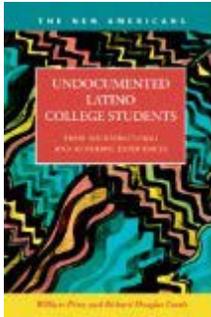


## Professional Book Review

Peréz, W., & Cortés, R. D. (2011). *Undocumented Latino college students: Their socioemotional and academic experiences*. El Paso, TX: LFB Publishing. 198 pp., ISBN 10-1593324618/13-978-1593324612. \$65

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As both a doctoral student in TESOL and faculty member in English for Academic Purposes at an open-access institution in Georgia, I have become extremely interested in the topic of undocumented students in higher education, particularly in response to the fall 2010 Georgia Board of Regents' decision to deny such students admission to the most selective public institutions of higher education in our state (University System of Georgia, 2010). Therefore, I was pleased to have the opportunity to review the recently published book *Undocumented Latino College Students: Their Socioemotional and Academic Experiences* by William Pérez and Richard Douglas Cortés, which is part of *The New Americans: Recent Immigration and American Society* series edited by Steven J. Gold and Rubén G. Rumbaut. The volume represents a timely contribution to this topic and presents a much needed focus on the socioemotional aspects of these students' experiences rather than the more traditional emphases on "immigration policies, socioeconomic conditions, and historical analyses" (p. 34).

The book is logically organized into six chapters. Chapter 1, the introduction, highlights the challenging political and educational contexts facing undocumented immigrants in the United States. Key points highlight that these students have much lower high school graduation and college-going rates than both legal immigrants and US-born residents and that those who do attend college face a multitude of social and psychological pressures, such as social isolation, stress, and discrimination. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on such students' socioemotional and psychological well-being and introduces the socioemotional (see Santrock, 1997) and Marginality and Mattering (see Schlossberg, 1989) frameworks used in the authors' study. It also describes the study's mixed-method approach, consisting of survey data from 37 undocumented community college students as well as in-depth interviews with 24 of the student participants and eight community college personnel.

In their third chapter, the authors include first-hand testimonies of undocumented students who have experienced socioemotional threats in college, such as fear, shame, anxiety, stigma, discrimination, work and financial hardships, and institutional barriers. One example is that of a student named Esperanza, who expresses reluctance to apply for scholarships or complete her college internship out of fear that she will be asked for a social security card. She

is also overcome by a sense of depression that her eventual college degree will be of little use as she is not legally authorized to work in the United States. Chapter 4, in contrast, highlights the tremendously positive counterbalances to these stresses that can be found through supportive teachers, counselors, faculty, parents, peers, academic outreach programs, and positive reframing. This latter psychological mechanism proves to be particularly important to students like Isabel who credit for their inspiration the many hardworking Latinos who have left their native countries behind to pursue better lives in the United States. Overall, the authors report that most undocumented community college students maintain high levels of motivation and optimism in their pursuit of higher education, despite multiple barriers. Surprisingly, the authors also find relatively low levels of psychological distress among these students.

The fifth chapter sheds light on institutional perspectives on undocumented student experiences. Interviews with community college personnel uncover negative attitudes on the part of some staff as well as a lack of training in how to meet the unique needs of undocumented students. The authors elucidate the need for more resources and support for these students both within the community college system and also at the high school level to increase students' awareness of the higher education options available to them. Perhaps the most compelling suggestion presented by Pérez and Cortés is a plea for community colleges to create welcoming and supportive campus environments where undocumented students find adult advocates who give them informed advice, work to support financing and career development opportunities, and create student support groups and social-justice-oriented counseling programs. Finally, in the book's conclusion (Chapter 6), the authors make an appeal to expand access to higher education for undocumented students, including the hoped for passage of a federal DREAM Act, through which college graduates could earn legal status to remain in the United States.

Because of the high quality of research in this book, it is unfortunate there are several flaws in the book that slightly undermine its overall quality. The first is the frequency of grammatical and typographical errors found throughout the text. Perhaps due to the timeliness of the issue, the book was rushed to publication without the due editorial attention it deserved. A second and more serious problem relates to some statistical inconsistencies in the authors' literature review. An example is found in the contradictory set of numbers beginning on p. 26 regarding the overall percentage of Hispanic college students enrolled in community colleges from 1996 to 2004. Whereas the statistic is initially presented as 70%, later figures place it at lower than 50% (i.e., 972,400 out of nearly 2 million). While the authors present these numbers in order to justify their decision to focus exclusively on community colleges, the lack of statistical consistency weakens their claim that community colleges are, in fact, the primary entrance point for Latinos in higher education. Finally, there is a concern that the sample selected for the 24 in-depth interviews, with only three males (or 12.5%), was not representative of the larger survey population, of which 40% were reported to be males.

Overall, however, *Undocumented Latino College Students* makes a valuable contribution to the existing scholarship and literature on undocumented students' college-going experiences in the United States. It also has clear implications for further research. While Pérez and Cortés made an attempt at a study with national scope, with student respondents from California, Texas, Virginia, Georgia, Missouri, New York, Washington, and Washington D.C., the vast majority (73%) attended college in California, which is also where most of the college personnel interviews seem to have taken place. While this is certainly warranted due to the large numbers of undocumented students in California, California is also among the U.S. states with the most progressive policies for undocumented students, including the provision of in-state tuition benefits through California AB540. Unfortunately, there are currently only 12 states with similar policies in place (National Conference of State Legislators, 2011). Thus, further research is needed to assess the socioemotional conditions of students in states like Georgia, Arizona, Colorado, and Indiana, which currently prohibit undocumented students from paying in-state tuition, as well as in states like South Carolina and Alabama, where undocumented students are banned from attending public institutions of higher education entirely. Considering that the national trend is for Latinos to be spread more broadly throughout the country, and particularly in the South, a shift which has been labeled the "new Latino diaspora" (Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2002), further research in these areas would be a vital follow-up to the current study.

As the authors state in their concluding paragraph, "Preventing undocumented high school graduates from obtaining higher education is bad public policy" (p. 130). This book makes a passionate appeal for facilitating college access for undocumented students. For educators and administrators whose lives intersect with them, this book will offer many insights and clarification of both the challenges and the resilience of undocumented students.

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