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DREAMers and Values: An Urban and Suburban Community College Comparison

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Although previous research on the role of postsecondary education in the lives of undocumented youth has offered insight regarding demographics, educational achievement, measures of well-being, and generational trajectories, less is known about these young immigrants' values and beliefs regarding themselves, their relation to others, their futures, and the potential influence of their social surroundings on these values. The intersecting perceptual beliefs between self and higher education were investigated among 7 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) participants in 2 U.S. community colleges and were hypothesized to reflect two social environments: an urban (New York) and a suburban (New Jersey) setting. As values analysis uncovers principles and goals embedded within narratives, the similarity (shared beliefs) and dissimilarity (unshared beliefs) of being undocumented in these two landscapes were investigated through values. Results revealed that regardless of location, undocumented students held values concerning perseverance and the need to hide their status yet be understood by others. However, depending on location, values either reflected the importance of improving either one's family condition (New York) or one's personal trajectory (New Jersey). Implications are discussed in the context of current U.S. immigration policy and what college administrators and faculty can implement in order to create a more welcoming climate for this vulnerable, yet growing, student population.

Keywords: DREAMers, immigration, community college, undocumented students, values analysis

As previous attempts in the United States to draft legislation that would provide protective clauses for undocumented youth had failed in previous years, the Obama administration issued a memorandum in June 2012 to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), directing that agency to handle deportation cases regarding undocumented youth with greater sensitivity if certain age-, legal-, and education-related requirements were met. Titled the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, DREAMers (undocumented 18- to 30-year-old individuals) who met certain requirements (including having come to the United States before the age of 16 and being currently enrolled in school) would be relieved from threat of deportation and could be granted a renewable 2-year permission to reside and work in the United States (DACA, 2018; Ochoa O'Leary, 2014) on a case-by-case basis.

Although DACA does not offer a path to citizenship, an estimated 1.76 million had served to benefit from this policy, with 85% having been born in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and

South America. Regionally, New York and New Jersey are two of the top 10 states that have the largest number of potential beneficiaries (110,000 and 70,000, respectively; Batalova & Mittelstadt, 2012). Recent research indicates that at the 1-year mark, DACA application rates for both New York (34%) and New Jersey (43%) were under the national average (49%), presumably related to a host of factors, including climate of reception and immigrant youths' workforce participation (Batalova, Hooker, Capps, Bachmeier, & Cox, 2013).

Because of the Congressional stalemate on immigration reform, DACA represents a bag of mixed fortunes. On the one hand, young immigrants are granted permission to stay in the United States for an extended (albeit limited) amount of time, whereas, on the other hand, their immigrant status is not fully resolved, resulting in their continued liminal existence (Sargent & Larchanché-Kim, 2006). Further complicating matters, although orders of deportation at the federal level may be paused, the rights and privileges that these young individuals have vary at the state level. Undocumented youth may be eligible for state resources such as driver's licenses and in-state tuition at postsecondary schools in some states (e.g., Illinois and California) or may be denied public benefits such as welfare in others (e.g., Nebraska). As undocumented students are ineligible for federal tuition aid, and given the byzantine treatment from state to state, opportunities for postsecondary education are fraught with barriers (Gonzales, 2009).

As evidenced by the current public debate on immigration reform in the United States, claims are made regarding the rights, responsibilities, and privileges that immigrants should and should not be entitled to. Consequently, much of the public and political discourse on the topic of immigration has focused on the extent to

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which immigrants are able to integrate themselves into the larger U.S. society (Casas & Ryan, 2010). One potential social and psychological area of cultural integration and socialization, particularly for youth, is the educational space. As one of the requirements of DACA is to be currently enrolled in school—and given the relatively cost-effective and time flexible nature of the institutions—most undocumented youth tend to enroll in the nation's community (or junior) colleges.

The Community College

Community colleges are the fastest growing U.S. institutions of higher education (Mullin, 2011) for immigrant students. Given their greater accessibility (i.e., open admissions, lower tuition rates, and flexible class schedules for adults in the workforce and/or those with family responsibilities), community college students are more likely than their 4-year counterparts to be minorities, to come from low-income backgrounds, and to be the first in their families to receive higher education degrees (Batalova et al., 2013; Dozier, 1995; Jauregui, Slate, & Brown, 2008; Perlstein, 2011; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011; Terriquez, 2015; Valenzuela, Perez, Perez, Montiel, & Chaparro, 2015). Nationwide, in 2003 to 2004, roughly 25% of the 6.5 million degree-seeking community college students were immigrants, and in the City University of New York (CUNY) system alone, a report on the entering freshman class revealed that 60% of foreign-born students began their higher education in community colleges (Teranishi et al., 2011). The community college clearly represents a niche for minority and immigrant youth. It is not surprising to note that undocumented young people are a relatively high percentage (13%, and closer to 20% in the New York City regional area) of students at public universities and college, especially community colleges, in which nearly 80% of all undocumented students enrolled in 2005 (Garza, 2006).

However, not all community colleges are situated equally. The context of reception—specifically, the political orientation of the community surrounding the college—may play a role in the resources available for students with special legal needs. More politically and fiscally conservative landscapes may be less likely to symbolically support undocumented students compared with more liberal milieus. Scholars have noted how implicit rules involving schooling both reflects and shapes inclusion and exclusion in and from society (Gonzales, 2010; Lareau, 2011; Patel, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2015). For instance, initiatives at CUNY—such as CUNY/NYC Citizenship Now!—provide an interactive space for studying the attitudes, perceptions, and emotions toward not only the community college but also immigration policy, such as DACA, of those involved.

As DuBois (1903) wrote over three quarters of a century before, Anzaldúa (2012) referred to the double consciousness that exists in the borderlands between cultures and social systems. Immigrants in the United States, whether undocumented or not, are subject to the prevailing commentary by news media sources about the rights and responsibilities that the foreign-born have or do not have (or should have or should not have) in this country (Finch, 2014). Immigrant youth, particularly undocumented youth, are unique in that they (a) have been students in the American educational system for their duration of their lives, and (b) tend to have greater fluency in the English language compared with more recent arriv-

als (Batalova et al., 2013). This greater fluency allows the user to navigate two or more “worlds,” each with their own language and messaging regarding society and politics. The inclusion–exclusion hybridity that exists in borderlands (whether geographical or psychological) results in new consciousness and perspective that can come only from being within a system while retaining the knowledge of an outsider who comes from outside the system. Those living in borderlands become adept at switching between both worlds (Anzaldúa, 2012). Therefore, the community college is certainly a site where immigrant and undocumented youth are participating actively in society as students, thereby legitimizing their presence (Abrego, 2008), contrary to the prevailing legal discourse of “illegal” immigrants as criminals and potential terrorists which illegitimizes them (van Dijk, 1995).

As a formerly undocumented immigrant raised in New York City in the 1980s, I understand and am aware of the trials and tribulations that families with precarious legal status face. Similar to many undocumented youth, I was unaware of my status until later in life, but I lack any understanding of what it is like to be an undocumented young adult in college. I also wanted to understand more about the differences in being raised in an urban and suburban environment and if (and how) the thoughts and emotions surrounding immigration status intersects with social landscape and contexts of reception.

The legislation regarding DACA brings with it many questions regarding its purpose, its utility, its advantages, and its disadvantages from the standpoint of those directly affected by it. Now is an opportune time to study the social psychological and developmental processes of enacted law on the lives of young adults, particularly as this nation has witnessed several changes in immigration policy since 2012, including the intended repeal of the program by the Trump administration in 2017. Understanding how the community college plays a role in the complex dynamic of interests, social relations, and practices around DACA offers insights about the challenges and opportunities of higher education and, more broadly, human development and socialization.

College participation in DACA is thus a site of interdependent meaning making and learning. The rationale for the community college as a research site rests on its unique position in the lives of these youth, and this study will look to address the interaction of young immigrants and their U.S.-born peers on the issue of immigration as mediated through two community colleges: the urban environment of New York Community College (NYCC) and the suburban campus of New Jersey Community College (NJCC).

Method

Research Sites and Participants

New York City is home to 8.4 million inhabitants, 6.4% (535,000) of whom are reported to be undocumented (Moradian, 2014). At NYCC, enrollment before Fall 2014 reflected a total of 25,849 students, with 697 reported to be undocumented. The county in which NJCC is located is home to 499,397 residents, 3.4% (22,000) of whom are reported to be undocumented, according to 2013 U.S. Census figures (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). At NJCC, enrollment before the Fall 2014 semester reflected a total of 8,096 students, with 45 reported to be undocumented.

As reflected in the student demographics retrieved from the respective colleges' institutional data for the Fall 2014 semester (see Table 1), this is a tale of two colleges. The student population at NYCC is slightly older, more ethnically and racially diverse, and has more females enrolled compared with the NJCC population, which tends to be slightly younger and White/Caucasian but evenly split between males and females.

Although NYCC is located in one of the largest global cities, NJCC is in a suburban section of New Jersey, approximately 30 miles west of NYCC. Given these figures, one can speculate how immigrants either "blend in" or "stand out" in these environments. With recent reports highlighting the fact that over one third of the New York City population is foreign-born (Moradian, 2014), the racial and ethnic saliency of being an immigrant is more subdued among the "minority majority" population of NYCC.

These two sites also symbolize somewhat contrasting poles of the political spectrum. New York City is, and has been, a socio-politically liberal environment, with 69% of voters registered as Democrats (New York State Board of Elections, 2014, p. 46). For the county in which NJCC is located, the corresponding figure is 21% (New Jersey Department of State, 2014). Politically liberal environments have tended to pass more supportive measures for undocumented immigrants, such as driver's licenses and in-state tuition (i.e., New York and San Francisco), whereas politically conservative environments have typically passed policies either preventing or prohibiting certain immigrant rights and privileges (i.e., Alabama, Arizona, and Virginia). Although there is no federal or state law that prohibits the *admission* of undocumented students to U.S. colleges, policies on *admitting* students do vary by institution (Gonzales, 2009). As the only public community college in the county, the political landscape has influenced policies at NJCC. After the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, NJCC approved a policy barring undocumented students from taking classes there. In February 2011, the Board of Trustees reversed their ruling to allow undocumented students to register for courses and pay the in-state tuition rate (\$115 per credit). However, after a public hearing held only 2 months later, the college reversed their ruling, proclaiming that undocumented students would now be charged the out-of-county rate (\$326 per credit; Caicedo, 2014; County College of Morris Votes to Allow, 2011; County College of Morris Votes to Charge, 2011). A com-

parison, then, between politically diverse sites seems worthwhile in discussing the psychological dynamics involving immigration.

Participants in this study were all undocumented students from either NYCC or NJCC who had received DACA authorization and approval. In total, there were seven students interviewed, consisting of four NYCC and three NJCC students. The four NYCC students were Asia (born in Antigua), Diana (born in Peru), Lorena (born in Mexico), and Eddie (born in Mexico). The three NJCC students were Roberta (born in Brazil), Christopher (born in Colombia), and Elsa (born in Ecuador). All names used in this article are pseudonyms. A snowball recruitment method was utilized for both groups of students. At NYCC, recruitment was made from the undocumented student-run NYCC Dream Team organization, whereas at NJCC, an institutional administrator scheduled an introductory meeting between the author and Roberta, one of the undocumented student leaders there. Each participant received a \$20 Visa gift card upon completion of the interview. Although this sample of undocumented college students in New York and New Jersey was diverse in terms of nationality, generalizations are cautiously made because of the small sample.

Materials

This study consisted of semistructured interviews consisting of five questions. The first question was a broad life history question: "Tell me about your life before coming to the U.S. and how you became undocumented." The second question asked specifically what their day-to-day life is like: "What is your education, work, and family life like?" The third and fourth questions asked participants to reflect on their lives and experiences and how both relate to their presence in the United States: "What does it mean to you to be living in the United States now?" and "How do you make sense of your life in the context of your life experience?" Finally, the fifth question asked for participants' opinion on the DACA program: "What is your opinion on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program? Are there good, and not-so-good, sides to this program?"

Procedure and Analysis

All procedures in this study were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York (Project No. 475901-2).

As Daiute (2010) noted, a speaker speaks to the requirements of the environment and its societal pressures. As values are "culturally-specific goals, ways of knowing, experiencing, and acting in response to environmental, cultural, economic, political, and social circumstances" (Daiute, Stern, & Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2003, p. 85), values analysis allows for the investigation of explicit and implicit principles and goals that a narrator has learned through lived experience and in relation to others, such as through sociocultural or situational interactions. By quantifying those, as well as describing and illustrating a wide range of meanings, connections can be made between the interpersonal relationships across individuals, groups, and institutions (Daiute, 2014). Therefore, a discursive analysis is well-suited for uncovering both explicit and implicit messages regarding social life.

The interviews were audio recorded by the researcher but subsequently transcribed by an outside professional transcriber who

Table 1
Fall 2014 Student Profile

Demographic data	NYCC	NJCC
Total enrollment	25,849	8,096
Gender		
Male	43.2%	50.3%
Female	56.8%	49.5%
Age		
≤20 years old	40.8%	48.9%
Race/ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	12.1%	59.1%
Black/African American	31.5%	4.8%
Hispanic/Latino	41.6%	19.5%
Asian	14.6%	5.6%

Note. NYCC = New York Community College; NJCC = New Jersey Community College.

was unaware of the study's aims. After the interview, transcriptions were entered into the Atlas Ti software program and an initial reading was done to capture any inherent values in the students' responses. Values were detected whenever a response included an explicit or implicit need of importance, whether tangible (e.g., money) or intangible (e.g., protection). Codes were then generated based on these values. Values were identified in their responses to the interview questions and consolidated after a second reading to group similar values together. Following this scope of analysis, values were then identified as either existing across the campuses ("shared") or not ("unshared"), based on the student's responses to the interview questions, ranging from "Tell me your life story and how you became undocumented" to "What does it mean for you to be living in the U.S. now?"

By dividing the values into shared and unshared categories, tentative conclusions can be made regarding the universality of being undocumented in a community college (shared) or the potential influence of the social environment on the lives of undocumented youth (unshared). Shared values are, then, argued to be generalizable to the larger population of undocumented community college students in the United States, whereas unshared values are offered as evidence for the differences between urban and suburban academic institutions, located in politically liberal and politically conservative environments, respectively. After the first round of the identification of values, the subsequent round of analysis dealt with whether the values were shared, or not, between the two college groups as a comparison (see Table 2).

Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used as both a methodological and analytical approach. As a methodological tool, it allowed for exploratory data collection. Because of the exploratory nature of the open-ended interview questions, grounded theory allowed for an unbiased collection of responses. As an analytical tool, grounded theory was used to extrapolate the categorical codes (values) from the responses to the exploratory questions. The codes were then subdivided into the shared and unshared categories, which ultimately led to the theoretical conclusions drawn in this study.

Results

A values analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in narratives revolving around three major areas of their lives: themselves

(e.g., "Education is a valued element in the life of an undocumented individual"), the world (e.g., "It is important to retain one's culture in the United States"), and the future (e.g., "Having a life purpose is needed for survival").

Shared Values

To start, there were shared values between NYCC and NJCC undocumented students regarding their daily life survival, others' understandings of their lives, and their outlook for the future, as shown in Figure 1. Concerning daily life survival, both groups of students expressed the value that "Having money, or a means of income, is needed for survival." It is perhaps not surprising to note this value, given that these are young adults, but it is considerable to note that for them, having money is important because of their responsibilities—as students and as family members:

But then in New York . . . I feel like many doors were open . . . I made my resume. I started looking everywhere in Manhattan . . . because that was where they pay you more. I started looking everywhere, and the job I found, thank God, was in an Italian restaurant. And I was a cashier there, and I was getting paid \$12 an hour. (Lorena)

In terms of their relationships with others, both groups of students shared the value that "It is important to be understood as an undocumented individual." This value tended to appear with another value: "It is important to acknowledge that undocumented individuals encounter many social, vocational, and educational obstacles." Implicitly found in their interviews, undocumented students were demanding and expressing the need for empathy and understanding by others of their plights. As students detailed their day-to-day routines, such as their often-frantic school and work schedules, coupled with their familial obligations in caring for others, or their difficulty in associating with peers because of their social and legal circumstances, these students were expressing the belief that others should be more cognizant of what it means to be undocumented:

I think it [immigration status] pops up every day for me. Either I'm always thinking about it in the sense of I can come to school full-time because of my status. My dad can't get a job because of his status. My mom can't get a job because of her status. My sister also. Even though we have the DREAM Act, it's still hard for us. I think I still see myself

Table 2

Frequency of Shared Values Enacted in Interviews by College

Values	NYCC	NJCC	Total
It is important to acknowledge that undocumented individuals encounter many social, vocational, and educational obstacles.	18	20	38
"Passing," or being in disguise, is needed for survival.	19	17	36
Family support and guidance are valued elements in the life of an undocumented individual.	10	14	24
Education is a valued element in the life of an undocumented individual.	9	14	23
Having money, or a means of income, is needed for survival.	7	10	17
Financial aid is critical to achieving one's educational goals.	6	10	16
Having a life purpose is needed for survival.	9	6	15
Despite one's immigration status, it is important to be determined in achieving one's goals.	6	8	14
It is important to be understood as an undocumented individual.	4	7	11
The United States provides many benefits and opportunities to young undocumented individuals and their families.	7	4	11
It is important to remain optimistic despite a current state of affairs.	4	5	9

Note. NYCC = New York Community College; NJCC = New Jersey Community College.

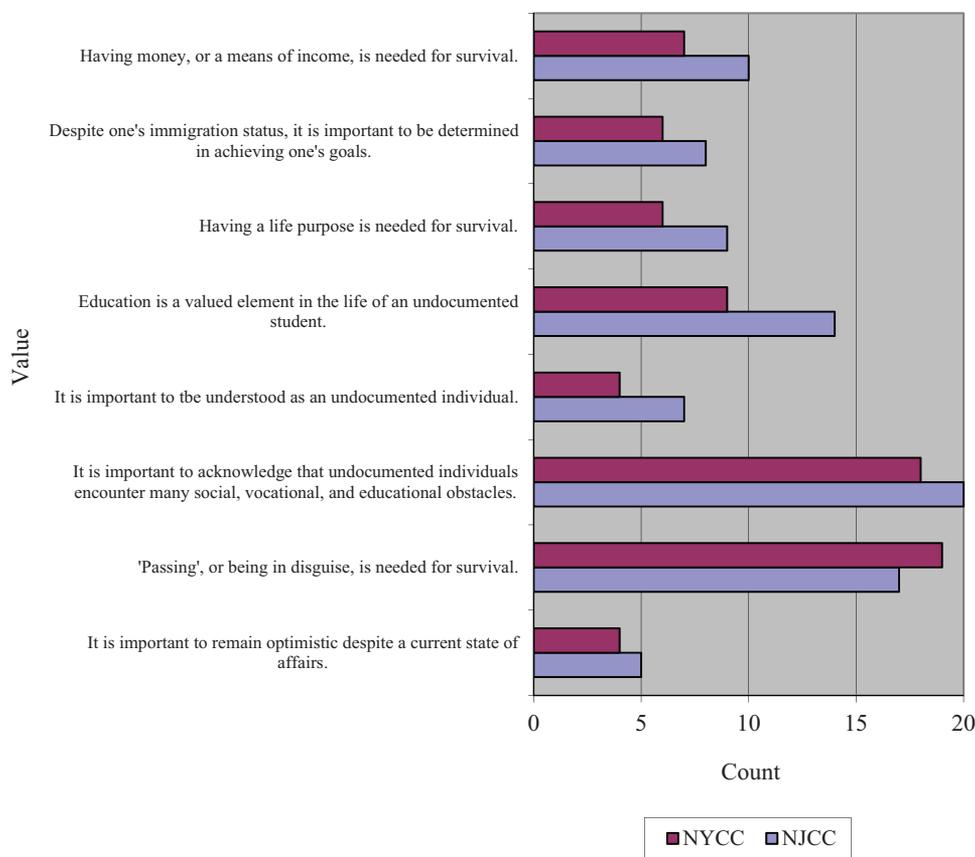


Figure 1. Shared values of undocumented students between colleges. NYCC = New York Community College; NJCC = New Jersey Community College. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

as an undocumented immigrant. And I see that, I think, every day. I think it's something that I have with me all the time. (Diana)

Both groups of students reported that their undocumented status indirectly gave them a sense of ownership and agency over their lives. This experience, of course, is not entirely positive given the demands and obligations they face as students, employees, and sons and daughters. Because of this pressure to excel, succeed, and be seemingly perfect in the eyes of others, they feel that nonimmigrant, and especially nonundocumented, students do not fully understand the struggle of “living in the shadows” and all the limitations inherent in not having a Social Security number. They believe that their U.S.-born peers take advantage of the educational system by not taking their lives and academics as seriously as they should, and drawing a comparison between “us” and “them” (Abrego, 2008):

So that (paying the out-of-state tuition rate) was . . . always the most frustrating part. And even seeing a lot of people not take school seriously here and skip class and just, you know, mess around with the professors . . . I never understood why people did that. And . . . why they didn't feel passionately about getting an education. Because, like for me, that was just so obvious. Like . . . why would you be here if you didn't want to be here? (Roberta)

The role of “disguise” also played prominently in both groups' narratives, as reflected in the value of “Passing, or being in

disguise, is needed for survival.” With this value, students expressed the need to be “in disguise,” either intentionally or not. In some cases, students were instructed at an early age, by their parents, to never disclose their legal status to others because of the potential negative ramifications, including the almost certain deportation for themselves and others related to the lack of due process in detention centers (Kanstroom, 2007). In other cases, students acknowledged that their friends and coworkers were not even aware of their legal status, which they prefer. In other words, “passing” for a U.S. citizen or Permanent Resident (i.e., “normal”) and concealing their stigmatized identities is a part of their daily lives and practiced occasionally for survival purposes (Goffman, 1963). “Learning to be illegal” and maintaining secrecy seems to be an early part of the psychological development of undocumented youth (Gonzales, 2011).

But then once I didn't get my license . . . my friends started questioning. And that's when I would make up excuses like, . . . “Oh, I like walking.” Or, “I'm scared of cars.” “I don't like driving.” . . . and I never really, like, came out to any of my friends then about my status, because . . . it was really instilled in me from the beginning not to talk about it. (Roberta)

The last of the shared values came in the form of optimism, expressed as “It is important to remain optimistic despite a current state of affairs.” This value was seen most readily when students

were discussing immigration reform. Despite its stalemate, students, like Diana, in the following quote, reflected the belief that reform may occur in the future, and therefore it is important to remain productive and optimistic—a belief echoed by many other undocumented youth nationwide (Abrego, 2006, 2008; Patel, 2013; Perez, 2009; Terriquez, 2014):

My parents have always taught me to go to school, finish . . . It's important. And they were the ones who also pushed me, like to take one class. . . . Because my mom said, "If you stop going to school, that's it. Because you're not going to find anything else. You're going to just be working. You're going to see the money, and you, just—you don't go from there. But if you keep going to school, then," she always used to say, "there's going to be something someday. And you have to be ready."

Unshared Values

Although both NYCC and NJCC undocumented students shared many of the same values regarding perseverance despite social and legal barriers, the need to be "understood" by the general public, and the importance of hope, there were also many other values that were not shared—ones that displayed more or less prominently in the interview narratives by college, as seen in Table 3 and Figure 2.

The sole NYCC value that was unshared, which appeared significantly more than in the NJCC narratives, was the value that "It is important to help fellow family members." With this value, students stated that much of their lives involve assisting other family members, whether immediate or in the home country (Gonzales, 2011). This could come in the form of remittances, as in the case of Lorena, who sent her work earnings back to Mexico and purchased a home and automobile for her mother and younger brother to use:

I was blessed with that job [Italian restaurant in Manhattan] because that helped me pay when my grandmother was still sick. I had to help her pay her meds. That helped me help my brother to start at the university.

It could also come in the form of Asia's assistance, in helping her mother and sister pay their past-due rent and utility bills, while serving in the military:

So by the time I was getting ready to go to the military, it was almost time for them [her family] to get out of the house. But since I had a job, I didn't really have any bills . . . So all the money I was making,

I was mainly just helping my mom. I set up a joint bank account, and I told my mom if she ever needed help, she can just, you know, use whatever.

It was surprising to note how many of the NYCC interviews mentioned the need, and want, to assist family members in tangible and symbolic ways, thereby upholding their end of the immigrant bargain (Smith, 2006).

The NJCC interview narratives, on the other hand, provided nearly all of the unshared values, ranging from the importance of activism to the loss of freedom.

The value of "Advocating for immigrant rights is needed for survival" played prominently in the NJCC narratives compared with the NYCC ones. This is not surprising given that both Roberta and Christopher acknowledged their participation in advocating for various initiatives at the college involving tuition and financial aid for undocumented students, including in-state tuition rates. None of the NYCC students made statements that indicated (or emphasized) the need for activism involving their rights as undocumented students, but this value was clearly tilted in the NJCC direction, as reflected in Roberta's grassroots efforts:

So I organized a group of students, both that had had dropped out, out of NJCC, and that were here that were undocumented. And we went to one of the board of trustees meeting. . . . And we—we had, like, meetings to—to really organize, like, our strategy and how we were going to, like, talk about this [out-of-state tuition rate policy for undocumented students].

This value concurred with three other values, which, again, were seen much more in the NJCC interviews than in the NYCC interviews: "Having an in-state tuition policy is critical to achieving one's educational goals," "It is the role of the community college to support its community of students, including the undocumented," and "It is unfair that undocumented students face greater academic demands and pressure than U.S.-born students." These values were distinct from each other yet grouped under the premise that life as an undocumented community college student is difficult because the academic and financial demands placed upon them are inequitable compared with their U.S.-born peers:

I cannot get—oh, yes, so the comparison is my friends, they could get college loans, government grants, government help. I have to pay all this out of pocket. I do not know . . . I do not owe anything to anyone right now, but they do not have to worry about that . . . because, I

Table 3
Frequency of Unshared Values Enacted in Interviews by College

Values	NYCC	NJCC	Total
As an undocumented individual, it is important to be mature, responsible, disciplined, and independent.	5	17	22
It is important to help fellow family members.	16	4	20
Advocating for immigrant rights is needed for survival.	0	17	17
It is the role of the community college to support its community of students, including the undocumented.	3	13	16
Having an in-state tuition policy is critical to achieving one's educational goals.	2	12	14
It is important to retain one's culture in the United States.	2	9	11
A parent's presence is particularly critical in the life of an undocumented individual.	0	10	10
While "lifestyle" has improved, life quality has not.	0	10	10
It is unfair that undocumented college students face greater academic demands and pressure than U.S.-born students.	0	7	7

Note. NYCC = New York Community College; NJCC = New Jersey Community College.

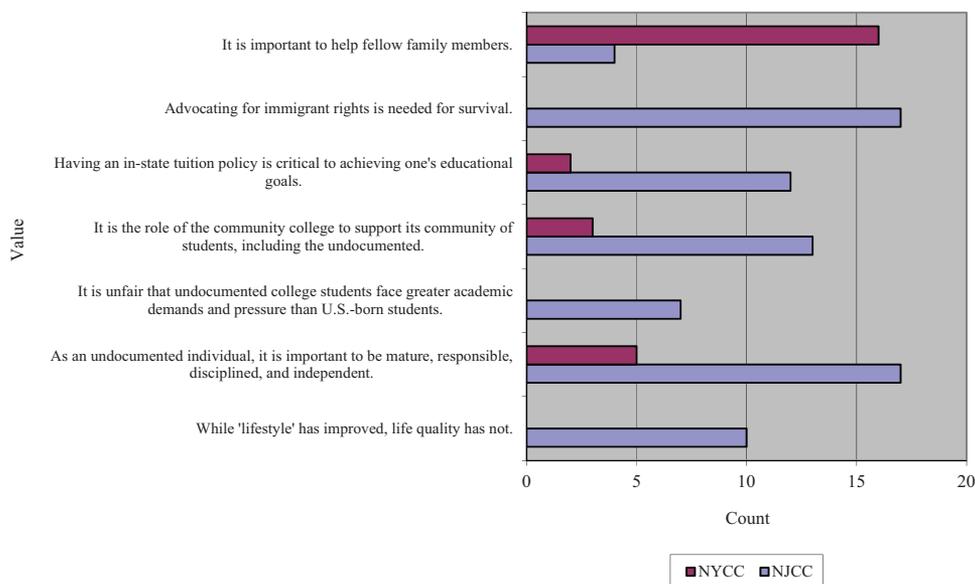


Figure 2. Unshared values of undocumented students between colleges. NYCC = New York Community College; NJCC = New Jersey Community College. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

guess, they didn't pay for it or work for it. I see them just slacking off, 2.7 GPAs, you know? (Christopher)

In terms of the quality of education, the NYCC and NJCC students generally felt that their academic experience as the respective institutions was a positive one. Yet the NJCC students also felt that college administrators should be more knowledgeable about, or play a bigger role in understanding, the struggles faced by undocumented students, whether at NJCC or at the 4-year transfer colleges that these students aim to apply to. Christopher recounted an experience he had contacting a small liberal arts college in southern New Jersey and being frustrated at their lack of knowledge regarding the particularities of being an undocumented student: "They didn't even know what Deferred Action was . . . it's just shocking that this tattoo that people like me have and thousands of us, and . . . people that are in charge of administering an education here, they don't know about it."

In fact, this acknowledgment of the struggles of undocumented students was what pushed Asia to come to New York City from Georgia and to enroll at NYCC after noticing a section on the school website devoted to undocumented student affairs: "And so I was like, 'This is awesome. This is where I belong.' Because I don't need to be in Georgia where nobody has a clue how to help me at all."

Perhaps not surprisingly, educational institutions who work with a significant immigrant student population hold greater knowledge about them and their needs compared with other, even more prestigious institutions (Patel, 2013). In Lorena's case below, she had been offered paid employment at the college by the Vice President of Student Affairs, thereby fostering a continuing a relationship with the school and giving her an opportunity to "polish her skills":

NYCC is like my first home . . . the home of my studies, the home of my dreams, because here is where I'm opening my eyes, where I'm

seeing all my opportunities. And here's where I met great people . . . There's so many others that have helped me—my advisors.

Lastly, two additional values displayed in the NJCC interviews dealt with having to embrace maturity and responsibility in the face of a loss of freedom. The value of "As an undocumented individual, it is important to be mature, responsible, disciplined, and independent" was expressed vividly in the interviews with Roberta, Christopher, and Elsa in their mention of a hyperawareness of themselves and their status and the potential consequences of their daily actions, which has affected their psychological development. These NJCC students reported having to "grow up" or mature faster than their college peers. The educational and vocational limitations brought on by undocumented status has forced them to work extremely hard in the classroom, devote any hours remaining in the day to their employment to pay for their tuition and fulfill their familial and personal economic obligations, but also sacrifice hours of sleep and leisure for social activities:

Like the way my mom raised me and my sister was, like, you have to be able to survive on your own, because at any time she could leave. So like I'm very self-sufficient. Like, I have my own job. I pay my own bills. I don't really depend on my mom that much. But it's weird, because she depends on me . . . like I need to pay rent and all that stuff. (Elsa)

Coupled with this value was "While lifestyle has improved, quality of life has not." What is stated in this value is that although lifestyle factors, such as safety and means of income, have greatly improved since arriving in the United States, the quality of life has not. However, what is lost since arriving in the United States is freedom, and this point was not lost on the NJCC students. Christopher spoke the most regarding what undocumented status feels like to him, when he stated, "It's like a tattoo you don't want on you." Clearly, Christopher feels and thinks that immigrant status is

given to you involuntarily rather than through conscious volition. In his interview, Christopher also commented, “[My] current status haunts me,” again reflecting a negative evaluation of having undocumented status, at least as seen through the eyes of society. Finally, he provided one of the most telling quotes among all the interviews, when he stated, “When I moved to the land of the free, I didn’t know I was sacrificing my freedom.” He makes an implicit connection between conferred-upon legal immigration status and the loss of liberty and freedom—through an action (or a series of actions) for which he was nonagentic.

This acknowledgment of political and legal realities was a critical element in all of the interviews, as to how these students viewed their positions in the DACA process. Christopher, again for instance, reported that with undocumented status, one must be very cautious in life because, “Anything you could do wrong, could lead to your deportation.” This immediate need to be careful in one’s dealings with society, as “no one really understood their situation” is most certainly haunting and led to Christopher stating that he felt like he “was in jail.” Having the tattoo of undocumented status removes agency, at least in the form of being able to be completely free to interact with others without fear of “making an error.”

DACA

For both the NYCC and NJCC students, a shared value that dealt with their life purpose was “Despite one’s immigration status, it is important to be determined in achieving one’s goals.” This value appeared concurrently with two additional ones: “Having a life purpose is needed for survival” and “Education is a valued element in the life of an undocumented student.” These values appeared when students were describing how they viewed their lives before and after receiving DACA. Roberta, Christopher, and Elsa claimed that DACA allowed them to become “human” again, by allowing them to not live in the shadows of society. DACA, in fact, helped reignite the desire to pursue education for Elsa, who found herself aimless and without hope during the year after her high school graduation:

And then after high school, there was no way I could go to college. Like at all, whatsoever. So I had to figure out what I was going to do. Though for a year, I didn’t have anything to do. I didn’t work, I didn’t go to school. I was just bored at home, doing nothing. And then I got the deferred action.

Eddie stated that having DACA motivated him to imagine and want to pursue more education beyond the associate’s degree, in order to obtain a degree for which he could prevent others from dropping out of school and encourage students to complete their degrees: “I think it’s just given me a light of hope. It gave me a boost of confidence. It just made me be even more positive towards my future. So I think it’s great. I think the DACA’s great.”

The confluence of money, education, and the value of DACA is reflected in the shared belief that “Financial aid is critical to achieving one’s educational goals.” Financial aid is important to any student in higher education, but obtaining DACA has assisted these undocumented students in continuing their studies (Batalova et al., 2013).

The one major crucible in their lives as community college students, however, was the economic and psychological effects of

paying for their tuition. Roberta, at NJCC, claimed that before obtaining DACA, she had the unfortunate and repetitive experience of having to pay her tuition in cash, for which she received quizzical looks by students as well as the administration. In December 2013, the Tuition Equality Act (also known as the “NJ Dream Act”) was passed by the New Jersey state legislature and signed into law by then-Governor Chris Christie, which allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates (Portnoy, 2014). However, because they are still barred from receiving federal and state financial aid, they are still faced with high tuition costs despite this policy change. This lack of financial aid as a barrier in life, in terms of not permitting the relative ease and flexibility in paying for college, was seen readily in the NJCC interviews.

Having undocumented status serves, in some ways, as a motivating factor in the participants’ pursuit of achievement, even with DACA status. Roberta commented that being undocumented makes her “feel like I have to be perfect in almost every way in order to succeed.” This drive for perfection, then, has made these students work harder for their goals, despite the legal barriers inherent in unauthorized status. Both groups of students also report that this drive to succeed adds some degree of pressure to accomplish what others cannot—including their parents, siblings, and friends. In other words, these youths find DACA status to serve as gasoline to their fires of ambition, particularly when living in a mixed-status household in which some family members may not qualify for DACA or any other federal immigration program. This weight on their shoulders is not interpreted as a burdensome weight but rather a weight of support and encouragement. Not surprisingly, then, the value of “Family support and guidance are valued elements in the life of an undocumented student” was observed in both groups.

The procurement of DACA, however, also seemed to symbolize a wedge between the “good” and “bad” immigrant, alluded to by Diana, when she was discussing her opinions on the program: “The [DACA] requirements are OK for me. I think we don’t want to keep adding to what people have in their mentality, off on the undocumented illegal immigrants.”

Diana seemed to indirectly distance herself from those who did not have DACA by stating that any attempt at immigration reform should begin with those that have already obtained this policy benefit, thereby eschewing the negative social image of the “illegal immigrant.” Having DACA may serve a dual protective purpose—both in the legal sense as well as in the social environment of human interactions.

Discussion

This article reflects an exploratory study into the experiences of undocumented youth within the broader population, attending the community college at a time of changing politics regarding their rights and the role that their socialization in the United States plays in their understanding of themselves, education, and politics in relation to diverse sociopolitical contexts where they live.

As such, this study builds on the work of educational psychologists and sociologists who have investigated the developmental limbo that exists for undocumented college students (Abrego, 2008; Gonzales, 2011), how political activism surrounding immigration policy impacts their educational well-being (Abrego, 2008;

Terriquez, 2015), the importance of the community college for documented and undocumented immigrant students (Dozier, 1995; Jauregui et al., 2008), and the beneficial effect of DACA (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Rusczyk, 2014; Terriquez, 2015).

However, this study offers a new lens through which to view the undocumented student experience in the United States, by way of interpreting the values and beliefs they endorse. Because societal values, such as meritocracy and familial responsibility, are embedded in society, a view of how undocumented students from different communities absorb, retain, and/or change these values is novel. Values analysis conducted on the interview transcripts revealed stark differences between the two groups of students regarding how they viewed themselves, how they viewed others (including their respective academic institutions), and what the future may hold for them. It is argued that these value differences are attributed to the different social environments found in urban New York City and suburban New Jersey. Being undocumented in a populous and diverse city is not the same as being undocumented in a smaller and homogeneous community, psychologically speaking. Malkin (as cited in Smith, 2006) coined the term “Benetton context” to differentiate between sites where ethnicity is viewed as “cool” and “hip” versus “racialized” and “stigmatized”—a possible categorization between urban and suburban environments. The results of this study, then, add to the knowledge base that immigrant rights organizations could utilize when preparing initiatives aimed at higher education. Although both groups of students found themselves having to work harder to accomplish their goals, the NJCC students seemed to have the added pressure of having to psychologically develop into well-groomed adults at a faster pace compared with their NYCC peers.

Terriquez (2015) claimed that the condition of illegality serves as a master status that overpowers social and individual characteristics, thereby influencing diverse aspects of their lives. Although immigration status is undoubtedly a constant psychological presence, the students in this study used their status to either help themselves or others with the help of DACA. Therefore, this study represents *illegality* as a psychological construct—one that can have both negative and positive appraisals dependent on social context. A motivation to succeed may be an indirect positive outcome as it pertains to the condition of illegality (Dozier, 1995). This maturity and determination seemed to be the undertone to the psychological experience in the United States for undocumented college students, as they will rest upon these qualities to achieve their individual goals. NYCC students, however, seemed content with achieving a more collective-centered goal, in helping their families obtain needed resources, as a function of their DACA status and their college education. Subsequent investigations should be made on the value or role of education on mixed-status families and the psychological influence of undocumented family members on students’ developmental pathways.

The respective colleges play a major role in this dynamic as well, as the NJCC students were much more expressive regarding their plight paying their tuition without financial aid. Undoubtedly a reflection of differing state immigration policies at the time, as well as these students’ roles in the undocumented student activist movement, a harsh moral comparison is implicitly drawn between themselves (as hardworking and diligent students) and their U.S.-born peers (as oblivious to their struggles and nonconscientious in their work ethic).

It is interesting that self-advocacy was observed much more readily in the NJCC sample compared with the NYCC sample given the relative isolated nature of this population in a suburban context. It might be assumed that activism and public exposure would be higher in the NYCC sample given the social context of metropolitan racial and ethnic heterogeneity. However, these results point to an interesting paradox—namely, that a greater sense of isolation is related to a greater need for self-advocacy. Future research should investigate how the interaction between stigmatized identity and social environment could lead to either self-advocacy or self-preservation.

Limitations

Educational scholarship continues to increase as it relates to the lives of undocumented youth in the United States. With this work, the experiences of these students are uplifted to show the effects of conferred-upon legal status, which is often only recently known. However, as Gonzales et al. (2014) note, most of this work consists of small sample sizes. This study also contains a limited sample size related to a confluence of multiple factors including the methodology (interviews), the recruitment approach (snowball), and the very nature of a highly charged political topic with personal ramifications.

Given the limited sample size, claims are cautiously made about the differences in enacted values between urban and suburban or even New York and New Jersey community colleges. The snowball recruitment approach may be the cause for the differences in values between the two colleges, such that the activism practiced by the NJCC students was concentrated in their narratives. Yet related to the fact that both groups of students came from college-based organizations, this effect should be attenuated for the same reason that differences were seen among other factors such as beliefs on, or about, family, culture, and the respective colleges’ responsibilities.

Implications for Educational Policy

College-based initiatives are vital in the life of the undocumented student if they are to continue their academic progression and become the nation’s next leaders. The country’s suburban and rural community colleges should support their undocumented student population by offering them feasible means by which to pay for their tuition (Perez, 2009). These students are yearning for an education—providing them with in-state tuition rates and institutional financial aid options to start would be a boon to their confidence (as well as the institution’s enrollment). Despite their age, these youth manage more responsibilities than many adults do. By facilitating, or even removing, the barriers found in higher education, such as tuition and financial aid, obstacles to social inclusion in American social and civic life would also be lowered. Otherwise, as Smith (2006) noted, a large, disenfranchised segment of the undocumented population grows, fostering the “rainbow underclass” that segmented assimilation theory claims would occur (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Yet recent research suggests that providing in-state tuition is insufficient in ensuring graduation (Conger & Chellman, 2013). Although the removal of this barrier is viewed as critical, other academic resources such as guidance and mentoring should also play a pivotal role in the academic life

of any student, but particularly so for the undocumented (Perez, 2009).

As centers for learning, as well as socialization, community college campuses should create welcoming environments for all their students, including the undocumented and their allies (Valenzuela et al., 2015). Given the results of the present study, urban- and suburban-based college events should aim to accomplish different objectives. At urban colleges like NYCC, efforts should be made to expose students to the sociohistorical elements of immigration, whereas at suburban institutions like NJCC, efforts should be made to expose students to the criminal justice side of immigration—including how legal policies, either in part or in whole—affect diverse dimensions of the undocumented immigrant lived experience.

Finally, as many others have noted (Abrego, 2006, 2008; Gonzales, 2011; Martinez, 2014; Valenzuela et al., 2015; Zatz & Rodriguez, 2015), comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship for undocumented youth is sorely needed in the United States. Undocumented students want to be heard. They want to be understood by those who may have never crossed the desert or given a false passport. Although not “born American,” they were “raised American” and demand the same benefits and privileges. Despite this, they have attended school, learned English, made friends, and done what any other “documented” young adult has done. In some cases, they have exceeded what has been expected of them. But they also want to be protected. And they want their families to be protected. The rescinding of DACA by the Trump administration presents a troubling forecast for the educational and social trajectories of these students. Time will tell what how damaging this effect will be.

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