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Title: The Emergence of UndocuPhDs: A Critical Testimonio of Latinx Undocumented Students Creating and Documenting the Journey through Doctoral Education

Abstract: In this paper, we use the method of testimonio (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Carmona, 2012) to introduce our collective experience as UndocuPhDs, as chronicled during our time as doctoral students from 2012-2018 through public writings, advocacy, institutional capacity-building and media. We frame the critical analysis of our journey through LatCrit (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and Institutional Undocu-Competence (IUC) (Valenzuela, Perez, Perez, Montiel & Chaparro, 2015) to trace the intersection of our undocumented status with our working-class background, financial aid policy gaps, and the advocacy strategies that helped us to overcome institutional invisibility and structural barriers. Our testimonio also highlights the importance of allies who mobilized opportunities for access to graduate school and for engagement in defining activities of the doctoral journey. Lastly, our testimonio transforms the role of undocumented students, as a collective, from research participants to authors and producers of knowledge. The discussion in this paper contributes to the understanding of the experiences of undocumented students in the new context of graduate education and elevates the voices of undocumented scholars in academia.

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Key words: UndocuPhDs, undocumented graduate students, undocumented students in higher education, undocumented PhD

The Emergence of UndocuPhDs: A Critical Testimonio of Latinx Undocumented Students Creating and Documenting the Journey through Doctoral Education

Citizenship matters for educational attainment, and non-citizen Latinx women are among the least represented in doctoral education (Perez Huber et al., 2014). A report by the New American Economy and the President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration (2020) estimates that there are approximately 450,000 undocumented students in postsecondary education, only 2% of all U.S. students enrolled in higher education. The report also estimates that approximately 10% (45,000) of undocumented students in higher education are enrolled in graduate or professional schools.

Bedolla, Montiel & Chen (2019) present a profile of undocumented students seeking to enter health-focused graduate and professional schools and discuss students' experiences with the transition into these programs. Chang (2011) presents a personal counter-narrative of the journey toward obtaining a doctoral degree as a way to negotiate an undocumented status and the search for legitimacy. Chang's personal narrative invites undocumented scholars to shape academic discourse through reflexivity and rigorous inquiry. Nonetheless, the experiences of undocumented graduate students are absent from the research literature. Empirical research on these experiences is critical to inform policy and institutional practices to expand access to this new educational horizon for undocumented people.

Almost a decade after the publication of Chang's narrative, we present our collective testimonio. We are three Latinx mujeres from working-class backgrounds who navigated higher education and enrolled in a doctoral program while being fully undocumented. Iliana and Gloria are now Deferred Action for Childhood Recipients (DACA) beneficiaries. Jessica obtained U Nonimmigrant status in 2013 and lawful permanent resident status in 2017. We met during the

first year of our doctoral program at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). Created by a nationally-recognized immigrant youth scholar and institutional allies, the 21st Century Civil Rights Fellowship at CGU was the first in the U.S. to implement a cohort model for undocumented students pursuing doctoral studies.

Our testimonio presents the term UndocuPhDs, in reference to our experiences as undocumented doctoral students. We braid the methodological traditions of testimonio (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Flores Carmona, 2012) with Latina/o Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and the social justice- and practice-oriented framework of Institutional Undocu-Competence (IUC) (Valenzuela et al., 2015) to explore the questions: *what is the experience of undocumented students in doctoral education? How do undocumented graduate students build Institutional Undocu-Competence at the graduate level? What are the ways undocumented students chronicle their journey through academia?*

Our testimonio makes unique contributions to the research literature on undocumented students in higher education. First, it brings visibility to undocumented students in doctoral education and introduces our experiences in the research literature. Second, it advances the use of critical methods and frameworks to build a collective story of resistance and persistence in a final stage of the educational pipeline that has historically excluded and pushed out undocumented people. Third, our testimonio presents a model for research collaboration among undocumented scholars centered on lived experiences and critical reflexivity.

Beyond our contributions to the research literature, our testimonio also expands the tools of advocacy for our community and the contexts in which these are applied. In the undocumented immigrant rights movement, personal narratives, traditional media, digital tools, and collective organizing have been historically used in the spheres of community-based

organizing and college access advocacy (Galindo, 2012; Nicholls, 2013; Zimmerman, 2016). Our testimonio translates these advocacy methods to graduate education to create a path for educational persistence for us as undocumented students in a doctoral program, build institutional capacity at our school to serve and advocate for undocumented students, and add to the historical record of undocumented student advocacy. Most importantly, our testimonio marks a shift in the role the undocumented community plays in scholarship. We move from being viewed exclusively as passive participants to actively producing knowledge regarding our experiences. This shift creates new possibilities for leveraging research methodologies and our positionality as undocumented or formerly undocumented researchers for advocacy through scholarship.

Undocumented Students and Higher Education

Absent federal policy, individual states enacted legislation, such as California's Assembly Bills 540, 130 and 131, granting certain undocumented college students access to in-state tuition rates and, in some cases, state and institutional financial aid. These legal advancements coupled with institutional practices across K-12 schools, community college districts, state university systems, and private colleges and universities have made it possible for undocumented students to enroll and persist in college (Flores, 2010; Flores & Horn, 2009; Kaushal, 2008). The introduction of DACA facilitated additional educational opportunities for beneficiaries (Gonzales & Terriquez, 2013; Wong et al., 2015). However, early research on the program showed that any educational gains made by the undocumented community through the program would be limited without permanent policy (Perez Huber et al., 2014). The future of DACA is currently being decided by the U.S. Supreme Court (National Immigration Law Center,

2019), highlighting the need for institutional action to expand educational access independent of volatile immigration programs such as DACA or Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

Early scholarship about undocumented students focused on barriers to higher education and experiences of undocumented youth in college. For example, Perez Huber & Malagon's (2007) study of six Latina/o undocumented college students found that lack of social support and financial aid create institutional neglect that perpetuates the marginalization and invisibility of undocumented college students. Prejudice among staff or their lack of knowledge about students' rights presented additional barriers for undocumented students (Casabona, 2014; Perez & Cortes, 2011). Perez et al. (2010) also found that undocumented Latino/a students' "triple minority status": ethnic origin, lack of documentation and economic disadvantages" results in increased social distress and that students cope with such burden through the motivation received from parents; the actions of institutional agents; the support from peers, and; the support of campus programs (p.39). Most undocumented students enter two-year institutions given its lower cost of attendance (Perez & Cortes, 2011). While the cost of community colleges makes education more accessible for undocumented students, attending a two-year college and being enrolled less than full-time increases the risk of not finishing college (Fry, 2002; Madera et al., 2008). Combined, these barriers narrow the pipeline of undocumented students who finish college and enter graduate school.

Although the literature on undocumented students has grown significantly starting in the mid-2000s, there are gaps as it relates to graduate education. Anaya, Del Rosario & Hayes-Bautista (2012) discuss the opportunities for undocumented students to access medical school through DACA. The executive order's provision of employment authorization allows individuals to complete required job training for licensure and provides access to general employment,

which can help to offset the financial burden of these programs. Bedolla, Montiel & Chen (2019) examine the impact of Pre-Health Dreamers, a community-based program created by undocumented students that prepare students for the transition into health-focused graduate programs. Aguilar (2019) conceptualizes a critical framework emerging from his own experience as an undocumented scholar, attesting to one of the few undocumented scholars in academia. Chang's (2011) personal essay reflects on her journey and pursuit of what she terms as being "hyperundocumented," a continuous effort to compensate for being undocumented through academic achievement and educational attainment. Her account introduces the possibility of individuals with the lived experience of being undocumented to claim authorship of our own experiences in academia. What is missing from the emerging literature that on graduate school opportunities for undocumented students is a nuanced understanding of our experiences once enrolled in a graduate degree program. Our testimonio herein introduces this experience in scholarship through a narrative of our collective journey through doctoral education, framed by Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and our previous framework of Institutional Undocu-Competence (Valenzuela et al., 2015).

Framework

Our testimonio braids Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312; Delgado Bernal, 2002) & Institutional Undocu-Competence (IUC) (Valenzuela et al., 2015) through an autopoietic process (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 149). We experienced graduate school through the multidimensional identities as brown, Latinx, working-class mujeres who experienced varying degrees of poverty while growing up undocumented in California: Iliana, in the Central Valley, Jessica in the San Gabriel Valley, and Gloria in Orange County. LatCrit has been used to frame research on the experiences of Latinx undocumented

students in undergraduate education because of its acknowledgment of intersecting identities and the recognition of multilayered oppression within the context of higher education (Perez Huber, 2010; Perez Huber & Malagon, 2006).

Our migration to the United States positions us along U.S.-specific axes of identity, including skin tone and race, a U.S. Latinidad that grapples with gender-inclusive language, social class categorization that is affected by multiple other axes of our migration experiences, and a U.S.-centric notion of gender identity. Our integration into U.S. culture was impacted in large part by the young age at which we each entered the U.S. and our understanding of the ways our lack of legal status shaped our exclusion. Our academic accomplishments were, and continue to be, a combination of our tenacity and the dedication of informed allies in the context of an educational system that excludes and expels women, people of color, queer students, and undocumented youth and young adults.

By centering on our UndocuPhD experiences, we examine and challenge the intersecting systems of oppression that serve to exclude people like us from engaging in epistemology (Chang, 2011). As doctoral students in Education, we received extensive training in the analysis of educational systems, which we then employed to propose a framework for IUC (Valenzuela, 2015) to assess, challenge and change institutional inequities affecting undocumented immigrant communities.

Methodology

This article draws on testimonio as a methodological tool (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Flores Carmona, 2012; Perez Huber, 2008) to introduce our experience as undocumented doctoral students in the research literature. We came together in 2012 at CGU's School of Educational Studies. For six years, we met in-person and virtually to discuss our progress in the

program, to problem-solve barriers we faced as students, and to develop advocacy strategies within our department and the university to build IUC and expand the number of undocumented students on campus. During this time, we facilitated ally trainings for faculty and staff, presented our individual and collective stories, wrote policy briefs for administrators, and developed a plan for long-term fundraising to sustain undocumented students. We also hosted capacity-building workshops for departments and institutions outside of our own.

Early in our journey, we intentionally sought and created opportunities for collaboration in academic writing and academic presentations that centered on our own experiences as undocumented doctoral students and our work in building institutional capacity at the graduate level. In 2014, we launched a public UndocuPhDs blog and accompanying social media accounts to use the power of personal narrative to assert our existence as a cohort of undocumented doctoral students in public consciousness. Through the term UndocuPhDs, we created a collective voice through which we chronicled our experiences in our doctoral program and advocated on campus. We used the hashtags #UndocuPhD #UndocuPhDs and #UndocuPhding on social media to advance the conversation around undocumented students in higher education into graduate education, to mark milestones in our academic pursuits, and discuss our challenges. Traditional media —newspapers, television, and radio— also served to highlight our experiences, struggles, and victories and to assist us in advocating for the institutionalization of resources to support future undocumented students. Two of our dissertation defenses were broadcasted via Facebook Live, allowing for nearly 3,000 individuals across the country to witness the culmination of our doctoral journey in 2017 and 2018.

Through these activities, we created a public “transmedia testimonio” (Zimmerman, 2016) of our doctoral journey that builds on the collective storytelling and public advocacy

strategies of the youth-led movements that have resulted in college access wins for the undocumented community (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Zimmerman, 2012). Through this paper, our public testimonio is transformed into scholarship. To accomplish this, we include writings that highlight key experiences or themes in our journey and use our selected frameworks to engage in the critical analysis of these and the experiences they captured. We contextualize the lessons learned from our experience within existing literature to serve as a point of reference to understand our experiences in doctoral education alongside what has been learned over the last two decades of research on undocumented students in higher education.

The method of testimonio, or “critical reflection of [our] personal experience within particular sociopolitical realities” allows us to transform our lived experiences into research (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Carmona, 2012, p. 364). Self-authored testimonios, in particular, expand the genre and allow for the voices of individuals who are often excluded from knowledge production (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The self-authored testimonio provides a space for academic and professional Latinx women to leverage critical methodology as resistance and solidarity with others experiencing various structural forces that continue to marginalize and silence our experiences within academia (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Carmona, 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Collectively, we are experts in our shared experience as undocumented Latinx mujeres within this particular graduate program and within academia. As advocates, we merge personal and professional expertise to move toward social justice. Because undocumented students have not historically had access to academia, through our testimonio, we form part of the growing community of undocumented scholars (Aguilar, 2019) engaging in epistemology (Chang, 2011). Herein is a re-telling of our shared journey.

Testimonio

My name is Gloria Itzel Montiel. I was born in rural Guerrero, Mexico. At eight years old, I became an undocumented student after permanently immigrating to the United States to reunite with my father and beginning my educational journey at the Santa Ana Unified School District. In 2005, I became the first student from my high school to attend Harvard College with institutional financial aid covering 95% of the cost of attendance. Later, after the second defeat of the DREAM Act in Congress and before DACA, I became the first undocumented student to receive a master's degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education while still being fully undocumented. I enrolled as a doctoral student at the Claremont Graduate University in the Fall of 2012 and became a DACA recipient in June of 2013. I obtained my Ph.D. in May of 2017 in Education Policy, Evaluation and Reform. My dissertation focused on the identity and college experience of undocumented students attending highly-selective private colleges and universities.

The fall after graduation, I became an adjunct professor at CGU's Allies of Dreamers Program, a graduate certificate program that trains educators, scholars and advocates to partner and work with undocumented and mixed-status families in the field of education. My fellow UndocuPhDs served on the original committee that created the program. I also co-taught with Jessica in the Fall of 2019 and Spring of 2020, and all three cohorts of the program have met Iliana through a virtual lecture.

UndocuPhDs Blog Entry: May 19, 2014, Visiting the Border during Finals

On this occasion, I struggled to remain focused on writing my final papers as I dealt with the possibility of not being able to register for school the next semester. I was charged health insurance fees associated with being an "International Student," despite having provided a social security number at the beginning of the year after becoming a DACA recipient and having

insurance through work. This was not the first time it had happened. It's impossible to not feel annoyed, frustrated, entirely helpless and defeated.

I stood there, on the overpass, watching cars slowly being let in, once every so often, one of them being pulled to the side for further inspection and questioning. I was simply there to gather my thoughts, to look for a place to type, and make sense of the three stories I had heard in the interviews I conducted for my final class project. I overheard several stories of passersby of difficult encounters with ICE, despite having the legal right to enter and exit the country. I observed hundreds of people walking to and from, carrying shopping bags from this side, bringing small backpacks from the other side.

UndocuPhDing Blog Entry: April 3, 2016, At Risk of Extinction

In our second meeting with the Provost, sometime in November, he excitedly shared that the university would cover four semesters of Doctoral Studies for the undocumented Ph.D. students on campus. He announced it as a victory, a demonstration of their commitment to us. The tone—not of his voice, but of the gesture—was one of “Fine we will fund your remaining work, so you can graduate and get out of our hair.” And yet, we explained to the Provost:

- This does not address the financial needs of undocumented master students.
- As Ph.D. students, we are committed to finding long-term solutions to ensure that this university continues to attract and support undocumented students. How can we be proud to be a CGU student when we cannot invite other undocumented students to attend?
- This mentality of focusing only on us continued to view undocumented students as a burden rather than as assets. We re-explained that personally and professionally, we had skills and connections that could be financially beneficial to the university.

The Provost's eyes lit up as we discussed fundraising goals. Months passed and the light was turned off by administrative chaos, the resignation of the Fund Development Trustee, a vacancy in the Advancement office, and other transitions. Because of this, he explained (unapologetically), we were not a priority for the Trustees (or the university).

New prospective undocumented students have been admitted without sufficient support to make attendance a viable option. One of us is ABD. The remaining two will begin writing their dissertation proposals. As we advance through these important academic milestones which are cause for celebration, we also mourn the fact that the undocumented student population at this university is, simultaneously, rapidly heading toward extinction.

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My name is Jessica Itzel Valenzuela Ramirez. I was born in Cuautitlan Izcalli, Mexico, and came to the United States at the age of seven with my mother. I grew up in Baldwin Park, California, where I attended Sierra Vista High School. After I was outed by an athletics coach and my academic future became uncertain, my high school counselor played a key role in helping me craft a vision of attending a private, liberal arts college. While enrolled in Pomona College as a QuestBridge Scholar, I engaged in community organizing with what was then the Inland Empire Dream Team. It was during that time that I developed my identity as an UndocuQueer immigrants' rights advocate. Thanks to fierce allies, I activated my passion for academic research as a McNair Scholar at CGU.

My fourth year of college was interrupted when another student sexually assaulted me, bringing my life to a complete stop including my graduate school application process. As I searched for communities of undocumented women who were recovering from similar trauma, I learned about the U visa. I enrolled as a doctoral student at CGU in the fall of 2012 and in the

fall of 2013, my application for a U Visa was approved. I completed a master's degree in Education, a Certificate in Gender and Women's Studies, and a Ph.D. in Education Policy, Evaluation, and Reform. I defended my dissertation proposal right before my first trip to Mexico as a lawful permanent resident in December of 2017. My dissertation introduced a framework to study legal status based on the experiences of queer and trans undocumented young adults in higher education. Iliana and I formed part of the Allies of Dreamers Certificate Program Board of Advisors at its inception, and I had the honor of co-teaching with Gloria this past year.

UndocuPhDs Blog Entry: May 5, 2014: Holding On

“You are not permitted to enroll at this time. Please contact the student accounts office to arrange payment of the past due amount.”

I inhaled deep, let it out slowly, and shook my head knowing that these notices could no longer draw out tears. I'll deal with it after writing this final paper, I thought to myself, as I took out Angela Davis's *Women, Race, & Class* and flipped to chapter 6, where she writes about the criminalization of education of Black people post-emancipation. I didn't mention the hold to anyone, until the text message came in two days later, “Hey, do you have a hold again this year, too?” I knew I was not alone. Although we have a work permit, a Social Security Number, and “permission” to be in the U.S., our lack of legal permanent status still precludes us from qualifying for government financial aid to cover the costs of our education.

My heart sinks every semester when the academic holds are placed due to overdue student fees. I ask myself if this will be the time I will have to take a year off to work and save up, and hopefully return in the future.

UndocuPhDs Blog Entry: February 10, 2016: On Having (Data) & (Set) Backs

“Having finished coursework was a milestone I looked forward to at the beginning and genuinely (naïvely, ¿quizás?) believed would be one to celebrate. I’m celebrating the fact that I got out of bed, got dressed, managed to pour a glass of OJ without spilling, got out the door, got to class (late), articulated some version of what I intend to answer with my dissertation study, and somewhere along the way I picked up a pre-packaged California roll at Café and ingested it to keep my body from collapsing.

I’m at the last 2 units of enrollment covered by financial aid with thousands of dollars of debt – that, mind you, cannot be covered with federal student loans because I don’t qualify for such. Fast forward to the actual moment, these fees are about to kick in and we feel as though we might fall into the lava... when... plot twist! The institution decides to magically find a way to cover those costs – with the exception of student fees that continue to pile up.

None of it was free. We all sat through countless days of worry, strategizing, meeting with administrators, explaining that “no, we aren’t eligible for federal loans and no, we are not deportable, and no, we don’t all have DACA, and yes, the immigration system is complicated and messed up...” Is there a way to itemize tears cried, anxiety attacks, phone calls, e-mail drafting and sending, following up with molasses-like administrative processes, bank overdraft fees, more anxiety, lost employment opportunities, inability to focus on academic projects or work, failed promises to meet with the Board of Trustees to present our case, or responding to urgent requests from administration to offer our “experiences” and “insight” as students of color?

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My name is Iliana Guadalupe Perez. I was born in Hidalgo, Mexico, and immigrated alongside my mother, father, and younger brother to the U.S. at the age of eight in 1995. I grew up in the California Central Valley and navigated the educational system as an undocumented

student for 18 years until I became a DACA recipient in 2013. I attended CSU-Fresno on a full-ride scholarship through the privately funded, Smittcamp Family Honors Program. I graduated from CSU-Fresno in 2009 with a degree in mathematics and a minor in economics, becoming part of the 3.5 percent of Latinas with a bachelor's degree in math and statistics (National Science Foundation, 2017). I enrolled at Claremont Graduate University to pursue doctoral studies in January 2012 (before DACA, AB130, and AB131) with full funding provided by CGU's 21st Century Civil Rights Fellowship. I completed a master's degree in economics in 2015 and obtained my Ph.D. in Education Policy, Evaluation and Reform in 2018. My dissertation examined the characteristics of Latino millennial entrepreneurs by nativity, including undocumented entrepreneurs. I became a lecturer in the Labor Studies Department at UCLA in the Spring of 2020.

Facebook Post: January 15, 2015

It's official, I now have an M.A. in Economics!

I became intrigued in Economics during my time in undergrad as a way to merge my interests in mathematics and immigration issues. I wanted to pursue graduate studies, but I was undocumented so I knew it would be difficult (but not impossible) to attend graduate school. I was denied access to many research opportunities due to my immigration status, but I was fortunate to come across individuals who believed in me and found creative ways around my status to get the research experience I needed.

Prior to graduating, I did my research on Ph.D. programs, but at the time it was nearly impossible to get into a Ph.D. program being undocumented unless I left the country. I chose to hold off on the Ph.D. and applied to a few M.A. programs in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. I was accepted to all. However, I only attended one semester due to the financial burden of being

low-income, undocumented, and not eligible to receive financial aid or apply for loans. I came back disillusioned and defeated by an unfair immigration system, at one point I completely let go of the idea of graduate school.

About a year later, I met El Profe, who was doing (and continues to do) cutting-edge research on undocumented students and was able to convince this institution that in order to continue to do great work, undocumented students needed to be part of the process not just as subjects, but as trained researchers. He invited me along with a few others to pursue graduate studies, and the rest is history. Mind you, this was before DACA, and before it became cool to support undocumented students. Today, I share this story to acknowledge and thank my advisor who chose to step outside the confinement of the ivory tower to not just write and publish about social justice issues, but to actually do something about it!

I've never been alone in this journey; there are many teachers, mentors, friends, and family who I will thank personally for their continued support. Last, but certainly not least, I thank my biggest cheerleaders and supporters, my parents for the courage to leave their family and home-country in exchange for my brother and me to have a better life.

Lessons from Our Collective Experience

Intersection of Undocumented and Working-Class Statuses in Doctoral Education

Our journey highlights gaps in our doctoral program in responding to needs arising from our undocumented status and related financial need. Financial aid is a critical barrier to access to higher education for undocumented students (Gonzales, 2009; Oliverez, 2006). In an extension of undergraduate experiences, our undocumented status also directly intersected with our experiences as working-class students in graduate school. What is unique about this intersection at the doctoral level is the degree to which doctoral education requires activities that can seldom

be completed without appropriate funding. Doctoral education is characterized by certain rites that may be even more critical than coursework: research, academic conferences and teaching are part of the training process for scholars. Without funding to cover these aspects of doctoral education, undocumented students will continue to be excluded from academic training and academia. While these issues may also impact other first-generation graduate students, undocumented students experience the added barrier of having limited access to private loans.

Our financial package covered tuition for coursework with a limit on units. Our financial aid package did not cover summer coursework, cost of books, or any student fees, including health insurance. We were not originally offered any financial aid to cover the capstone activities of our doctoral program, including research costs. Because of this, all three of us worked multiple jobs as independent contractors and employees once we obtained a valid work permit, all while being enrolled in full-time coursework and later while researching and writing our dissertations.

Our financial concerns are what brought us together initially, in search of both support and collective problem-solving. At times, we considered taking a leave of absence and evaluated whether we should invest our money in pursuing immigration relief through DACA or a U Visa for Jessica or paying the student fees that continuously prevented us from registering on time. Additionally, the May 19th blog also highlights administrative confusion that prevailed even after DACA, resulting in classification as International Students. Our plights for additional support were often ignored until we began leveraging public tools--including the writings presented in this article--to bring our experience to the light in a public manner.

Resisting Invisibility

As undocumented doctoral students, we struggled to become visible in an institution that continually attempted to hide our presence, a common experience also shared among undocumented college students (Abrego, 2009; Huber, 2010; Soto, 2011). While we were often acknowledged as exceptional Latinx students, our existence as undocumented students was sometimes framed as a rogue operation of a small group of individuals who allowed us to enter through the backdoor. This framing echoes deficit narratives of undocumented individuals as lawbreakers and undeserving of educational opportunities (Gonzales et al., 2012; Jones-Correa & Graawu, 2013). Latinx women are already underrepresented in academia (Briscoe, 2009), and criminalizing discourse contributes to the marginalization of Latinx women whose experiences are further complicated by immigration status and working-class background.

Undocumented communities and undocumented youth established a collective identity in public consciousness and created visibility out of a place of historical exclusion and disenfranchisement (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014; Seif, 2011). As UndocuPhDs, we brought similar strategies to doctoral education. We shared our journeys publicly to expand public consciousness of educational possibilities for our community. We present a record of our experiences with oppression but also a record of our collective resilience through advocacy, friendship, and scholarly collaboration. Before DACA, having three of us on one campus and in the same program was groundbreaking. Our survival depended on having a critical mass. We were able to be witnesses to each other's struggles, to validate each other's frustration, and to share the emotional labor of our advocacy. This cohort model allowed us to create a collective that helped us to move forward, less alone. This testimonio also provides a witness to academia of our survival and brings visibility to the experiences of undocumented students in graduate school.

The Role of our Advisor

For Latinx students, the doctoral journey is one that is characterized by intricate complexities and interrelated issues that intersect academic achievement, cultural values, family obligations, and negative institutional interactions (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). As we negotiated these factors within our Latinx immigrant families, El Profe—our academic advisor and dissertation committee chair—helped us to negotiate and navigate academic spaces that were unfamiliar to us. He honored our multifaceted identities and family responsibilities throughout the process and uplifted our professional experience and aspirations.

Our academic advisor was also intentional in creating opportunities for us to participate in the doctoral rites of passage that CGU did not make available and that would have otherwise been inaccessible to us due to cost. This was especially important when we did not have temporary immigration relief or work authorization. As early as our first year, El Profe included us in active research projects and prepared us to share our work at one of the largest educational research conferences. He also engaged us in the development of the Allies of Dreamers Certificate Program and prepared us to make pedagogical contributions as instructors in the program.

The research literature on undocumented students marks the importance of allies in opening doors and facilitating resources for our community (Chen & Rhodas, 2016). El Profe's active mobilization of his own privilege and social capital as faculty and researcher demonstrates another important role for institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) in the graduate school context. Specifically, academic advisors and allies need to closely partner with undocumented students to build IUC during a critical turning point for the undocumented community seeking access to graduate school. This not only protects the academic persistence of existing or

incoming students. It also creates change within the higher education system to expand the pipeline of future UndocuPhDs.

UndocuPhDs: Scholar Advocates through our Doctoral Journey

We name our collective experience in this paper using the term UndocuPhDs, which encompasses two primary experiences and identities as undocumented individuals and doctoral students, now PhDs. We introduced the term for the first time through social media and our blogs to document our journey in a historic time in which undocumented individuals were—for the first time—entering doctoral and other graduate programs. Through this term, we mobilize our collective experiences, challenges, breakthroughs, and voices as advocacy.

Advocacy and civic engagement in various forms have been necessary for undocumented students' survival in higher education (Perez et al., 2009; Perez et al., 2010). This was also true for us in doctoral education. Collectively, we negotiated small increases in financial aid to cover fees and continuous enrollment during our dissertation phase. We also wrote an entire fund development plan for CGU to leverage in support of undocumented students. Sometimes, our advocacy included leveraging public communication to advocate for CGU's commitment to and acknowledgment of undocumented students. One of our greatest successes was collaborating on the creation of the Allies of Dreamers Program, a graduate certificate program designed to prepare educators and advocates to work with undocumented students and mixed-status families. The program will begin its third year in the Fall of 2020. Beyond collaboration on its design, two of us have been instructors in the program. Through this program, we continue to build capacity within the field of education to support the academic resilience of undocumented students.

Through this paper, we mobilize research on our own experiences in doctoral education to advocate for IUC (Valenzuela et al., 2015) at the graduate level. We hope that this testimonio

also inspires other undocumented scholars to document their journeys in academia and continue building the empirical knowledge base on undocumented students in graduate education. In turn, empirical knowledge can be translated into policy and institutional best practices that are asset-based and centered on undocumented students' experiences.

Conclusion and Implications

Through our collective testimonio, we engage in reflective inquiry to understand our experience as undocumented doctoral students, our experience in building IUC within our graduate school and doctoral program, and our experience in documenting our work through public and collaborative strategies. We introduce the emergence of UndocuPhDs, a role that is defined by our experience as undocumented scholar advocates with a commitment to expanding educational access for undocumented students into the final stages of the educational pipeline and uplifting the voices of undocumented communities in academia. Although we are only three students among a fast-growing pipeline of undocumented scholars-in-training, our collective experience offers early implications for institutional policies and practices at the graduate level.

First, equitable investments in graduate school access require investments in fully-funded cohorts of undocumented students. Graduate institutional financial aid policies have to be built for all undocumented students, not just for those who are protected by temporary programs, such as DACA or TPS. Financial aid packages should also be inclusive of all activities that define each particular field or discipline. Second, it is urgent that graduate education--as a subsystem of higher education--build IUC (Valenzuela et al., 2015), especially as more undocumented students seek access. This process requires that undocumented students are at the center of the development and institutional practices. Undocumented students should be valued as partners in this process rather than being seen as a burden or a problem to solve. Lastly, the introduction of

our testimonio also calls for the expansion of academia to create space for a new type of voice in scholarship, that of undocumented scholars, such as ourselves. We also make a call to undocumented scholars to continue expanding social justice-focused frameworks such as IUC (Valenzuela et al., 2015) and Undocumented Critical Theory (Aguilar, 2019) and introducing new methodologies that intricately align with our positionality as undocumented scholars.

Our UndocuPhDs experience will differ from the experiences of other undocumented graduate students across various fields and disciplines. Undocumented students in other programs will develop new forms of advocacy and engage in new ways of producing knowledge, as they navigate the intricacies and contexts of their own schools and programs. Nonetheless, we aim to provide a foundation for future engagement of undocumented scholars to increase the historical and empirical record of our persistence in the higher education pipeline, create institutional change, and advance policy that expands the opportunity for our community.

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