



Welcome to:



Undocumented Students: Identities, Experiences, and Trauma

March 17, 2025

3:30-5:00pm

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We will begin shortly → Please grab a cup of **tea**, coffee, or **water** as we wait.





- Sociology professor & researcher - *not a mental health professional*
- Area of research is experiences of undocumented college students



UCS → Trauma & Stress → Trauma Informed Practices →
Love, Joy, & Resiliency

Disclaimer



TW: We will be discussing trauma & stress and view images that may cause distress → honor your well-being. Disengage as needed.

Keep in Mind:

- There are things we can do when we feel overwhelmed, anxious, or disassociated.



Hum	Slow Breathing	Smell
Take a pause	Rock	Energy Release

A silly trick, try to cross your toes anytime you feel stress/triggered in today's workshop!



Today's Roadmap: ↓

- Part One: Complexities in Undocumented Experiences
- Part Two: Complexities in Identities
- Part Three: Trauma
- Conclusion: Q&A

Please join us on for a follow up workshop on
Trauma Informed Practices!

April 7, 2025

Zoom

3:30-5:00pm



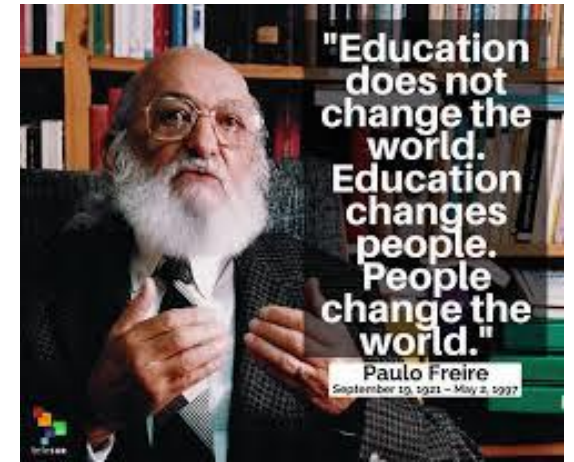
Important

The purpose of this workshop is to:

- Learn about the complex experiences of our undocumented students
- Further a “call to action” for **compassion, understanding, and CHANGE.**

Additionally:

- We will not romanticize trauma, survivors, or undocumented students.
- We will acknowledge that suffering, oppression, resistance, and resilience exist.
- This workshop is **not** a replacement for mental health services or allyship training.
- We ALL benefit from understanding diverse experiences and how trauma impacts individuals. ♥



*It is imperative that hope is not simply seen as a lofty, wishful concept. Instead, we must critically engage in the past and present while simultaneously thinking about how we can collectively impact our communities through praxis, which is defined as continuous and cyclical process of reflection and action” - **Bishundat et al. 2018***



PART ONE:

Experiences

Introduction

- Immigration → Family Affair where parents or adults bring their children to the U.S.
- Can result from: *entering a country can be either without authorization or limited authorization that eventually expires (i.e. work, travel, student visas).*
- In previous decades, most research focused on the experiences of undocumented parents, caregivers, adults and not undocumented youth.



Paul: CSU Student, Business Major



- Paul was one of the first undocumented students I interviewed

He:

- Was brought from **South Korea** when he was one year old
- Entered the United States with a **visa**; along with his parents
- Hardly spoke Korean; **identified as American**; and *distanced himself* from the “immigrant label”
- *Presented* himself as an **AB540 Student**
- **Worried** about being deported to a country he had no connection to
- Had **limited** *open communication* with his parents: they would not discuss any details
- Had not been able to adjust his status even though his parents did
- **Did not have to pay** for tuition or his car; parents were able to cover those costs
- Reflected and spoke about being *more* **privileged** than his undocumented peers



Understanding Diversity

Undocumented students are **not** a homogenized group; complexities exist

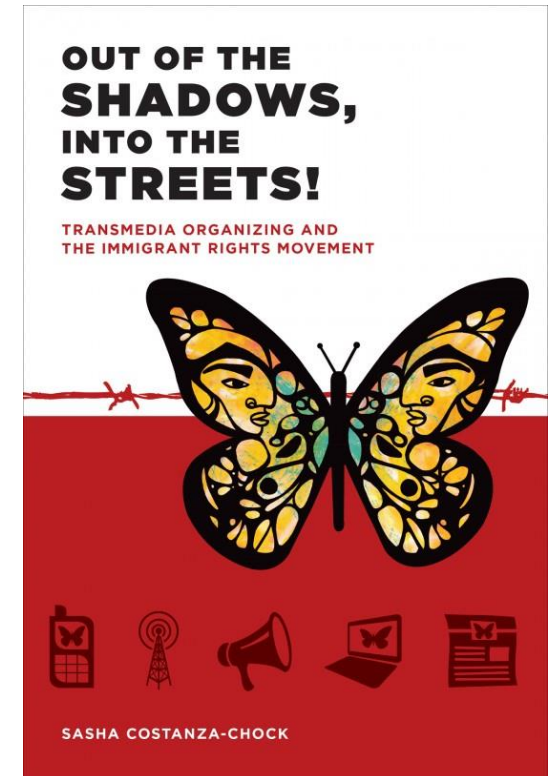
Diversity exists in:

- **Statuses:**
 - Racial, ethnic background; SES; family structure (mixed status); age of arrival; fluency in English; parents' education level
- Ability to “pass”
- Comfort with, and use of, **disclosure***
- Their **identities** and labels used (Dreamers, AB540, Undocumented Immigrants)*
- The extent to which they identify with the broader immigrant community
- **Emotions:** discomfort, pain, shame, anger, anxiety, depression, isolation to **resiliency, hope, joy, and empowerment.**
- Experiences with fear: **Afraid ↔ Unafraid***



Disclosure & The Undocumented Closet

- Being undocumented can be or feel like a secret (De la Torre III and Germano 2014).
- Similar to “coming out” in the LGBTQI+ community, many young people now “come out as undocumented” to others (close friends, mentors; at rallies, protests, and online) (De la Torre III and Germano 2014: 450).
- Coming out is typically a *cautious* choice and a product of a risk assessment.
 - Disclosure is typically done when it will work in one’s favor.
- Coming out can be **empowering!** (authority over one’s own story and social narrative)



Disclosure



Disclosure is the act of *giving* someone new or secret information; it entails revealing such information and thus making it known.

Things to keep in mind:

1. Disclosure can be enabling (helpful) and constraining (present challenges/barriers).
2. Various factors impact disclosure/coming out.
3. Sometimes people engage in partial disclosure.
4. We come out to others and also ourselves → “... *we must accept the fact that we’re undocumented*” ... “*we don’t only tell others who we are, we also tell ourselves.*”



Managing Disclosure & Identity

- One can manage disclosure and identity in various ways:
 - **Pass**: managing one's identity to appear documented.
 - **Covering**: censoring information that would imply you are documented.
 - **Implicitly out**: being honest about one's life without documented/undocumented labels (also known as partial disclosure).
 - **Explicitly out**: openly indentifying as undocumented.

Pass → **Covering** → **Implicitly Out** → **Explicitly Out**

- However, this process or evolution is not linear or static. Fluidity can and does exist within the spectrum. Certain settings can motivate one to pass or “be out”.
- There is movement. Individuals don't evolve to “unafraid” and permanently stay there. Individuals can move from being (and feeling) afraid to unafraid then unafraid to afraid.

Disclosure & Boundaries

- Not disclosing a status can be a way of upholding boundaries.
- **Boundaries**: entail *limits* of physical belongings, time, physical space and touch, finances, energy (including emotions and ideas), and information shared *with others*.
- Boundaries are *helpful* and *necessary* to maintain our own (financial, physical, psychological, emotional) *well-being*.

Factors that Impact “Coming Out”



- How they **perceive their own legal status** (internalized stigma, shame).
- Overall **anti-immigration sentiment** – especially as it produces a climate of fear.
- Their **own level of fear**, especially with deportation or other repercussions like having their families or employers “outed.”
- **Family norms**: being told by parents to not disclose their status or carefully disclose
- **Community support**: For some, undocumented youth feel compelled to support the larger community and engage in opposition and defiance **AFTER** experiencing support from the community. (Chang et al. 2017).
- Their own level of ***critical hope*** (Chang et al. 2017).*
- The amount of **knowledge regarding their own rights** should they be approached or detained by law enforcement.*
- **Networking**, particularly with other immigration right organizations.*
- Ability to **navigate** different social settings and institutions*

*These are all considered a form of capital.

Fear: Rejection & Complexities

- Fear can encourage and discourage disclosure
 - some try to overcome or reject fear by coming out.
- Overcoming fear can give individuals a sense of agency or control that being undocumented “seems to take away” (De la Torre and Germano 2014: 454).

The reality is that:

Living with fear can be fluid – **fear is a spectrum** (Munoz 2016)

Afraid ↔ Unafraid

Individuals do not simply come out once become eternally unafraid.

Which situations may revive fear?



Shared Vulnerabilities

- Regardless, undocumented students are bound by their experiences with illegality or **liminal legality**
 - LL: some access to protection, social resources/benefits may exist
 - Translates to *shared vulnerabilities*.

Shared vulnerabilities include:

- Limited ability or inability to work legally; seek internships; travel; pursue graduate school
- Limited access to financial aid and/or economic stability
- Risk of deportation for self and others
- Bullying; exploitation; harassment; discrimination
- Limited federal and state help during COVID
- Assimilation; language acquisition
- Limited ability to access and identify *informed* and *supportive* school staff***
- Stress & Trauma



What makes a success story? Framing Matters

Success varies for our undocumented students and communities.

- Success may entail becoming an entrepreneur, artist, advocate, community organizer, and more.
- The reality is that some of our undocumented students may not be able to use their academic degrees or education to develop their career due to a lack of employment authorization.

Because of this, it is important to abstain from solely framing educational or career achievements as a “success story.”

- *Using framing that only labels educational achievement as “success” reflects the **hegemonic** (dominant political, cultural) vision and standard for success.*
- Students can feel discouraged or alienated when they don’t connect to, or cannot achieve, the specific definition of “success” presented. We want to *uplift* our students and that means being inclusive and expanding the parameters for what success is.
- To be clear- providing “success” stories can be useful because it can give students a guide or pathway on “how to” achieve something. However, we also want to let students know that they can find their own path.
- For information on how undocumented students and immigrants can pursue entrepreneurship, visit this link:
<https://undocuhustle.org/>

PART TWO:

Identities

Labels & Identities



as opposed
to:



Terms and Identities



Undocumented immigrants do not have legal authorization to live or work in the United States (such as a temporary visa, residency, or citizenship).

- Often referred to as “illegal” immigrants. Abstain from using the term “illegal” and kindly inform/redirect others to embrace “undocumented” (especially in our classrooms).
- Some have overstayed visas, some entered without any authorization (without visas), some have DACA, some are in the process of legalizing or adjusting their status.

Undocumented youth are undocumented immigrants under the age of 24 (Perez 2010).

Undocumented students are students who do not have legal permission to reside in this country.



Dreamers



Dreamers: Dreamers are undocumented students who often emphasize two things:

1. the fact that they were mostly raised in the United States
2. their individual and collective achievements (especially educational achievements).

-
- The identity and label entails disclosing one's status as undocumented, at least to school staff. They *may* engage in civil disobedience and other forms of activism.
 - The Dreamer identity is largely used to **confound** and **counter** negative images of undocumented immigrants.
 - The label and identity are used to 1) reveal complex immigrant biographies, 2) highlight similarities that come from acculturation (living in and growing up in the U.S.) and 3) demonstrate the contributions of immigrants (De la Torre III and Germano 2014: 449).

Not all undocumented students identify as Dreamers. **These include:**

- Undocumented students who came to the United States at a later age or have not assimilated or acculturated to “American” culture.
- Students who enrolled in school before the Dreamer theme was established.
- Students who may feel more comfortable with identifying as AB540 students – this label may feel safer and more comfortable as AB540 students are not necessarily undocumented.
Presenting as an AB540 student allows for some privacy.



- **Undocumented youth/students/adults who believe that the Dreamer identity perpetuates, even unintentionally, a problematic narrative of WHO is worthy of choices, legal residency, opportunities, etc, and WHAT a contributing immigrant looks like/is.** Some undocumented students and young adults strategically and intentionally reject the Dreamer identity to foster solidarity within, and advocate for the rights of all, undocumented individuals in the United States. (!)

Undocumented & Unafraid

“**Undocumented & Unafraid**” is multidimensional: it is a label individuals can identify with, a way of consciously existing, and a “coming out campaign” (strategy) to publicly reject the societal invisibility, silencing, and criminalization of undocumented immigrants (Beltran 2010, Galindo 2012).

- Those who are *Undocumented and Unafraid* often engage in civil disobedience and activism (Galindo 2012).
- Dreamers and other undocumented students may not be Undocumented and Unafraid because they may not be comfortable coming out or engaging in activism.



Additional Labels & Identities

AB540 Students: Students who qualify for in-state tuition if they meet certain criteria based on *school attendance*, not CA residency. These students may or may not be undocumented.

DACAmented: refers to youth/students/adults who are eligible and have applied and received the documentation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (niu.edu).

Undocuqueer: refers to the intersection of the Undocumented and LGBTQ struggles to give voice to those living in both worlds and embracing both identities. For more information, please visit the [Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project](#)

UndocuAsian: refers to the growing number of undocumented Asian youth who are coming out of the shadows. For more information visit [Asian American Justice Center](#)

Lastly, we have students who exist outside of the spectrum and reject labels. We have to be mindful of this, too.



"I know there is no such thing as single issue struggles because we don't lead single issue lives"

PART THREE:

Looking at Trauma

Stress & Trauma

- Undocumented students can experience stress and **trauma**.



Stress ≠ trauma ≠ PTSD

- **Stress** is a physical or mental (emotional) response – typically to a change or a difficult/challenging situation. Stress is often defined as experiencing a state of worry or tension.
- **Trauma** is not the specific event, condition, or circumstances — it is the individual's response to these things and the lasting effects on the human body. It results from stress that overwhelms our ability to cope.

Stress & Trauma

“Trauma results from an **event**, **series of events**, or **set of circumstances** that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” –Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, 2020



Stress & Trauma

- Stressors and trauma can happen *before, during, or after* migration (Franco 2018; Lee 2018; Ornelas et al. 2020):
 1. Pre-migration
 2. In-Journey
 3. Post Migration

What might be some examples?

Pre-Migration	In-Journey	Post Migration

Pre-Migration Stressors & Trauma

- Pre-migration stressors depend on the individuals' socioeconomic status before migration, their country of origin, and even the specific area within the country (Kim et al 2018; Li and Anderson 2015)
- Specific stressors include: political climate/instability, extreme poverty, crime, violence, physical and sexual assault, abuse, war/combat, civil unrest, natural/human-made disasters (Lee 2018; Li and Anderson 2015; Ornelas et al 2020).

In-Journey Stressors and Trauma

- The journey to U.S. can have **long lasting impact**.
- Exposure to traumatic events and stressors are impacted by **HOW** youth are bought or come to the U.S. (Franco 2018)
 - La Bestia, for example, can be the most traumatic.



People report:

- physical and emotional trauma: being physically and sexually assaulted, robbed, sustaining physical injuries; being extorted or abandoned; experiencing human and drug trafficking; witnessing violence (Ornelas et al. 2020).
- having little to no access to food or water → risk of dehydration, heatstroke, malnourishment, and death from long periods of traversing through arid terrains and dangerous rivers ... *All while avoiding detection from government officials* (Franco 2018; Lee 2018).
- Interception → physical and verbal abuse; inadequate living conditions; family separation; limited to no access to phone calls; overall inhumane conditions (Ornelas et al. 2020).

Post Migration Stressors

- **Culture shock:** differences in language, money, norms, and even weather.
- **Feeling unwelcome and unwanted:** reduction in size and quality of social network/support = ↑feeling of stress.
- Immigrants can **recognize biases & stigmas** immediately after arriving → feelings of isolation and prevent them from seeking services or support.
- **Limited employment and educational opportunities.**
- **Witnessing violence and discrimination** against immigrants in the United States adds stress; fear is daily.
- Immigrants can feel like violence is a real part of their daily experiences even if they don't experience it directly (Lee 2018).
- **Anti-immigration policies** in the US (i.e. the cancellation of TPS; laws that limit rights).

Post Migration Stressors

- **Interception:** people can be detained; both a fear and a real, lived experience for some; well-being & safety is compromised.
- **Immigration enforcement** serves as an anticipatory stressor; can also engage in mistreatment and profiling of immigrants
- **ICE Detention Centers:** hostile, often extremely cold, overcrowded, with limited access to restrooms, medical care, food, and water. Youth can end up in foster care, they can be abused and exploited.
- **Discrimination** related to: race/ ethnicity, limited English language proficiency, cultural differences, and low economic status (Kim et al. 2018).
- **Specific to children/youth:** limited opportunities to engage in childhood activities such as play, and having to take on adult responsibilities (adultification/parentification); may need to balance academic and work life.
- **Settlement** is accomplished when people feel fully established in their new location; *some people report never entering this stage.*

Things to Note

- Exposure to pre-migration, in-journey, and post-migration stressors and trauma puts individuals **at risk** for PTSD and anxiety and depression
- *Trauma can impact all areas of a youth's life* (Franco 2018).
- Stress might be compounded for children who feel like they were forced to leave their country of origin; might also deal with feelings of **grief**.
- Older age at immigration can have a greater impact on psychological distress, perhaps because of a lesser ability to adjust and adapt to a new situation (Kim et al. 2018).
- **Language conflicts** between youth and their parents can be primary contributors to depression and anxiety in youth (Perreira et al. 2018).

Emotional Regulation Break!



- Write down TEN things you observe in this picture.
- Who, what, when, were ... describe in detail!!
- Observe:
 - Color
 - Texture
 - Size
 - Scent

Trauma & Avoidance

- **Avoidance** is a common behavior noted in immigrants.
- It's believed that avoidance reflects an attempt to cope with certain emotional states → an unhealthy coping mechanism. It's a developed habit that produces an immediate effect but ultimately *does not offer a long-term solution*; not useful or beneficial.
- Avoidance (the overarching desire to avoid potentially stressful events and/or experiences) may stem from prior experiences that elicited stress.
- Immigrants may avoid certain things that appear stressful and daunting.
- Tasks (such as making a doctor's appointment) can appear overwhelming (Lee 2018).*
- We might see avoidance in our friends, our students, our co-workers, *ourselves*.

Trauma

- **Acute Trauma:** a one-time traumatic event
- **Chronic Trauma:** trauma that is repetitive and occurs over an extended period of time
- **Complex Trauma:** typically results from *invasive, chronic, prolonged, overwhelming* traumatic experiences which are compromising. It is often within the context of an interpersonal relationship. It often impacts multiple areas of life and domains of functioning. At its core, it's persistent and more impairing. It can be seen as a product of repeated acute and chronic trauma.
- **Insidious trauma** is the result from ongoing, daily incidents of *marginalization, objectification, dehumanization*, and *intimidation* that are experienced by members of groups targeted by oppression: such as: racism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, sexism.

Trauma can ...

- **Impact:** cognitive and emotional growth.
- **Result in:** cognitive delays, learning and behavior impairments, anxiety, depression, attention difficulties, disrupted attachment process (excessive help seeking OR dependence and isolation).
- **Lead to:** disassociation (zone out, shut down); impulsive behavior; individuals being hyperalert (focus on environment for danger) or hyper-aroused (quick to react to nonthreatening cues).
- **Create difficulty in:** processing information; memory (retaining/recalling); one's ability to interact positively, identifying and regulating emotions (ability to use serotonin); executive functioning skills.
- **Set the stage for PTSD**

Students Who Have Experienced Trauma May ...

- Be unable to control their emotions and have frequent outbursts
- Be quiet and submissive
- Have difficulties learning in school
- Have difficulties getting along with others
- Have unusual eating or sleeping behaviors
- Attempt to provoke fights (appear oppositional) or solicit sexual experiences
- Be socially or emotionally inappropriate for their age
- Be unresponsive to affection

Trauma: Effects on the Body

Somatic Symptoms

- Bodily symptoms or dysfunctions that express emotional distress, such as: headaches, dizziness, fainting, pain, constipation*

Sleep disturbances

- Insomnia
- Night terrors
- Narcolepsy
- Learn more [here](#).

Various disorders:

- gastrointestinal (IBS, constipation)
- cardiovascular (heart disease, stroke)
- neurological (epilepsy, migraines, movement disorder)
- musculoskeletal (arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis)
- respiratory (asthma)
- dermatological disorders (acne, psoriasis, eczema)
- urological problems (UTIs, kidney stones)
- substance use disorders.

Keep in Mind: Resilient Responses to Trauma

Many people find healthy ways to cope with, respond to, and heal from trauma. Such resilient responses include:

- Increased bonding with family and community.
- Redefined or increased sense of purpose and meaning.
- Increased commitment to a personal mission.
- Revised priorities.
- Increased charitable giving and volunteerism.
- CBT (psychoeducation) and EMDR can be helpful*

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

One of my wishes

Is for people to stop saying: “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.”



1. To start, this is not true (even if it is true for you).
 - Yes, people can demonstrate resilient behaviors and coping strategies after experiencing traumatic conditions, but that is not true for everyone.
 - Trauma, at its core, is impairing and impacts people’s ability to FUNCTION. There is variety in terms of HOW LONG people’s functions are impacted and which functions are impacted but nevertheless, our functioning is compromised with trauma.
2. This waters down a very COMPLEX experience → Someone can show “strength” and still deal with impairments, dysfunctions, challenges resulting from trauma. These can co-exist. This statement invalidates, minimizes, or hides those very real challenges.
3. Potentially invalidates people’s experiences, perpetuates myths/misunderstanding, etc.
4. We can shape strength in others (such as children) without abusing or traumatizing them (IE model resilience and adaptability).

CONCLUSION

Coming to the end of our workshop

Keep in Mind: Trauma in Professionals

- Deeply care and are interested in the lives and success of our students.
- Practitioners can experience satisfaction AND compassion fatigue.
- Professionals who work with undocumented students are not always well trained for all of the responsibilities they are given.
- Often have to balance administrative and advocacy roles with limited resources.
- Exposed to the experiences and trauma of undocumented students.
- Deal with anti-immigration sentiment and practices in your campus or society.
- Practitioners can feel incompetent when they cannot give students the help, resources, or results they need.
- Practitioners can feel a level of responsibility and guilt for being able to get ahead while others cannot.

(Hoy and Nguyen 2020)

Being an Ally

- Allyship exists on a spectrum: Reflect on your own access to resources: time, energy, finances, knowledge.
- We cannot comprehensively or holistically support our undocumented students without supporting ALL undocumented immigrants (think about how conditional love feels).
- Allyship means following and listening; respecting the actions and wishes of the communities we want to help and allow *them* to take the lead.
- Allyship is a continuous practice; it is a series of behaviors; a willingness to learn and take accountability for any mistakes or hiccups.

Enemies & Allies of Hope

Bishundat et al. 2018

Enemies of Hope	Allies of Hope	Leadership Considerations	Reflection Questions
Fear	Love	<i>Leading with love and passion as opposed to fear helps educators focus on addressing concerns rather than avoiding them</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you operating out of fear or love? • Are your actions and decisions made based on what you want to accomplish or what you are attempting to avoid?
Apathy	Anger	<i>Apathy promotes disengagement, whereas anger, when leveraged productively can ignite action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is causing you to feel apathetic? • What are ways to productively express anger?
Isolation	Community	<i>Educators who resist isolation by finding community can be more resilient leaders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the people that support and challenge you with care? • Who else may feel isolated? • How can you align with and draw support from allies?
Despair	Struggle	<i>Educators can challenge despair by understanding the context and forms of resistance, but still choose to engage in leadership committed to the struggle</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the context of your struggle, who is involved, and what is at stake? • At what point do you choose to continue or to back out?

Reminders

- Post and communicate instructions in the event Immigration Enforcement arrives on campus and/or in the community.
- Create, post, and communicate a system for reporting immigration sightings (monitored email or hotline).

Resources in Orange County

- [Immigrant Advocates Network](#): can search resources using your zip code
- [OC Rapid Response](#): to report ICE sightings and more
- [Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants](#): assistance for noncitizen elderly
- [Church World Services Orange County](#)
- [Catholic Charities of Orange County](#)
- [CARECEN \(Central American Resource Center- LA\)](#)
- [California Immigrant Policy Center](#): Know Your Rights
- [CHIRLA](#)

Conclusion: Q&A



Any final questions or contributions?

Reminder: Please join us on for a follow up workshop on Trauma Informed Approaches!

Date: April 7, 2025

Modality: Zoom

Time: 3:30-5:00pm

Topics: Trauma Informed Practices, Compassionate Praxis, Fostering Equity, Critical Theory of Love