

Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Racist Nativism To Explore Intersectionality in the Educational Experiences of Undocumented Chicana College Students

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Introduction

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One of the most powerful elements of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education is that it provides critical researchers with a lens not offered by many other theoretical frameworks—that is, the ability to examine how multiple forms of oppression can intersect within the lives of People of Color and how those intersections manifest in our daily experiences to mediate our education. A theoretical branch extending from CRT is Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), which examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (Solorano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). A LatCrit analysis

Undocumented Chicana College Students

has allowed researchers to develop the conceptual framework of racist nativism, a lens that highlights the intersection of racism and nativism (Pérez Huber, et. al., 2008).

This article examines how a racist nativism framework can help understand the experiences of undocumented Chicana college students attending a public research university in California. First, this article will provide a brief description of how CRT and, in particular, LatCrit have allowed researchers to develop the frame of racist nativism. Second, the framework of racist nativism will be described, including how it is used in this study. Third, this article will describe the data collection strategies, methodological approach and analysis process used to gather and analyze 20 critical race *testimonio* interviews. Following this description, I will present the findings that demonstrate the ways racist nativism, class and gender have manifested in the educational trajectories of the undocumented Chicana college students.

The Need to Examine Undocumented Latina/o Educational Experiences

There is a limited but growing body of research on the experiences of undocumented Latina/o immigrant students in the U.S. (Abrego, 2002; Bastida et. al., 2007; De Leon, 2005; Fields, 2005; Gonzales, 2007; Guillen, 2004; Madera, et. al., 2008; Oliverez et. al., 2006; Olivas, 1995, 2004; Pabon Lopez, 2005; Pérez Huber & Malagón, 2007; Rangel, 2001; Rincón, 2005; Seif, 2004). We know that thousands of undocumented students graduate high schools throughout the country each year, but most are in state of California (Oliverez et. al., 2006). We also know that most undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are from Latin American countries, but México in particular (Passel, 2006). The historical and continued efforts of U.S. foreign policy to ensure Mexican economic dependence on the United States suggests economic conditions in México will continue to leave many Mexican citizens with no choice but to emigrate (Gonzalez & Fernandez, 2002). This means, until the U.S. enacts comprehensive immigration reform that offers the U.S. undocumented population with a path to citizenship, the number of undocumented Latina/o students will continue to grow. Research focusing on this group of students lags far behind this demographic growth.

CRT, LatCrit, and Racist Nativism: An Intersectional Approach

CRT and LatCrit. The overarching theoretical frameworks for this study are CRT, and in particular, LatCrit. CRT in educational research unapologetically centers the ways race, class, gender, sexuality and other forms of oppression manifest in the educational experiences of People of Color. CRT draws from multiple disciplines to challenge dominant ideologies such as meritocracy and colorblindness, which suggest educational institutions are neutral systems that function in the *same* ways for *all* students. This framework challenges these beliefs by learning and building from the knowledge of Communities of Color whose educational experiences are

marked by oppressive structures and practices. The efforts of revealing racism in education is a conscious move toward social and racial justice and empowerment among Communities of Color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso 2006).

LatCrit is an extension of the efforts of CRT in educational research. LatCrit can be used to reveal the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging the Latina/o experience with issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity and culture. Thus, LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinas/os specifically, through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). A LatCrit theoretical framework in this study, considers the intersectionality of race and other issues such as immigration status and language that undocumented students negotiate in their educational careers.

A further framework has been developed from LatCrit, specific to the intersections of racism and nativism. Racist nativism is a conceptual frame that helps researchers to understand how the historical racialization of Immigrants of Color has shaped the contemporary experiences of Latina/o undocumented immigrants (Pérez Huber et. al., 2008). In order to understand this framework and how it is applied in this study, it is first necessary to describe how the terms race, racism and nativism are operationalized and how these understandings lead to the definition of racist nativism.

Defining Race and Racism. While many definitions of race exist, most scholars agree that race is a socially constructed category (Haney-López, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Historically, racial constructions have been utilized as a tool to maintain and perpetuate racism, and more specifically, institutional racism that creates social inequities based on racial hierarchies (Banks, 1995). Racial definitions mediate power to benefit whites by validating white values, beliefs and knowledge over that of others and normalizing these privileges to subordinate People of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2006; Sue, 2003).

Understanding racism as a tool to subordinate People of Color reveals its intent as an ideological function of white¹ supremacy. White supremacy can be understood as a system of racial domination and exploitation where power and resources are unequally distributed to privilege whites and oppress People of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Dubois, 1999; Roediger, 1999). Solorzano, Allen, and Carroll (2002), provide three fundamental elements of racism that include, (1) one group believes itself to be superior to others, (2) the group that believes itself to be superior has power to carry out racist behavior, and (3) racism affects multiple racial and ethnic groups. Thus, these researchers frame racism as institutional power that People of Color have never significantly possessed and has been protected by racist ideologies rooted in notions of white supremacy. Memmi (1968) adds an important component to the understanding of racism, highlighting the significance of perceptions of racial differences. Thus, one can be victimized by racism, despite the reality of whether or not any real differences exist. Drawing from these understandings, racism is

defined as, *the assigning of values to real or imagined differences in order to justify white supremacy, to the benefit of whites and at the expense of People of Color, and thereby defend the right of whites to dominance* (Pérez Huber et. al, 2008, emphasis added). This understanding of racism demonstrates the significance of utilizing a theoretical framework such as CRT that allows researchers to expose and understand how race, racism and other forms of power mediate the educational experiences of People of Color.

Defining nativism. This study seeks to extend the discussion of racism for People of Color and Latinas/os specifically, by also acknowledging the role nativism has historically played in the ways People and Immigrants of Color have been racialized. Contemporary discourse around issues of race and racism are most often devoid of nativism, engendering an “historical amnesia” about the ways nativism has consistently been tied to race (Galindo & Vigil, 2006). The framework of racist nativism seeks to inject the discussion of nativism into racial discourse and examine its complex intersections.

Nativism has been approached in various ways, however, there are at least three critical components consistently identified with this concept. They are: (1) there is an often intense opposition to the “foreigner” which, (2) creates the defense and protection of a nationalistic identity, where (3) the foreigner becomes a perceived threat to that nationalistic identity (Galindo & Vigil, 2006; Higham, 1955). During the mid twentieth century, Higham (1955) described how nativism functioned to exclude white ethnic immigrants from participation in dominant U.S. society. Higham defined nativism as the “intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections” (p. 4). Higham’s description of nativism highlighted the ways Anglo-Saxon white superiority justified the belief that “the United States belongs in some special sense to the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’” (p. 9). This description of nativism explicitly demonstrates how nativism was directly connected to white supremacy and claimed Anglo-Saxon whites “native” to U.S. soil (Pérez Huber, et. al., 2008).

Recent scholarship on nativism acknowledges how contemporary nativism has targeted specific groups according to racialized perceptions of who fits into the “American” national identity (Galindo & Vigil, 2006; Johnson, 1997; Perea, 1997; Sanchez, 1997). Drawing from a similar logic in defining racism, contemporary nativism is a perceived superiority of the native, which justifies perceived native dominance. Thus, nativism in this study is defined as *the practice of assigning values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, and to defend the native’s right to dominance, at the expense of the non-native* (Pérez Huber et. al., 2008, emphasis added). This definition of nativism departs from previous descriptions, in that it acknowledges the preoccupation of who is perceived to be native, rather than who is considered foreign, and positions power on the native oppressor (De Genova, 2005; Pérez Huber et. al, 2008).

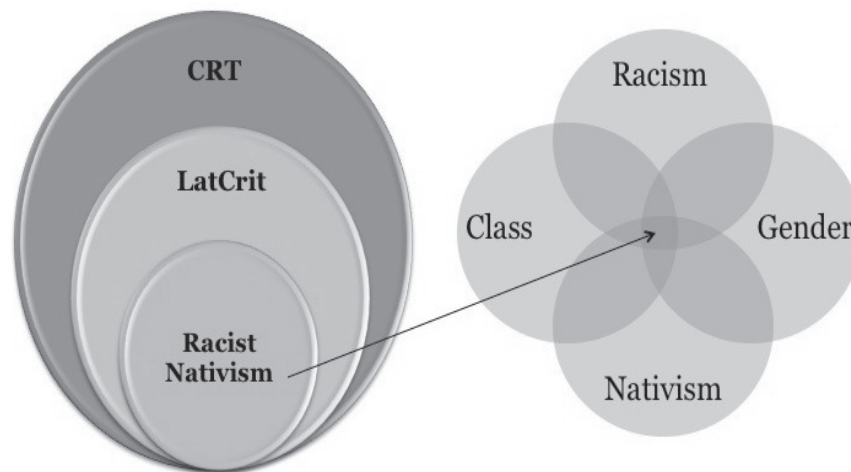
Defining racist nativism. Historically, perceptions of the native have been

directly tied to definitions of whiteness. Beliefs in white superiority and historical amnesia have erased the histories of the indigenous communities that occupied the U.S. prior to the first white European settlers. Whites have been historically and legally deemed the native “founding fathers” of the U.S. (Higham, 1955; Saito, 1997). With this important connection between nativism and whiteness in mind, racist nativism is defined as, *the assigning of values to real or imagined differences in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is perceived to be white, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the native’s right to dominance* (Pérez Huber et. al., 2008, emphasis added).

Racist nativism has targeted various groups of immigrants throughout U.S. history. White ethnic immigrants in the late nineteenth century were racialized as foreign because they did not fit into the current perceptions of whiteness. As the perceptions of whiteness changed, so have the racial groups included in the “American” identity. Historically, U.S. immigration law has been used as a tool to legally exclude and marginalize Immigrants and People of Color. For example, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, Mexican repatriation and deportation programs beginning in the 1930’s and Japanese Internment in the 1940s were government regulated laws established to exclude Asian and Mexican immigrants, but also U.S. born Asian-Americans and Chicanas/os who were perceived to be immigrants. In the current historical moment, racist nativism continues to exclude Latinas/os who are perceived to be undocumented Mexican immigrants. (For further discussion on historical roots of racist nativism and current manifestations see Pérez Huber et. al., 2008). It is within this context, a racist nativism framework is used in this study.

Figure 1 provides a visual illustration of how the overarching framework of CRT and LatCrit are applied together in collaboration, to arrive at the conceptual framework of racist nativism, which more explicitly reveals the intersection of racism

Figure 1
A Model of CRT, LatCrit, and Racist Nativism Frameworks



Undocumented Chicana College Students

and nativism. Through the critical race testimonios of the undocumented women participants, this study will also show how racist nativism becomes layered with class and gender at particular moments in their educational trajectories. The figure presents a visual model of the theoretical framework that guides the intersectional analysis of this study to show the theoretical links between CRT, LatCrit, racist nativism, and the intersections this framework allows researchers to see.

Methodological Approach

This study employs a critical race grounded theory approach, an analysis strategy that allows themes to emerge from data, while using a CRT lens to reveal often unseen structures of oppression (Malagón, Pérez Huber, & Velez, 2009). Sampling procedures used a network sampling method (Delgado Bernal, 1997; Gándara, 1995) to identify participants who (1) were undocumented at the time of the interview, (2) were female, (3) identified México as their country of origin, and (4) were from a low-income family. A total of 10 low-income, undocumented Chicana college students attending one public research university in California participated in the study. Each participant was interviewed twice (for a total of 20 interviews) and an additional two focus groups were conducted following the completion of individual interviews.

The methodological approach utilized in this study was shaped by the concern of romanticizing the educational experiences of successful students who have overcome tremendous obstacles to attend a top-tier research university. With these concerns, I turned to the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2003) who argue that qualitative research is in a historical “moment of discovery and rediscovery” where notions of objectivity must be rejected and traditional theories, epistemologies and methodologies that once guided the qualitative field must be challenged. Denzin and Lincoln state, “the search for grand narratives is being replaced by more local, small scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations” (p. 29). The frameworks of LatCrit and racist nativism in this study are a response to the need for more specific theorization around complex, intersectional issues. In line with the tradition of critical race scholarship, the methodological design for this study borrows from various academic fields. In an effort to portray the experiences of the women in this study as they see accurate, I offer the development of critical race *testimonios*.

Critical Race Testimonios

Researchers in various fields utilize *testimonio* as a research strategy. Informed by recent uses of *testimonio* in educational research (Burciaga, 2007; Cruz, 2006; Gutiérrez, 2008), this section will discuss how a LatCrit frame and Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) can be used with *testimonio* to develop a methodological approach of critical race *testimonio*, which shaped the research process for this study.

Testimonio is a research strategy that was initially utilized in Latin American literature as a method to document the experiences of oppressed people during times of war. While there is no universal definition of *testimonio*, it has been generally used as a strategy to denounce injustices experienced by marginalized groups (Booker, 2002). For example, Yúdice (1991) describes *testimonio* as, “authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation” (p.17). Brabeck (2001) describes *testimonio* as a “verbal journey...of one’s life experiences with attention to injustices one has suffered and the effect these injustices have had on one’s life” (p. 3). Scholarship highlights how *testimonio* is a process of a “collective memory,” transcending a single experience and connected to a larger group struggle (Beverley, 2004; Yúdice, 1991). These definitions, and those of other scholars who use *testimonio*, recognize the power of narrative in understanding the experiences of oppressed communities (Beverley, 2004; Booker, 2002; Brabeck, 2001; Burciaga, 2007; Cruz, 2006; Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983; Gutiérrez, 2008; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Yúdice, 1991).

The critical elements of *testimonio* identified by scholars in various fields are similar to some of the elements of a LatCrit framework. *Testimonio* and LatCrit both validate and center the experiential knowledge of People of Color, recognize the power of collective memory and knowledge, and are guided by the larger goals of transformation and empowerment for Communities of Color. Highlighting the ways a LatCrit frame is similar to the key elements of *testimonio*, critical race *testimonio* can be described as, *a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment and advocacy for a more humane present and future* (see Pérez Huber, 2009, for a description of how the women participants contributed to and shaped this definition).

Utilizing *testimonio* as methodology in educational research is a challenge to traditional Eurocentric epistemologies imbedded within and perpetuated by notions of white supremacy (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). As Delgado Bernal & Villalpando (2002) explain, dominant beliefs in what constitutes valid research legitimate a Eurocentric epistemological perspective while simultaneously delegitimizing knowledge and belief systems of those who do not share the same perspective. The consequence is a one-dimensional perspective in academic research called “apartheid of knowledge.” This work moves towards deconstructing the apartheid of knowledge by recognizing sources of knowledge which exist outside of the academy and in the lives of the undocumented women in this study.

Burciaga (2007) further developed the use of *testimonio*, showing how the process of *testimonio* can be enacted in educational research through a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Delgado Bernal (1998) describes how researchers can re-center a foundation of knowledge through utilizing an epistemological perspective that acknowledges our experiences as Chicana women as legitimate and can be brought to the research process through our *cultural intuition*. Delgado Bernal (1998) identifies four sources of cultural intuition Chicana research-

ers draw upon during the research process. They include forms of knowledge we build from our personal, professional, and academic experiences which shape the ways we understand, interpret and make sense of our data in the research process. The final source of cultural intuition lies in the analytical research process itself to “bring meaning” to our data and larger study. According to Delgado Bernal, a critical element of a Chicana feminist epistemology is the incorporation of participants into the data analysis process. In doing so, the undocumented women in this study transcend the traditional role of the “subject” to co-creators of knowledge, collectively analyzing the data.

Data Analysis

A three-phase data analysis process has been utilized in this study, guided by LatCrit, Chicana feminist epistemology and critical race grounded theory (Pérez Huber, 2009). A critical race grounded theory approach is developed from traditional grounded theory in qualitative research, which allows themes to emerge from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, because of dominant ideologies imbedded within the research process, it is necessary to utilize critical frameworks with explicit anti-racist and social justice agendas, to reveal oppressive experiences dominant ideologies mask (Malagón et al., 2009). The three-phase data analysis process included (1) preliminary, (2) collaborative, and (3) final data analysis stages. During the preliminary phase, themes were identified in the data, using initial and focused coding strategies (Charmaz, 2006).

Once these themes were established, examples of each theme were extracted from the data and used to create “reflections” that were utilized in the collaborative data analysis phase. The second collaborative data analysis phase took place in a focus group environment. The reflections constructed from the preliminary analysis were used to create a “reflection exercise” where each woman was given a series of reflections to read aloud as a group and had individual time to respond to the reflection in writing. Following the completion of reflecting, the group then engaged in a dialogue around the themes they would use to categorize this data, how and why they would use these themes, and how their own experiences agrees with or refutes the group’s findings.

Arriving to a group consensus about the way to analyze the data was not the goal of this collaborative process. Rather, this process was used as an opportunity to reflect on personal experiences and engage in dialogue that allowed both researcher and participant to “see” the data in ways that that we would not have seen on our own, and thus provide a richer understanding (Kruger, 1988). This dialogue allowed us to connect our experiences to others, and consider how larger social and political phenomenon have shaped those experiences. This process also provided the opportunity to member-check (Maxwell, 1996) and gain insight to the validity of the findings that were produced in the third, and final analysis phase. This phase combined the findings of both the preliminary and collaborative phases to

construct a final version of themes that were then coded to produce a final analysis of the critical race *testimonios*.

The methodology employed in this study was shaped by the theoretical frames and a Chicana feminist epistemology that specifically utilizes the process of cultural intuition to validate the experiential knowledge of the participants and myself, redefining our relationship during the research process as collaborators. The methodological frame for this study reflects the overarching goals of critical race scholarship- to expose and deconstruct normalized ways of knowing and doing research that encompass an anti-racist, anti-hierarchical, social justice agenda.

Findings: Understanding Intersections of Racist Nativism, Class, and Gender

Understanding the context of each woman's life was critical in making sense of the ways they experienced multiple forms of oppression in education, as told through their critical race *testimonios*. The findings in this section will provide a glimpse into the lives of the 10 undocumented Chicana college students. In brief, the women arrived to the U.S. between the ages of 6 months to 9 years old. Most women had attended K-12 schools in urban areas with a predominately Latina/o student population. Four of the women entered the university immediately following high school, while most were community college transfer students. Most of the women were majors in the social sciences, two women were majors in the sciences. All names used in this article have been changed to protect the participant's identity.

Throughout the women's critical race *testimonios* there were clear examples of the intersections of racism and nativism. Racist beliefs were often tied to constructions of undocumented immigrants, who were perceived as a threat to the well-being of the U.S. and its "native" citizens. Goreti shared how she rarely disclosed her undocumented status to anyone prior to college, but particularly in high school. She attended a racially and socioeconomically diverse magnet high school in the Los Angeles area. She described how classroom discussions became uncomfortable for her when issues of undocumented immigration arose. She commented,

I didn't want to tell anyone in high school because...some of my teachers were very hard core republicans and so when we had discussions about immigration, they were like, *Oh, they should go back to their country*, or, *they're taking away our money*, you know all of the usual ideas. They were like, *They don't pay taxes... they're just taking our jobs away*, and no one would ever speak up against that. I wouldn't because I was just like, *Yeah right, I'm going to say something right now?* They're going to go and... attack me about it.

In her *testimonio*, Goreti explained how it was clear in these discussions that references to undocumented immigrants were about undocumented *Mexican* immigrants, and reference to "their country" meant México. In this context, the intersections of racism and immigration status can clearly be seen. Racist perceptions are ideologically tied to the meaning of being an undocumented immigrant. Yet, the example also shows how these comments are about more than immigration

Undocumented Chicana College Students

status, but about a hostile opposition to undocumented Mexican immigrants who are perceived as a threat because they “take away jobs” and “money” from those who “belong”, or, those who are “native.” These beliefs indicate that undocumented Mexican immigrants somehow contribute to the social decay of U.S. society and should return to their own country. Through a CRT lens, the meaning of this experience could have been interpreted as a racist encounter, where a white teacher engages a racist classroom discussion about undocumented Latina/o (“Mexican”) immigrants. Through a LatCrit lens, the intersections of race and immigration status in this experience would be clearer than a CRT analysis could provide. A racist nativism lens shows how this experience is more about the intersections of racism and nativism, constructions of the undocumented immigrant and the perceived threat of this group to the well-being of the white “native” teacher.

Another form of racist nativism which emerged from the *testimonios* occurred at the intersection with class. Traditionally, CRT has been useful in identifying the ways class and its intersections emerge in the experiences of People of Color. Often, the ways class emerge are tied to perceptions of low-income or working class People of Color. Using a racist nativism lens, the women in this study have described the complex layers of class, race, and immigration status. Three students included in this study, Arcadia, Minerva and Estela, described how these intersections mediated the occupational trajectories of their parents, which later, impacted the educational opportunities they would have as students in the U.S.

Each woman in this study described past and present occupations of their parents and their parent’s highest level of education. For Arcadia, Minerva, and Estela, at least one parent had obtained a college education in México, prior to arriving in the U.S. Arcadia’s father was college educated and became a professor of psychology at one of the most prestigious universities in Latin American, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM (National Autonomous University of México). Her mother completed four years of technical training after high school and was a certified accountant. Minerva’s father was also college educated and was a teacher in his home state of Morelos, México. Her mother attended two years of college with aspirations of becoming a biologist. Estela’s mother had completed four years at a university, became a biology teacher and had aspirations of becoming a doctor. Once the parents of these women arrived in the U.S., their status as undocumented immigrants ascribed them to the low-wage labor market, despite their educational background, degrees obtained, and professional skills acquired in their home country. Arcadia’s father worked in a landscaping business and her mother was a housekeeper. Minerva’s father also worked in landscaping and her mother was a housewife. Estela’s father worked in a commercial cleaning business and her mother was housewife.

Through a racist nativism lens, we see intersections emerge from these family experiences that go beyond class. While the undocumented status of their parents was a critical factor in how they became incorporated into the low-wage labor market, it was also just as important that their parents were undocumented

Mexican immigrants. As undocumented Mexican immigrants, the educational and occupational histories of these men and women would be erased, in order for the racist nativist class structure to more easily ascribe the subjugated role of the undocumented Mexican worker. The widely-accepted, racialized constructions of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. allows this process to occur unnoticed. The layers of class, race and nativism help explain how a college-educated woman or man can be relegated to work as a landscaper or housekeeper. In the same way, the children of these women and men are provided educational opportunities that align with the conditions of low-income, working class communities. These conditions often translate to a lack of educational resources and quality teachers, decaying school facilities and limited college access. These parents were unable to pass down their educational capital attained in their home country to their children, as it was erased as they crossed the border and entered the U.S. as undocumented Mexican immigrants. As a result, Arcadia, Minerva, Estela and the remaining women in this study have had to struggle to make their own.

Yet another way the intersections of racist nativism and class emerged in the experiences of the women was in their college opportunities. California Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) allows undocumented students, who meet certain requirements, the right to pay in-state tuition fees at all public institutions of higher education in the state. However, unlike other college students, undocumented AB 540 students do not have access to state or federal financial aid programs. The women in this study identified paying for school as the most difficult barrier in obtaining their college degree. The students struggled each quarter (about every three months) to figure out how they would pay for the following quarter's tuition. This means, aside from their full-time course load and part-time or full-time employment, they must organize fundraisers, raffles and apply to scholarships (although they are eligible for very few) to help raise money to pay for tuition. These women and other undocumented AB 540 students are also ineligible for many state and federally funded campus resources and programs.

Carmen explains that as a first generation, low-income student, there are many academic enrichment programs, campus resources and undergraduate research programs she should be eligible for and receive free of charge. However, because of her undocumented status, state and federal funds cannot be used to pay for her participation. Here, she describes a state-funded summer residential program at her campus that prepares first generation and low-income students for their first year of college. Due to her undocumented status, she could not receive the funding other students received to pay for her participation. She had to pay the fees herself. Carmen explains,

It was very emotional for me to go [to the program]...I couldn't stay with the rest of the students [in the dorms]. I would commute. And then on top of that, I had to work. I [thought], *It's gonna be perfect! I'm gonna do events, I'm gonna go to class and I'm gonna work.* But I had no time for any events, I don't think I even went to one, because I had to pay for [summer program] classes. I didn't feel like I could connect with anyone either. It was emotionally draining because of the

Undocumented Chicana College Students

expectations they had for you, especially because they expect you to read 300 pages and then I have to go work a six hour shift.

Unlike other low-income students in this program, Carmen had to pay to participate in the program herself. Although Carmen has been identified as a highly-qualified student to be accepted to the university and this program, her undocumented status was a barrier to her full participation. Carmen's experience shows how class and racist nativism intersect at an institutional level. Racist nativist immigration policies have historically marginalized undocumented immigrants from full participation in U.S. society. Here, these policies have translated to state mandated exclusionary efforts to protect state and federal resources from students whose status ascribes them to a subjugated noncitizen (non-native) category. The exclusion from campus programs, resources, and financial aid programs is an institutional reminder of the subordinate position undocumented students like Carmen are relegated to at the university.

Through the critical race *testimonios* of the women, there was yet another layer to the ways they experienced racist nativism in their educations, the intersection of gender. Several women described how discussions about undocumented immigration, particularly in college, were clearly gendered. Paulina provided a description of one such experience. She explained how her college peers perceived undocumented Latina/o immigrants during class discussions. She shared,

They [peers] think about like, the "anchor" baby. They [immigrants] just come here to have babies just to get all the benefits, and they come to get all the [social] services, and they're criminals. And actually, that is not true. Research shows that Latinos get less services than they put their money into. They can't get services because many times you can't really apply to them...so that's what they said, there's so much crime and Latinos are lazy.

Here, Paulina clearly describes how dominant perceptions of undocumented immigrants are directly tied to race, but also gender. The myth about immigrants coming to the U.S. to receive social services to support their "anchor babies" is directed to those immigrants who are able to reproduce, or women. Thus, through this brief excerpt, Paulina has shown how dominant perceptions of immigrants target poor, undocumented Latina women. Coming to the U.S. to have their children, Paulina described how her peers criminalize undocumented women for attaining services that they should not have access to as noncitizens, or, non-natives. However, we can see the importance of perceptions in the construction of the undocumented Latina woman.

As Paulina begins to explain, undocumented immigrants do not have access to social services in the U.S. due to their status. Therefore, the perception that undocumented women abuse these services is false, yet these social constructions continue. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1995) explains that recent anti-immigrant legislation such as Proposition 187 (excluded undocumented immigrants from receiving a range of public and social services) in California targeted undocumented Latina women who were perceived to be taking advantage of social services, as

expressed by Paulina's peers. Chavez (2008) reinforces the gendered constructions of undocumented immigration, arguing that Latina fertility and reproduction is a critical element of the "Latino Threat Narrative," the dominant public discourse of immigration where the prevalence of U.S. Latinas/os, and undocumented immigrant Latinas/os in particular, are a threat to the stability of the nation. Latinas generally and undocumented women in particular, are constructed within this discourse as "hyper-sexualized" and having abnormally high birth rates. The "anchor babies" of these women are perceived as a threat to the nation, who may one day "take over" the country, displacing those who "belong" in the U.S. Paulina's experience above illustrates these racist, nativist and sexist constructions of undocumented Latina immigrants and how these constructions are perpetuated in the classroom.

Consequences of Racist Nativism

Thus far, this article has discussed how the undocumented Chicana college students in this study experienced varying forms of racist nativism, intersecting with class and gender in their educational trajectories. It is just as important to acknowledge how these experiences can effect students and impact their education. The women in this study expressed feeling uncomfortable, discouraged, fearful and isolated throughout their educational trajectories. Racist nativist perceptions held by teachers, professors and peers were emotionally painful. Limited or no access to campus resources and programs was frustrating. Restrictions on daily tasks to get through each day, such as driving to school, were disheartening. Through interactions with peers, teachers, professors and the media, these women learned, from a very early age, the social constructions and negative perceptions of undocumented Latina/o immigrants in the U.S. In one of our focus groups, we discussed how these constructions are learned. Martha commented,

I think that it comes from the media, how they portray you, they categorize you and they label you and it keeps on going. I think we talked about it in [a] class, the majoritarian story, like they keep on repeating it and repeating it and we internalize it.

Research has documented the powerful role of media in shaping public discourse and perceptions of U.S. Latina/o undocumented immigrants as problematic to the social foundations of "American" (i.e. "native") life (Chavez, 2001, 2008; Santa Ana, 2002). Chavez (2008) explains how media contributes to the prevalence of these negative constructions through the "Latino Threat Narrative," a consistent public discourse that perceives "Mexicans" (and all other Latina/o groups perceived to be Mexican) as a dangerous "invading force" who pose a threat to the nation. Through a racist nativism framework, we can see how these narratives are part of a strategic effort to perpetuate notions of the "native" and "non-native" (perceptions of who belongs and who do not), based on race. Through the women's *testimonios*, we see the power of these narratives manifest when other

Undocumented Chicana College Students

Latina/o students internalize and perpetuate racist nativist beliefs about others in their own Latina/o communities.

Minerva provides a clear example of how Latina/o students internalize racist nativist perceptions when she explains the tensions that existed between the English and Spanish-dominant Latina/o students in her (predominately Latina/o) elementary school. Minerva shared,

Teasing! Omigod, there was a lot of teasing, saying little remarks. I think I would laugh it off, because it would hurt me a lot. They would call out ¡La Migra! ¡La Migra! They used to say that a lot and we used to [think], *what they hell? Why are they saying that?* Because we sort of thought it was a joke, but it used to hurt us at the same time. They used to say really, really, mean remarks like “beaners,” stuff that referred to new immigrants. There was a lot of like, not racism, like prejudice. Remarks that really hurt. I know it hurt me, even though they never told me, they were telling other kids, but it hurt me because I didn’t think that was right, that division between students, which was *clear* to them. It was clear, that [if] you didn’t speak good English, you had an accent, that meant you were a *newcomer*.

This excerpt of Minerva’s *testimonio* shows how Latina/o fifth grade youth have already learned and internalized negative constructions of what it means to be an undocumented Mexican immigrant, and could articulate those perceptions to use as a divisive tool towards other Latina/o peers. For these children, there were clear distinctions between those who “belonged” and those who did not, as indicated by language. As Minerva explained above, a child’s English language proficiency, or their “accent” was an indicator for who did not belong in the U.S., those who were “newcomers.” When this distinction was made, Minerva described how racialized derogatory terms were used to degrade students who were perceived as not belonging. In this context, the racialized term transcends race and refers to newly arrived undocumented immigrants. This interpretation is validated when Minerva says the children would call out “¡La Migra! ¡La Migra!” a widely understood warning that border patrol agents are near. Interestingly, Minerva makes a differentiation between classifying this incident as “prejudice” versus “racist,” recognizing the larger dynamics of racism, and that other Latina/o students can’t be racist. Racism, in this study is defined in this exact way. While these remarks are clearly racialized, other Latinas/os do not possess the structural or institutional power to carry out racist acts (Solorzano et al., 2002).

Through a racist nativism lens, we see the complexity of this incident, layered with race, immigration status, language, and class. Racialized derogatory terms, teasing about being a “newcomer,” not speaking English well enough, and the working class dynamics tied to all of these perceptions, is clearly racist nativism. Considering the understanding of racism as presented in this article, this incident cannot be classified as racist. However, we cannot deny that the Latina/o youth Minerva described contribute to perpetuating racist nativism in school.

Pérez Huber, Johnson, and Kohli (2006) describe how Students of Color internalize racism in U.S. schools through the conscious or unconscious acceptance

of a racial hierarchy, where whites are consistently ranked above People of Color. They explain the concept of internalized racism “goes beyond the internalization of stereotypes imposed by the white majority about People of Color. It is the internalization of the beliefs, values, and worldviews inherent in white supremacy that can potentially result in negative self or racial group perceptions” (p. 184). This example shows how Latina/o youth have consciously or unconsciously internalized racist nativist beliefs about Latina/o undocumented immigrants, rooted in notions of white supremacy that have resulted in the negative perceptions of other Latina/o students, perceived to be immigrant. When other Latina/o students engage in racist nativist acts, they perpetuate racist nativism and at the same time, as Malcolm X said, are being taught to hate themselves. Internalized racist nativism affects all Latinas/os, regardless of status because of the ways dominant discourse essentializes Latinas/os as a homogenous group. Internalized racist nativism is also dangerous, especially when used as a divisive tool to unconsciously perpetuate negative constructions of Latinas/os, which reinforce larger structures of power that use these constructions to justify oppression. These are consequences of a form of racist nativism, internalized racist nativism which emerged often from the *testimonios*.

Borrowing from the concept of internalized racism, internalized racist nativism can be understood as *the conscious or unconscious acceptance of a racist nativist hierarchy, where perceived white superiority ascribes whites as native to the U.S. Based on real or imagined differences, People and Immigrants of Color are ascribed as non-native, justifying exclusionary racist nativist practices and white dominance. It is the internalization of white dominance, and thus, white supremacy that can potentially result in negative self, racial group and immigrant group perceptions.* Internalized racist nativism was a prevalent theme that emerged in the critical race *testimonios* of the women in this study. Because most women attended schools and lived in predominately Latina/o communities, many of their early experiences with racist nativism were consequences of internalized racist nativism with other Latinas/os. White teachers, professors and college peers, were critical in reinforcing racist nativist beliefs and other Latina/o students’ own internalized racist nativism.

Conclusion

The critical race *testimonios* of these women reflect the tremendous complexity in understanding educational experiences at the intersections of oppression. Their experiences illuminate the layered meanings of race, immigration status, class and gender in dominant public discourse around immigration and in particular, the social constructions of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. This article has also shown the consequences of racist nativism, providing an initial understanding of internalized racist nativism, and highlighting the need to further examine this concept in future research. The findings on internalized racist nativism indicate the power of racist nativist ideologies, rooted in white supremacy, to be transmitted and accepted by Latina/o youth, often times as young as elementary school, before becoming aware of a racial

group identity. Thus, the women in this study showed how Latina/o youth learned and internalized the meaning of being an undocumented Mexican immigrant, before understanding the historical and social meanings of being Latina/o in the U.S.

This study highlights the need for educators and researchers to be conscious of the ways they can perpetuate racist nativism in education for Latina/o students, regardless of status. Acknowledging and understanding the complex intersections of race, immigration status, class and gender present in dominant constructions of Latina/o identity and in particular, a Latina/o undocumented immigrant identity, is an initial step towards deconstructing negative perceptions of this group. For example, research has identified the unconscious, subtle, racial insults directed towards People of Color as racial microaggressions (Constantine, 2007; Constantine & Sue, 2007; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et. al., 2007). Research on racial microaggressions makes people aware of the ways they unconsciously reinforce racist stereotypes and perceptions of People of Color, perpetuating racism. Acknowledging racial microaggressions moves toward disrupting racist acts and the racism they ensue. Research on racial microaggressions have explored the experiences of Latinas/os, African Americans and Asian Americans, but has yet to examine how racial microaggressions are committed against undocumented Immigrants of Color. Moreover, it would be important to examine the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions for this group.

Future research on undocumented Latina/o and Chicana/o students should focus on the powerful ways they resist dominant public discourse which seeks to keep these women in a position of subordination. The undocumented women in this study demonstrated multiple strategies of resiliency and resistance, which allowed them to navigate higher education despite the many barriers they encountered. Moreover, they were able to draw from various forms of capital from their parents, families and communities to endure their educational struggles and become successful undergraduate students. Thus, future research must also examine the role of community cultural wealth in the educational experiences of undocumented Chicana/o students (Yosso, 2005; 2006). Exploring how undocumented Chicana/o students experience oppression and its intersections only scratches the surface of where critical race research must go to better understand the educational experiences of this student population. In listening, hearing and reading their stories, we become witness to their *testimonios* of struggle and survival within and through racist nativist structures and institutions. Becoming witness to the ways undocumented Chicana/o students are oppressed, we can better understand the ways we are *all* oppressed and, as Paulo Freire (1994) would argue, move towards our own liberation.

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Note

¹ I do not capitalize the term “white” in this article, rejecting the standard grammatical norm as a means to acknowledge and reject the grammatical representation of power capitalization brings to the term “white.” In line with this argument, I do capitalize the terms People of Color, Communities of Color, and Immigrants of Color as a grammatical move towards empowerment and racial justice.

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Lindsay Pérez Huber

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