Undocumented Youth and Local Contours of Inequality

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Abstract

About 2.1 million undocumented immigrants are members of the 1.5-generation, meaning they arrived in the United States as children and remain without legal permission. The experiences of the undocumented 1.5-generation have captured the sociological imagination, and research about undocumented immigrant youth is a burgeoning and exciting field of study. This research captures both the challenges that immigrant youth face growing up undocumented in the United States, and also how they are responding to these challenges. This chapter draws from two different studies examining the experiences of undocumented youth in the United States, in order to understand this group's conflicting experiences of illegality and belonging. The data presented in this chapter suggests that there are two key axes of educational stratification *within* the undocumented youth community. The first is among those who complete high school and attend college vs those who are considered early exiters, young people who leave K–12 schools at or before high school graduation. Relatedly, the second axis of stratification is connected to *where* undocumented youth grow up and live. Ultimately, we show that as undocumented young people make critical transitions from childhood to adolescence and young adulthood, their immigration status is a central impediment to their hopes and dreams. Almost as consequential, the resources and practices of their school districts and the policies of their states condition their post high school lives.

Approximately 11.1 million undocumented immigrants, largely from Mexico and Central America, currently live in the United States, the result of decades of unauthorized migration and settlement and increasingly restrictive immigration laws and policies (Passel and Cohn 2011; Massey et al. 2002). About 2.1 million are members of the undocumented 1.5-generation (Batalova and McHugh 2010), meaning they arrived in the United States as children and remain without legal permission. Unlike the first-generation who migrated as adults and the second generation, who are similarly children of immigrants but are born in the United States, undocumented youth and young adults have developed values, identities, and aspirations that are influenced by growing up American. But their lives are also deeply impacted by the practical reality of living "illegally" in the United States.

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The experiences of the undocumented 1.5-generation have captured the sociological imagination, and research about undocumented immigrant youth is a burgeoning and exciting field of study (Gonzales 2015).

Over the last 10 years, researchers have examined a diversity of issues pertaining to undocumented young people, including the high school experiences of undocumented immigrant youth (Gonzales 2010a; Gonzales and Ruiz 2014; Jefferies 2014); the effects of in-state tuition policies on these young people (Conger and Chellman 2013; Diaz-Strong et al. 2011; Dougherty et al. 2010; Flores 2010; Flores and Horn 2009; Kaushal 2008; Olivas 2004, 2009); efforts of higher education institutions and their staff to integrate undocumented students (Gildersleeve and Ranero 2010; Gildersleeve et al. 2010; Gonzales 2010b), the identity development and relationships among undocumented young people (Abrego 2008; Chang 2010; Ellis and Chen 2013; Mangual Figueroa 2012; Munoz and Maldonado 2012); the transitions undocumented young people experience after high school (Abrego 2006; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Enriquez 2011; Gonzales 2011; Gonzales and Bautista-Chavez 2012; Terriquez 2014); and their civic and political participation (Enriquez 2014; Galindo 2012; Gonzales 2008; Negrón-Gonzales 2013, 2014; Nicholls 2013; Patler and Gonzales 2015; Perez et al. 2009; Rincon 2008; Rogers et al. 2008; Seif 2004; Zimmerman 2012).

This growing body of research expands understandings of the immigrant experience by highlighting the profound impact of undocumented immigration status on the incorporation and mobility prospects of the undocumented 1.5-generation (Abrego 2006; Gonzales 2007, 2009, 2011). Beyond understanding the impact of immigration status for social mobility and access, research about the experiences of undocumented youth has also addressed fundamental questions about membership and exclusion.

Because undocumented 1.5-generation young adults arrive as children, often before the age of 14, primary and secondary schools are a key socializing force (Gonzales 2010a; Gonzales et al. 2015a). In 1982, the United States Supreme Court held in *Plyler v. Doe* that undocumented immigrant youth had a right to a public education through high school (Olivas 2011). After high school, though, undocumented youth face more uncertain futures (Abrego 2006; Gonzales 2011; Enriquez 2011). In addition, research suggests that making it through high school, and to college, is no easy feat for undocumented immigrant youth, as they face the same challenges that many low-income students of color must also overcome on the road to and through college (Abrego 2006; Gonzales 2010b; Enriquez 2011; Gonzales and Ruiz 2014). A well-established body of research, however, captures the unique role that an undocumented immigration status plays in shaping the lives and the futures of undocumented immigrant youth (Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Enriquez 2011; Gonzales and Ruiz 2014). In this chapter, drawing from our own research and the vibrant field of studies about the experiences of undocumented immigrant youth, we examine how laws and policies have created conflicting experiences of illegality and belonging for undocumented young people living in the United States.

7.1 Growing Up Undocumented in the United States

Sociological inquiries into the immigrant experience have long sought to understand and explain immigrant incorporation, largely around the questions of how immigrants and their children are becoming a part of the United States. While there is lively debate about how contemporary processes of incorporation are taking place (Alba and Nee 2003; Bean and Stevens 2003; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993), these different theoretical approaches to immigrant integration share a central concern, that of membership. And while formal citizenship and the legal conferring of rights have been historically defined by immigration status, many immigration scholars have argued for a broader view of citizenship that recognizes community and cultural participation as forms of membership (Bosniak 2008; Nakano Glenn 2011; Blooemraad et al. 2008; Soysal 1994). Sometimes

referred to as cultural citizenship (Rosaldo 1994; Rosaldo and Flores 1997) or substantive citizenship (Brubaker 1992; Marshall 1950), or a sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006), these notions of citizenship are meant to capture feelings of membership that cannot be defined by the nation-state (Nakano Glenn 2011; Blooemraad et al. 2008). Developing in concert with this expanded view of citizenship, has been a close examination of the ways in which policies and enforcement practices frame the everyday lives of undocumented immigrants (Coutin 1999; DeGenova 2002; Ngai 2004; Willen 2007). The concept of "migrant illegality" emerges from this research, which is rooted in the everyday experiences of undocumented immigrants, and captures a "social relation that is fundamentally inseparable from citizenship" (DeGenova 2002, p. 422). Like expanded notions of citizenship, the theoretical construct of "illegality" simultaneously encompasses a relationship between the individual and the nation-state *and* the social and cultural realities of undocumented immigrants as members of their communities. In this vein, the experiences of undocumented immigrant youth who were raised in the United States and yet face significant constraints as they age because of their formal legal status, have provided unique insight into the contradictions of U.S. immigration law and policy (Gonzales 2016).

For nearly a decade, scholars have made incredible strides in gathering systematic, empirical research about the constraints facing undocumented immigrant youth. This research captures both the challenges that immigrant youth face growing up undocumented in the United States, and also how they are responding to these challenges. The social, political, and educational integration of undocumented immigrant youth has been profoundly shaped by the aforementioned 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* decision. In *Plyler* the Supreme Court argued that denying undocumented immigrant children a public education based on their immigration status would create an educational underclass, and that this was not in the best interest of undocumented children and society. This decision highlighted the key role that schools play in socializing children and in shaping their social and educational opportunities. Perhaps more importantly, the Supreme Court's decision was also an implicit acknowledgement of the settled lives that undocumented immigrant children and their families were living in the United States. In fact, just 4 years later in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed, granting citizenship to nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

In the years since the *Plyler v. Doe* decision and the passage of IRCA, the undocumented immigrant population has grown dramatically. During the 1990s the number of people living in an unauthorized residency status increased by 3.5 million, and between 2000 and 2013, it increased by 4 million (Rosenblum and Ruiz Soto 2015). However, IRCA was the last major comprehensive immigration reform to offer a pathway to citizenship, and the law ushered in an era of increased immigration enforcement (Golash-Boza 2015; Kanstroom 2012). Nevertheless, undocumented immigrant families have become a part of the fabric of American life, settling into everyday patterns of living, working, and attending schools in their local communities (Chavez 1991, 1994). Still, they struggle to achieve full social incorporation precisely because their undocumented status narrowly circumscribes their possibilities. This paradox is most acutely experienced by undocumented immigrant children, many of whom have spent most of their lives in the United States and have grown up with "American" values, identities, and aspirations.

Previous research finds that because school is the major socializing institution for undocumented immigrant children, their experience of "growing up undocumented" is complicated by the fact that for most of their lives they inhabit a legally protected space, the educational system. While public schools, writ large, are legally protected spaces, undocumented immigrant children participate in an educational system that is stratified (Gonzales 2010a; Gonzales et al. 2015a). Because immigration status and poverty are intimately connected for this group, undocumented immigrant children often grow up in segregated neighborhoods and attend high-poverty, low-

achieving schools (Gonzales 2016, Gonzales and Ruiz 2014; Abrego 2006). These schools are often under-resourced, experience high teacher turnover, and have inadequate facilities and learning materials. While these structural disadvantages impact the whole student body, the implications may be greater for undocumented children precisely because of the additional layer of vulnerability due to their undocumented status. As previous research suggests, being undocumented increases children's chances of "living in the shadows"—as undocumented parents may be less likely to access an array of services that have traditionally benefitted immigrant families (Yoshikawa and Kalil 2011; Menjívar and Abrego 2009; Fortuny et al. 2007)—and negatively impacts school outcomes (Bean et al. 2011). For this group, conflicting experiences of illegality and belonging start very early, as they often experience integration in their schools but also witness their parents' legal exclusion (Dreby 2015).

This chapter draws from two different studies examining the experiences of undocumented youth in the United States, in order to understand this group's conflicting experiences of illegality and belonging. Between 2003 and 2015, Roberto G. Gonzales carried out longitudinal research in the five-county Los Angeles metropolitan area. This chapter draws from his extensive fieldwork and interviews with 150 Mexican young adults who came to the United States before the age of 12. Edelina Burciaga conducted ethnographic research between 2009 and 2011 that consisted of 20 interviews with undocumented youth activists involved in the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act campaign in Los Angeles and Orange County, California. This chapter also draws from her comparative qualitative research conducted between 2014 and 2015, including 70 interviews with undocumented young people growing up and living in metropolitan Los Angeles, CA, a traditional immigrant gateway, and Atlanta, GA, a new immigrant destination.

The data presented in this chapter suggests that there are two key axes of educational stratification *within* the undocumented youth community. The first is among those who complete high school and attend college vs those who are considered early exiters, young people who leave K–12 schools at or before high school graduation (Gonzales 2011, 2016). Relatedly, the second axis of stratification is connected to *where* undocumented youth grow up and live. Previous research about the undocumented 1.5-generation has focused primarily on undocumented youth living in California, arguably one of the most welcoming regions in terms of postsecondary access (Gonzales 2015; Gonzales et al. 2015a; Enriquez and Saguy 2016; Terriquez 2014; Abrego 2006). While there is emergent research about the educational experiences of undocumented immigrant youth in regions other than California, (see for example Cebulko 2014; Gonzales and Ruiz 2014; Martinez 2014; Silver 2012), the comparative data presented in this chapter suggests that state and local contexts matter for the educational trajectories as well as the experiences of illegality and belonging for undocumented youth.

7.2 Studying Undocumented Youth

Until recently, there was scant available evidence from which to understand the lives of undocumented youth. Part of the difficulty inherent in such an endeavor is the lack of reliable demographic and empirical data. It is difficult to obtain survey data about undocumented immigrants because they comprise a small share of the U.S. population. In addition, large-scale surveys generally do not include questions about immigration status, so we do not have sufficient data from which to develop a clear statistical portrait. And, surveying them through random dialing methods, respondent driven sampling, or other similar approaches can be costly and cost prohibitive, especially when trying to generate a national sample.

To move beyond conjecture requires a methodological approach that yields deep familiarity with the lives of the undocumented young people and their families. Foner (2003) makes a persuasive case for ethnography as a central

method to engage and understand hard-to-reach populations. While this approach has its downside in that it limits the number of people a researcher can study and the ability to make generalizations for broad populations, in-depth study of a small number of people over time provides insights into their beliefs, values, and social relations, as well as the complex ways they construct their identities in specific contexts (Foner 2003, p. 26). Relying on large-scale surveys may mean missing some of this important nuance or even getting it wrong. As Kubal (2013, p. 20) notes, inquiry into the power of the state is most fertile at "the level of lived experience, where power is exercised, understood, and sometimes resisted." Understanding how young adults experience and push back against power requires a methodology deeply rooted in their lives.

As such, qualitative inquiry has provided valuable insight into how undocumented youth make meaning of their experiences of illegality. Ethnography and in-depth interviews, the most widely employed methods of data collection with undocumented youth, are able to uncover how these young adults navigate the transition to and through adulthood, including their educational trajectories. It is through ethnographic research that we have learned that the transition to illegality is a complex process. Because undocumented youth experience both social inclusion and legal exclusion (Gonzales 2011, 2016), sociologists employing qualitative methods have learned that illegality shapes processes of incorporation differently for undocumented youth than for other immigrant youth. Ethnography and interview based research has documented the differences in participation in education and the labor market, hallmarks of immigrant incorporation, as well as the symbolic and emotional implications of incomplete inclusion. Capturing the affective component of the undocumented youth experience has been a key strength of the body of qualitative studies in this area. While immigration scholars have been long concerned with sense of belonging, qualitative research about undocumented youth has significantly extended sociological understandings of this complex process.

Another strength of qualitative work about undocumented immigrant youth is that it is rooted in the everyday lived experience of this group. Distinct from quantitative research, these studies reveal how undocumented youth negotiate and manage their legal status in multiple facets of their lives. While most of this research focuses on educational access, amongst the most formative experiences for undocumented young adults, this research also has revealed how undocumented youth make sense of their racial and ethnic identity, their mental health and well-being, and their own articulation of what it means to be an American (Patler and Pirtle 2018; Aranda et al. 2015). A key strength of the qualitative approach in this field has been that it centers the voices and experiences of undocumented young adults. In doing so, it has highlighted the challenges that undocumented youth face, but also their agency and power in the face of significant structural barriers. In contrast to public perceptions of undocumented young people as vulnerable because of their legal status and age, qualitative studies have shown that undocumented youth activism is a vibrant aspect of the undocumented youth experience in the United States. To date, qualitative research about undocumented youth has made significant strides in building theory about how legal status shapes immigrant integration, especially in the area of educational access, but the field remains open to new lines of inquiry.

Research on undocumented young people must continue to be methodologically rigorous and address the multi-layered complexities that exist within this diverse population. Much of the current research has focused its attention on high academic achievers and a small group of undocumented youth who are connected to immigrant rights organizations or who are politically active. Indeed, high-achieving undocumented college student activists are an attractive convenience sample for university researchers, politicians, and journalists. And they are also much easier to locate and with whom to gain cooperation. But this group is not representative of the undocumented population as a whole. And if we limit our scope of inquiry to the most talented,

resourced, and connected among a particular community, what we know is inherently skewed. Efforts to study inequality must seek to fully understand a range of experiences, not merely those of the most successful. We know very little about undocumented young people who do not make the successful transition from high school to postsecondary education, and even less about those with little to no K–12 experiences in the United States.

In addition, this research has focused primarily on undocumented young people living in urban areas in states with a significant portion of the undocumented immigrant population, including California, New York, and Illinois. We are just beginning to understand the consequences of different state and local-level policies for undocumented youth living in new immigrant destinations. We still know very little about how undocumented youth living in rural areas of the United States are faring (for an exception see, Gonzales and Ruiz 2014). Given the racial and ethnic makeup of the undocumented immigrant population more generally, much of the research has captured the experiences of Latina/o undocumented youth. There is still more to learn about the experiences of undocumented youth from other racial and ethnic groups (for exceptions see, Cebulko 2014; Buenavista 2012). To be sure, studying hard-to-reach populations can be difficult, time consuming, and expensive, but scholars employing qualitative methods are uniquely positioned to continue gathering data that highlight the contours of how undocumented immigrant youth experience both exclusion and belonging, which we address in the sections that follow.

7.3 Formative Experiences of Illegality and Belonging

As undocumented children grow up, they continue to face barriers and challenges on the road to and through adulthood, as their family responsibilities increase but their opportunities for social and economic mobility become more limited. Previous research finds that as undocumented immigrant youth transition into adulthood, there is a pattern of defining moments that shape their educational and social mobility, as well as their sense of belonging (Gonzales 2011). Recent administrative action through the introduction of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has opened some short-term opportunities for undocumented young adults as they transition to adulthood (Gonzales et al. 2014). The long-term benefits, however, are still being understood.[1] Announced in 2012, DACA offers a stay of deportation and a work permit for eligible undocumented young people. While DACA has shifted the experiences of undocumented young people in some ways for better, the transition to adulthood is still significantly shaped by their undocumented status. Many undocumented young people grow up aware of their undocumented status, as some of their parents openly discuss and share with them their efforts to fix their status. In addition, parents often offer advice about how to handle questions about their undocumented status. Dolores, a 22-year-old college student who migrated to the United States with her mother at just 2 months old, was encouraged to have an alternate story about where she was born,

> In elementary school, my dad used to always tell me, "Don't say that you were born in Mexico. Tell them that you were born in Texas and that you're from Texas. Whatever you say, don't tell them that you're Mexican, and that you don't have papers or anything like that."

During our interview, Dolores, who had since "come out" as an undocumented youth activist, shared that she and her mother had recently come across an elementary school art project where Dolores had drawn the state of Texas as the place she was born. While she and her mother could laugh about the art project 15 years later, Dolores' experience reflects how early the conflicting experience of illegality and belonging starts for undocumented immigrant youth.

[1]Efforts such as the National UnDACAmented Research Project, headed by Roberto G. Gonzales at Harvard University, are collecting multi-sited, longitudinal data on the impacts of DACA.

Victoria, who also lived in Orange County, and migrated from Mexico at the age of 13, was explicitly advised by her parents not to tell anyone that she "didn't have papers." Instead when asked if she was born in the United States, she would say, "'No, I was born in Mexico.' But I would leave it up them. I wouldn't say, 'Oh, I don't have papers.'" Other undocumented youth learn about their status through their parents' unsuccessful attempts to adjust their immigration status. Jennifer, whose family overstayed their visa, shared that she grew up under the impression that she, her sister, and her parents were going to be a "hundred percent and be legal soon." She shared, "That was the goal that—we always talked about it, with our family, that by now—like by college, I would have a green card. I would be legalized." While Jennifer did not grow up with explicit advice from her parents to hide her immigration status, Jennifer's sense of belonging was informed in part by her parents' assurances that someday she would be a legal resident and have a green card. Like Jennifer, Yadira, who immigrated on a 6-month visa with her mother and brother, watched her mother spend over ten thousand dollars to "fix their status." After September 11, 2001, when Yadira was in the third grade, her mother's attorney informed her that, "there wasn't anything to do," leaving Yadira's family without any hope of adjusting their status.

These early experiences of knowing and yet hiding their immigration status socialize undocumented young people to understand to some degree that it is shameful to be undocumented. Andrea, who lived in Orange County and would return to Mexico during the summers before 2001, shared,

> Yeah, I definitely knew I was undocumented. Just because you had to hide—you had to lie. I remember that I had this bracelet that had my initials and every time I would cross, I would have to take it off. When it came to school or those kinds of things, I myself was ashamed to say it because I thought I was wrong.

At the same time that undocumented youth internalize the stigma of being undocumented, they also form a sense of belonging through experiences in school and in their communities. Jennifer, who is 19 years old, migrated to Los Angeles when she was 7 years old. She described her transition as less shocking than she expected, primarily because she migrated to a predominantly Latino neighborhood, or as she described it,

> I would like to say [my neighborhood was] one hundred percent Latino. I mean when we got there I was like, "Why is everyone speaking Spanish?" I was surprised because I was like, "Okay." It was comforting to go to a city where at least other people knew the language that I spoke. I didn't feel too out of place.

While Jennifer later described facing challenges in school because she didn't know English, like many undocumented youth, she eventually transitioned out of English as a Second Language classes into mainstream classes. Like Jennifer, Edith and her family also migrated to Los Angeles and she lived there until she was 12 years old. Edith recalled her earliest memories of living in the greater Los Angeles area as happy. She shared,

> I have really looked back at my childhood experiences, and I started reflecting and I started thinking, there were so many signs [that I was undocumented], but I did not put them together. I think that is because I was, I had a really happy childhood in Los Angeles, I sincerely mean that.

While Edith attributed her happy childhood to the simple needs of a child, her experience reflects how during elementary and middle school, for undocumented youth a sense of belonging is cultivated in part by just being able to be children.

Between the ages of 16 and 18, undocumented youth begin to wrestle with the full impact of their undocumented status in their day-to-day lives. During this discovery stage (Gonzales 2011), undocumented young people begin to negotiate access to rites of passage such as getting their first job, a driver's license, and considering the college application process. As Dolores, who we introduced earlier, shared during our interview,

> I always knew [that I was undocumented] but it didn't start to affect me until high school, like senior year. When everybody was applying to

> college. I thought maybe we had the money so that I could go to school. And that's when reality hit. Like, I can't. My parents can't afford it, I can't get financial aid because I don't have documentation. I thought that was like, the end of my world. Because I couldn't go to college.

Dolores—like many undocumented young adults who attended college before California passed the state Dream Act which expanded access to state and institutional financial aid—faced significant financial barriers to college access.[2] Despite the passage of the California Dream Act, which in some ways has eased the transition to college, undocumented youth still navigate an array of confusing systems. Yesenia, who was 20 years old at the time of our interview and had enrolled in a 4-year college in Southern California, shared that when it was time to apply for financial aid, her high school guidance counselor was not able to help her. Instead her counselor focused on helping citizen students navigate the financial aid process. During our interview, she shared,

> Then the day before I told her that I still needed help with my Dream Act [application] and she just told me there was nothing she could do about it because she was helping the FAFSA students…it made me feel like I didn't belong, like I was just another random student nobody cared about. So I got mad [*laughs*] and I went to the library and I just did my application on my own.

While in some states laws like the California Dream Act are easing the transition to college in practical ways by providing financial support, Yesenia's experience shows that legal reforms are incomplete without training and preparation for school agents who are most likely to interact with undocumented students. For many undocumented youth, who do attend college, the need for informed and trained staff does not end in high school, as exemplified by Kelvin, who grew up in the Pomona Valley and attended community college for 4 years before applying to transfer to a 4-year university. Kelvin shared that after being accepted to his dream college, the University of California, Berkeley, he still did not know whether and if he would be able to attend because his financial aid offer was confusing. He shared,

> I was finally able to get on the [online financial aid] portal. Then I saw the numbers. It was really confusing. I just remember seeing like, "I need $5000 by the time I get there and to attend UC Berkeley." I was like, "Whoa, I need to come up with $5000 in 2 or 3 months" so I was working almost 3 jobs because I wasn't sure if it was going to be covered.

Kelvin, like many other undocumented young adults, lives in a financially vulnerable family. To cover the $5000 he thought he would have to pay, he continued working his retail job and started to work a second job at a warehouse. He said, "I was basically on my feet all day, just running around." After several phone calls to the university's financial aid office, Kelvin learned that he would be responsible for $2500 of his educational costs that year, an amount that was still steep but more manageable.

In addition to state laws expanding or constricting higher education access, DACA has shaped the transition out of high school as eligible undocumented young people are able to get driver's licenses and can legally work, mitigating some of the isolation of the discovery stage. Yet, research continues to show that undocumented young people still begin to feel the profound personal effects of living without "papers" in the United States as they transition out of the K–12 system (Gonzales and Bautista-Chavez 2012; Gonzales et al. 2016; Teranishi et al. 2015). Thus, even with a provisional status, the post-DACA period continues to be a critical moment in the lives of undocumented young people. Estimates on high school to postsecondary transitions prior to DACA suggest that about only 5–10% of undocumented students attend college, with an even smaller number actually graduating from college (Passel 2003). While DACA has opened up some important avenues that support a smoother college transition, it does not address exclusions from financial aid. Moreover, in the absence of federal immigration reform, immigra-

[2]The California DREAM Act refers to two state laws, California Assembly Bill 130 and Assembly Bill 131, that allow eligible undocumented students to apply for certain state public financial aid benefits.

tion action at the state, county, and municipal levels ensures that now, more so than ever before, where one lives is consequential for experiences of integration and incorporation. Therefore, the "transition to illegality" is also critically shaped by K–12 experiences and increasingly by which region of the country they grow up in.

7.4 Divergent Experiences of Illegality and Belonging After High School

7.4.1 College-Goers and Early Exiters

The transition to illegality does not play out in a singular manner among all undocumented adolescents. As immigration scholars have noted, local institutions mediate immigrants' incorporation prospects. While adult immigrants typically become incorporated into the U.S. economy through the labor market, children are woven into the country's social and cultural fabric through schools (Gleeson and Gonzales 2012). Schools provide immigrant students opportunities to learn the language, customs, and culture of their new country and to integrate into a peer group that will experience common milestones together (Rumbaut 1997; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2009).

Participation in K–12 schools is undoubtedly a defining and integrative experience. However, undocumented students, like their peers, are educated in a stratified public educational system (Gonzales et al. 2015a) that structures opportunities for its pupils. Increasingly, poor, minority, and immigrant students attend high-poverty, low-achieving school districts with fewer resources (Miller and Brown 2011). Operating with limited resources, schools often make decisions regarding how students are integrated into the larger curriculum and they determine student access to scarce resources. These decisions benefit a small portion of students while disadvantaging large segments.

While access to school resources has an important bearing on the success of all students, decisions that negatively affect a larger student body can be especially detrimental to undocumented students (Gonzales 2010a). Due to barriers related to legal exclusions and limited family finances, undocumented students confront several barriers. Their parents often lack knowledge of the U.S. education system, and their own unauthorized status keeps them in the shadows. This can have a direct effect on children, as it limits their access to critically needed services (Hagan et al. 2011; Menjívar and Abrego 2012; Rodriguez and Hagan 2004) and leaves them without the guidance and advocacy needed to persist, graduate, and advance to college. Undocumented students are also ineligible for federal financial aid, limiting their pathways to college. While DACA has bridged some of the financial gap, by providing work authorization to its beneficiaries, it does not address financial aid exclusions (Gonzales and Bautista-Chavez 2012). And for those without work authorization, once they leave school they exit a legally protected space and enter a world of low-wage work and legal exclusions (Gonzales 2016).

In his longitudinal work on undocumented immigrant youth, Gonzales (2010a, 2011, 2016) has examined the diverging experiences of two groups of differently achieving young people, the college-goers and the early exiters. The college-goers benefited from positive school-based networks, nurturing relationships, and avenues of access to academic counseling and advanced curricula. The early-exiters, on the other hand, did not make meaningful social connections in high school, followed trajectories that ended in dead-end jobs, and exposed them repeatedly to a harsher world of legal exclusions. During high school, extra-familial mentors, access to information about postsecondary options, and financial support for college helped college-goers to bypass some of the negative effects of undocumented status. These benefits enabled them to make transitions from high school to college and to continue membership in an institution for which participation was legally permissible. They also allowed them to engage in meaningfully productive activities and to maintain positive aspirations about the future.

For those unable to make transitions to postsecondary education, the onset of adult responsibilities coupled with legal exclusions dramatically shrunk their worlds. Limited to low-wage employment and driven deeply into the shadows by legal exclusions and fear of deportation, early exiters settled into lives of limitation and struggle. As a result, their future aspirations flattened and stress and worry developed into mental and physical ailments.

Undocumented youth enter the transition to adulthood with varying resources. Public schools offer them access and inclusion. The school is arguably the single most important institution in their education and integration. However, as decades of research suggest, schools are not meritocracies, and stratification within and across school districts detours the postsecondary trajectories of many undocumented students. As such, the futures of undocumented students are tied to school reform efforts. Similarly, state and local contexts have a great bearing on their futures.

7.4.2 The Influence of State Laws and Policies on Educational Trajectories and Belonging

As previously mentioned, much of what sociologists know about the undocumented 1.5-generation has been based on research about immigrants living in California, arguably an ideal locale to study this group because of the long history of immigrant flows to the state and the large size of the undocumented immigrant population (Gonzales 2016; Rumbaut 2012). In recent years, undocumented immigrants have dispersed to new destinations, including the Midwest and the South (Marrow 2011; Massey 2008; Waters and Jiménez 2005; Singer 2004; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon 2009). In the absence of a national comprehensive immigration reform, states and localities have enacted a number of laws and policies that impact the day-to-day lives and incorporation of undocumented immigrants, resulting in a variegated legal climate (Olivas 2008; Walker and Leitner 2011). Some states have broadened access to the polity—offering undocumented immigrants the ability to apply for driver's licenses and in-state tuition at public universities. Others have taken a more restrictive approach—for example, by attempting to criminalize unauthorized presence and exclude undocumented immigrants from public universities.

Neither undocumented nor DACAmented students are eligible for federal financial aid. However, opportunities for postsecondary education still vary widely by state. In states with the most inclusive policies, undocumented and DACAmented students receive in-state tuition rates and qualify for state-based financial aid. Currently, 20 states offer in-state tuition to undocumented immigrant students, 16 by state legislative action (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Washington) and 4 by state university systems (the University of Hawaii Board of Regents, University of Michigan Board of Regents, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and Rhode Island's Board of Governors for Higher Education established policies to offer in-state tuition rates to undocumented immigrants). In addition, 5 states (California, New Mexico, Minnesota, Texas, and Washington) offer state financial assistance to undocumented students. In states with the most exclusionary policies, these students may be barred from in-state tuition rates and scholarships, be excluded from state-based financial aid and scholarships, or be banned from public universities and colleges entirely (e.g., Georgia and South Carolina). Presently, 6 states (Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, and South Carolina) bar undocumented students from in-state tuition benefits, while public university systems in Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia bar undocumented students from admission.

In addition, several states have passed laws providing additional access to DACA beneficiaries, otherwise unavailable to undocumented immigrants without DACA. While state governments cannot directly alter DACA itself, they can control the state benefits available to individuals receiving deferred action. The driver's license is an important example. Rules for governing

eligibility for driver's licenses vary by state, and currently, only 12 states plus the District of Columbia offer undocumented immigrants eligibility for driver's licenses.[3] However, otherwise-eligible DACA recipients who obtain an employment authorization document and a Social Security number are now able to obtain a license in every state. This benefit provides DACA holders the ability to travel freely and safely to school or work, a significant form of relief for DACA beneficiaries and their families.

Higher education is an important area where DACA beneficiaries have added layers of access. In addition to being able to legally work to help pay for college, DACA beneficiaries in certain states now have significant advantages over those without DACA. For example, several states, including Arizona, have passed state legislation allowing eligible DACA beneficiaries to pay tuition at in-state residency rates. Also, South Carolina, which otherwise bans undocumented students from enrolling in its public higher education systems, allows DACA beneficiaries to enroll. In addition, certain postsecondary institutions offer scholarships to DACA beneficiaries that are not open to other undocumented immigrants. DACA has also opened up possibilities for beneficiaries to pursue graduate studies. Many graduate programs offer funding packages to their graduate students that include teaching or research assistantships and fellowships; each are considered a form of university employment. And, many medical schools have opened up opportunities to DACA beneficiaries. But university employment and participation in residency programs is tied to the ability to lawfully work. Without work authorization, many of these opportunities would not be available and, as such, a range of graduate programs would not be an option for DACA beneficiaries.

Saul, a lanky 20-year-old, was in the 11th grade when Policies 4.1.6 and 4.3.4, collectively known as "the Georgia ban," took effect. During our interview, which we conducted at the dining table of his parents' home, he shared that it was during 10th grade that he became serious about attending college. He was looking forward to starting the college application process, but after learning that the ban would prevent him from attending college in Georgia, he fell into a depression. He stopped doing his homework and he let his grades slip. Despite this setback, in his senior year, with prodding from a good friend, Saul decided to explore community college as an option. He visited the admissions office of Southern Crescent, the closest 2-year college, and learned the following:

> So we went there and like asked about the like applications, and then that's when I found out again, they were like "Well, these are the in-state tuition rates, but this is what you have to pay, out-of-state tuition, which is like 3 or 4 times more," and I was like "Wow, this is ridiculous"…I was like, I'm not paying this, especially for a technical school.

Several of the respondents in Georgia echoed Saul's statement that the financial challenge of paying out-of-state tuition prevented them from attending even 2-year colleges. For example, Georgia Perimeter College, the 2-year university in the Atlanta area, would cost an undocumented immigrant $21,000 for 2 years versus the $7600 in-state tuition rate.

At the time of his interview, Omar had been out of high school for 2 years. While he attended the University of North Georgia directly after high school, he was not able to continue because he could not meet the costs of tuition, fees, and books. When we spoke, he was taking a year off from the University of North Georgia, and was planning to work while he attended the less expensive technical college in his community:

> It's hard for me to pay for college. Last year I attended University of North Georgia, and it was hard cuz I was paying out of state tuition. I paid five grand for twelve credits…and here in Tech I tried to apply earlier to enter spring semester but apparently their policies have changed and now even for [DACA] students from the beginning, they're charging them as international. So that's three to four times.

[3]These states are: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Vermont, and Washington.

As Omar emphasized, even attending Athens Tech was out of his financial reach. As such, he was actively saving to return to college. He managed to save about $150 from each paycheck for college, but could not maintain the level of savings because his father, also an undocumented immigrant, was out of work. So Omar contributed a portion of his weekly earnings to his family for food and bills, reducing the amount of money he could save in order to return to UNG.

In addition to the policies explicitly excluding undocumented immigrants from Georgia public universities, the Board of Regents announced in 2015 that some smaller colleges would merge with larger colleges in order to streamline administrative costs. Two of the colleges that merged were Georgia Perimeter College, the 2-year college in the Atlanta area, and Georgia State University, one of the five colleges included in the ban. The announcement created uncertainty about whether or not undocumented young adults would also be banned from Georgia Perimeter College. Jovan, a 23-year-old DACA beneficiary was working in retail and not enrolled in college although he hoped to be. During our interview, he shared that the merger created uncertainty for him and other students who might consider attending Georgia Perimeter,

> …There is Georgia Perimeter, but, it's soon merging with Georgia State University, and that's one of the schools where I'm banned from, so I don't know if they are going to continue the same policies of banning us from that. So it's in a limbo altogether, and I don't really want to put up a fight with that…

The consolidation of several campuses across the state created a sense of anxiety about narrowing educational opportunities. While Policy 4.3.4 (out-of-state tuition) made the cost of attending 2- and 4-year colleges nearly impossible for undocumented young adults, Policy 4.1.6 (ban from top five colleges and universities) heightened the negative impact of seemingly neutral policies like the consolidation of smaller colleges and universities with larger ones. Participants shared that like most of their citizen classmates, they preferred to stay in the state of Georgia to attend college. This was due in part to their desire to be close to their parents, of whom many were also undocumented.

While the Board of Regents policies presented structural barriers to college completion and entry for undocumented young adults, these policies also had symbolic implications. During interviews many undocumented young adults expressed feelings of rejection, disappointment and frustration over these policies. Like Saul, who fell into a depression upon learning that his legal status would make it difficult for him to attend college, other undocumented young adults described similar instances of depression both during and after high school (Gonzales et al. 2013). Jovan, for example, shared that at a party during his senior year of high school,

> I do remember this one time I went to a party, my friends and me were drinking, and you know having fun, and, I just broke down crying in front of them because I told them, you know I couldn't go to school, you know I couldn't do the military, I couldn't do all of this, and I felt just stuck…

For Jovan, who went to a predominantly White high school in a suburb of Atlanta, this incident was one of the first times he disclosed his immigration status to his friends, many of whom were not undocumented. While most of his friends planned to attend technical or state colleges, Jovan felt stuck and excluded from the opportunity to "go off and leave this small town to find something…figure out life." Similarly, both Diana and her younger sister, who was also undocumented, worked hard in high school to take full advantage of the educational opportunities that were available to them, including taking Advanced Placement courses. Diana who described herself as a "very hard worker," shared that she regularly worked 50–60 h a week as a server at a local restaurant, both to contribute to her family's household income and to be able to save enough to eventually go to college. Because of her full-time work schedule, her interview took place on her one day off. During our interview she shared,

> It's just the limitation of what I can do frustrates me. It's frustrating. That's how I feel. I feel frustrated. I know for a fact that my parents do too. They want us to go to school. They came here to

> give us a better life, to get a better education. The fact that I can't get it frustrates me. It makes me angry. I can't do anything about it. I don't have a say in the government. I can't vote. I can't. It's my country, too. This is all I know. The fact that they're limiting me to not only my potential, my success, my education, my right as a human being to get that education frustrates me.

During our interview, it was clear that Diana was proud of her work ethic and her contribution to her family's economic well-being. But like many of the undocumented young adult respondents in Georgia, she was frustrated that her intellect and her work ethic were not being used to improve her own and her family's life. In short, Diana and other undocumented youth felt that they were failing not only themselves, but also their parents. Like Diana, Ines worked between 60 and 70 h per week as a manager at a pizzeria. Her work schedule was demanding and unpredictable, and because of this, her interview took place at the restaurant when her shift was over. Ines, who shared that she had done very well in high school, wanted to attend a culinary arts program to become a pastry chef. While she knew that there were different routes she could take to achieve her goals, she wanted to attend a culinary arts program to give herself the best chance of securing a good job in a competitive industry. Nevertheless, attending a culinary arts program at a technical college or a culinary school was impossible because of the cost. During our interview, it became apparent that being prevented from attending school not only meant that she felt stuck but it was also taking an emotional toll on Ines. Through tears, she said, "I always get teary, because it means a lot to me. It means a lot to me to be able to go to school. I felt like, in a way, I felt like I had let my parents down, because I wasn't able to do more. But [my mom] was like, 'You don't have to go to school to be good.'" For Ines and many of the other undocumented young adults interviewed in Georgia, the Board of Regents policies not only created a structural barrier to upward mobility but also had significant implications for their sense of belonging.

7.5 Educational Exclusion and Belonging

This chapter captures the varied educational experiences of undocumented immigrant youth as they navigate the transition out of the legally protected spaces of the K–12 system and into adulthood. As this chapter shows, schools are not only crucial for undocumented immigrant youth's educational mobility, but they are also a significant socializing institution. It is in America's public schools where undocumented immigrant youth learn and begin to internalize both a sense of belonging *and* exclusion. In addition, schools are nested within a broader web of immigration laws and policies that have become increasingly hostile. These laws and policies, in conjunction with the complete absence of a comprehensive immigration reform for the nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States, has created a variegated landscape of belonging and exclusion for undocumented immigrants broadly, and more specifically for undocumented immigrant youth. Despite the *Plyler v. Doe* holding in which the Supreme Court explicitly sought to avoid creating an educational underclass, many undocumented immigrant youths find it difficult to realize the promise of *Plyler*. The temporary relief provide by DACA has in some ways eased the transition to adulthood for this group. However, their long-term futures are still uncertain.

And while there have been considerable strides in gathering systematic, empirical research on the contradictory circumstances that frame the lives of undocumented immigrant youth, there has been considerable focus on the experiences of college-bound and high-achieving youth. In this chapter, we draw from our own work to introduce additional axes of stratification and show how they play out differently across educational attainment and place. Highlighting the experiences of differently achieving young people is key to painting a more complete picture of the educational trajectories and experiences of undocumented immigrant youth.

As data collected by both authors show, experiences of illegality and belonging are profoundly shaped by whether or not undocumented young people successfully complete high school and/or make it to college, and increasingly by which area of the country they grow up in. Hostile educational access policies, like those enacted in Georgia, not only create educational exclusion that has long-term implications for undocumented youth's structural incorporation, but also has socio-emotional implications, as Latino undocumented youth in hostile states must negotiate the emotional ups and downs of feeling educationally untethered. During our interview with Saul, he shared that he felt like Georgia, a place he considered "home," no longer cared about what happened to him and his future after high school. He said that he believed that through hostile policies, like those enacted in Georgia, states were effectively sending the message, "Okay, thanks for coming…good luck."

Despite the layers of inequality we have uncovered, the young people we met shared more similarities than differences. They grew up in neighborhoods across the United States where they were encouraged to work hard to achieve their dreams. During their integrated childhoods they had as much in common with their peers as they did with their parents. However, as they made critical transitions from childhood to adolescence and young adulthood, their immigration status became a central impediment to their hopes and dreams. Almost as consequential, the resources and practices of their school districts and the policies of their states conditioned their post high school lives.

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