

“A DREAM DEFERRED”: UNDOCUMENTED
STUDENTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

By

JENNY NGUYEN

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Texas Christian University

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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Jean Van Delinder

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Tamara Mix

Dr. Bin Liang

Name: JENNY NGUYEN

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how undocumented students construct their sense of reality as college students by retaining positive feelings toward higher education. Given their college experience is shaped by their undocumented status limiting their access to such things as financial aid, scholarships and loans, how do they reconcile the contradictions of their college experience given their undocumented status? The participants in this study were between the ages of 18 and 27 who have or are currently attending a suburban college. Many undocumented students decide to risk pursuing higher education despite knowing that upon completing a degree, it will still be difficult to find work in the United States. Currently, only twelve of the fifty states allow undocumented students to pursue higher education paying in-state tuition if certain criteria are met. Using primary data collected from archives, legal documents and ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this study uses a symbolic and phenomenological framework. During the course of this study, Deferred Action was announced which further complicates their lives given it only grants a two year window for work with no promise of amnesty or hope of legal residency. The results reconfirm previous themes that have been discussed in previous literature and research, but also indicate a need for future research to establish a better understanding of the experiences of undocumented students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

An estimated 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school each year (The College Board 2009). Currently, federal policies allow undocumented students in all fifty states to attend public secondary schools and obtain a high school diploma. However, their access to higher education is determined by where they live. Only twelve of the fifty states permit undocumented students to pay in-state tuition for higher education at public universities provided they have been attending high school in the state for up to three years before applying to college. Given this limited access to public higher education, undocumented students face additional barriers by not having access to most financial aid programs while finding a job upon their degree completion is almost impossible due to their illegal status. While recent studies suggest that legal status does play an important role in limiting educational attainment (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2002; Abrego 2008; Belanger 2001; Flores 2010), few have explored how they construct their sense of reality given the contradictions between their aspirations and goals.

Given the estimated number of undocumented students who graduate from high school, those who are able to attend college are a fraction of that number (The College Board 2009). The often cited reason for why many undocumented students never pursue a college degree is that they must overcome poor academic preparation and other economic, financial, cultural obstacles just to graduate from high school. The likelihood is high that they have had to attend overcrowded

inner-city schools “where they face overwhelmed teachers, hyper segregation by race and class, limited and outdated resources, and otherwise decaying infrastructures” (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2002: 2). However, surviving this less than ideal type of high school might actually give them necessary skills to overcome the additional difficulties they will face in trying to attend and pay for college.¹ Given the social psychological predisposition of those who have managed to graduate from high school, this study seeks to understand how undocumented students socially construct their sense of reality in order to pursue higher education through a symbolic perspective.

Undocumented students, even those who have completed a bachelor’s or graduate degree cannot legally work in the U.S. without a social security number or visa. Further, there are numerous legal restrictions regarding hiring undocumented employees (Sharron 2007). Given the changes brought about by the Dream Act with regards to the issue of immigration, few undocumented students, will ever be allowed to apply for residency in the United States. Though education is often cited as an avenue toward upward mobility (Hao and Pong 2008), for most undocumented students, having a college degree does not wipe out their status as an “illegal immigrant.”

Purpose of Study

I became interested in the study of undocumented students several years ago. I was working as a Go-center mentor (helping students in the college application process) at a high school close to my university when one day a student came in with a 3.7 GPA and many Advance Placement courses. Yet, she did not know how to apply for college. She whispered in my ear, “I don’t have a social security number”. I was not prepared for her situation but I decided to help her. I

¹ Much of the literature therefore focuses on poor academic preparation to explain the high drop rate for Hispanics, which is estimated at 30 percent, for their lack of going on to college. Fry (2003) argues that the thirty percent high school dropout rates for Hispanics may actually be distorted, since the dropout rates include many immigrants who never attend school in the United States. By only counting those who dropped out after actually attending school, the dropout rate for Hispanics is actually closer to fifteen percent among 16-to 19-year olds, Fry (2003:3) argues.

contacted several local universities to ask for help with regards to the application process. The admission office of one particular university in Texas was very helpful in guiding me through the process. When I called financial aid and scholarship, I was told by the person answering the phone that they did not have any aid for “those type” of students and that person hung up the phone. From then on, my interest in this area of research grew.

Therefore, this study addresses how structural barriers created by “legal” versus “illegal” immigration status creates policies inhibiting access to higher education for undocumented college students living in Northern Texas, or the Dallas/Fort Worth metro area. Though Texas is a state that currently allows undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition, these students are not eligible to receive federal, and often times, state financial aid. Such policies send contradictory messages and inhibit access to higher education by simultaneously opening and slamming the door. It is a dream deferred.

Given the tightening restrictions on undocumented immigrants and the implications of limited access to employment, this study seeks to investigate why undocumented students decide to pursue higher education. What happens to these students after the completion of a post-secondary degree as they face bleak employment prospects compared to others due to their illegal status?

Some recent studies with regard to undocumented students suggest the primacy of legal status in educational attainment (Abrego 2008; De Leon 2005; Munoz 2008). Research in this area also lacks information regarding how immigration policies may be creating additional barriers by inhibiting access to resources for higher education (Fry 2003; Doane 1997; Natour 2013).

Studying undocumented students who have obtained or are in the process of obtaining a post-secondary degree will provide a better understanding of how immigration status contributes to marginalization.

First of all, undocumented students are also immigrants. Immigrants in the U.S. are often marginalized, and to be an undocumented or “illegal” immigrant is often a much more different experience. Secondly, undocumented students are trying to pursue their own American Dream while their status as an illegal immigrant makes them outcasts. Lastly, undocumented students are often cast as “deviants” since their presence seemingly takes away opportunities of American citizens. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the “complexities of bias and discrimination against this marginalized group” (Vega Najera 2010:16).

Previous studies have used assimilationist paradigms in which researchers try to explain the experiences of undocumented students in the education system using a qualitative perspective. Some research focuses solely on assimilation (i.e. De Leon 2005), while others discuss uncertainty in future aspirations (i.e. Gonzales 2008). Recent studies have also incorporated the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) as a key influence, since this Act offers undocumented students a way to obtain residency under certain conditions.² In these recent studies, the DREAM Act has only been used a small variable in analysis of the undocumented student’s experiences even though the Act itself can cause a major shift in the incorporation of undocumented Hispanic students into mainstream American society. During the course of this study, the Deferred Action—a policy that allow undocumented immigrants (who meet certain requirements) to apply for a social security number, obtain a state identification or driver’s license , and obtain a two year work permit —was passed. Therefore, this quickly became an area of focus during my interviews along with questions regarding the DREAM Act.

This study uses two of four basic types of triangulation (Denzin 2006), theory and methodological. [Denzin, Norman (2006). *Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook*. Aldine

² “The DREAM Act aims to accomplish two major goals: first, it would resolve the question of whether states can continue to offer undocumented immigrants in-state tuition rates by repealing IIRIRA (Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act); second, it would make both higher education and future employment more accessible to certain undocumented immigrants by providing them with the opportunity to obtain conditional legal status upon graduation from high school, and permanent legal status later on, as well as providing eligibility for certain federal aid benefits.” (Sharron 2007)

Transaction] Theory triangulation or the use of more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon is employed in this study by combining assimilation symbolic interaction and strain theories. While the methodological triangulation involves using more than one method to gather data, such as the document analysis and in-depth interviews collected by the author. These theoretical and methodological approaches will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

As previously indicated, the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of undocumented students who have or are currently attending a suburban college. The intention of this study is to obtain insights into the barriers undocumented students confront throughout their college experience; this study also seeks to better understand the goals and aspirations of undocumented students and their feelings towards higher education. This study, therefore, investigates the ways in which undocumented students negotiate their marginal status in the American society in a metropolitan location in Northern Texas. In particular, this study examines how their marginalized status relates to the way they manage the contradictory statuses of “student” and “illegal immigrant.” Not only do they face the normal financial barriers most students face during their pursuit of higher education, they also face an uncertain future with regard to finding a job, and even being able to establish a future career and family. This study, seeks to answer some major research questions.

One of my major questions coming into this study is: Why do undocumented students pursue higher education despite the obstacles and limitations? (Do they not know of the existence of these limitations prior to enrollment at an institution of higher education?) Second, how do various institutions play a role in the educational aspiration of undocumented students? By understanding why undocumented students pursue higher education, and the role that various institutions play, this study develops a better understanding of the marginalization of

undocumented students and how reality is constructed around various limitations and obstacles. As seen in the sample questionnaire (Appendix A), the interview questions are structured by categories: education/current life, culture/immigration, DREAM Act, and demographics. These categories and the questions under these categories help in developing an understanding of the participant's construction of identity and reality under different institutions, while also addressing the concept of marginalization.

These research questions stem from my experience working as a Go-Center mentor. I wanted to use a symbolic approach to understand why undocumented students accept the goal of higher education, despite the limited means to obtain it. I wanted to see how these students shape their reality and identity—or how their reality and identity may be shaped by these limitations. A symbolic understanding provides openness in interpretation and data analysis; this does not limit the study to any one particular theory.

Conclusion

I became interested in the study on undocumented students because of my experience working with undocumented students as a Go-Center mentor—working with students who want to pursue higher education. In this chapter, I have discussed why I became interested in this area of research along the purpose of this study. I have also presented my research questions and how these research questions help to structure the interview questions and categories. After working with undocumented students as a Go-Center mentor, I feel that there needs to be a different understanding of the limitations and obstacles that undocumented students face in their pursuit of higher education—an understanding that does not primarily rely on any one theory or perspective.

In the next chapter, I will address the existing literature with regards to studies on undocumented students. I will focus on three major aspects of literature: the historical antecedents of the DREAM Act, the marginalization of undocumented students, and major themes that have

emerged in this area of research. These three areas of literature provide an understanding of how undocumented students are marginalized through various institutions.

In Chapter III, I outline my analytical framework. This chapter will provide a discussion of symbolic interaction in relation to marginalization. Because of the symbolic nature of this work, two other areas of theories emerged: Strain Theory and double consciousness. In this chapter, these two theories will be discussed in their relationship to the study—their importance in understanding the construction of reality by undocumented students.

Chapter IV focuses on the methodology utilized in this study. First, the chapter provides a discussion on semi-structured interviews and snowball sampling. The chapter moves on to discuss the limitations present in the study, data triangulation, and finally the overall research design of the study. After outlining the research design, the chapter provides information on the participants of this study.

In Chapter V, I will discuss five themes that emerged in this study. The first three themes revolve around the concept of the self: *Negotiation of the Self*, *Dramaturgy in the Hidden Self*, and *The Significant Other/Group*. The fourth theme—*Deferred Action: Hopes for the Undocumented, Votes for the Politicians*—focuses on how policies like the Deferred Action send contradictory messages by providing hope but also furthering marginalization. The last theme, *Against the System*, deals with the various institutional barriers that undocumented students are constantly facing. For this chapter, I will end with a discussion on *double consciousness* and its application towards undocumented students.

In Chapter VI, the final chapter, I will provide a discussion on future research and recommendations for policy. The major focus of my discussion on future research will be on ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement). This interest on ICE emerged during an interview with a

participant who was a DREAM ACT activist. I will end this chapter with some final thoughts on this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the literature review which guided me in the development of my theoretical and methodological approaches. It is organized around previous research on Mexican migration, the marginalized status of undocumented students and their limited access to higher education.

In particular, I discuss research investigating the experiences of Mexican immigrants in the United States, the politics of immigration laws and how they influence access to higher education. The chapter is separated into three separate sections: an overview of immigration legislation related to the undocumented status of primarily Hispanic migrants from Mexico. This section is organized around the antecedents of The DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act (2001), the marginalized status of the undocumented due to political barriers, and an examination of themes that have emerged in this area of study.

The first section will focus on the antecedents of the DREAM Act. The reason I included this section first is because the DREAM ACT, through a symbolic interactionist approach, symbolizes hope and opportunity for undocumented students. Since this study uses a symbolic framework along with a phenomenological approach, it is important to understand the foundations and

implications of this Act. While representing hope and opportunity, this legislation also reminds undocumented students of their marginalized status—while many undocumented students are working towards the passing of this legislation, it also reminds them that they are not American citizens and that they are not constituents. As the Act symbolizes hope and optimism for one group (undocumented students and their family), it creates a feeling of injustice and insecurity to other group (American families who must pay out of state tuition for their children to attend an institution of higher education in a different state). As one of the most recent and constantly debated national legislation, the DREAM Act will lead to a better understanding of barriers undocumented students face and how these barriers may influence their construction of their goals and aspirations with regards to higher education. Under this section, the literature will also discuss the most recent legislation that is closely related to the DREAM Act—the Deferred Action.

The second part of this chapter will focus primarily on marginalization of undocumented students due primarily to political/legal barriers—legislations and policies that have been passed in different states that will inhibit the access to higher education for undocumented students. The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the barriers that undocumented students face in higher education, therefore it is vital to understand the policies that will inhibit or create barriers for undocumented students in their pursuit of higher education.

The third part of this chapter will discuss present research in this area of study. This section will address common themes/ideas that have emerged across various studies. Though this is not a comparative study, it is important to understand that even though the experiences of undocumented students may vary, there are some contingency in their experiences. Theoretical framework and methodologies of present literature will also be discussed in this section because they helped in the formation of the symbolic and phenomenological approach of this particular study.

The DREAM Act: Historical Antecedents

Though it is often discussed as a recent piece of legislation, the DREAM Act's historical antecedents can be traced back to the 1965 Higher Education Act which offered financial assistance for students in their pursuit of higher education by allotting money for the Pell Grants, Trio Programs, and loans. Yet, under Title IV Section 484, it states that in order to receive these type of assistance, a student must be a citizen or resident. This act excluded undocumented students from receiving financial assistance for higher education. The numerous conflicts between the state and federal level either prohibiting or granting access to financial assistance for undocumented students can be traced back to this legislation. A major part of these conflicts were brought to the Supreme Court in the case of *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982).

Plyler v. Doe was a case involving a Texas state law which did not allow undocumented students access to state funds for public education (regardless of grade level). Specifically, a school district in Texas wanted to charge families of undocumented students a one thousand dollar tuition fee for each undocumented student enrolled in their district. In 1982, on the basis of the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause—which “prohibits states from denying any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (Legal Information Institute)—the Supreme Court ruled that this Texas law was unconstitutional. Sharron (2007) observed that though “*Plyler* made it unconstitutional to deny undocumented immigrants access to free public education through the twelfth grade,” it failed to address higher education. Though this meant that undocumented students now had a legal basis to challenge limited access in education up to high school, it did not address access to assistance in funding their higher education.

A more recent legislation addressing illegal immigrant's access to higher education is the “The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA).” This legislation “prohibited states from ‘providing a postsecondary education benefit to an alien not

lawfully present unless any citizen or nation is eligible for such benefit.” In 2001, H.R. 1918 and S. 1291 were bills proposed to amend the Illegal Immigration Reform Act of 1996 and are similar to the most recent DREAM Act. The bill asked that states be allowed to determine residency so that undocumented students may be able to be considered “residents” and apply for financial assistance. In 2001, Senator Richard Durbin introduced S2205, the current version of the DREAM Act to the Senate, but it was never even discussed—Hebel (2007) wrote, “Advocates of the legislation, S 2205, needed 60 votes to begin debate. They fell eight votes short, with a tally of 52 to 44.”

The reason it is important to know the IIRIRA along with the various forms of the DREAM Act is because it once again shows how undocumented students are continually marginalized by the majority in society. As discussed before, undocumented students are not constituents. In a direct election as those of Senate and House of Representatives, this plays a major role in the representatives’ agendas. The fate of undocumented students rests in the decisions of these representatives who want to keep their actual constituents content. The DEAM Act continues to act as a symbol of hope, but also as a reminder that undocumented students are not residents and do not have the rights of American residents/citizens.

A step closer to the Dream Act was announced by President Obama through his Deferred Action on June 15, 2012. According to the website from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (UCIS), an individual must meet certain criteria before applying (see Appendix C). The Deferred Action is an important legislation in that it allows undocumented students the opportunity to obtain a social security number and a work permit. Under this legislation, undocumented students can now legally work and have a driver’s license in the United States. However, this only lasts two years, and then students will have the option of reapplying. Many people have mistaken this as an application for residency or amnesty, but this policy does not indicate any type of residency status—in a way, it can be viewed as a temporary permission to stay in the States. As seen in

Appendix C, the required information for the application is tedious. The person must be able to show necessary information upon request i.e. proof that that he/she has been in the U.S. before their 16th birthday—this included documents ranging from any official school records to medical records (UCIS website).

The information regarding the Deferred Action suggests that undocumented students continue to face this marginalization process despite the minimal opportunities/hope that appears to them.

While the Deferred Action presents this hope and opportunity, it also provides further challenges and contributes to the existing marginalization. By using a symbolic interactionist framework, one major area of focus in this study is to understand how undocumented students interpret and understand these legislations. This study, taking the Deferred Action into consideration, is concerned with how undocumented students view the Deferred Action in their social construction of reality—is it a step closer to the DREAM Act and residency, or should it be approached with skepticism since it may be a way for collective information to be gathered on these students and their families?

Marginalization through Legal Barriers

Currently only twelve of the fifty states allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. Four states (Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, and Indiana) actually prohibit undocumented students to pay in-state tuition (see Appendix D). Flores (2010:271) found that in-state resident tuition “positively and significantly affects the college decisions of students who are likely to be undocumented as measured by an increase in their college enrollment rates.” Yet, even with in-state tuition policies, undocumented are limited to certain majors and career opportunities—even volunteering often times require background checks. Upon completion of a degree, they will then face the bleak opportunities in the job market—they will not be able to legally work. The following discussion of existing literature is centered on the marginalization of undocumented

students due to legal barriers. By developing an understanding of the legal barriers that the undocumented face, this study addresses the question of why undocumented students pursue higher education despite the knowledge of all these limitations.

Arizona is one of the four states that prohibit in-state tuition for undocumented students. Najera and Araceli (2010) suggests that due to of the Proposition 300—a proposition which “denied certain state-funded services to any person who could not provide proof of legal status” (Najera and Araceli 2010:2), services including in-state tuition and financial aid for public institutions of higher education—many undocumented students will no longer be able to afford to pursue higher education. While Arizona is state that is known for its stricter policies on immigration and specifically on undocumented students, Lopez (2007) had similar findings through a study done in North Carolina (a state that has not had a definite stand regarding this issue, its policies change periodically).

Lopez (2007) found that policies in North Carolina create barriers for undocumented students to attain higher education through ethnographic study. Lopez (2007) used a quote from Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) that reflected findings of many research done in this area, “The legal status of an immigrant child influences, perhaps more so than national origins, his or her experiences and life chances.” Lopez (2007) suggests that legal status does have an effect on educational “aspirations.” The idea—if students work hard in school, obtain good grades and test scores, they will be able to pursue higher education—cannot be applied to undocumented students due to legal barriers that inhibit access to higher education. This will affect the way undocumented students construct their realities and the meanings that they give to goals and aspirations.

Kim (2012), through a legal approach, discussed that there are many undocumented students who grew up and reside in the United States, and for those who have graduated from high school and

want to pursue higher education, they face, “insurmountable financial barriers due to the combination of high tuition costs and ineligibility for governmental grant, loan, and work assistance programs. In addition, most states do not allow undocumented students to receive in-state tuition rates... Immigration status clearly serves as an effective bar to the pursuit of a higher education for many long-term undocumented young adults.” Existing literature often times focuses on the states that allow for in-state tuition versus those that prohibit in-state tuition, Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga (2010) suggests that we must also look at how institutions of higher education implement these policies of in-state tuition.

These scholars brought up a historical context with regard to comparing two states, California and North Carolina. California is the state that is much more open in its policies regarding undocumented student and allows for in-state tuition. North Carolina on the other hand, is still struggling to figure out where it stands. Oseguera, Flores, and Burciaga (2010) using Marrow (2008) indicated that “California represents a state context whose response to undocumented students and educational benefits is influenced by its long history with immigration and Latino residents...” This issue of immigration and undocumented students, however, is more of a recent problem in North Carolina. Due to the methodology of this study, data collected from participants vary from those who attending a community college to those attending a private institution in Texas.

It is important to recognize that despite state and federal policies regarding undocumented students in higher education, institutions may vary significantly in their implementations of these policies. Policies therefore, play a major role in the marginalization process of undocumented students. The following will discuss some major themes that have been discussed in this area of study.

Themes

Due to the legal status of undocumented students, research in this area is a difficult task. There is no feasible way to get a representative sample since the total population is unknown—therefore, researchers have to use estimates about the total population and rely on theories of immigration such as those through an assimilationist framework and qualitative field work. This section will seek to explain three common themes found in existing literature and discuss a common paradigm that is often used in studies on immigration and undocumented students.

There are several common themes with regards to the experiences of undocumented students that are discussed in current literature, and I would like to discuss three major ones. First, due to their immigration status, the marginalization of undocumented students leads to the construction of an uncertain future (Munoz 2008). As their immigration status dictates, undocumented students are classified as “illegal” immigrants since they cannot legally work regardless of level of education achieved. This creates another problem in selecting a program of study in college majors such as education or social work requires a background check. Having to always be cognizant of such barriers leads to a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity about their chances for future success after college.

Second, undocumented students not only face political barriers related to the legality of their status, but as immigrants they also face cultural barriers—English proficiency (Munoz 2008). This theme of cultural barriers leads to questions of identity with regards to goals and aspirations in higher education. Hispanic high school students have a high dropout rate. “Latino youth in the U.S. are more likely to have dropped out of school than other youth. In 2000, 21 percent of Hispanic 16- to 19-year-olds were school dropouts, in comparison to 8 percent of white youth and 12 percent of African American youth” (Fry 2003: 4). Fry (2003) suggests that when studying undocumented students and looking at the high school dropout rates we must also take into consideration how long these students have resided in the States—this will affect their English proficiency and more importantly, their integration into American society. Therefore, this study

takes into consideration and provides information on the length of time that participants have resided in the States along with where they are in their educational career, and what type of institution they have attended or are attending.

Third, in recent research, the DREAM Act is characterized by hope and optimism, “The Dream Act is one of the most important legislation regarding immigration: it could provide undocumented immigrants the ability to achieve their college dreams while gaining a pathway to citizenship. This bill would provide a rapidly growing population the chance to increase their social and economic mobility.” (Munoz 2008:169) Respondents in Lopez’s study (2007), for example, indicated that the DREAM Act is their opportunity in pursuit of the American Dream. In reality, however, the passage of the DREAM Act seems unlikely. This study addresses how the DREAM Act (and its most recent related legislation, the Deferred Action) serves as an important symbol of hope and opportunity in the eyes of undocumented students in a metropolitan area of northern Texas.

Theoretical Framework

One primary theoretical framework in studying immigrant groups is the assimilation paradigm. Assimilation refers to how a minority or ethnic group becomes acculturated into the dominant society primarily through language, intermarriage and socioeconomic status. For example, De Leon (2005) using Gordon (1964), discussed that originally “the ideal type of assimilation requires that the immigrant group and their offspring become completely absorbed by the host society.” This, therefore, almost always involves the gradual loss of one’s own original ethnic identity. This term was developed to characterize the migration and assimilation process of many European ethnic groups. One limitation of this approach, however, is the differential experience of many ethnic groups that are structurally unable to “assimilate” into the majority of American

society due to ethnocentrism and lack of economic advancement (Winant 2000). The legal status of an immigrant is one such barrier that is often overlooked.

Many immigrants, like Mexican Americans, are considered “sojourners” (Chavez 1988) or only here for a short time to earn enough money before returning to their home country. The close proximity of Mexico to the United States has made it relatively easy, until recent years, for migrants to move back and forth across the borders. This geographical location in addition to the legacy of the Bracero Program, essentially a guest worker program that was operated by the U.S. Government beginning in 1942 and ending in 1964. Over those 22 years, there was an estimated 4.5 million border crossings of guest workers from Mexico. This large influx of Mexican migratory workers, essentially a non-assimilated minority group, was worrisome to states like Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California (Scruggs 19603; Miller 1981; Bustamante 1997). Given the assimilationist values of the dominant society, the fear that a minority group might not assimilate into American mainstream society led to the use of education, particularly the teaching of English, as a vehicle of acculturation. As De Leon (2005) used the quote from Walsh (1990) from a California superintendent, “We’ve got to attend to the idea of assimilation and to make sure that we teach English and our values as quickly as we can so that these kids (immigrants and other minority groups) can get in the mainstream of American life.”

However, as Vega (2010:173) using (Park 1930) pointed out, “Assimilation requires acceptance, positive orientation, and identification with the dominant group. It is assumed that immigrants assimilate into new cultures as they learn the language, incorporate the social rituals of the native community, and participate without encountering in the common, economic and social arenas.” This study, seeks to explain the gaps in existing literature with regards to integration. Rather than solely using an assimilationist perspective, through a symbolic framework, this study seeks to understand how undocumented students negotiate their outsider status even though the possibility

they can stay in the United States remains uncertain. How do they maintain their sense of reality as they continue to be bombarded with new limitations and obstacles as they progress through higher education: legal barriers, financial barriers, and the expectation to “assimilate” while remaining an outsider?

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the limited literature regarding undocumented students since states vary in their laws and regulations regarding undocumented students in higher education. There needs to be an awareness to bring about more public knowledge. Recently, the media has focused on the Horatio Alger stories (rags to riches) of undocumented students published in magazines and newspapers including *New York Times* to *The Chronicle Review*. However, there has been little research focusing on the experiences of undocumented students who are finishing a post-secondary degree or who have earned a degree. What happens when these students who are about to or have entered the real world market after pursuing a college degree? Why do these students want to pursue higher education?

The issue of undocumented students will remain a controversial topic if no solution is found. On one hand, U.S. citizens are asking why they need to pay out-state-tuition when illegal immigrants can pay in-state-tuition (depending on states). On the other hand, many undocumented students came to the U.S. and grew up in the states; they know little of their country of origin and consider themselves Americans. It's one thing to be an immigrant in the U.S., it's a whole different story to be an illegal immigrant. Undocumented students, therefore, find themselves not only marginalized from the dominant society but also from their own immigrant communities. The next chapter will discuss the analytical framework of this study—focusing primarily on the how this study employed a symbolic interactionist framework but also drawing on Merton's (1938/1968) Strain Theory and Dubois's (1903) double consciousness.

CHAPTER III

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

“The individual, however, is not born a member of society. He is born with a predisposition toward sociality, and he becomes a member of society. In the life of every individual, therefore, there is a temporal sequence, in the course of which he is inducted into participation in the societal dialectic” (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss my analytical framework. I will draw on Park’s (1928) theory on race relations and marginalization as well as Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) phenomenological social construction of reality. This study utilizes a symbolic and phenomenological approach to study the marginalized status of undocumented students. After discussing symbolic interaction, I will briefly discuss two other areas of theory that emerged during the course of this study: Merton’s (1938) Strain Theory, and Dubois (1903) concept of double consciousness.

Symbolic Interaction and the Subjective Nature of Society

The above quote is important in that it emphasizes the subjective nature of society. We are not born into society, but rather in a way, we become inducted into society—we are taught its values, norms, culture, etc. I am interested in how undocumented students construct their reality while attempting to integrate into a culture as both immigrants and undocumented students—undocumented students who have not yet been “accepted” into American society. Because they

are undocumented immigrants, they are seen as outsiders who take away American jobs and opportunities.

A symbolic interactionism perspective will help to explain the structure of the subjective experiences such as the limitations and obstacles undocumented students face in higher education. While symbolic interaction emphasizes an inductive approach and “the role of meaning in interpretation” (Wallace and Wolf 2006)—people give meanings to behaviors/actions/symbols through the process of interpretation—as a phenomenology it emphasizes how “everyday reality is a socially constructed system of ideas that has accumulated over time.” (Wallace and Wolf 2006: 262) I feel that these two perspective are vital in understanding the experiences of undocumented students—students who continually interpret the world around them to construct a reality for their two contradictory statuses as a student in the American educational system and as an undocumented immigrant. The following sections will discuss symbolic interactionism along with Park’s groundbreaking work regarding marginalization of immigrants and the observed race relations cycle. His ideas will be tied to current research on marginalization and assimilation.

Robert Park and Marginalization

The theoretical perspective of this study is taken from Park (1928/1967), who later influenced Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) and Berger and Luckmann (1966). Specifically, Park’s focus on marginalization as part of his theory race relations is particular to my study because it provides marginalization framework—that as groups differentially assimilate into mainstream society they “produce a man (sic) on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused” (Reitzes and Reitzes (1993:53). The interviews with undocumented students, as later discussed in Chapter V, are in-between cultures and constantly face points of marginalization through political, legal, and educational institutions. This concept of marginalization is similar to the phenomenon that Park observed, though Park thought this was a

temporary status as part of the race relations cycle. I argue that marginalization of immigrant groups does not disappear once they are acculturated, actually it becomes more attenuated.

The majority-minority paradigm along with the assimilation paradigm is most often used to describe migrants' integration into American society. There exist strong factors that pressure immigrants to assimilate into American society. Yinger (1985) argues, by quoting Juliani, that ethnic groups do not necessarily have to accept every aspect of assimilation, rather by refusing to be forced to fully assimilate, people can have a better understanding of where they are from—this type of awareness will be more beneficial than forced assimilation. Assimilation refers to a more homogenous idea, that the minority group will integrate into the majority group and everyone will share common values, norms, etc. By utilizing Park's concept of marginalization as sustained through acculturation rather than temporary causes one to reconsider the processes of assimilation in contemporary society. As suggested by Reitzes and Reitzes (1993:54), Park had a different perspective on assimilation and race relation—assimilation was not seen as a “melting pot,” but rather “pluralism,” that the majority society would be as much changed by the processes of adaptation to the dominant society. This idea of pluralism in assimilation is very different than how the term “assimilation” is often used today—which is the full integration of a minority group into the majority group. In this sense, the melting pot idea is an idealistic paradigm.

Assimilation is actually a difficult theory to employ due to its moral rather than causal framework (Callan 2003). This is why sociologists breakdown assimilation into processes of acculturation (Samnani, Boekhorst, and Harrison 2012; Dow 2010). The process for most ethnic groups might actually be acculturation—they accept and learn about the culture they are in, they adapt to the culture in terms of English proficiency, but they still maintain their ethnic identity. A sharing of norms, values, ideas between cultures is probably more beneficial to society as a whole compared to the more idealistic model of the assimilation paradigm that is often used to study immigrants today since many immigrants face a marginalization process.

This study, using the symbolic understanding of race and ethnicity along with the concept of marginalization by Park, explains how undocumented students—a socially constructed category/label (a phenomenological perspective), negotiate their contradicting statuses as “students” and “undocumented” while trying to integrate into society. Using a symbolic perspective allowed for openness in the interpretation of data, which led to two other area of theories: Strain Theory and the concept of double consciousness.

Strain Theory

Robert K. Merton (1938) is a structural functionalist who is often studied in area of crime and deviance. He suggested that, “Cultural Goals (desires, aspirations) are blocked by inadequate means to achieve those goals which results in strain. Strain is built into the society.” (Merton 1938). For Merton (1938), strain is built into society and members within a society have to adapt to these societal constraints. The following table is from Merton’s (1938) “Social Structure and Anomie.” This table shows how members of society may adapt to these constraints.

Table 1: Modes of Adaptation

	Cultural Goals	Institutionalized Means
Conformity: both goals and means are accepted	+	+
Innovation: goals accepted, but means are rejected	+	-
Ritualism: means accepted, goals are rejected	-	+
Retreatism: both goals and means are rejected	-	-
Rebellion: goals and means rejected and substituted	+/-	+/-

While this is not a study on crime or deviance, I found that the participants in my study fell under two categories: conformers and innovators (which will be further discussed in Chapter V: Findings). For Merton (1938/1968), conforming and innovating are two modes of adaptation that

people of society typically follow. “Conformity occurs when individuals accept the culturally defined goals and the socially legitimate means of achieving them” (Merton 1938); this indicates that the group of students who accept the goal of higher education and who willingly obey by the laws and rules set forth for them. “Innovation occurs when an individual accepts the goals of society, but rejects or lacks the socially legitimate means of achieving them” (Merton 1938). This second group, the innovators, I would say are those who accept higher education as an goal, but do not fully accept all the laws and rules laid upon them i.e. driving without a driver’s license. I think that the distinction between these two groups of undocumented students play an important role in understanding how these two groups of undocumented students construct their reality as they adapt to societal constraints.

As they decide how to adapt to society, undocumented students a share in a state of in-betweenness. They are not accepted as residents in American society, and they are not allowed to visit their country of origin without repercussions. These students, therefore, face the double consciousness.

Double Consciousness

Dubois (1903) used this term “double consciousness” to refer to “the double consciousness of being both an American and not an American-by double consciousness. Du Bois referred most importantly to an internal conflict in the African American individual between what was "African" and what was "America” (Bruce 1992: 301). Undocumented students are, in a sense, living in-between countries. They are not accepted in American society, but it’s all that most of them know of—especially those who came to the States at a young age. In most cases, they cannot return to Mexico.

Some undocumented students do not find out about their immigration status until later in life, like in high school. While they are expected to assimilate into American culture, they are limited by

existing rules and regulations to fully integrate into American society—specifically through their educational journey. To a great extent, undocumented students face what DuBois termed as *double consciousness*—they constantly marginalized and cannot become part of mainstream American society. With current legal barriers, they will not be considered “Americans.”

The societal constraints/limitations lead these students to discover ways to adapt to society so they can attempt to integrate into American society during their pursuit of higher education.

While they face various societal limitations and obstacles, they develop a double consciousness as they try to maintain their identity while integrating into American society.

Conclusion

My analytical framework draws from the concepts of symbolic interaction. As a micro-level theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism engages in the idea that reality is constructed through interpretations of social interactions (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Reality, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966) is socially constructed, and it serves to be both objective—habitualization and institutionalization—and subjective—individuals having to be accepted into society. This concept of reality being socially constructed and serving as both objective and subjective factors plays an important role in this study on undocumented students because their reality is constructed around constant barriers/limitations during their pursuit of education.

Utilizing a symbolic framework, led to other areas of theory that do not necessarily fall under the symbolic umbrella: Strain theory and double consciousness. Strain theory added a structural analysis to the symbolic approach while the concept of double consciousness added a more social psychological understanding of identity formation. The symbolic and phenomenological nature of this study is also reflected in the methodology/research design of this study. The methodology will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

“Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situation constraints that shape inquiry.” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:8)

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology employed in this research. I will first provide a discussion on semi-structured in-depth interviews; discuss snowball sampling and its interrelation with in-depth interviews; explain the triangulation of data in this study; and finally introduce the participants in this study.

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

The method of interviewing allows for an exchange of interaction through communication between the interviewer and the participant. Interviewing, as a method of data collection, has been used across various fields of research (both qualitative and quantitative research). Fontana and Frey (2000) discusses the role that interviews play in contemporary U.S. society—that we have become to be known as “the interview society.” Interviews have become a main source of “information” (646). This method has been discussed as a “universal mode of systematic inquiry.” This method leaves room for interpretation and a great exchange of information through dialogue—which allows for a symbolic emphasis in its nature. This section will discuss

interviews as a method of data collection, its strength and weaknesses, along with some ethical concerns.

In a structured interview, there are sets of questions that have been formulated before the interview and all the respondents are asked the same questions. This method of interviewing allows for little flexibility (Fontana and Frey 2000). In unstructured interviewing, there is more depth in data collected and a different level of relationship between the interviewer and the respondent—for example gaining trust and establishing rapport (655). Therefore, semi-structured interviews are the combination of both types of interviewing. While having an interview outline with some focus questions to guide the interview process, it recognizes that each interview is unique and different. The semi-structured nature allows for an open discussion and interpretation. Interviews allow for collection of rich and powerful data. However, there are certain factors that need to be discussed with regards to this methods—some strengths and weaknesses.

Kvale (2006:481) discusses how interviews give participants a “voice”—“for example, the marginalized, who do not ordinarily participate in public debates, can in interview studies have their social situations and their viewpoints communicated to a larger audience.” Interviews, therefore, are much more personal in nature compared to other methodologies. Each interview is unique and no two interviews will be identical (Kale 1996). Due to the personal nature of interviews and the uniqueness of each interview, this allows for rich data collection.

While providing a voice for participants, it is also important to note that a major weakness of this method is that it is not an equal dialogue that takes place during the interview. According to Kvale (2006), the interviewer is trying to obtain information from the participants—there is an “asymmetrical power relation” that takes place during the course of interviews. The researchers, in semi-structured interviews, already have some questions (an agenda) that they may want to focus on or feels is important to address. It is important to understand that while interviewing is a

powerful tool in qualitative research, it has its pros and cons. While providing rich and often times, personal data of respondents, there are many factors (i.e. types of questions asked to location of interview) that need to be considered so that a power dynamic does not alter how respondents would address a certain question.

The method of in-depth interviewing reflects the symbolic nature of this study—to examine reality in a subjective light. An interview is an interaction/conversation between the interviewer and the respondent (Babbie 2007:306). The next section will discuss the interrelation between in-depth interview and snowball sampling.

Snowball Sampling

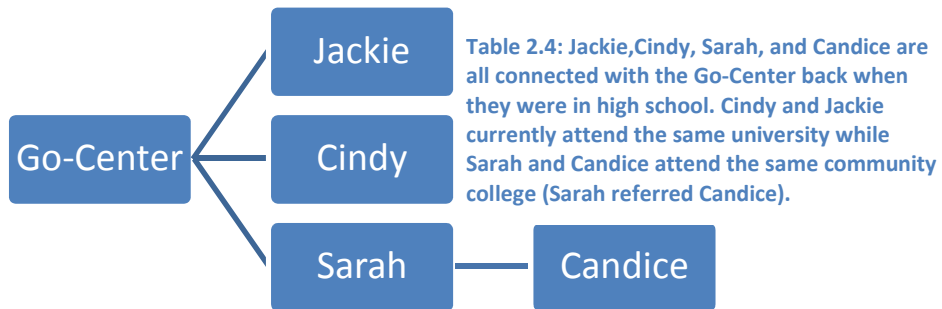
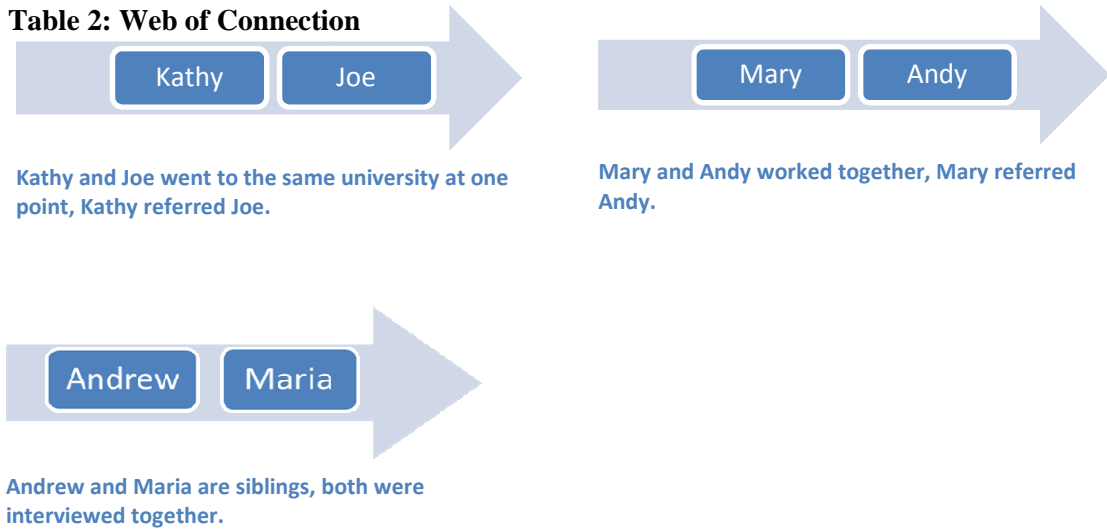
Because of the hidden characteristic of the targeted population, undocumented students, snowball sampling was used in this study. Another term for this method of sampling is called chain sampling—participants referring other participants create a chain of association or social networks (Noy 2008). While this method of sampling does not create generalizable data, it is an important method of sampling used for qualitative studies that involves in-depth interviews—as one informant will refer the next leading to the chain aspect of the study. Noy (2008:334), for example, explained that, “the quality of the referring process is *naturally related* to the quality of the interaction: if the informant leaves the interview meeting feeling discontented, or if the researcher did not win the informant’s trust and sympathy, the chances the latter will supply the former referrals decrease.”

For this study, snowball sampling became useful when it came to analyzing and understanding the social construction of reality of the participants. This is due to their similar social networks. While the method of snowball sampling can be unpredictable (at times I had two interviews back to back, other times I waited weeks), this method, as suggested by Noy (2008), is interrelated to the method of interviewing. Since participants referred someone, there was already some type of

relationship that exist between one informant and the next—making it a little easier for me, as the researcher/ interviewer, to develop a level of rapport with each participants.

The following flow charts indicate the relationships between participants—these charts indicate who was referred by whom to participate in the research. (There is a short explanation that follows each flow chart of connections.)

Table 2: Web of Connection



As suggested by the flow chart, these ten participants share similar social networks. This is actually beneficial in understanding how these students interpret various symbols (i.e. the DREAM Act or the Differed Action) in their construction of reality, since through a symbolic framework, meanings of situations are often times defined by social interactions. While undocumented students are not accepted into American society, they maintain their social

networks to help aid in the pursuit of higher education—the optimism that is shared between the participants can be accredited to their similar social network.

By using a non-probability, snowball sampling, this study was able to address how these undocumented students construct their reality. Because of their hidden status, they often times share their struggles and experiences with each other providing each other with strategies to approach obstacles. As later discussed in my findings, these students at one point in their life encounter a significant other or group that influences their decision to pursue higher education. By sharing similar social networks, a few also share the significant other or group. For example, Jackie, Sarah, and Cindy all share a Go-center mentor who helped them with their college application and financial aid process. While snowball sampling was definitely a beneficial method of sampling for this particular study, it also has its limitations. The following section will discuss the limitations in this study. After discussing the limitations, I will discuss the triangulation of data—which aided in the development of the findings in this study.

Limitations

Although the findings and conclusion of this study helped raise an awareness regarding the issue of undocumented students in northern Texas through a symbolic framework and introducing into existing research the Deferred Action legislation, this study, has its limitations. While using the symbolic approach provided openness in dialogue and interpretation along with the addition of other theoretical frameworks during data analysis, there are limitations of this study that should be discussed.

First of all, the results of this research are not generalizable to the overall population of undocumented students—especially since I have only interviewed undocumented students currently residing in the DFW area. Because of the snowball sampling, I was interviewing students within the same network of friends who share some similar characteristics (as shown in

Table 2). By using snowball sampling, my sampling frame was very narrow. However, I chose a qualitative method of in-depth interviewing to study this phenomenon because I wanted to develop a deeper understanding regarding the issue of undocumented students. I wanted to see if the individual experiences of undocumented students, although unique in each case, may be a shared phenomenon with similarities and differences. Qualitative studies are often times are limited in their generalizability. Due to the nature of my research and the characteristic of my population, I was only able to do ten interviews during the span of my thesis. Their experiences, however, are each different and unique. I believe the methodology I have chosen does not seek to provide generalizability to the overall population, but it seeks to develop a deep understanding, *verstehen*.

While this study may not be generalizable to the overall population of undocumented students, to ensure the reliability of data, I used multiple sources. This next section will discuss the this study's triangulation of data.

Triangulation

Using Strauss and Corbin (1990), Byczkowska (2009:106) wrote, "Data triangulation gives us an opportunity to verify information from different sources, like interviewees, research stages, as all data has its strengths and weaknesses." While this study collected new data through the semi-structured interviews, primary documents, archival data, and extensive field notes (including observations during the interviewing process) were used. This triangulation of data provided insightful information for data analysis. For example, an understanding of family socioeconomic status was developed by using observation and field notes (taken during the interviews).

For each participant and each new interview, I had with me a clean interview questionnaire in which I took notes on and noted where follow-up questions were asked. (Since it is semi-structured, I did not have to completely follow the interview questionnaire.) For one particular

question, “What is your family’s estimated annual income?” I noted hesitations in the answer, long explanations, or even subtle movements i.e. participant “shifts in chair.” These observations and extensive notes aided in the construction of one of my themes regarding socioeconomic status. Triangulation is important in qualitative research in that it provides more solid and reliable data since it does not come from just one source.

Now, that I have discussed the method of in-depth interviewing along with its interrelation with snowball sampling, and provided a brief discussion on the triangulation of data, in the next section, I will discuss the overall research design of this study.

Research Design

In their study of the experiences of Polish immigrants adjusting to American society, Thomas and Znaniecki (1984) observed that the Polish immigrants have to gradually exchange, “his consciousness of American cultural values for Polish cultural values...” (1984:239) Using a phenomenological approach like Thomas and Znaniecki (1984), I want to understand how the experience of being marginalized and undocumented is shared between students in their integration into American society especially since undocumented students are also immigrants who are trying to integrate into the American educational system. Therefore, this study utilizes a qualitative in-depth interview instrument designed to investigate undocumented students and their construction of social reality.

Due to their need to remain hidden from the authorities, it is not possible to get a representative sample for this targeted population, forcing me to use snowball or nonprobability sampling. In this study, I define undocumented status as those without legal identifications i.e. social security number or green card, work visas, or those who have over stayed initially granted visa. This definition of undocumented student is commonly used in present literature; for instance, Munoz (2008) and Lopez (2007). This data of this study is grounded on in-depth semi-structured

interviews along with the triangulation of other types of data (field notes, observations, etc.) as discussed previously in this chapter.

This study takes place in DFW and involves ten participants. Data collection for this study began with the first interview on July 8, 2012 and ended with the last interview conducted on January 12, 2013. Participants in this study are all given informed consent (verbal or written upon participant's discretion) and promised confidentiality—only pseudonyms are used in place of participant's actual names in all records kept. Each participant is given a code number and no documentation of their identity is kept. Using Kvale (2006) and his discussion on the different types of interviews along with power dynamics, as the only interviewer in this study, I tried to provide some kind of power balance so that there is a more equal and open dialogue taking place.

First of all, respondents chose the location or method (in person or phone) of the interview. Due to their hidden immigration status, allowing participants to choose the location of the interview gave them control over the setting. As the interviewer, I had to be prepared to meet the participants at their desired location. Interviews were conducted at participants' homes, local coffee shops, and even fast food restaurants. The actual interview was approached as a platonic dialogue (Kvale 2006)—it was an exchange of information between the participant and I. While the whole interview was not solely a platonic process, I made sure to allow participants some control by accepting that the participants are the more knowledgeable ones—that I am there to learn from them. The interview times ranged from twenty five to approximately ninety minutes.

The interview questions focus on what factors contributed to their college decision process to questions involving their current and future outlook along with questions accessing their knowledge of existing policies and legislations (see Appendix A). Questions that shifted the power dynamic involved open-ended questions in which participants started to narrate their experiences along with questions involving legal legislation and political barriers—despite an

extensive literature review this area, these participants are the ones who have experience these barriers and effect of legislation. Many of the interview questions asked have been used by previous scholars in the area. For example, several questions came from Vega and Araceli (2010), Munoz (2008) and Lopez (2007). Due to the variety in their experiences, follow-up questions of specific situations were asked. These follow-up questions help in developing an understanding of how participants may interpret the world around them—in a symbolic and phenomenological approach, details of their life and background play an important role in the construction of the self.

Interviews are then transcribed verbatim by me, the primary investigator. All ten transcriptions went through an extensive coding process using Charmaz (2006) and Richards (2009). I started with the initial *line-by-line* coding as suggested in Charmaz (2006). I then moved on to *focused coding and theoretical coding*. “In short, theoretical codes specify possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focus coding” (Charmaz 2006: 63). While the interviewing process was time consuming, the transcription also took up a lot of time. “Transcription involves the complication process of translating from oral discourse to written language” —therefore, the full reality of the interview will not be “captured” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004: 200). Therefore, during the interviewing process of each participant, extensive written notes were taken so that as much of the reality of the interview can be captured.

The method of interviewing and triangulation of data gave me the opportunity to interpret the data using a symbolic theoretical approach—it allows for openness in dialogue, and rapport is developed during most of the interviews in which participants reveal some very personal information. There has to be some type of trust (whether it be because the participants were referred by someone that they trust or because this was done as through approval from an academic institution) for participants to reveal their immigration status. The following section will provide more details on the participants of this study.

The Participants

In this section, you will first find a description of the ten participant's characteristics including age of first arrival to the U.S., age at the time of interview, and how participants chose to identify themselves. A table is used to present these characteristics. It is very important, through a symbolic approach, to get to know the participants. By knowing who the participants are and their background, you will see how some of the themes discussed in this chapter arise—especially since symbolic interactionism focuses on the individual and the micro level interactions involved with the individual. Though undocumented students may each have their own unique experiences, they are connected through a group label and face barriers and limitations set by mainstream society. Due to the methodology of this study, a majority of the participants belong to the same network. Symbolic interactionism, according to Blumer, “is: a common set of symbols and understanding possessed by people in a group,” (Wallace and Wolf 2006:198)—by understanding the background and characteristics of these participants, this study comes to evaluate how they make use of symbols and meanings, how they construct and face a reality full of limitations and obstacles.

Data collected for this study came from ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Because of the hidden nature of the targeted population and method of snowball sampling, a very diverse group of students participated in the interview. I started with the very first participant Kathy (who was 23 at the time of the interview). This particular participant is someone I have known, who in the past, has talked to me about her immigration status. When I talked to her about my research, she was interested in the project. Kathy and I have known each other for over five years and I have heard her narrative regarding her immigration status in the past. Therefore, we already had an

established level of trust. I also contacted a former colleague who used to work with a Go-Center in DFW to see if she could pass on the information about my research project. From there, the snowball process began.

Out of the ten students, two have already obtain their bachelor's, and one is currently working on his PhD—both having obtained their first bachelor's from a four year, private institution in northern Texas. From the remaining eight participants: two are currently attending a public four-year university in Texas, four are attending a two-year college in Texas, and two are currently no longer enrolled in school (due to financial obstacles and familial expectations to be a provider). Although I planned to initially obtain five female and five male participants, because of the nature of my study and snowball sampling, I ended up with three male participants and seven female participants.

The following table, Table 3, summarizes some characteristics of participants in the study. The first column is the list of names (pseudonyms have been used to replace actual names of participants). The following two columns show the age of participants at the time of interview and age upon arrival to the United States. The fourth column is how participants chose to identify themselves, and the last column shows the participants' level of education.

Table 3: Summary of Ten Participants

Participants	Current Age	Age at Arrival	Identify As	Schooling
Kathy	23	1	Hispanic	BA
Joe	27	14	Mexican	In process: PhD
Andy	20	14	Mexican	In process: CC
Jackie	20	2 or 3	Hispanic	In Process: CC
Mary	23	11	Mexican	No longer enrolled
Andrew	24	12	Mexican and Hispanic	In process: CC
Maria	22	10	Mexican and Hispanic	No longer enrolled
Cindy	19	3	Hispanic	Public University
Sarah	18	2	Hispanic	Public University
Candice	19	4	Mexican	In Process: CC

(Note: CC indicates community college)

This table shows some basic characteristics of the ten participants. Their current age ranges from the youngest, 18, to the oldest, 27. The age of arrival is definitely very interesting to examine.

Sixty percent of the participants in this study arrived in the United States before or at the age of ten. The following paragraphs give a brief description of who these ten participants are.

Kathy, 23 is a university graduate with a BA in Economics, from Cuernavaca in the State of Morelos, Mexico. Kathy, currently works for a restaurant in Arlington, TX as a waitress. Kathy is a very small statured woman. She is well dressed and professional. I could barely notice her

accent during the interview. She is also a very articulate person. The interview was conducted at her home in Arlington, TX. Her parents grew up in poverty and decided to move to America so that their kids may have a better life. One of her greatest challenges as an undocumented student who went through higher education was financial aid, especially since she attended a private institution. It was an emotional interview. When I asked Kathy about how she feels after completing a degree at a prestigious institution in Texas and working as a waitress, she replied, “It’s very humbling, but at the same time it’s very discouraging. Um...It’s just, you see everyone graduating and continuing on and you know, establishing a career and it’s just like you’re stuck here...”

Joe, 27 has already obtained a BA in Physics and is currently working on his PhD. He came to the United States when he was 14. He was the only participant who is currently married, and who also through marriage obtained his residency. He is originally from Mexico. Joe, his wife, and his young son all reside in his in-laws home—two families under one roof. Joe’s parents live in an apartment complex nearby. The interview was conducted in Joe’s current home, with the presence of his wife and child. He is the oldest of my participants and currently the only one pursuing a professional degree.

Andy, 20 came to the States at the age of 14 and is currently enrolled at a community college. His interview was conducted at his job, a restaurant in Fort Worth, TX. He is a small statured man and very soft spoken. I remember the day that I interviewed him; it was during his break at work. He walked me into the restaurant and sat with me at an empty table. A white young man in his early twenties, who appeared to be his manager came over, and asked him what he was doing and was giving Andy a hard time for using a table that wasn’t being used. Andy and I moved to a different table, and I could see the manager keep looking at him. This interview was probably the most awkward one for me. I even told Andy I could meet him at a different time and place, but his schedule was pretty packed with school and work and he wanted to get the interview over

with. As I looked around me in the restaurant, the people in the manager or higher ranking shirts were mainly white male, while the servers and waiters were all people of a darker skin color, most of whom I would say are of Hispanic or Latino origins—it was pretty uncomfortable to conduct an interview in that setting.

Jackie, 20, is currently attending a community college in Fort Worth, TX. Her interview was conducted at a Starbucks in Fort Worth. Out of the ten people, I have interviewed, I think she is the most optimistic person. She was accepted into other four-year universities, one being the private university that *Kathy, 23*, graduated from. However, due to financial reasons, she decided to attend a community college first—almost certain that she will eventually transfer out. Something that really stood out for me during her interview was her estimated family income and how she perceives it. She told me that her family income was around twenty five thousand (family of four). What is interesting is after the recorder turned off and we sat and talked a bit longer, she mentions that she considers herself middle class. From that interview on, I decided to pay a closer attention on family income and where participant's see themselves on the socio-economic scale here in America.

Mary, 23, is initially from Mexico City. She is no longer enrolled in school. Mary and Andy both work at the same restaurant in Fort Worth, TX. She is the oldest of four children. I met her in person while conducting my interview with Andy; however, her interview was done over the phone. Two of her younger siblings are also undocumented, but the youngest one (8 years old) was born in the States. She was accepted into two other universities before enrolling at the community college for two semesters. One university could not help her with financial aid since she does not have a social security number. Mary mentioned that she has always wanted to become a teacher—something that is almost impossible under the current legal system.

Andrew, 24 and Maria, 22 both wanted to be interviewed together. They are siblings and are originally from Poluca, Mexico. Andrew came when he was 12 and Maria when she was ten 10. They chose the interview location, and it was at a McDonald's in Arlington, TX so that Maria's little boy can be in the playhouse while I conducted the interview. Andrew is currently enrolled in a community college and Maria is no longer enrolled in school, but rather is a full time at home mother who hopes to return to school in the future and obtain a medical degree. It was interesting to interview two people who are siblings that played a very important role in each other's lives.

Cindy, 19 came to the United States when she was three. She is originally from Irapuato, Mexico. Her interview was conducted through the phone. At the time of her interview, she had just completed her first semester at a four year university. Cindy wants to pursue a degree in computer science engineering. She was able to receive a scholarship for being in the top ten percent of her class. This scholarship helped cover half of her tuition. Therefore, her parents are helping her with the other half of the tuition. Like many other undocumented students, her parents came to the United States in search of a better life.

Sarah, 18 is currently attending the same university as Cindy, 19 and a nursing major. She came to the United States at the age of two. Her interview was also conducted by phone. Sarah is originally from Monterey, Mexico. It is interesting to note that the difference she sees between Hispanic (how she identified herself) immigrants and U.S. born Hispanics is that "they (U.S. born) get to do certain things that we (Hispanic immigrants) can't like drive. And they can go anywhere without having fear of getting caught." Sarah applied for the TAFSA to help aid in her educational expenses; however, she was given a number. Her number was thirty on the list, and the university only awarded twenty five TAFSA aids. She had a three thousand dollar scholarship that came with her from the I Have a Dream foundation, through her years in school starting in the first grade. Her parents are paying for the rest of her tuition.

Candice, 19 came to the United States from Guanajuato, Mexico when she was four. She is currently enrolled at a community college. Candice refers to herself as a “DREAMER,” a DREAM Act activist. She is currently involved with the North Texas Dream Team in helping people with the application of the deferred action. She wants to study nursing, but also recognizes the limitations that due to her immigration status, that this dream may not be possible within the near future. She mentioned that if she obtains a degree (in nursing) and still cannot be a nurse in the States due to her immigration status, she has considered the option of going back to Mexico to practice.

These ten participants, because of snowball sampling, share similar social networks. While it is important to understand that each individual participant all have unique experiences as undocumented students, they share similarities in their construction of reality—how they give and construct meaning of symbols.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a discussion on the methods used in this study, why these methods were are useful in a symbolic approach, and introduced the participants. Despite coming in with two major theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, this study did not used any one particular theory under these two traditions because both traditions emphasize the important of developing the subjective understanding, verstehen. The symbolic and phenomenological aspect of this study is reflected in the methodology—the interconnection of snowball sampling and in-depth interviews. All this leads to the following chapter on data analysis and findings.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter will discuss five themes that came about after analysis of data. These five themes derived from the triangulation of data discussed in Chapter IV. These themes all reflect a symbolic and phenomenological understanding of the reality that undocumented, marginalized students construct during their pursuit of higher education. It is interesting to see that by using a symbolic approach, two different areas of theory also started to play a role in the study—two theories that were not initially used in the study and are actually not a part of symbolic interactionism: Robert Merton’s Strain Theory and W.E.B Dubois’ double consciousness.

Negotiation of the Self: The I and the Me in Conforming or Innovating

For Mead, the self is made up of the *I* and the *Me*. While the *I* is seen as the spontaneous/impulsive response to a situation, the *Me* is what the individual has learned and internalized—how society expects the individual to behave. In a symbolic perspective, the individual is not just a passive self, but a self that consistently interprets symbols that give rise to actions and behaviors (Wallace and Wolf 2006) Undocumented students are facing challenges in developing the self—due to their marginalized status—which affects both the *I* and the *Me* , which are at conflict due to societal expectations and limitations

One of the main goals of this study is to understand how undocumented students construct their reality despite various limitations. In order to understand how they construct this reality, we must understand how they construct the self. As the *Me* keeps the *I* from acting spontaneously (often times against societal norms), the *I* gives the person the sense of individuality—not just conforming to every societal norm. With regards to undocumented students, the *I* and *Me* created two distinct groups of students: those who conform, and those who innovate.

While this is not a study on crime and deviance, this study found that two categories/patterns emerged—these two categories actually reflect that of Merton’s (1938) Strain Theory.

Conformity indicates the groups of students who accept the goal of higher education and who willingly obey the laws and rules set forth for them. The second groups, the innovators, are those who accept higher education as a goal, but do not fully accept all the laws and rules laid upon them i.e. driving without a driver’s license. For example, Maria, 22, stated, ““I mean obviously, you don’t have a license, but it’s like a necessity. You have to drive to get place. The same thing with work, you have to work and you have to make your way around it.”(Maria, 22) I think that the distinction between these two groups of undocumented students play a vital role in understanding how these two groups of students, although undocumented, construct their reality. While both groups construct their reality through the concept of hope, they adapt to the situations presented by society differently.

A very interesting analysis of these two groups has actually been present in another major work, Martinez-Calderon (2010). In the researcher’s dissertation chapter titled “Before the Law, With the Law, and/or Against the Law: Dilemmas Facing Undocumented Students,” the researcher discusses how, “undocumented AB540 students always think about the law and about how their actions may result in complex entanglements that are with it, by it, or against it. Showing how they interpret, make sense of, and use the law shines light on how the law appears in varied and oftentimes, contradictory ways that lead to varying perceptions of belonging and citizenship.”

(Martinez-Calderon 2010:62) While I did not focus on the criminological aspect of my study, I did find that as some of my participants were very skeptical about some everyday actions (i.e. driving without a license), others felt that these actions and decisions are a necessity.

Undocumented students continually negotiate their *self*—while higher education is greatly valued in American society, access to it is limited. The *I* and the *Me* work together in the maintaining the self (Wallace and Wolf 2006: 206). Undocumented students continue to negotiate their roles and status in society to fit the defined situation—whether or not to conform or to innovate. This brings forth a major theory under Symbolic Interaction and its application to the negotiated roles of undocumented students.

Dramaturgy in the Hidden Self

The self, through a symbolic approach, can be influenced by society and the situation. For Cooley (1902), the self that is developed is “a result of the information reflected back at you in the judgments of others with whom you interact.” (Wallace and Wolf 2006: 203) The way we perceived ourselves—from how we dress to how we behave—is significantly influenced by the society around us, how we “think” others perceive us. For Goffman (1959), our self is presented through what he terms impression management “the ways in which the individual guides and controls the impressions others form of him or her”—a dramaturgical analysis—which involves two regions front and back. (Wallace and Wolf 2006: 238). Undocumented students, continually negotiate their self in their construction of reality. Seen as the outsiders of society, their front region shows their confidence and optimism, while their back region shows insecurity and conflict in identity. This section will discuss how undocumented students portray a front and back region. While the data from the transcribed interview is very important in understanding the experiences of undocumented students, it is important to understand that while the recorder is

great tool, it puts a distance between the interviewer and the participant. Therefore, this theme derived from the triangulation of data.

The interviews in this study, as indicated prior to this section, were all recorded and transcribed. However, in the in-person interviews, it was when the recorder turned off that participants were more comfortable in portraying their background. An example of this is a discussion on family's socio-economic status. While financial hardship was definitely a common theme in all the participants of this study, the participants tended to give an explanation of their family socio-economic status—that yes they may struggle financially, but this only is because they decided to pursue higher education. Out of all ten participants, I would not describe any as middle class according to American standards—most falls within the lower middle/working class, and a few fall right above the poverty line. However, what I discovered from my interviews and especially talking to the participants after the interview, was a different definition of middle class.

When asked where they are in the social economic ladder, some participants assertively said “middle-class.” As mentioned earlier in the participant characteristics, Karen, 20, considers her family middle class despite actually falling very close to the poverty line. Andrew, 22, and Maria, 22 both consider themselves middle class. Andrew who supports his parents, family of three, estimates an income of around forty thousand; Maria, also a family of three including a toddler, estimates an income of about twenty-two thousand. Participants had a different construction of income level, and at first I thought this was due to the fact that many probably lived in wealthier conditions back in Mexico. Then, I thought, why is it then, that when asked why their families decide to come to America, the participants' replies were almost unanimous in saying “for a better future?” When the recorder was turned off and as I continued talking to participants, I learned that while culturally speaking, these participants may have a different perception of middle class probably because they have been taught to define the middle class as having “enough,” the term “middle class” was also used to hide stereotypical assumptions of mainstream

American society—a society which marginalizes and labels them as illegal immigrants. The participants' confidence and assertion in saying middle class is also reflected in their optimistic view of the future. When the recorder is turned off, participants showed more skepticism and uncertainty. One participant, for example, mentioned that though she has applied for the Deferred Action and sees a better future for herself, she was concerned for her family members during the whole process of application—what all the information she reveals would do to her family. Participants, in general, were comfortable discussing challenges and obstacles they face as immigrants and as undocumented students who want to identify themselves as Americans, but are not accepted in American society when they were not being recorded.

Undocumented students in pursuit of higher education have to play their front or back region with careful consideration—i.e. who they reveal their undocumented status to. If they reveal their back region of being undocumented, society will have different expectation towards them. As they keep their backstage hidden, they can more easily pursue their goal of higher education. Yet, at a certain point, their hidden status has to be revealed to a significant other or a group who influenced their decision to pursue higher education despite the limitations.

The Significant Other/Group

For symbolic interactionist like Mead and Blumer, the significant other plays an important role in the formation of the self. For undocumented students in this study, they encounter a significant other or group who influences their decision to pursue higher education despite the obstacles and challenges.

Being undocumented is a hidden status, and not something that people go around sharing. At a certain point in their life, undocumented students in this study encounter someone or some group who became a guide in their decision to pursue higher education. Students, while often time, try to conduct their own research regarding college application and financial aid, at one point or

another, a significant other or group comes into play. When they were asked how they discovered that college was an option, these participants replied with answers ranging from a high school coach, to college professors, and to organizations such as the Go-Center or I Have a Dream Foundation. The following are some replies from participants:

“That is the first year that I kind of talked to my Go-Center and that is how I learned more about it.” (Cindy, 19)

One particular student mentioned that she was told she couldn't pursue college, but her coach played a major role in her college application process:

“I guess the first time in high school that I found out there is a possibility that I couldn't go to college because I don't have my papers, cause of one counselor he told me that I couldn't, I ran to him and one day he sat down with me, he helped me investigate if I could or couldn't and once we found out that I could, he helped me investigate what schools, how can I apply to them, what's the difference between a citizen and noncitizen applying into college...uh...and he also helped me investigate cause I wanted to do Air Force at one point, so he helped me looked into the Air Force and found out that I couldn't do the Air Force so we just stuck to college and I would report back to him when I applied, when I got my acceptance letters, and he helped me edit my essays and resume.” (Jackie, 20)

This significant other or group has also been discussed by other scholars who have studied undocumented students. Villegas (2006: 60) wrote that “Participants indicated that major sources of support came from peers. These included friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, and members of organizations.” The reason I used the term “significant other/group” under this theme, rather than just peer support, is because my participants' responses indicated that the one individual or group of individuals played a significant role in contributing to their knowledge of higher education.

Some of the participants did not know that college was an option until their encounter with this significant other or group.

George Herbert Mead used the term “significant other” to describe the stage where a child learns the perspective of those important in their lives. For undocumented students, learning that college is an option is a perspective that is new to them. In order for them to develop this knowledge, some type of social bond must have been established between them and the individual or group in which they share their immigration status—whether it is a family member or a college professor—this person or group of individuals made a major impact in their decision to pursue higher education.

As they encounter their significant other/group, undocumented students are also constantly keeping up with changes in legislations and policies—policies such as the Deferred Action and the DREAM ACT, which are interpreted as symbols of hope. As the undocumented see these legislations as hope, they also understand the underlying politics.

Deferred Action: Hope for the Undocumented, Votes for the Politicians

In a phenomenological perspective, the interpretation of symbols plays an important role in the construction of reality. In this section, I want to discuss the role that legislations (with a strong focus on the Deferred Action) play in the experiences of undocumented students in this study.

Legislations like the Deferred Action send contradicting messages to the targeted population of this study—undocumented students. On one hand, it symbolizes hope—a major contributor to the optimistic reality that undocumented students in this study constructed for themselves, to hide the reality that is full of uncertainty, limitations, and constant fear. This section will discuss how the symbol the Deferred Action, as a symbol of hope, is also a process of further marginalization and control. It is important to note that the Deferred Action does not “legalize” undocumented students, but rather gives undocumented students permission to continue to stay in the United

States and obtain a work permit. It in no way is an amnesty that leads to some type of citizenship. Yet, for the participants of this study, it was hope and it was one step closer to a better future.

The Deferred Action was announced on June 15, 2012. The participants of this study were also split into two groups with regards to the application. Since one participant already obtained his residency, the nine other participants were asked whether they had applied for the Deferred Action before or after the November 2012 election to take into consideration difference in immigration policies between Democratic and Republican Party platforms. While six of the nine participants applied before the election, three applied after the election. Two of the three participants who applied after the election applied a week after the election. While agreeing that the Deferred Action policy is a huge step for undocumented students, that it was symbol of hope and a sign of progress, the participants in this study recognized it as a political strategy for Latino votes.

“I think it’s just a way of like you know, making the president look good and for him to get more like the Latino vote because they’re helping their students or their kids and stuff like that. And, I don’t know if it’s just a good way of saying, yeah chose me for next term or something but I mean you got the positive and negative about that. The positive is that it’s helping us too if we qualify.” (Mary, 23)

“I personally do not like Obama but I got to tell you he’s a brilliant strategist announcing such a thing so, you know, so close to re-election. That was brilliant, a brilliant move especially taking into account it is not a law yet it has to go through Congress so it’s no different than any congressman suggesting Dream Act. UH...But people, especially Hispanics who are you know, very hopeful people, they uh...heard the press say this and uh... believe that it was very close at hand—which I hope it is but then again.” (Joe, 27)

“I was filled with joy with because even though I know it’s a long process, and still something I have to apply for, it’s just that one you know glimpse of hope that we have for undocumented students. I can think that someday, I can apply for this work permit, it would extremely just...I was just overwhelmed with joy.” (Kathy, 23)

While most of the participants in this study saw the Deferred Action as a symbol of hope, they also approached it with caution and insecurity. They understood that for legislation like the Deferred Action to be passed, there are potential prices (i.e. information obtained about family members). Yet they continue to be optimistic. Hope is the basis of their construction of reality—it keeps them motivated to pursue higher education. While participants understood that after two years, under the Deferred Action, they must reapply for a work permit (and go through a similar process), they continue to be hopeful that the DREAM Act will eventually pass—that they one day will become American residents and eventually citizens.

“I had hopes that maybe, as the future came, things would change and if I did have an education by then, then I could get a good job...So, I would prefer to have an education and be prepared for the day when the future comes, for me to get set up by having a good education.” (Cindy, 19)

While given some aspect of hope through legislation like the Deferred Action, undocumented students continually face limitations and challenges in higher education—they are always up against and face different barriers set up by various institutions.

Against the System

Students who are undocumented are always up against the system—various institutions including: educational, political, legal economic, and to an extent, even familial. This section will discuss how the participants in this study have been against the system (institutions). While some studies have suggested that higher education is actually a way for undocumented to rebel against the societal expectations i.e. Vega Najera (2010), this study, through a symbolic approach shows

how undocumented students consistently face challenges in different institutions (focusing on the educational institution). It is important to understand the challenges that these institutions bring towards undocumented students because in a symbolic perspective, these institutions (macro and micro) define various situations and expectations towards undocumented students.

In the educational institution, undocumented students face both financial and legal barriers—due to their immigration status; they are often times ineligible for financial aid and scholarships.

Sarah who is eighteen for example, applied for the TAFSA, but was told she was on a waiting list since the school can only offer a limited number of TAFSA aid. Under the educational institution, undocumented students face language barriers depending on their demographic region. The issue of the English proficiency is once again present depending on the location of schools that undocumented students are enrolled in (Munoz 2008). Some school districts/ schools will have bilingual education whereas others don't. Munoz (2008) argues that the learning and testing environment in state schools are all English based, creating a very difficult barrier for immigrant students to overcome—also leading to the formation of an identity. “It almost seems as though acquiring English language skills equate with being less Mexican or conforming to the American culture.” (Munoz 2008: 72) English, according to Munoz (2008), plays a very important role in the experience and development of undocumented Mexican—English, was a way to be incorporated into the education system and form a sense of identity. While all the participants in this study were interviewed in English, Spanish was and for many, is still their primary language at home. Along with language expectations at home, they face other familial expectations in developing an identity.

Family, as an institution puts forth expectations towards undocumented students—often times without realizing the obstacles that undocumented students must face in higher education. For most participants in this study, their parents were not able to pursue higher education in their country of origin; therefore the pressure of attaining a degree falls on the participants. Here,

undocumented students often times have no familial resources with regards to pursuing higher education—they are not only first generation students, but they are undocumented students.

“My mom, my parents they always told me that I had to go to college, that education was very important. They weren’t able, my mom she just went to like some high school and my dad, I don’t think he even went to high school. So um...they always told me, my mom, whenever she was in Mexico she was a volunteer at the hospital and so she wanted to keep going to school but my grandparents didn’t let her keep going to school. And then my dad, he didn’t go to school either because at the time, he wasn’t interested, he had to wait, for his parents to have the money to help him out but he didn’t wanted to..” (Candice, 19)

“One of the main reason why she feels so strong about it is because she wasn’t able to continue on past junior high. She meant we have the opportunity here. She holds that very strongly, the value to education.” (Kathy, 23)

Parents of undocumented students therefore, have an expectation towards their children to pursue higher education. Education is not only seen an improvement of life, Joe 27, mentioned that his parents believe that education is “very necessary nowadays but they also have an illusion that education means you’re going to be rich, which is not the case but that’s their view.” One question I asked participants was their family’s reaction when they announced that they were going to college—the results: participants indicated that their family were excited and happy, and over half of the participants indicated that it was something that was already expected using the term “expected” or “they have always known.”

While facing challenges in the educational, political, and legal institutions, undocumented students face the familial expectations of completing a degree. Laws and policies on undocumented students constantly change whether good or bad, then, depends on the type of political platform (conservative versus liberal). Undocumented students face challenges in all

these various institutions. Through a symbolic framework, this study was able to show how various important institutions (from micro to macro) play a role in development of the self. As undocumented students are constantly up against the various systems, regardless of what institution it is, they continue to construct a reality build on hope and optimism.

Conclusion: Double Consciousness

One of my major questions entering this research project was why undocumented students decide on pursuing higher education, and in most cases, despite the knowledge of their future limitations with regards to financial aid, choosing of majors, careers, etc. What I found from these ten participants in their construction of reality is that the idea of hope and optimism surrounds their decision to pursue higher education—hope that one day policy changes will occur, hope that by the time they finish their degrees, they will be able to become a resident and obtain a job. Their status as undocumented students remains in their backstage region, and despite continually be marginalized through legal barriers, they maintain an optimistic and hopeful front. Yet undocumented students remain in a state of in-betweenness—a state in which W.E.B. Dubois coined as *double consciousness*.

Through a symbolic and phenomenological approach, this study is able to understand how undocumented students in higher education construct their reality. While given symbols of hope through pieces of legislation such as the Deferred Action, undocumented students continue to be reminded of their marginalized status as undocumented immigrants. They negotiate the *self* by either conforming or innovating. As they continue to be seen as outsiders in American society, they are in-between countries, and start to develop a double consciousness. This study has portrayed the sociology of everyday life for undocumented students—a life which is constantly challenge by various institutions and is lived through optimism and hope. The following section will provide some concluding thoughts and discussion on undocumented students.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

Introduction

Undocumented students continue to be marginalized in their pursuit of higher education. They maintain two contradictory statuses of “student” and “illegal immigrant” while facing a future full of uncertainty—a future that is socially constructed on the basis of hope. Due to their immigration status, they continually face challenges in mainstream American society—a society that perceives them to be outsiders while asking them to assimilate. Their legal status plays a major role in their experiences in the development of the self. While this study is not generalizable to the experiences of undocumented students across the nation, it does raise an important issue—the challenges and obstacles that undocumented students face in their pursuit of higher education needs to be addressed. This chapter provides a closing discussion on undocumented students by providing some recommendations future research and policy.

Future Research

Due to the limited existing literature on undocumented students in higher education, there are many possibilities for future research. In this section, I will discuss three areas of future research that can be addressed. These ideas for future research stem from this study. While the first suggestion for future study involves the possibility of addressing some of the limitations of this

study, the other two involves specific areas of focus: the Deferred Action legislation and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement).

If possible, future research should address some of the limitations of this study. Future research, if time allows, should definitely try to obtain a larger sample size of participants and especially participants in states that allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition and receive some state financial aid, along with those in states who do not. This will give better comparative results since state laws vary. A comparative study of existing data may also lead to some interesting studies. There are many studies done on undocumented students in various states and to compare the experiences of these students will establish more validity and reliability with regard to the results. Besides addressing some of the limitations of this study, future research should also focus in on the Deferred Action.

The Deferred Action allows undocumented students to obtain a work permit and everything that goes with it i.e. social security number and driver's license, but has no indication of residency status. These students, however, will not be legal residents or have the opportunity to become citizens. An interesting limitation on the work permit is that it expires after two years and students will need to reapply. My biggest concern is what happens when these permits reach the two years and there have been major changes in policy? Since the Deferred Action is a symbol of hope for so many undocumented student, many have and will continue to apply for this legislation—suggesting that a pretty large record will be obtained, records of the applicant's life, residency, job, etc. What will happen in two years when the work permit is expired?

Another area of interest that future research may be able to address is on the topic of ICE. During the last interview of a participant for this study, a whole conversation on ICE emerged. One participant, Candice, was my last interview and she was a Dream Act activist who refers to herself as a Dreamer. Her interview was very informative with regards to various aspects of being

an undocumented student. A major discussion that came about during the interview was the topic of ICE. Her interview was conducted on January 12, 2013. A day before the interview, I had come across a news article regarding another dream activist Erica Andiola and her family's encounter with ICE. Candice brought this up during the interview, saying that many people of the North Texas Dream Team knew Erica. She told me about how Erica's brother and mother were both taken in and were to be deported. This furthered my curiosity regarding ICE. I always read articles and hear news report on families being raided by ICE. Then, I thought, how does ICE choose which families to raid? Like I mentioned earlier in my research using Kim (2012), "There are currently an estimated 700,000 undocumented immigrants under the age of 30 who have graduated from high school in the United States, as well as an additional 700,000 currently under the age of 18 and enrolled in school." ICE has to have some type of record of undocumented families, and why only particular ones get raided?

As I kept thinking about the question, Candice gave me her own opinion on this issue:

"One of the reasons that Erica's house was raided because she is one of the main activist leaders in Arizona and it was kind of...well we see it, it was kind of kind of like a threat to scare her or something because I mean, not only that...in her case, that's what we think because of our leader... she was in 2006, her house got raided and they took her mom and they took her family and they didn't take her even though she was undocumented too and they took them and then...by doing the same thing that they did with Erica's case, her family was released and they have been here living in the United States since 2006. So I think the thing, why they did that to her was to kind of scare her and because I mean they don't like people standing up for themselves, they don't like all that and um...and I think that's one of the things."

After hearing this from Candice, I became more curious and decided to look up information on ICE and their raids. According to the Committee on Education and Labor (2007)—asking for a

more “humanitarian” approach from ICE—ICE raids have definitely led to very complicated situations. These complicated and emotional situations do not only affect the adults involved, but also their children—familial separation, fear, and in some situations lasting traumatic memories with the potential of post-traumatic stress syndrome:

“Let me tell you about Kebin Reyes, a U.S. citizen from my district. Kebin is just now 7 years of age. In March of 2007, when he was 6, ICE arrested his father. His father is his only parent in the United States and Kebin was a witness to his father’s arrest. When his father was arrested, Kebin was taken to a facility where he spent 10 hours in detention. His father was detained for 6 weeks, and during that time Kebin had no idea if he would ever see his father again. He experienced severe emotional trauma as a result.” (Committee on Education and Labor 2007: 3)

This is an area for future research. It is interesting to note that as ICE and government officials are pushing for more immediate action on illegal immigration, many areas of society are impacted, from social to political, and even economic. According to Miriam (2011):

“The Obama administration intensified a crackdown on employers of illegal immigrants, notifying another 1,000 companies in all 50 states Wednesday the government plans to inspect their hiring records.” If possible, future research should try to address undocumented students who have been impacted by ICE raids.

It will be interesting to see where future research will head with regard to undocumented students in higher education. Policy changes are happening rapidly and the experiences of undocumented students will vary significantly across the nation—unless a federal law is passed to address the limitations and obstacles that these students face in their pursuit of higher education.

Recommendations for Policy

For many undocumented students, they know very little of their home country. The participants I interviewed, despite being proud of their culture and heritage, for the most part, have not been able to visit their country of origin since they came to America—they cannot go back to Mexico, and they are not welcomed here in the States, they are in-between countries. While Deferred Action offers them a “permission” to stay here in the States, they are still in-between countries. Many of these undocumented students have been in the States at a young age, without any say of whether or not they want to be here. Their family came to the States in search of a better future:

“I know definitely my parents decided to come here because they wanted a greater opportunity for us. They didn’t want us to go through the same trouble they went through and uh...they grew up in poverty and they don’t want that for us. They wanted us to have a better opportunity.”

(Kathy, 23)

To keep the family together, rather than just one parent working here in the States, these undocumented students along with their family came to this Land of Opportunity in search for that better future. Munoz (2008:170) wrote:

“The DREAM Act is one of the most important pieces of legislation regarding immigration: It could provide undocumented immigrants the ability to achieve their college dreams while gaining a pathway to citizenship. This bill would provide a rapidly growing population the chance to increase their social and economic mobility.”

I understand that the Dream Act may be far in the future, but I do hope that some smaller policy changes will start to occur. One main factor that I feel would help undocumented students to pursue higher education is in-state tuition. Out of fifty states, and only twelve currently offer in-state tuition. In a study on the effects of in-state tuition policies on undocumented students, using logistic regressions, Stella (2010: 266) found that:

“Despite variation in immigration rates, history, and incorporation of Latino immigrant students into each respective state's school system, the data in this analysis indicate that the policies significantly increased the college-enrollment rates of Latino foreign-born noncitizens, a large percentage of whom are undocumented.”

By allowing undocumented students in-state tuition, this will encourage more to pursue higher education. After completing a degree at an institution of higher education, student should be able to apply for residency and be able to legally work. Undocumented students will be able to obtain a job in their field of study and contribute to the economy.

Concluding Thoughts

Through the course of this study, I have met some very passionate individuals. I have heard very personal stories of their lives, future goals and aspirations, etc. As mentioned in the introduction, I became interested in this area of study primarily because of the students I used to work with. By utilizing a symbolic and phenomenological analytical approach, I was able to understand a lot of the challenges that these students face in pursuit of higher education—I was able to develop a better understanding of the concept of marginalization. I know that this thesis does not encompass all the obstacles and challenges they face, but it is a start for social change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sample Questionnaire

Family

1. How would you describe your family?
2. How long has your family been in the U.S.? In the DFW area?
3. Where is your family originally from?
4. What are your family beliefs about education?
5. In your upbringing what specific things did your family do to help you in your schooling?
6. Which family members have been most influential or supportive in your college journey?
7. If you can, in detail, tell me about your family's reaction when you announced that you wanted to go to college?
8. How do you describe your college experiences to your family?

Education/Current Life

For those with a bachelors

1. What was your college experience like?
2. As an undocumented student, did you know that you were able to go on to college? How did you find out that college was an option?
3. Where did you attend school?

4. Did you enjoy studying there? Why?
5. Did you live on campus? (If yes, discuss the challenges of living way from your family—for you and your family members).
6. Did you join any campus organizations? If yes, what type of organizations?
7. What did you study?
8. How long ago did you obtain your bachelors?
9. What are you doing now? (School, work, etc.)
10. Where do you see yourself in ten years?
11. As an undocumented student, where you aware of the limitations that you will have to face in higher education? (i.e. Not being able to work, can't be in certain, etc.)? Why did you decide to pursue a college degree despite the knowledge?

For those about in process of obtaining a bachelors

1. What is your college experiences like?
2. As an undocumented student, did you know that you were able to go on to college? How did you find out that college was an option?
3. Where are you attending school
4. Do you live on campus?
5. What is your major?
6. What types of organizations are you involved in?
7. What have been your greatest challenges in college? What was your most negative experience in the classroom and outside the classroom?
8. What to you plan on doing upon graduation?
9. Where do you see yourself ten years from now?

Culture and Immigration

1. Where are you initially from?

2. How do you identify yourself? (Hispanic, Mexican, Latino, etc.)
3. What does it mean for you to be _____ (however they identify themselves)
4. What are some positive perceptions of your culture that you see?
5. What are some negative perceptions of your culture that you see?
6. Tell me a story about a time that you felt “Mexican” on campus?
7. Do you gain strength from your culture? If so, how?
8. How did culture play a role in your college experience?
9. How old were you when you came to America?
10. Did you attend school in your country of origin? If so, what was it like?
11. What do you remember most about your country of origin?
12. Why did you and your family come to America?
13. Do you have any siblings? If so, how old are they?
14. What was your earliest memory of America like?
15. Why did you and your family move to the US?
16. Describe an event that made you realize that you were no longer in (country of origin) anymore?
17. In your opinion, how are Mexicans immigrants different than US born Mexicans?

Dream ACT/Conclusion

1. Discuss the Dream Act legislation. What are your thoughts about this policy?
2. How familiar are you with laws and regulations regarding undocumented students in the State of Texas?
3. When thinking about your future, what do you fear the most?
4. Is there anything that you would like to add? Is there anything that you feel I should have asked you?

Appendix B

IRB Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012
IRB Application No: AS1265
Proposal Title: Undocumented Students: Construction of Reality and Higher Education

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 6/25/2013

Principal Investigator(s):

Jenny Nguyen	Jean VanDelinder
3602 N Washington F#28	412 Murray
Stillwater, OK 74075	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

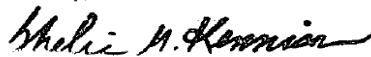
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Appendix C

Deferred Action Qualifications (Directly from: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2013)

Guidelines

You may request consideration of deferred action for childhood arrivals if you:

1. Were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012;
2. Came to the United States before reaching your 16th birthday;
3. Have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time;
4. Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making your request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS;
5. Entered without inspection before June 15, 2012, or your lawful immigration status expired as of June 15, 2012;
6. Are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and
7. Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety.

Age Requirements

Anyone requesting consideration for deferred action under this process must have been under 31 years old as of June 15, 2012. You must also be at least 15 years or older to request deferred action, unless you are currently in removal proceedings or have a final removal or voluntary departure order, as summarized in the table below:

Your situation	Required age
I have never been in removal proceedings, or my proceedings have been terminated before making my request.	At least 15 years old at the time of submitting your request and not over 31 years of age as of June 15, 2012.
I am in removal proceedings, have a final removal order, or have a voluntary departure order, and I am not in immigration detention.	Not above the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012, but you may be younger than 15 years old at the time you submit your request.

Timeframe for Meeting the Guidelines

You must prove	
That on June 15, 2012 you	As of the date you file your request you
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were under 31 years old • Had come to the United States before your 16th birthday • Were physically present in the United States • Entered without inspection by this date, or your lawful immigration status expired as of this date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have resided continuously in the U.S. since June 15, 2007; • Were physically present in the United States; and • Are in school, have graduated from high school in the United States, or have a GED; or • Are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States

Education and Military Service Guidelines

Your school or military status at the time of requesting deferred action under this process	Meet education or military service guidelines for deferred action under this process (Y/N)
I graduated from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public or private high school; or • Secondary school. Or • I have obtained a GED. 	Yes
I am currently enrolled in school. See the Education section of the FAQs for a full explanation of who is considered currently in school.	Yes
I was in school but dropped out and did not graduate. I am not currently in school and am not an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the U.S.	No

Your school or military status at the time of requesting deferred action under this process	Meet education or military service guidelines for deferred action under this process (Y/N)
I am an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the U.S.	Yes



Collect documents as evidence you meet the guidelines.

You will need to submit supporting documents with your request for consideration of deferred action for childhood arrivals. You can submit legible copies of these documents unless the instructions specify you must submit an original document.

Examples of Documents to Submit to Demonstrate you Meet the Guidelines
Please see the [instructions](#) to Form I-821D, [Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#), for further details on acceptable documentation.

Proof of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passport or national identity document from your country of origin • Birth certificate with photo identification • School or military ID with photo • Any U.S. government immigration or other document bearing your name and photo
Proof you came to U.S. before your 16th birthday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passport with admission stamp • Form I-94/I-95/I-94W • School records from the U.S. schools you have attended • Any Immigration and Naturalization Service or DHS document stating your date of entry (Form I-862, Notice to Appear) • Travel records • Hospital or medical records

<p>Proof of immigration status</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form I-94/I-95/I-94W with authorized stay expiration date • Final order of exclusion, deportation, or removal issued as of June 15, 2012 • A charging document placing you into removal proceedings
<p>Proof of presence in U.S. on June 15, 2012</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent receipts or utility bills • Employment records (pay stubs, W-2 Forms, etc)
<p>Proof you continuously resided in U.S. since June 15, 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School records (letters, report cards, etc) • Military records (Form DD-214 or NGB Form 22) • Official records from a religious entity confirming participation in a religious ceremony • Copies of money order receipts for money sent in or out of the country • Passport entries • Birth certificates of children born in the U.S. • Dated bank transactions • Social Security card • Automobile license receipts or registration • Deeds, mortgages, rental agreement contracts • Tax receipts, insurance policies
<p>Proof of your student status at the time of requesting consideration of deferred action for childhood arrivals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School records (transcripts, report cards, etc) from the school that you are currently attending in the United States showing the name(s) of the school(s) and periods of school attendance and the current educational or grade level • U.S. high school diploma or certificate of completion • U.S. GED certificate
<p>Proof you are an honorably</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form DD-214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from

discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the U.S.

Active Duty

- NGB Form 22, National Guard Report of Separation and Record of Service
- Military personnel records
- Military health records

VITA

Jenny Nguyen

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: "A DREAM DEFERRED": UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS AND HIGHER
EDUCATION

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Sociology at
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at Texas
Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas. in 2011.

Experience: Oklahoma State University Sociology Symposium
Stillwater, Oklahoma
February 2, 2013