head of the multicultural center, who made it a priority to introduce herself through visits to new students in first-year introductory courses. This individual was particularly important for Samantha's journey because "…she gave her background and then how she was also an alum from the institution. And she mentioned that her family was undocumented," so "I went to her constantly. I'm like, 'Okay, this is someone I can trust…if it's worth coming out and then letting them know about my status.' And she was helpful." In contrast, Little Johnny noted that in his interaction with campus staff at an ongoing orientation event, "…as soon as I shared that I was undocumented, they were like, 'I don't know how I could help you.'" To address this reality, Samantha suggested having faculty and staff visibly display awareness and advocacy, which can start with workshops that train individuals to assist undocumented students. Esmerelda also emphasized the importance of faculty and staff "being more educated on that topic, I think it would

really ... Something as simple as learning who we are and what we do, and just learning about our stories, I feel like that's something that can easily just help them understand us and provide help for us." Social support from educators was important via OTR efforts, as were opportunities for peer connections.

In addition to visible campus faculty and staff serving as proactive resources, participants noted the importance of OTR initiatives facilitating peer connections. Maytate suggested, "…having like a peer program for university students that are DACA, from maybe graduating seniors or have already been through. It's like what is willing to learn about the process and then just help the students out." Samantha noted the benefits of a peer mentoring program from students in the same major who can help with progress to earning a degree, giving advice on working with faculty, and networking. Similarly, she noted the relevance of an informal DACA/undocumented peer network because "It's a very close-knit community," but people do not want to be judged for seeking help from faculty or staff. She explained that students are more comfortable coming to peers with questions since "a lot of the students, we rely on each other." A significant site for educator and peer connections was a campus multicultural or identity-based center, which some participants learned about from initial OTR programming.

Discussion

Participants emphasized how their sense of belonging related to incorporating family in OTR efforts, connecting them to identity-based resources, and facilitating social support with educators and peers. Overall, the discussion themes below demonstrate how participants highlighted OTR experiences reflecting the sense of belonging framework regarding the need for campus educators to create opportunities for connection, inclusion, welcoming spaces, and support (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FAMILY

Participants consistently emphasized the need to incorporate parents in OTR efforts, and this finding can be expanded to consider including all family members in proactive outreach, as existing literature highlights the importance of family ties and collectivist culture for this student population (Salazar, 2021; Witkowsky et al., 2020). As such, it was particularly important for participants to feel a sense of belonging via family inclusion in OTR efforts to help them feel supported, connected, and respected (Strayhorn, 2012), which combats a lack of belonging due to isolation and invisibility (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012).

Participants' experiences highlighted key themes from existing literature, such as sharing the reality of Latinx familial cultural expectations to remain at home (Salazar, 2021), which created challenges to OTR participation. For example, students noted the need to help families understand the importance of milestones such as overnight orientation on campus, even if that was not typically allowed in their community. Cultural expectations were also layered with the family's financial realities regarding the cost of participating in OTR opportunities. Literature on undocumented college student cost barriers in higher education generally focuses on tuition and financial aid (see Thangasamy & Horan, 2016), and the current study expands this reality to OTR costs, such as attending summer bridge orientation programming. Participants noted the importance of free summer orientation programs that exposed them to campus and were focused on serving first-generation college students, Students of Color, and/or low-income students. Participant emphasis on the importance of these events reflects existing literature regarding overnight orientation programs that expose students to campus life (see Gentry et al., 2006) and leave students with a sense of enthusiasm for their upcoming college experience (Mann, 1998). Including family in these OTR efforts can foster a sense of belonging during the college-going process, given the importance of collectivist cultures that can foster feeling supported, connected, and respected.

THE ROLE OF IDENTITY-BASED RESOURCES

Participants noted the importance of OTR efforts proactively connecting them to identity-based resources, including campus spaces created specifically for undocumented students. These resources were important for promoting a sense of belonging, as they provide spaces of personal connection, which contrasts with lack of belonging via exclusion and alienation (i.e., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Several participants noted that OTR programming was the first time they were introduced to general campus multicultural centers, and one participant noted that this was the first time they were also connected with another undocumented college student. Participants noted that these pre-orientation efforts helped expose them to the college environment and available campus resources so they could envision themselves belonging on campus. Given that undocumented students are in a unique position with so many barriers to higher education access and support and have not historically been fully included in postsecondary education (Alanis et al., 2021; Nienhusser et al., 2020; Shelton & Thompson, 2023), these pre-connections are especially meaningful. Although not specifically undocumented-focused, OTR programming centered around additional salient social identities, such as events for first-generation college students, students of Color, and/or low-income students, were important for participants since the outreach and resources were tailored to them, and they made connections with others from similar backgrounds.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Participants noted the importance of OTR efforts that facilitated social support from peer and educator connections. These social supports reflect key elements of fostering a sense of belonging related to feeling like they matter, are cared about, and accepted, all of which combat a lack of belonging from loneliness (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Participant experiences reflected existing literature regarding the importance of undocumented students seeking emotional and academic support from parents, instructors, counselors, and peers (Pérez et al., 2010). Participants' peer connections stemming from OTR efforts included making lasting friendships, finding peer mentors, and having a network to tap into for involvement opportunities. This theme connects to Morgan et al.'s (2020) findings on the sense of belonging as "orientation must provide students with ample opportunities to identify and connect with a supportive peer community" because failure to do so means orientation is not achieving the goal of preparing students for college success (Mack, 2010, p. 21). Beyond informal social connections, the need for formal support for undocumented peer networks is highlighted in Shelton's (2020) recommendation for creating undocumented college student peer mentor programs. Participants also noted the importance of OTR efforts in connecting them with campus educators who served as resources and mentors.

While all educators can engage in training to provide awareness and advocacy, literature has shown the importance of specific mentor-mentee relationships for undocumented college students, such as Shelton's (2020) work that emphasized institutions recruiting faculty and staff who can serve as mentors as well as increasing undocumented individuals employed on campus to provide additional role models and mentors for undocumented students (Witkowsky et al., 2020). This recommendation is highlighted in participant suggestions that OTR efforts include support from educators with shared social identities. Students noted that connecting with supportive educators early in the process was important for developing their sense of belonging, although several participants noted that some campus educators were unaware of how to assist them with undocumented-specific structural barriers. Students also highlighted, and research has shown, that connecting students with staff members who share social identities can increase parental engagement and trust in the institution (Witkowsky et al., 2020). These experiences reflect existing literature regarding the importance of institutional agents who can support undocumented students in navigating college (Nienhusser, 2018; Shelton, 2020). Overall, peer and educator connections were central to participants' sense of belonging, and OTR experiences facilitated these relationships to connect with the community by providing social support for students to feel they matter, are cared about, accepted, respected, and valued.

Implications

Study implications emphasize facilitating a sense of belonging via OTR experiences that include attention to family, identity-based resources, and social support. These implications are situated within the necessity for creating systems-level change that will provide environments that support undocumented college students while acknowledging the need to further broader change regarding the U.S. immigration socio-political climate.

INCLUDING FAMILY

Participants' stories contributed to understanding the need to foster a sense of belonging by incorporating families in OTR efforts, including providing multilingual support, working with educators who have shared social identities, considering cultural norms regarding overnight stays on campus, and minimizing participation costs given the family's financial realities. Similar to Witkowsky et al.'s (2020) findings about including Spanish language in familial outreach, we recommend incorporating participant suggestions about including Spanish translators for parents at OTR events while also expanding this support to provide multilingual services representative of all family's language needs, including at in-person events and via all outreach such as marketing materials and website information. Similarly, OTR offices can partner across campus and the community to recruit and retain educators who reflect an array of racial and ethnic identities and educators from all backgrounds who are prepared to proactively serve undocumented college students and their families.

In addition to family inclusion, accessing initial OTR programming is especially significant for undocumented students, most of whom are first-generation college students who would greatly benefit from this exposure to campus and resources. However, given that overnight stays on campus could be frowned upon for many Latinx cultures, especially for women, campus outreach should communicate with families to help them understand the process and feel more comfortable allowing students to attend. We recommend looking to COVID-19 practices to adapt comprehensive virtual experiences for students for whom it would not be appropriate or possible to have an overnight campus stay for OTR programming. Similarly, given the financial barriers undocumented students and their families face, institutions must communicate how they are making these programs cost-effective, which may include some accessible, free, virtual components.

OFFERING IDENTITY-BASED RESOURCES

As scholarship on undocumented college student OTR experiences grows, educators can examine how existing research on other minoritized student groups may inform practice. Although each population will have specific needs, there may be some

commonalities, such as the current study participant stories reflecting findings from Morgan et al. (2020) that Black students may have felt more of a sense of belonging if they learned about their multicultural affairs office during orientation. Current study participants noted that these efforts and early exposure to identity-based resources and spaces allowed them to see themselves on campus and that exposure opened them to possibility and a sense of belonging. These efforts build upon Rode and Cawthon's (2010) work that using social identity theories can help serve new Latinx students at orientation with identity-specific resources, although this work did not specifically mention undocumented students. Some participants had positive experiences with OTR efforts, introducing them to undocumented student resource centers (USRCs), which are important sites of centralized services and resources. Several students noted USRCs as primary sites for developing a sense of belonging and that OTR efforts introduced them to these key spaces. However, some of our participants did not have access to these spaces on their campuses. These participants still noted the importance of OTR efforts in introducing them to general multicultural centers where identity-based support facilitated their sense of belonging. Overall, regardless of the presence of a USRC, highlighting identity-specific resources in initial OTR efforts would need to be done mindfully, given the realities of being "out" with one's status on campus.

Identity-based efforts require proactive and ongoing outreach and would benefit from a cross-campus network for support and resources combined with community engagement. We recommend making explicit social identity-related support at program, institution, and community levels. Due to the nature of the undocumented student population, it may be difficult to identify members of this community. Institutions can include undocumented identity-specific outreach and resources via community engagement, programming, recruitment, and retention efforts, much like many institutions may do for other student populations, such as out-of-state, international, or first-generation students. Also, USRCs are key sites for facilitating identity-specific belonging, but many campuses do not currently have this resource. We suggest that general multicultural centers and collaborating offices look to other institutions' USRCs regarding impactful practices ranging from financial assistance, support in navigating campus, peer and educator connections, and culturally responsive career and legal counseling. While communities work for broader legal and policy reform impacting undocumented college students, campuses can work within their local structures to find ways to create these identity-specific resources.

FACILITATING SOCIAL SUPPORT

It is important for campus educators to take responsibility for staying abreast of the ever-changing political climate and legal policies in place that may impact the college-going experience of undocumented students. In addition to educator awareness of

these realities, they may tailor their messaging and opportunities to various student groups. It is important to note that undocumented students may not disclose their status in these brief, first-time interactions. Educators will need to be informed of undocumented student realities while working to build rapport with students over time to allow for OTR-related conversations relevant to these students. We also recommend structured opportunities for students to make peer connections via additional summer outreach, such as early peer mentor programs and extended in-person program orientation, including small group advising breakout tables, to connect with educators. At institutions where the political climate or institutional resources may make such opportunities difficult, we recommend connecting undocumented students with other affinity spaces and resources, such as those designed for Latinx and/or first-generation students. For example, of the approximately 59 USRCs across the United States, many were created because of student advocacy, and most are located at four-year public institutions in California (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). Educators working outside of these more supportive and resourced environments must still abide by state and federal policies while enacting creative solutions to help students navigate educational experiences (Shelton, 2018). Overall, OTR efforts can mindfully focus on social support from educators and peers, combined with identity-based resources and family outreach, to create a comprehensive approach to facilitating undocumented college students' sense of belonging.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research can address the limitations noted above, such as learning from participants who identify outside of the Latinx sub-population to reflect the broader diversity within the community. A longitudinal study could also work with participants over time to see how their reflections may evolve, especially in response to ever-changing socio-political climates. Also, research could focus on the efforts of HESA/OTR educators working in restrictive geographic and policy climates and how they navigate the realities while serving undocumented students.

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