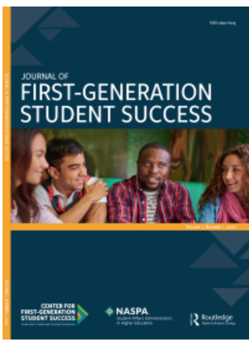

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Hard Work and Heart Work: First-Generation Undocu/DACAmented Collegians, Cultural Capital, and Paying-it-Forward

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ABSTRACT

This critical ethnography highlights how first-generation Latinx undocu/DACAmented collegians who are members of a social and advocacy student organization at a public, historically white institution in the Southwest, U.S.A develop a scholarship and peer-mentoring program for other students with liminal legal statuses. The theoretical connections that guide this study are social and navigational capital and seek to answer how these collegians use these forms of cultural wealth to develop different campus support services for their peers. The findings from this study reveal how these organizational members use their cultural capital to organize and network with various stakeholders to develop a scholarship for undocu/DACAmented students, in addition to applying for and obtaining grant funding to commence a peer-mentoring program. This study highlights the agency exercised and assets these first-generation collegians bring to college and offer institutional agents recommendations to support them better.

KEYWORDS

Advocacy; activism; cultural competency; extracurricular involvement; first-generation; identity; Latinx

Undocumented Latinx im/migrants in the United States

Anti-im/migration sentiments in the U.S. have affected an array of different groups since the nineteenth century (i.e., Italians) and the twentieth century (i.e., Asian Americans; Pérez Huber et al., 2008). Im/migration law is an extension of white supremacy; continuously used to *legally* exclude and further minoritize underrepresented groups, primarily Black and Brown undocu/DACAmented im/migrant communities (Kantamneni et al., 2016; Pérez Huber, 2010). More than 619,000 Black undocumented individuals reside in the U.S. (mostly from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Nigeria; There are Black Dreamers, too: How Trump's DACA decision affects the Black community, 2017). Moreover, half of the undocu/DACAmented affidavits that pay in-state resident tuition in the University of California system derive from Asia (Escudero, 2020). Although the makeup of undocumented im/migrants in the U.S. represent various cultures and backgrounds, most have origins from Mexico. In the Donald Trump "enforcement era" (2016–-2020), Latinxs, and more specifically persons from Mexico and undocumented, have been the direct targets of racist, xenophobic, inequitable, and exclusionary rhetoric and policies (Nienhusser & Oshio, 2019; O'Connor, 2017).

Racial categories have been fluid over the years, with whiteness defining "who is and is not native" (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 709). As stated above, there is an extensively documented history of systemic oppression and exclusion of Black and Brown undocumented im/

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migrant communities in the U.S. An essential point of history was the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act), which developed a quota system that favored white im/migrants from northern and western Europe (Ngai, 2004). The Johnson-Reed Act also created border patrol regulations at the U.S-Mexico border, which is known to be the beginning of what some call "illegal" im/migration in the U.S. (Ngai, 2004). Further, during the U.S. Great Depression of 1929, Mexican workers were accused of "stealing" jobs from Americans–similar to the rhetoric shared throughout the Trump regime–resulting in more than 500,000 individual deportations to Mexico, including those born in the U.S. (Pérez Huber et al., 2008). Although there is an extensive history of anti-im/migration policies and practices, we are exiting an era where such legislation employed by the Trump administration has caused a hostile sociopolitical climate with long-lasting effects for Black and Brown bodies with liminal statuses. Over the last four years, these racially minoritized communities have been constant targets of racist nativism, xenophobia, microaggressions, and just outright legal violence (Muñoz & Vigil, 2018) that will take an abundance of transformative effort and legislative lawmakers to support.

First-generation undocu/DACAmented collegians

As exemplified above, the history of inhumane and unjust policies and practices targeting Latinx im/migrant communities reflects systemic oppression in the U.S. The heightened enforcement practices under the Trump administration (e.g., detention and deportation) have affected not only undocu/DACAmented students but also their families and communities (Daniela, 2020; Nienhusser & Oshio, 2019). In particular, one policy that was terminated under this administration in 2017 and has severely impacted first-generation undocu/DACAmented students is the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA; Kleyn et al., 2017; Muñoz & Vigil, 2018). DACA is an executive order enacted under the President Barack Obama administration after years of im/migrant activists and allies advocating for a proper citizenship path (Escudero, 2020). Congress did not pass DACA, so it is not a legitimized path toward citizenship for the approximately 11 million undocumented individuals in the U.S. (Dorador, 2019). However, it has allowed over 800,000 people to obtain social security numbers, two-year renewable work permits, government identification cards, driver's licenses, deferred status of deportation (Dorador, 2019; Kantamneni et al., 2016), eligibility for in-state resident tuition (ISRT) in states that offer it, and other benefits. Gonzales et al. (2014) investigated the benefits of DACA and identified that beneficiaries enrolled in college in higher numbers than the year before having DACA, 59% obtained a new job, acquired driver's licenses, and experienced increased job earnings. However, undocu/DACAmented collegians in the U.S. remain in a constant gray area due to the failure of bipartisan im/migration reform efforts (Escudero, 2020). Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) undocu/DACAmented students regularly have been and are continuously faced with hate, discrimination, and racism from their peers, faculty, and staff (Williams, 2016), in addition to non-inclusive institutional policies (Nienhusser, 2018; Teranishi et al., 2015).

Most undocu/DACAmented undergraduates are first-generation in college, hail from low-income households (below 30,000 USD a year; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), and again do not have access to federal aid (Regan & McDaniel, 2019); making these culminating factors less likely for them to enroll in college after obtaining high school

diplomas (Borjian, 2018). Moreover, according to the United States Department of Education (2014), first-generation students are an underrepresented group, only accounting for approximately 32% of students at four-year colleges and nearly a third of all undergraduate students (Cataldi et al., 2018). Although the existing literature is necessary to highlight, it is also salient to provide anti-deficit counternarratives to push back and center the experiences and assets these collegians–who hold both identities as first-generation and liminal legal statuses–arrive with to college campuses across the country (Santa-Ramirez et al., 2020).

Purpose and research question

The student communities I highlight in this study are first-generation college students (e.g., first in their families to obtain degrees higher than a high school diploma in the U.S.) and first-generation to attend U.S. K-12 schools and grow up in the United States. Often, existing literature and campus rhetoric surrounding first-generation students, including those who are also undocu/DACAmented, position these students as "high need," academically deficient, in need of saving, and come from a plethora of familial burdens (Morton, 2019; Wildhagen, 2015). I allude to a deficit perspective as the assumption that assimilation is the only path to success (Yosso, 2005) or solely the sharing of "pobrecito" ("awe, poor thing") narratives when referencing these collegians. I recognize Morton's (2019) intensions of exploring the complexities of first-generation students' lives and how they sometimes face making difficult choices between home and school; however, the author often positions these collegians from places of life burdens and families that do not have much going for themselves. While it is imperative to showcase the barriers and challenges many first-generation college students face, it is also salient to share narratives of how these families are often their sole source of encouragement; helping keep these students grounded in oppressive whiteness-centered college spaces.

In this article, I aim to add to the existing published literature and challenge that notion by highlighting how my undergraduate student collaborators use their agency, skills, competencies, and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to not only survive but thrive on their respective campus. To that end, the research question that guided this study is: How do first-generation Latinx undocu/DACAmented collegians use their social and navigational capital to develop different resources and support services on campus for their peers? Their selfless efforts are worthy of sharing, and higher education and student affairs (HESA) professionals can learn from and actively work toward better supporting these collegians.

Theoretical connection

Critical scholars such as Anzaldúa (1990), Denzin and Lincoln (2003), and Museus (2014) have challenged educational researchers to develop new theories or reject foundational worldviews and replace them with approaches specifically designed for those who are marginalized and often pushed out of the existing paradigms. Considering that some scholars have theorized cultural capital very narrowly to include white, middle-class persons' assets and resources (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995), I employed *social* and *navigational* capital from Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW)

to lead this study. The CCW paradigm emerged from the influences of Anzaldúa, funds of knowledge, ethnic studies, and is an asset-based framework to further the workings of critical race theory (CRT). Specifically, incorporating the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals and investigating how race and racism play active structural roles at institutional levels, further oppressing these minoritized persons (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT shifts the deficit lens from positioning BIPOC individuals from cultural poverty disadvantages and instead aligning their lived experiences through a lens of "cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed . . . that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). CCW also expands to comprise the "array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts . . . to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The different tenets (i.e., aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant) are not mutually exclusive or static (Yosso & Garcia, 2007); rather, they build on one another to survive and resist oppressive structures (Allen, 2015; Luna & Martinez, 2013).

Social capital refers to the networks and community resources BIPOC individuals use for instrumental and emotional support to gain college access, navigate through, and persist toward graduation. *Navigational capital* is used to traverse through institutions that were not designed with BIPOC students in mind (i.e., maneuvering through an anti-im/migrant and racial campus climate at a historically white institution), and being able to "sustain high levels of achievement, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly at school and, ultimately, dropping out" (Alva, 1991, p. 19, as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Collectively, CCW helps to reframe hostile and antagonistic rhetoric often portrayed about Latinx im/migrant communities by highlighting the multiple cultural and community assets they bring to college (Luna & Martinez, 2013). For example, in a study conducted by Pérez Huber (2009), CCW is utilized to highlight how undocumented Chicanas use their various forms of capital to challenge racist nativist discourses and survive, resist, and navigate college. Romo et al. (2019) engaged with CCW as a framework with undocu/DACAmented Mexican college graduates to investigate the resources, processes, and networks used as they traversed through the college choice process. Further, Allen (2015) employed the framework to examine how family and friends act as support networks for these collegians' academic achievement. My investigation uses CCW to go beyond these critical studies mentioned above. I focus on how undocu/DACAmented collegians use their social and navigational capital to develop and implement specific programs catered to supporting their fellow peers with liminal legal statuses, vis-à-vis a "for us, by us" model.

Although there are six tenets within CCW, not all applied to the data collected; therefore, I engage in the most prevalent two in my analysis. The dimensions of social and navigational capital served as my initial deductive coding, which provided an analytical roadmap for the coding scheme and analytical approach (Saldaña, 2016) to position these first-generation undocu/DACAmented collegians from an anti-deficit orientation.

Methods

Although most of the students in my study identify as Mexican, not all have origins from Mexico or subscribe to the gender binary. Therefore, in this article, I refer to these collegians as Latinx, all born in Latin American countries. It is also a more inclusive and humanizing term

for non-binary, genderqueer, and transgender communities than the descriptor of Latina or Latino (deOnis, 2017; Ortiz, 2018). This investigation is part of a more extensive study on the everyday experiences and anti-im/migrant exclusionary policies affecting Latinx undocu/DACAmented collegians. Considering the vast history of oppressive and colonizing knowledge in research that has exploited BIPOC communities (Paris & Winn, 2014) and positioned Western worldviews with Anglo-Euro-American discourses as superior (Bhattacharya, 2009; Jackson, 2004; Smith, 1999), I chose to employ a critical ethnography for this study.

Critical ethnography is particularly useful due to the nature of my being actively involved in the community for an extended period-of-time with the research collaborators, researching alongside and learning "from" them versus conducting research "on" them (Bhattacharya, 2009; Cruz, 2011; Madison, 2019), and centering social and racial justice. To exemplify this, some of my involvements with these collegians included attending every meeting as an active participant, reviewing grant-funding applications and providing feedback to the leadership team of *Leaders of Tomorrow* (discussed later), participating in on-and-off campus events alongside these students (i.e., protests and advocating state legislators), a reviewer for their student-led funding program, writing recommendation letters for scholarships and awards, and providing advice and guidance as an unofficial advisor to the organization. I did not want to take up space that was theirs and not mine, so I was intentional with only inserting myself in ways they asked of me, learning from them, and not "on" them. These practices helped me build trust, rapport, and friendships (Martinez, 2016) with undocu/DACAmented collegians on their respective campus. In a political climate that often is working toward dehumanizing and minimizing the voices of minoritized Black and Brown im/migrants in the U.S., critical ethnography allowed me to honor my collaborators' power in guiding their own lived narratives and share the admirable work that they have done and continue to do on campus. This methodology also offered me the opportunity to be the researcher that makes me most comfortable, being part of the community's struggles and joys rather than occasionally dropping in and privileging my agenda (Pulido, 2008).

My study centers my work alongside members within a specific social and political activism student organization, with membership comprising of Latinx undocu/DACAmented students and their allies. I will refer to this group as *Leaders of Tomorrow* (LOT). For two academic years, I collected field notes and written memos for two-to-four days a week throughout the data collection process. I spent prolonged time at the LOT meetings, events, programs, and civic engagement initiatives. I documented salient moments shared with members within LOT spaces, observations, feelings, and thoughts. Moreover, LOT members had an active online chat where they discussed upcoming events, vented on exclusionary federal, state, and institutional-level policies affecting undocu/DACAmented communities, and celebrated milestones in each other's lives (e.g., accolades and birthdays). With permission, I wrote memos from the online conversations regarding the mentoring and scholarship programs. Early on in my engagements with LOT members, I saw a salient pattern centering these two initiatives. I then made an active decision to continue collecting data focusing on their work toward the scholarship and mentoring programs.

Site selection

As aforementioned, my study highlights Latinx undergraduate collegians who are first-generation undocu/DACAmented students and LOT members, a campus organization at

a historically white, Pac-12 university in the Southwest, U.S.A. I was first introduced to LOT in November of 2017 while at a meeting. I received news that the organization was organizing a rally centered on awareness building and encouraging attendees to call congressional representatives and request they vote "no" on an omnibus spending bill that did not contain a clean Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors[1] (DREAM) Act. I attended the outdoor rally, standing in the grass on a warm November day, watching different Latinx undocu/DACAmented student leaders, recent graduates, and faculty allies share personal testimonies and the importance of using the power of numbers to vote "no" on the bill.

These collegians made others aware of different laws and policies affecting the undocu/ DACAmented community and building allyship from their peers on campus to support crucial causes and issues. I have witnessed these collegians' agency in the important activism and advocacy efforts they have engaged in that challenge inequity and resist subordination (Yosso, 2005). I chose to work alongside LOT members, in addition to being an active participant within the organization, because the organization provides undocu/DACAmented students one of the only spaces on campus to be their authentic selves, provide personal and social support for one another, and actively advocates on behalf of fair laws and policies for the im/migrant community writ large. These issues have always been imperative to me. For anonymity, I am not disclosing individual identities and am altering some research site and organization information to make it more difficult for readers to identify these people and places (Magolda, 2016).

Positionality

Educational ethnographers need to move away from a neutral positionality (O'Connor & Mangual Figueroa, 2017; Paris, 2011) toward being value inclusive and aware of individual subjectivities to best re-present the lived and everyday experiences of the collaborators (Bhattacharya, 2008). Further, confronting a researcher's positionality forces us to acknowledge our power, biases, and privileges while simultaneously denouncing the power structures between researcher and collaborators (Madison, 2019). LOT members considered me an "insider" due to some similar social identities and experiences in many ways. Some of these include being a first-generation college student attending historically white institutions for my degrees, from a high financial need family, having experienced racist encounters identifying as Latinx and visibly nonwhite, residing in a mixed-status family household, and my identity as a scholar-activist.

These commonalities and lived experiences increased my connection-building with undocu/DACAmented students in LOT. However, I wholly acknowledge that I was an "outsider" in various ways. Being Puerto Rican and born on U.S. soil automatically grants me citizenship; therefore, my life experiences, including my years as a college student, do not compare to what these collegians have to navigate with liminal citizenship statuses. I understand that although some of my social and cultural identities align with these students, my U.S. citizenship has offered me privileges and opportunities that they do not have (e.g., international travel and access to federal funding). As I maintained active involvement in LOT, I made sure not to take charge of the student club, only contributing and using my social capital and networks to assist in any way the collegians asked of me (i.e., being on an event planning committee and reviewing a grant application).

Analysis

I analyzed at the end of the data collection process. Using my field notes from in-person interactions and my memos from the online chat, I first performed open descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016). I then analyzed the data using a deductive process (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). I identified sections with my guiding framework in mind, centering their advocacy and campus involvement efforts using social and navigational capital. Specifically, I coded moments where these collegians leaned on their assets, peers, and campus networks to enact various initiatives and how they navigated the institution as they resisted the status quo and limitations put on them via lack of authentic institutional-level support and resources. From the coding scheme, I clustered commonalities in the codes to generate identified themes. The two programs of focus in the findings were chosen because they were the primary initiatives.

Findings

My findings showcase how first-generation Latinx undocu/DACAmented students in LOT exemplify their agency, social, and navigational capital to build additional support services by and for undocu/DACAmented collegians. Although these collegians worked diligently and selflessly on various advocacy, programmatic, and social events, below, I highlight the two primary initiatives that were thought of, planned, and executed by the organization's members: a scholarship and a peer-mentoring program.

Communal uplift via scholarship and mentoring

Due to the following programs not previously offered as resources or support by administrators at their university, Latinx undocu/DACAmented collegians and allies in LOT used their social and navigational capital to take-up and make space unapologetically, to ensure that they are helping each other achieve their academic goals in the nature of "lift as we climb" (Luedke, 2020). I had the privilege of witnessing them develop and come to fruition. The first is a scholarship program.

United Together scholarship

The LOT meetings are held in what I would call a "room of Latinx excellence." The room is beautifully covered in posters and murals of Latinx leaders and activists, where attendees often sat on sofas or made themselves comfy on the carpeted floor. Further, food and snacks were available for free at most meetings, collectively creating a comfortable and familiar home space where all those in attendance could be themselves authentically. Unfortunately, based on my observations and opinion, the meeting room is located in a campus building section hidden away from the general public. After visiting the room for the first time, I wrote in my field notes,

> Such a lovely and powerful space with murals of Latinx activists painted all around. However, the room is in a dark corner. It reminds me of an 'underground party.' Like, if you aren't personally invited, you'd never know that this location exists. They [university administrators] have literally shoved these Brown student leaders in a corner, away from everyone. All of the other student leader offices and meeting spaces are centrally located, yet, these students are thrown into a dark area in a corner."

Although the physical space is situated in a not-so-ideal setting on their campus, the feeling of love and acceptance among LOT members during meetings was unfailingly omnipresent. During several meetings, LOT student leaders would suggest attendees sit together on the ground to share their thoughts on a particular topic. One evening, we all gathered on the floor and engaged in dialogue around our feelings and opinions of the DACA program potentially getting rescinded by the Trump administration. Some attendees shared their feelings of worry, stress, and anxiety. Some began to cry while speaking with broken spirits. Although hope was not present throughout the conversation, my heart smiled when I witnessed LOT members hugging and comforting their peers who were crying, providing them with hopeful, motivational, and encouraging words. While hugging her peer, one student looked around the room and said aloud, "things will be okay. We will continue fighting!"

Due to their liminal legal statuses, undocu/DACAmented students cannot apply for and receive non-private scholarships. The academic scholarship, which I will refer to as *United Together*, was developed and advocated by first-generation LOT undergraduate student members. Since undocu/DACAmented students are barred from accessing federal funding (e.g., Pell grants and Work-Study), and in most states are ineligible for state-level aid, an initial idea to provide more funding opportunities for greater access to and persistence through college for undocu/DACAmented students became a reality. With an initial proposal, these collegians used their social capital and campus networks to engage with the appropriate campus administrators to support this inclusive initiative for both scholars with and without DACA. Via a student-led umbrella organization that oversees various multicultural-based groups on campus, LOT members worked alongside their peers and got connected to their administrative staff networks in the university's development office. These collegians in LOT wanted to make sure they were "taking care of their own" and paying-it-forward as they navigated an institutional space not designed with them in mind.

As a result of LOT leadership crafting and presenting demands to their institutional administrative leaders, including the proposal to develop an "Im/Migrant Center" and a private scholarship, as previously mentioned, they worked alongside the staff within the development office to assist with building this much-needed funding source for undocu/DACAmented collegians. Initially, the university's development office personnel solely wanted to include those with DACA status. LOT members did not agree to that exclusionary limitation. They demanded that all undocumented and DACA beneficiaries get included in the eligibility requirements, or else they would not participate or support the efforts as presented. During a LOT meeting, when speaking about the initial planning of the scholarship, several students advocated for the inclusion of both those with and without DACA. One student who is not DACA eligible stated, "we need to be certain to include people without DACA because of the lack of scholarships available to us. There are very few scholarship opportunities for folks with DACA; those without DACA have even fewer options to apply to." At this meeting, during a late weekday evening, everyone spoke about the importance of such a scholarship and the impact it could have on current and future undocu/DACAmented college students who aspire to attend their respective institution.

Everyone in LOT are first-generation college students in the U.S., and those who are undocu/DACAmented frequently spoke about the challenges associated with locating scholarships they were eligible to apply. The issue was not that these collegians did not know how to navigate the scholarship search process successfully; it was the minimal

funding opportunities available to them to apply. After the club president asked for input regarding eligibility requirements for the scholarship, one student who is a DACA beneficiary responded,

> I think it's important that we include those without DACA. We have members in LOT that are not eligible for DACA. Although we all have barriers, those who are not beneficiaries [of DACA] have even slimmer funding opportunities. We need to look out for them as much as possible.

Resisting the suggestion to solely include DACA recipients, with an assertive demand to incorporate all undocu/DACAmented students at any level within their academic journeys, the development office staff conclusively agreed. Like many activism efforts led by individuals who are undocu/DACAmented and reside in mixed-status families, these collegians continued advocating for what they believed was right for the community writ large, and eventually, their battle was won. Soon after, LOT members worked on the details, guidelines, and purpose of the newly developed inclusive scholarship. When it was time to review the first round of applications, I was invited to be an external reviewer on the scholarship selection committee. Upon accepting the offer, I was tasked with recruiting other individuals who are knowledgeable of policies affecting these communities and the various experiences undocu/DACAmented college students have writ large. Similar to these talented collegians who are LOT members, I, too, used my social capital and professional networks to seek volunteers across the nation interested in being part of this important scholarship initiative. The initial communication I received inviting me to be a reviewer stated,

> The [United Together] scholarship was created when undocumented students felt that the scholarships offered by [university name retracted] were not inclusive of the entire undocumented community. The [United Together] scholarship looks to remove common barriers that limit students who can apply for such scholarships. Students who created the scholarship made sure that undocumented students could apply regardless of GPA, DACA or undocumented status, or current academic year.

I had the privilege of reading all the beautiful essays written by current and incoming undocu/DACA students. Some of the essay questions included writing about their personal, academic, and career goals, in addition to how the scholarship will alleviate some financial constraints. I felt incredibly honored and privileged to be part of the inaugural process. While reading through the writing pieces, I wrote in my field notes,

> Wow! These applicants are all phenomenal. I wish more people could read these essays. They write about their passions, personal and professional goals, and how attending college and obtaining higher education degrees will assist in their being better contributors to their families and society writ large. These are the narratives that need to be highlighted with regards to individuals with liminal statuses, not the false realities often portrayed on TV and by the current presidential administration [Trump]. This scholarship is going to bring so much joy to several of these students.

LOT members promoted the application through a variety of networks (i.e., social media, e-mail listservs, and forwarding the call to their former high school teachers and counselors to disseminate). That summer, multiple students were awarded a scholarship. Although not citizens of a nation-state, these collegians indeed used their active citizenship (Hinton, 2015), social, and navigational capital to enact change on their campus. They succeeded at

commencing a new scholarship program that will hopefully help numerous current and future students with their educational pursuits. After receipt of the announcement, one member of LOT–who at the time was not enrolled at the university–shared, "I just received notice that I'm a recipient of the [United Together] scholarship, and I'm so happy! I haven't been enrolled in college because I've been working full-time to save money and pay tuition out-of-pocket. I'm so grateful for this scholarship. Thank you!" In addition to creating and implementing this inclusive scholarship, simultaneously, these collegians worked on developing and launching a peer-mentoring program for and by undocu/DACAmented students.

In this Together Mentoring Program

In the fall of 2018, members of LOT's leadership team proposed the idea of a peer mentoring program to their members. After countless conversations on the challenges of navigating college as first-generation students who are also undocu/DACAmented, LOT members established the *In this Together Mentoring Program* (ITTMP; pseudonym). The idea of IITMP emerged upon recognizing that additional support was needed from those who had navigated the collegiate journey before them in a campus space that did not always feel welcoming or inclusive to Latinx im/migrant bodies. In the initial planning phases, LOT members sought me out for guidance, advice, and to review and provide feedback for a small grant proposal they wrote up to obtain funds to implement the program and assist with better supporting their affiliates. These collegians drafted mission and vision statements, guidelines for mentors and mentees (e.g., attend professional development workshops facilitated by LOT throughout the academic year), an application process, and a training program for mentors.

I was in attendance at the grant proposal presentation where LOT leaders shared the purpose was to "bring awareness, visibility, and maximize the engagement of undocumented and DACAmented students at [university name retracted], while also building communities of belongingness on campus." Moreover, these scholars revealed that a salient focus of this innovative peer mentoring program was to have all participants engage in advocacy efforts (e.g., grassroots organizing), community events (e.g., campus programming), and provide greater access to various opportunities (e.g., scholarships and internships). Lastly, one of the primary goals stated during the presentation was for the ITTMP to maintain a "give and receive" model, where mentees will then become mentors after their first year in the program. The LOT students were explicit about training and cultivating new leaders through the ITTMP; to ultimately "create a sustainable community for undocumented and DACAmented students that aid in the retention of these students, despite policy changes." After presenting their grant proposal to the selection committee, funding support was awarded.

When LOT leadership broadcasted the news on the organization's online chat platform, I vividly recall how proud I was of the students while reading LOT members' enthusiastic reactions. One student member replied, "OMG, this is great news! Congrats to everyone who worked on the grant. I'm so happy that we will have this much-needed program for us and by us." After accepting the grant, these collegians continued planning and worked toward a successful peer mentoring program. While preparing for the mentor training meet-and-greet amongst participating students, LOT leadership used their social capital to contact an external nonprofit organization for sponsorship, which resulted in LOT

receiving donated supplies (e.g., note pads and tote bags). They also worked alongside staff in a department on their campus that supports undocu/DACAmented students and those in mixed-status families. Although mentees could be currently enrolled freshman and sophomore students, not solely newly entering, LOT members wanted to ensure incoming undocu/DACAmented students were aware of the ITTMP. Thus, they partnered with this department and reached out to students who were accepted and enrolled for the following semester. Further, they used their alumni network of recently graduated undocu/DACAmented students and invited them to apply as mentors.

While speaking with one of the LOT student leaders who took an active role in the development and implementation of the mentoring program, she said, "Our mentors currently consist of undocu/DACAmented students and one recent alum, who is also a current grad student here. We are just so happy that we can provide this additional support for our gente (people). I wish we had something like this when I started at this university. However, I'm glad that others have it now." The program is still in its infancy, but from what I have gathered, it has been a success thus far, with several mentors and mentees helping each other, sharing resources, and building community. At a LOT meeting two semesters into the inaugural year of the program, one of the mentees who is undocumented without DACA, shared with the group, "I've learned so much through my mentor, and she's connected me with so many other students and student affairs staff on campus." As exemplified in the above excerpt, the mentor used her social and navigational capital to introduce her mentee to peers and campus staff as she navigated her first year on campus.

Discussion

As a participant-observer in this critical ethnographic study guided by social and navigational capital, I witnessed how these first-generation undocu/DACAmented collegians used their positions in a student organization to network with various stakeholders and developed two resources not previously offered, a scholarship and mentoring program. Although there exist some critical and informative studies where BIPOC scholars engage with CCW to investigate further the agency, capital, and assets used by undocu/DACAmented collegians (see Allen, 2015; Pérez Huber, 2009; Romo et al., 2019), my study contributes to the existing empirical literature by using collaborative and participatory methods; collaborating alongside these students throughout the development and implementation process of two important initiatives. By being an active member for an extended period, I learned that these students appreciated me being a researcher and a friend that took the time to authentically build community alongside them, versus coming into their spaces and privileging my agenda without contributing to their greater good of the organization. Moreover, I learned, in greater detail, how self-sufficient these collegians are, contradicting deficit-oriented viewpoints on first-generation and undocumented students. These students organized and used their social and navigational capital to do the hard work that comes from their selfless hearts. When these collegians detected needs, they organized and worked relentlessly to uplift and pay-it-forward to their fellow peers who are undocu/DACAmented.

My findings highlight the agency exhibited by these collegians to resist subordination and use their various forms of capital to make transformational changes on their campuses. They collaborated with their peer leaders in another campus organization to connect with staff members in the university development office to implement an innovative and

inclusive scholarship program developed by and for undocu/DACAmented students. Upon becoming abreast from campus administrators that only DACA beneficiaries would be eligible to apply, LOT students continued to navigate exclusionary policies and practices, demanding to include all undocumented students regardless of status. One of my final memos reads, " . . . they always stood up for what they believed in, leading with their hearts, no matter the cost."

By employing the CCW framework, I was able to shed light on these collegians' "practices of resistance, agency, and hope" (Pérez Huber, 2019, p. 3). More published studies are needed centering first-generation undocu/DACAmented Latinx collegians' skills and assets. Unfortunately, these narratives are not shared as often as they should be in academic spaces. HESA professionals must keep in mind that undocu/DACAmented students are also first-generation. I hope that my study's findings encourage HESA professionals to pay closer attention to the competencies and talents these students have and enter college with (i.e., event planners, grant writers, and researchers). It is essential to consider them as valuable assets to our campus communities as scholars and future colleagues within higher education institutions across the nation.

Recommendations for practice

College students who are undocu/DACAmented are enrolled on our campuses nation-wide. They will continue to be a growing presence, especially as more individuals can now apply for the DACA program and benefit from specific policies, such as in-state resident tuition (ISRT). For the first time since 2017, as of December 2020, the courts decided that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) can now accept new DACA applicants. For states that do not currently have ISRT eligibility in place for undocu/DACAmented collegians, HESA professionals can advocate for and enact such policies, in addition to state-level financial aid. Although thriving and using their cultural and community capital to persist through college, HESA professionals must alleviate the burdens placed on undocu/DACAmented collegians. One example to consider is having the college's Development Department (or equivalent) fundraise and have a separate allocation of money available to assist with any tuition gaps. Similar to how LOT students used their social and navigational capital to develop the scholarship fund, this money can support undocu/DACAmented students with private scholarships. Further, as these first-generation collegians bring various skills, competencies, and experiences, they should be paid for the added labor (e.g., scholarships and hourly pay/stipends). Their service to others should be validated and seen as a value to the campus community (Santa-Ramirez et al., 2020). Institutional leaders must put money in place of institutional responses of support; actions speak louder than words.

As indicated in my findings, greater access is not the lone entity needed for these collegians to thrive in school. Creating resourced physical counterspaces for these students to meet, organize, work on student-initiated programming, and be their authentic selves is warranted. One way to achieve this is establishing undocumented student resource centers where additional support services can be offered for prospective students, currently enrolled students, those in mixed-status families, and their family members (see Cisneros & Reyna Rivarola, 2020). HESA professionals can also enact an undocu/DACAmented student task force, including representation of these collegians and recent alumni. Further, these

individuals have a plethora of assets, skills, and experiences, making them prime candidates for hiring at colleges and universities post-graduation, paid featured speakers, and consultants.

At the site my study takes place, as mentioned above, the undocu/DACAmented students and other Latinx campus student leaders meet in a room in a closed-off area excluded from the rest of the campus community. HESA professionals must be conscious of where historically marginalized students are placed on campus and actively work toward including them in spaces that are not hidden away. They should not be forced to the margins of society or on our campuses. Moreover, many institutions have mentoring programs catered to various student and social identity groups (e.g., STEM majors and LGBT+ community). As illustrated in the findings, first-generation undocu/DACAmented students can benefit from mentoring support to be holistically successful in college. Having support and guidance from others who have navigated college prior and those who share similar experiences as first-generation and with liminal legal statuses are of salient importance as we consider these scholars' retention. Developing a peer and/or faculty/staff-protégé mentoring program(s) for these collegians is necessary. Lastly, leaders at every college and university must examine their institutions' centering of whiteness ideologies in policy and practice. Whom are we including and excluding? Transformational changes cannot be implemented without intentional and strategic challenges to the status quo (Common & Galvez, 2020). Implementing some or all of these recommendations can assist with access to and persistence through college for undocu/DACAmented students.

Concluding thoughts

My hope with this paper is that higher education and student affairs professionals can begin shifting from a deficit-oriented lens of first-generation students and those who are also undocu/DACAmented, and better emphasize the myriad of assets, skills, and attributes these collegians bring with them to our campuses. We often read, or see in the media, narratives of these students who share both identities framed as "needs-only," which immediately positions them as non-contributors to our campus communities. As my findings reveal, these first-generation students used their social and navigational capital to design, plan, and implement diverse programming and scholarship initiatives that continue to impact their peers on campus positively. HESA professionals must continue supporting first-generation undocu/DACAmented students in ways that set them up for holistic success in college (e.g., mentorship, jobs, internship opportunities, and scholarships) while also acknowledging that these individuals are the talent that we need and assists with many of the aims written in our institutional missions.

Undocu/DACAmented im/migrant students are active on-and-off campus citizens, with their participation leading to leadership roles that ultimately help with higher education institutions achieving their goal of creating engaged global citizens (Hinton, 2015). Too often, first-generation BIPOC bodies, including those who are undocu/DACAmented, are othered, disregarded, "marked with difference … easily dismissed as irrelevant, invisible, and immaterial" (Bhattacharya, 2015). Collectively, HESA professionals and faculty must actively include these collegians in inclusive policies, programming, curriculum (e.g., including course readings written by and about undocu/DACAmented student experiences and policy effects; see Abrego & Negron-Gonzales, 2020), and ultimately work toward

campus climates that allow these scholars to thrive as they reach their goals of graduation. Just as these collegians continue to engage in various *heart work* initiatives, institutional agents should provide the same levels of love and care to these phenomenal scholars.

Note

1. In 2001, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM Act) legislative proposal was introduced to the U.S. Senate and House. If passed, it would provide a conditional pathway toward permanent residency and citizenship for undocu/DACAmented persons brought to the U.S. without authorization by their parents (Gonzales, 2010; Nguyen & Serna, 2014; Schmid, 2013). Over the years, there have been many revisions of the DREAM Act, with little bipartisan consensus and never successfully passed (Borjian, 2018; Cebulko, 2013).

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