

ABSTRACT

Conceptualizing the Undocumented College Student's Legal Status

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Undocumented students in pursuit of a college education face a unique intersection of conflicting identities: one that potentially gives them a higher societal status by joining the social category of “college student,” and one that is associated with a social stigma that comes from the label of “undocumented.” Higher education institutions provide a place for undocumented students to navigate their legal status identity, make sense of it, shape it, and define it. In addition, the impact college has on a student's social status can profoundly affect their life through opportunities for movement within society. This research study explored the following question: What is the role of college in how an undocumented student defines status ownership?

Conceptualizing the Undocumented College Student's Legal Status

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DEDICATION

To my brothers, Fermín and Luis Mendoza
You were the source of my inspiration for this study.

To all undocumented students in higher education
I hope that wherever you are, you know that you are not forgotten.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“I want to get deported publicly,” my brother said to me over the phone. We were both undocumented college graduates hoping for the Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) to pass. Our degrees meant nothing if we could not use them due to our legal status in the United States. However, there was a difference between us. Holding on to our dreams was not enough for my brother; he was willing to bring attention to the issue of immigration publicly and pursue fair consideration for all undocumented students. I, on the other hand, was not ready to be open about my undocumented legal status. This contrast between us, despite similar backgrounds and experiences, raised this question for me: did our individual college experiences make a difference in how we perceived our legal status and the extent to which we took ownership of it?

This story was the touchstone for my scholarly interest in this issue. However, protests for immigration reform at the national level fed the social context from which my personal and academic interests grew. A few months ago, 30 young people who lived in the U.S. but lacked legal documentation, attempted to cross back into the country through a legal port of entry and surrendered themselves to U.S. authorities (The Huffington Post, 2013). This was the second time that a group of undocumented youth protested against the Obama Administration’s record-high deportations. In 2012, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency set a deportation record that was three percent higher than

2011 (Washington Post, 2012). No longer bystanders to the legal and ethical debates, undocumented students have made their plights known through public marches and organized immigrant rights protests. Often, national newspapers frame public demonstrations of student activism in a positive light by acknowledging the activists' passion for change and portraying them as inspiring young people (Veléz, Perez Huber, Benavides Lopez, de la Luz & Solorzano, 2008). This increase in activism has been propelled primarily by immigrant youth-led organizations, such as United We Dream, whose mission is to promote fair treatment of immigrant youth and families. Their persistence in advocating for human rights has provided awareness about the DREAM Act, a bill that would allow undocumented students who meet certain criteria to apply for conditional, authorized legal residence in the United States for six years. Due to the current national events, scholarly interest in students with undocumented status has increased. Before attempting to understand this student population, it is important to understand the legal context of their situation.

Legal Context on Education for Undocumented Students

Researchers estimate that 11.6 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States. Of this number, between 7,000 and 13,000 undocumented students are enrolled in college across the nation (Fact Sheet E4FC, 2014). “An undocumented student is a foreign national who: (1) entered the United States without inspection or with fraudulent documents; or (2) entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status and remained in the United States without authorization (as defined by the National Immigration Law Center)” (E4FC Fact Sheet, 2014). Most undocumented college students have lived in the United States for more than 5 years,

since it is a requirement to have attended and graduated from a U.S. high school to be considered a candidate for higher education (“Creating opportunities,” 2013).

Undocumented students in this situation are also referred to as the “1.5 generation.”

According to Gonzales (2009), undocumented students “are not first-generation immigrants because they did not choose to migrate, but neither do they belong to the second generation because they were born and spent part of their childhood outside of the United States. In a sense, they straddle two worlds” (p. 7). The large number of undocumented students is also a result of the Plyer v. Doe case, a Supreme Court ruling that grants undocumented students legal access to K-12 education but does not address these students’ access to education after high school.

Plyer v. Doe

In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled that undocumented students could receive legal access to public K-12 education (Pérez, 2012, p. 5). This decision provides undocumented students with access to formal public education until they reach college age. The educational options of undocumented students are no longer assured when they graduate from high school because they are no longer protected under Plyer v. Doe. Many undocumented students attend school within the U.S. education system from an early age and aspire to many of the same dreams of attending college as their documented peers. However, although they may pursue postsecondary education, they still face many barriers including state policies and an undefined legal status in the United States.

State Policy

There is no federal law that creates provision for undocumented students to participate in higher education. Due to the absence of federal law on the issue, states deal with access to higher education for undocumented students independently. Some states have taken action by permitting undocumented students who meet certain criteria to attend a public higher education institution and pay in-state tuition. Currently, seventeen states allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Washington (“Allow in-state tuition,” 2014). Oklahoma and Rhode Island allow in-state tuition rates only through Board of Regents decisions (“Allow in-state tuition,” 2014). Allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition aids their access to higher education but does not necessarily make higher education accessible if the student cannot afford to pay for it. Texas was among the first states to extend access to a higher education by allowing undocumented students to apply for state-funded grants. California has also joined this initiative as a state that grants extended access. Though undocumented students may receive state aid in Texas, New Mexico, and California, they are banned from receiving federal aid to fill the financial gaps in their financial aid packages. Other states, such as Alabama and South Carolina, have passed bills prohibiting undocumented students from enrolling in public higher education institutions in those jurisdictions (“Allow in-state tuition,” 2014). For those undocumented students who do not live in a state that allows in-state tuition or who find the in-state tuition unaffordable, the dream of a college degree is unattainable. Though some states allow undocumented students to receive state financial help, the only

unifying legal considerations for this student population are the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and the DREAM Act.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

The most recent legal consideration that benefits undocumented students is the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program signed by President Obama on June 15, 2012. DACA allows certain individuals who came to the United States as children and who meet certain criteria to request deferred action for two years (USCIS website, 2013). Deferred action postpones removal action from the United States and allows for work authorization of qualified applicants for a two-year time period; however, it does not provide a lawful status for those who are approved under the program (USCIS website, 2013). DACA is a standard measure granted by the federal government that temporarily relieves qualified undocumented students from deportation but does not confer the legal status that the DREAM Act seeks to provide. Therefore, this temporary relief still leaves individuals with an undefined legal status.

The DREAM Act

The Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) has been the primary possibility for legalization of undocumented students in recent decades. The bill was first introduced in 2001 and would benefit students who fit the following criteria: (1) entry into the United States before age 16; (2) continuous presence in the United States for 5 years prior to the bill's enactment; (3) receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent; and (4) demonstration of good moral character (Pérez, 2012, p. 8). The DREAM Act would allow undocumented students who meet the

criteria to apply for conditional legal status and have authorized legal residence for up to 6 years. During this 6-year period, the student would be required to attend college or serve in the military to earn permanent residency (Pérez, 2012, p. 8). Various attempts have been made to pass the DREAM Act, with the latest attempt in December 2010 when the bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives but fell short five votes in the Senate (Immigration Policy website, 2013). It is currently unclear whether the DREAM Act will be re-introduced as a standalone legislature or as part of a broader comprehensive immigration reform plan.

The Unique Educational Experience of Undocumented Students

Plyer v. Doe allows undocumented students access to a K-12 education; however, only certain states provide access to a higher education and only a few provide the benefit of in-state tuition. The inconsistency between state policies makes each student's college experience different based on the legal context of the state in which they reside. Because the DREAM Act has repeatedly stalled in Congress, the educational fortunes of undocumented students remain uncertain. Nevertheless, thousands of undocumented students pursue and attain a higher education degree every year (Fact Sheet E4FC, 2014). Their presence in higher education institutions makes it necessary for administrators and student affairs professionals to understand their situations and personal experiences if they desire to support this student population.

Current Studies on Undocumented Students

An increase in research focusing on undocumented students has resulted from the national attention groups of undocumented youth advocating for immigration reform

have received. The literature on undocumented students in higher education explores the variety of challenges they encounter. Foci include barriers to enrollment (McWhirter, E. H., Ramos, K., & Medina, C., 2013), factors that impact undocumented students' success, resilience, and perseverance in college (Parker, K., 2012), the socioemotional and academic experiences of undocumented students (Coronado, H., Cortes, R., Pérez, W., & Ramos, K., 2010), the effect of undocumented status on students' mental health (Gonzales, R.G., Suárez-Orozco, C., & Dedios-Sanguinetti, M.C., 2013), and the effects of law and policies on the perception of societal integration of undocumented students (Gildersleeve, R.E. & Hernandez, S., 2012).

The recent research on student identity of undocumented students recognizes three stages of student development (Ellis, 2006). The cognitive approach to the progression of undocumented student identity development includes increased awareness of their identity as it develops in relationship to their legal status. According to the study, students first become aware of the social, professional, and educational opportunities they are unable to obtain and react with emotions of frustration, anger, and or confusion (Ellis, 2006). The second stage involves individuals "counteracting the victimization of their undocumented status by actively searching for means to voice their experience" (Ellis, 2006, p. 54). The final stage refers to the way undocumented students address the incongruence between their American Dreams and their legal status and includes a range of plans of how they would either pursue their professional lives in another country or wait for the DREAM Act to pass (Ellis, 2006). This body of research addresses student identity formation from a cognitive perspective, but not from a sociological perspective. These studies offer important and useful information on how to better understand and

support this student population within higher education. However, the role college plays in an undocumented student's social status formation and how this interacts with the socially constructed implications of being undocumented in the United States has not been explored in tandem.

The Impact of College on Students

Developmental and psychological frameworks dominate the literature on the impact of college on students (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). Studies examining change in college students from a psychological perspective have presented explanations about the internal cognitive process of development they undergo, including intellectual and ethical development (Perry, 1970), reflective judgment (King & Kitchner, 1994), self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001), moral development (Kohlberg, 1979), and ways of knowing (Gilligan, 1982/1993). These frameworks usually describe models, theories, or stages through which students move in part as a result of their collegiate experience. For instance, Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993) articulate a stage model theory of seven vectors for students' psychosocial development in college. Decades earlier Nevitt Sanford (1966) was one of the first to look at the person-environment interactions and the resulting effect on students based on the amount of challenge and support they receive from faculty, peers, and their own campus engagement. More recent research on the impact of the college environment on students explores the role of campus environments. These authors make suggestions for creating environments that foster college student educational success (Strange & Banning, 2001).

The impact college has on a student is less often considered from a sociological standpoint. Feldman and Newcomb (1969) were among the first to question the impact of

college on students from this perspective. Soon after, Feldman (1972) noted the non-cognitive impact college has on students and highlighted the impact it has on a student's social position. As students progress through college, labels concerning their identity, such as those associated with their future occupation, are pressed upon them by their peers, faculty, and staff (Feldman, 1972). This social labeling legitimizes a new social identity that Kaufman and Feldman (2004) further researched. Using Feldman's (1972) framework, Kaufman and Feldman (2004) focused on the extent to which the college experience allows an individual to form a particular sense of self. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) referred to this newly formed identity as *felt identity*. They sought to understand how students construct a revised form of self as a result of the new social status of "college student" they receive simply by entering college. By being a part of this new social category, Kaufman and Feldman (2004) argue, students piece together an identity that has less to do with internal cognitive development and more to do with the way they construct their identities from social norms and environmental cues about what college allows students to be and to do. This reformulation of identity is further reinforced through the validation they receive from their role as college students, often from peers, parents, faculty, and others inside and outside the collegiate environment. Furthermore, a student's felt identity includes their individual personal traits or characteristics and their status or positional identities (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). This research drew on Kaufman and Feldman's felt identity framework, focusing on legal status as a sub-set of the "status and positional identities" component of felt identity they describe. The role of college as an entrance to a new social status uniquely affected this particular student

population due to their legal standing in the United States and the social implications this legal standing has on their identities.

Undocumented Student Identity

Undocumented college students are often in a conflicted situation where they bear the social status of a college student and the social implications of being undocumented. Students in this situation often find it difficult to reconcile incongruent identities. For many, it is the first time they confront the social constraints of their undocumented identity. Many of these students define what this means to them in ways they had not considered before. As young adults, they begin to face the inevitable challenges of undocumented immigrants, including some of the social constraints of this legal status. The most evident of these social constraints are tangible forms of access and opportunity: obtaining a drivers license, a library card, buying a cell phone, or even renting a movie (Pérez, 2012). The thought of facing the discomfort that comes from exposing their legal status may encourage avoidance of situations that would put them at risk or manifest stress (Pérez, 2012).

Less obvious and more powerful than the fear that results from disclosing their legal status is the social stigma that comes from the label of being undocumented. Undocumented youth begin to form a sense of embarrassment when pursuing small tasks that require some type of legal identification. Despite the social stigma undocumented students face, they also learn to minimize their feelings towards the strain that comes with their legal condition (Pérez, 2012). Respondents in a study by Pérez (2012) coped with their undocumented status by self-decriminalizing: they perceived their reasons for coming to the United States as compelling enough to legitimize their circumstances

(Pérez, 2012). Furthermore, the student respondents in the study sought to see their lives beyond the lens of an undocumented individual. Instead, they reframed their condition to one of self-determination. Making meaning of their undocumented identity may be embraced through self-determination or even through acts of activism. In the case of the undocumented student, activism has been common in both direct and indirect forms; the former involves physical forms of activism and the latter is often embodied through written biographies of lived experiences (Vélez, et al., 2008).

Undocumented students often make a decision on whether to conceal or reveal their identity based on the context and whether or not they feel it is favorable or hostile (Pérez, 2012). Similarly, an undocumented student's perception of his or her legal status involves the environmental context. Leisy Abrego (2011) explores the diverse experiences of *legal consciousness* of undocumented immigrants. The study of legal consciousness is "the search for the forms of participation and interpretation through which actors construct, sustain, reproduce, or amend the circulating (contested or hegemonic) structures of meanings concerning the law" (Silbey, 2005, p. 334). Thus, legal consciousness refers to the way an undocumented person understands, interprets, and applies the law everyday (Abrego, 2011). Moreover, the extent to which a person makes claims or voices his or her concerns requires that person to be aware or be informed of existing rights (Abrego, 2011). The legal consciousness of members of the 1.5 generation differs from the legal consciousness of first-generation undocumented immigrants due to their knowledge and awareness of the law. As a result, "legal consciousness for undocumented youth seemed to be shaped less by a concrete fear of deportation and more by a sense of stigma from recognizing that there are rights and

privileges that are unavailable to them due to their status” (Abrego, 2011, p. 350). This differs from their adult, first-generation immigrant counterparts who often experience fear as a result of their identity as illegal workers and the different context in which they live. The varying school and work experiences affect an undocumented person’s ability or inability to demand rights while in the United States (Abrego, 2011). These findings highlight the ways that their experiences shape their legal consciousness. Furthermore, Abrego’s work also illustrates the impact of the physical and social context on the way undocumented persons make meaning of their legal status and identity.

Statement of the Problem

Undocumented students in pursuit of a college education face a unique intersection of conflicting identities: one that potentially gives them a higher societal status by joining the social category of “college student,” and one that is associated with a social stigma that comes from the label of “undocumented.” Higher education institutions provide a place for undocumented students to navigate their legal status identity, make sense of it, shape it, and define it. In addition, the impact college has on a student’s social status can profoundly affect their life through opportunities for movement within society, whether that is in America or in their country of origin. This study makes an implicit assumption that undocumented students ought to be granted access to higher education and be supported in the process by institutions of higher education. This presumption is controversial, and administrators and government officials do not generally agree upon it. This research study explored the following question: What is the role of college in how an undocumented student defines status ownership? This question was further focused by these sub-questions:

- (1) What aspects of the college environment have an impact on undocumented participants' self-perceived legal identity?
- (2) Do undocumented participants' experiences in higher education change the way they make meaning of their legal status?
- (3) In what ways and for what reasons do participants expose their undocumented status?
- (4) What does *status ownership* mean to undocumented participants?

Significance

College impacts students in complex ways, as noted in the aforementioned studies, research, and theories. This study provided an opportunity for students to be heard and to continue on their process of gaining self-awareness as they made meaning of their own identities through their participation in this research. In the case of the undocumented student, studies have addressed several aspects of their college experience. However, the role college plays with specific regards to the new social identity undocumented students incur and the impact this has on their identity required consideration. As a result, the goal of this research was to provide insight into the social and environmental aspects of how college influences undocumented students' self-perceived identities. The findings provide higher education administrators and student affairs professionals with an opportunity to further understand the connections between college as a certification into a new social status and the way this new social status impacts students who enter college with the socially-rejected label of illegal. Furthermore, this research reveals new ways to understand this student population at such a critical time in the history of immigration in the United States.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

This chapter synthesizes existing literature on the topic of undocumented students in higher education, demonstrating the need to better understand the impact of college on how this population perceives their legal status from a sociological perspective. In the following review, I highlight three particular gaps that this proposed study addresses. The literature demonstrates the importance of the specific elements of this study (undocumented students, college context, and sociological perspective). However, in each case the existing literature addresses one or more elements of this study but none of these studies incorporates all three. First, the literature demonstrates a preoccupation with a psychological analysis of undocumented students' lived experiences in higher education (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012). The literature addresses the undocumented student experiences but not from a sociological framework. Second, the body of literature that does currently address the impact of college on students from a sociological perspective in most cases does not include undocumented students (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012). Important studies focusing on the impact of college on students such as Kaufman & Feldman (2004) does not include consideration of legal status. Third, research on undocumented students that is from a sociological perspective does not consider the role of college context. Existing literature demonstrates social context makes a difference in the way a person who is undocumented perceives his or her standing with the law, yet it does not specifically address the social context of higher education (Abrego, 2011).

Undocumented Students in Higher Education

Existing literature may benefit from the expansion of research focusing on undocumented students from a non-psychological framework. The current literature regarding undocumented students in higher education typically describes the undocumented student experience from a psychological and developmental perspective. Researchers have focused on the factors that impact undocumented students' success, resilience, and perseverance in college (Parker, 2012), their barriers and stories of fear, drive, and survival (Gadson, Gaffney, Hernandez, Hernandez, Huftalin, Ortiz, & White, 2010), barriers to enrollment (McWhirter, Ramos, & Medina, 2013), the socioemotional and academic experiences of undocumented students (Coronado, Cortes, Pérez, & Ramos, 2010), the effect of undocumented status on students' mental health (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013), the career development process for undocumented students (Hinojosa & Ortiz, 2012), and others specifically analyze the effects of in-state tuition policies on undocumented student identity (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012).

The role of social context and its implications for undocumented students has only recently begun to appear in the literature. Some studies have explored the impact of social contexts on undocumented students, though the focus remains largely on the cognitive effects social context has on undocumented students. For instance, researchers have examined the influence of social contexts on a student's college choice process (Gildersleeve, 2010), and in the way the pre-college context shapes undocumented students histories of participation in higher education (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010). A related study of the factors that shape undocumented, Latino high school and college

students' pathway to college examines the pre-college experiences related to their higher education access (Pérez, 2012, p. 21). This study suggests that many undocumented students live a dual life: one in which they live with the social stigma that comes from being undocumented and one in which they choose to look past it and persevere with a sense of agency (Pérez, 2012). Undocumented students can come to terms with their legal status and pursue their lives with resiliency during their transition to adulthood (Pérez, 2012). This process requires developing through social constraints and barriers cognitively: perseverance, self-determination, and self-decriminalizing. The current research on undocumented students in higher education provides a wealth of information and insight on some of the societal impacts undocumented students experience pre-college and the implications these have on their path to college. By discussing the social barriers and challenges undocumented students face on their path to college, this research demonstrates the need for studies that more closely examine how students perceive their legal status as a result of their direct and indirect interactions within the context of higher education. Moreover, the meaning undocumented college students make of their unusual position of conflicting identities requires further exploration from a sociological perspective. In a recent synthesis of the most influential research done about undocumented students, Ryan Gildersleeve and Susana Hernandez (2012) recognize that "there is growing literature documenting the experiences of undocumented immigrant students" (p. 15) but that this literature has a "psychological foundation" (p. 19). As a result, their recommendation for "more work to take interdisciplinary approaches" demonstrates the need to look at the lived experiences of undocumented students from alternate perspectives (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012, p. 19).

The Role of Social Context in the College Experience

Feldman (1967) was among the first to note that college impacts students in more than just academic ways. Research on the role of the social context in a college student's self-perceived identity generally relied upon psychological explanations that made only cursory inclusion of the social environment until Peter Kaufman and Kenneth A. Feldman (2004) considered college as "an arena of social interaction" (p. 463). The authors draw upon Feldman's (1972) claim that college impacts students in non-cognitive ways, including impacting a student's social position. Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) work also calls attention to the idea that students take on a new social status as part of their identity when they become a college student. They further explore the extent to which college allows students to construct or form this new social identity, or felt identity, by approaching the concept of college as a structural location that enables individuals to enact the social label of "college student" now integrated into their identity. The labels imposed on the student by his or her peers, faculty and/or staff validate the student's new self-constructed social identity and certify students for certain social positions (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). Kaufman and Feldman vaguely address a student's status as a characteristic of a student's self-perceived identity, and it is unclear whether they had in mind statuses such as the legal standing of an undocumented student, though this concept certainly fits within their concept of social status. Here, I presume legal status to be a characteristic of a student's self-perceived identity because legal status is an important aspect to the lives of undocumented students that affects how they perceive themselves and how they interact. Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) findings demonstrate ways in which the social context of college can change how students make

meaning of their identity and experience. In their framework, the focus is on how students construct their role as college students and the new form of self that results from this social certification. This research study examined the role of college on the unique position undocumented students are in due to their legal status and attempted to understand how college impacts an undocumented student's perception of his or her identity. In this study I explored the participants' identity through the concept of *status ownership*.

Undocumented Student Identity and Self-Awareness

Examining the legal consciousness of undocumented immigrants according to their social position and age at migration presents a way to understand how undocumented individuals make claims about their existing possible rights. Abrego (2011) suggests there is a difference in the legal consciousness experienced by different undocumented immigrants: individuals who are with the law and those who are against the law. Individuals who are with the law are those who are aware of the law and may find it easier to make claims of their rights; these were usually members of the 1.5 generation because they argue that they did not have a choice in coming to the United States (Abrego, 2011). Those who are against the law are individuals who may not find it as easy to make claims because they see the law as the authority; members of the first generation are "against the law" because they made a conscious decision to immigrate, and thus, live consciously under the fact that they are breaking the law (Abrego, 2011, p. 341). As a result, members of the 1.5 generation are more likely to experience stigma rather than fear related to their status. On the other hand, members of the first generation, who knowingly broke the law by immigrating illegally, experience fear of the law due to

their negative experiences with the law. Both fear and stigma result from the individuals' perception of their legal consciousness and can further affect the limit to which a person is able to defend his or her human rights. The lived experiences of undocumented youth and the experiences of undocumented people who immigrate at a later age are varied based on their school or work context. This difference in legal consciousness makes it evident that social context has an influence on undocumented individuals.

Abrego's (2011) findings pose both the idea that undocumented individuals experience legal consciousness differently based on the social context and their environment. In addition, legal consciousness is related to the way they are able to voice their claims to potential human rights. This existing research also shows the importance of the difference between environments on the way an undocumented individual experiences legal consciousness. However, Abrego (2011) and others do not specifically explore how the college environment may have a particular effect on the undocumented student. Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) framework on the impact of college addresses both the self-perceived identities and formation of self-perceived identities within spaces provided by institutional environments. My study bridges these two research strands by uniting the elements of undocumented students, college context, and sociological perspective.

CHAPTER THREE

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework of the effect of college on student identity drew upon Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) felt identity formation study. Their research approach was based on Feldman's (1972) work that differentiated between cognitive and sociological theoretical approaches to college students' change and stability. Feldman (1972) highlights this sociological approach and distinguishes it from typical developmental frameworks, which are primarily concerned with the notion of student progress, growth, and/or maturity in college and are often illustrated through linear stage models (Fig. 1.A). Feldman notes that college can impact students in non-cognitive ways, including the movement of students within a social system (Feldman, 1972). In this orientation, "theorists concentrate on the distinctive life-cycle and social-system context of college students by emphasizing the societal functions of higher education. The impact of college is analyzed in terms of the movement of students within a general, national social system in which college is a subsystem in interaction with other sub-systems" (Feldman, 1972, p. 11).

Kaufman and Feldman (2004) also diverge from the common psychological paradigm that dominates the study of college on student identity (Figure 1). They focus on students' self-perceived identities (or felt identities) from a sociological perspective, in contrast to the typical psychology-based models and theories (Fig. 1.A). Like Feldman

(1972), their work calls attention to the idea that most students take on a new social status as part of their identity by the simple act of enrolling in college. This new social status is validated or “certified” by the labels imposed on the student by his or her peers, faculty, and/or staff as the student integrates into and navigates through college (Fig. 1.B).

“College certifies students for certain social and occupation positions in the world (usually of the middle and upper-middle classes), channels them in these directions, and to some extent ensures them of entrance to such positions” (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004, p. 464). Their focus is on the way students construct their role as college students and the new form of self that comes from this social certification, rather than on how they cognitively develop through a process of maturation into a social status. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) further explore the extent to which college allows students to construct or form particular felt identities. They use the concept of college as a structural location that enables individuals to enact the social label of “college student” now integrated into their identity.

The model and assumptions of Kaufman and Feldman’s work guided my conceptual framework of the role of college on how undocumented students construct a particular self-perceived identity (felt identity). I sought to extend Kaufman and Feldman’s (2004) study and focused on one specific aspect of an individual’s felt identity: their legal status (Fig. 1.C). Kaufman and Feldman (2004) emphasized that their use of the term *felt identity* “includes personal traits or characteristics...as well as status or positional identities” (p.466). Kaufman and Feldman (2004) did not clarify all that is included within “status,” though I presumed that it referred to aspects of an individual’s positional identity such as socio-economic status, social status, and legal status. Legal

status is an often-overlooked aspect of college students' identity since for many it is conferred by birth. However, an undocumented student's legal status is conferred by immigration – usually not of their own choice – and can become an important feature in of their identity. I drew on Kaufman & Feldman's framework to make sense of undocumented students' legal status as a sub-component of their felt-identity, and furthermore, to expand the field's understanding of this population's sense of self as a result of the social status they enter by being in college.

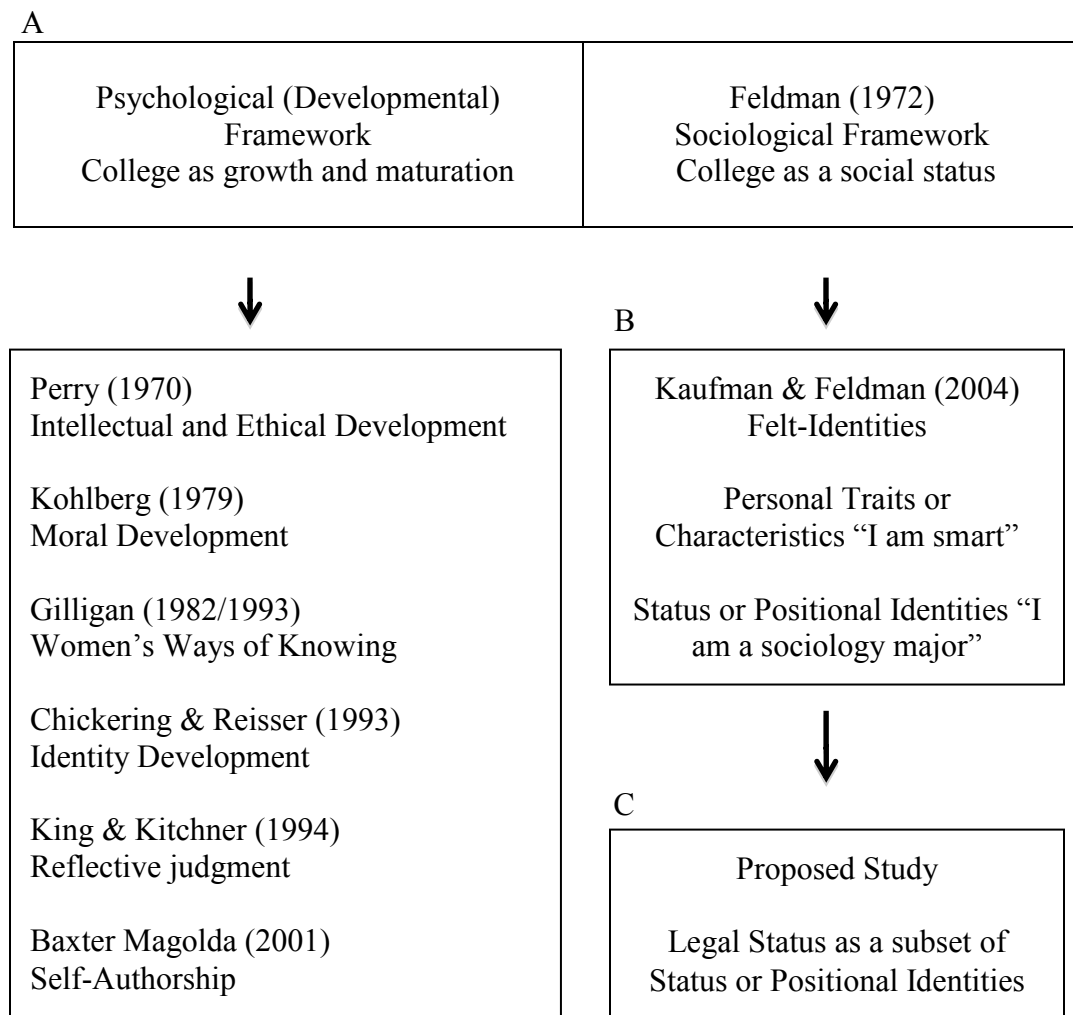


Figure 1. Impact of College: Feldman (1972)

The various interrelated terms used in this study to refer to legal and identity elements can be potentially confusing. Therefore, I distinguish between *legal standing*, *social status*, and *status ownership* (Figure 2). Legal standing is a politically defined relationship to the immigration system of the United States: an individual either has documentation to live in the country or does not (Fig. 2.A). This standing before the law is different from the social implications attached to the label of *undocumented* in the United States. In this sense, legal standing produces socially constructed self-conceptions that affect part of each individual's identity (Fig. 2.B). In this study, I refer to the interaction between the socially constructed implications of the label of *undocumented* and the formation of the social status that comes from being a college student as *status ownership* (Fig. 2.D). I explored undocumented students' self-perceptions of *status ownership* to understand the role of college and how it affects undocumented students who must balance the often negative social implications of their legal status with the social position they enter when they become college students.

The legal status of a student is a unique and largely undefined aspect of their felt identity because most college students do not have a need to consider their legal status as a significant part of their identity. For undocumented students, however, legal status may very well be the most prominent aspect of how they perceive themselves. Drawing from Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) interest in "the degree to which college as a particular structural location fosters the formation of particular felt identities" (p. 465), I suggested there might be different social implications associated with the direct and indirect interactions students experience within the institutional context. This difference would be due to the unique social and environmental components of each institution and would

affect the way a student perceived his or her status ownership. I explored the way individual undocumented students defined the concept of *status ownership* as a result of the certification and labeling that comes with the social position of college student. Though both the college environment and the larger social structures of the United States are relevant, I was more concerned with how a student's *status ownership* reflected the social context within the structure of a higher education institution. This research did not ignore the legal context outside the higher education institution environment that influenced the way students made sense of their undocumented status, since the legality of their presence also affected their college experience. However, I focused on the role of college as a place where a student had the opportunity to engage in defining the conflicting aspects of his or her identity: those socially imposed by their undocumented legal status and the social status they enter by enrolling in college.

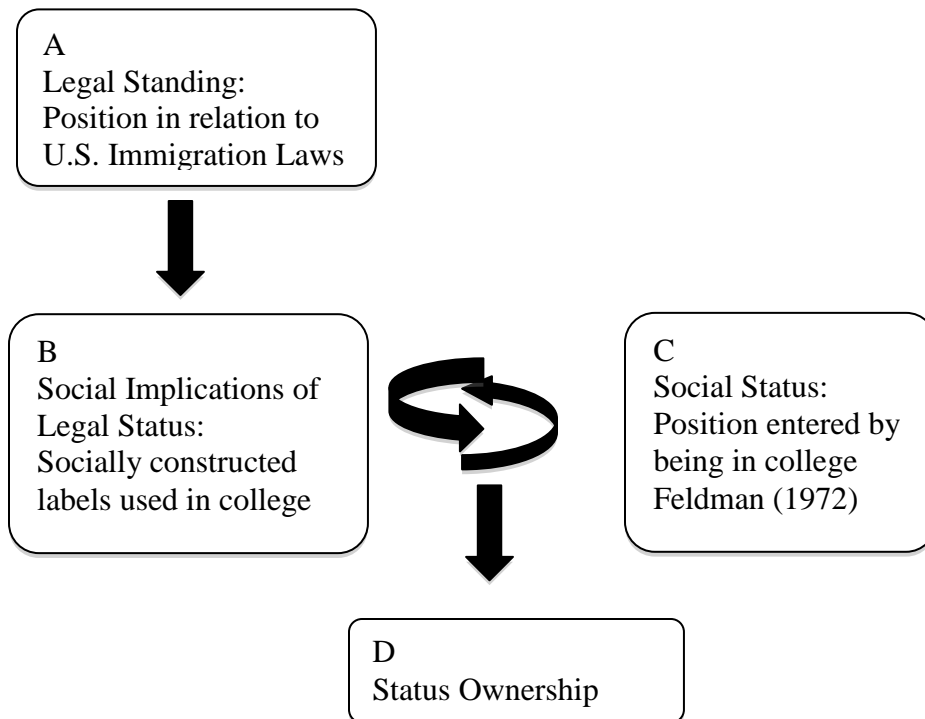


Figure 2. The Role of College in How an Undocumented Student Defines Status Ownership

Methodology

Meaning making is at the heart of the work of qualitative research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), and it was also a focus of this study. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the lived experiences of participants and provides an opportunity to examine the meaning participants attribute to their experiences; it also helps us understand the way others see, construct, and perceive their own understanding of the world. This study adopted a phenomenological tradition and an interpretive position to qualitative research. The phenomenological tradition is concerned with how one “thinks” about experience and “how consciousness is experienced” (Hesse-Biber, S.N., & Leavy, P., 2011, p.19). As a result, this tradition highlights participants’ individual lived experiences because it emphasizes understanding their personal perceptions and ways of thinking. An interpretive approach assumes the participants’ constant construction of social reality, which can be understood via their social interactions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The participants constructed meaning from their own interpretations, but my own perceptions on the lived experiences of undocumented students (see positionality statement in Appendix) also affected the overall meaning given to this study’s findings. How I conceptualized data resulted from a mutual meaning-making process, as the interpretive strand presupposes that meaning is constructed from interactions between humans and between humans and objects (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). My position as the researcher and the interactions I had in the data collection process with the participants effected the conclusions I drew. Nonetheless, the epistemology of this study sought to honor the participant as the primary expert and knower of his or her own experience.

Methods

Data Collection

I collected data for this study from students at different institutions in the United States. The role of college and the emphasis this research has on the sociological aspects of college attendance can be attributed from any higher education institution. Thus, a wider variety of social contexts provided more information that revealed the differences between social contexts and how participants defined their status ownership. The exploratory component of this research also made it feasible to collect data from students at different institutions in the United States. I identified potential participants through a convenience sample of individuals who met the baseline criteria for this study: undocumented students currently enrolled and attending a four-year college or university. Due to commitment limitations from several participants, I made an exception to the four-year criteria for one participant who was enrolled in a community college in California to account for the social context that is unique to that region.

I collected participant data through semi-structured, open-ended interviews. I audio recorded all of the interviews, which I completed in person and through video calls when geographic location of the institution did not allow for an in-person interview. I asked student participants to reflect in the form of a short description that accompanied pictures of places on campus that were important to them. All participants submitted two to three pictures of the places they perceived as important and included a brief description with it. The prompt I provided the participants was:

The purpose of the pictures is to explore how the environment and social interactions in this environment impact your definition and meaning-making process of your legal status. If you are willing and able to, just take a few

pictures of places on campus that are important or meaningful to you. There are no guidelines for the type of place since it is specifically attached to your view of the place and whether or not it is a place of importance to you. The place may have impacted the way you view yourself positively or maybe you had a negative experience in a particular place that impacted the way you see yourself. The possibilities are endless, and up to you to choose. To honor your confidentiality and identity protection, you do not need to be in the pictures. This part of the project is pretty flexible. I would say three pictures is a good number, but I will take as many as you wish to take and share. If you would, please add the name of the place and a short reflection accompanying the pictures. The reflection should explain what the places are and why they are important to you. It does not have to be long, but just enough information to help me understand your perspective of why these spaces on campus/places are important to you.

Participant Selection

The number of undocumented students at a particular institution differs based on the type of institution, private or public, as well as the state in which the institution is located. As a result, the opportunity of a large sample from one particular institution is often limited when studying this student population. Undocumented students are also not easily identifiable, since the undocumented aspect of their identity is not visible. This study involved eight undocumented students who are currently in college or participating in higher education (Table 1). All eight participants were Hispanic females and represented the following countries: Mexico, El Salvador, and Argentina. Seven of the participants were enrolled in a four-year institution and one at a community college. I had originally intended to exclude students at community colleges from this study because of the unique institutional make-up of such institutions. However, I wanted to account for the unique experience of an undocumented student in the West Coast, so I made an exception. Two participants were enrolled at two different private, prominent institutions in the Northeast. Two others were at two different large, public state schools in the South

while another two participants were at one, medium-size public institution also in the South. Lastly, one participant was at a small, liberal arts Catholic college in the Midwest.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Institution	Classification	Country of Origin	Gender	Major
Paola	Large, Public South	Sophomore	Mexico	F	Government Spanish minor
Andrea	Private, Prestigious Northeast	Junior	Mexico	F	Psychology Education Minor
Natalie	Private, Prestigious Northeast	Senior	Mexico	F	Psychology Educational Studies
Sophia	Medium, Public, South	Senior	Argentina	F	Communications Sciences & Disorders
Julieta	Medium, Public, South	Senior	Mexico	F	Biology
Juanita	Large, Public, South	Freshman	El Salvador	F	Allied Health
Yovanna	Small, Catholic, Midwest	Junior	Mexico	F	Political Science Criminal Justice
Jasmine	Medium, Community College, West	Sophomore	Mexico	F	Sociology

I took a convenience sample approach to participant selection. The selection of the informants was a result of their availability and willingness to participate (Hesse-Biber, S.N., & Leavy, P., 2011). A participant's legal status was also a basis for selection: she had to be undocumented. That is, she had to have been born outside of the United States and either (1) entered the United States without inspection or with fraudulent documents; or (2) entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status and remained in the United States without authorization (as defined by the National Immigration Law Center)" (E4FC Fact Sheet, 2012). To find the participants, I applied a "snowball sampling" technique in which sampling comes from a known network. The participants in the study were therefore approached to participate based on known networks of undocumented students and were selected on availability and willingness to participate.

Participant Protection

Protection of the participants' identities was of high importance in this study due to the sensitive nature of legal standing and the repercussions associated with one's undocumented legal status. Thus, I received approval from the IRB to have the participants sign the consent form under a pseudonym of their choice. I kept their confidentiality through the careful handling of all documents involving the study, and I took steps to ensure I kept my participants' identities anonymous. For example, I ensured confidentiality by asking the participants to use a pseudonym and to refrain from being a part of the pictures they submitted. I also assigned a number to each pseudonym for data collection and analysis purposes. I filed the audio recordings and transcriptions under said number so that names could not be traced back to the participant's real identity. For

those interviews that required video conferencing, I gave the participants the option of concealing their persona in whichever way they felt appropriate. I also shared the consent form with the participants prior to the interview and read it aloud with them before the start of every interview to ensure they were informed of their rights. Furthermore, I was the only one to have access to the real identities of the participants. My chair only had access to the data once it was saved under the corresponding numbers of the pseudonyms. Lastly, in presenting the results, I generalized locations and descriptions so that participants cannot be identified through my discussion of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The participants received an honest and comprehensive explanation of the study. I provided them with an informed consent letter stating their role and their right to remove themselves from participating at any time, including after the data collection process. I also informed the participants that they could decline to answer any questions in the interview, and I gave them time to ask clarifying questions regarding the consent form. In addition, I assured them their identities would be kept confidential and that all documents linking them to their identities, if any, will be destroyed upon completion of the study. I demonstrated ethical behavior towards the participants by explaining to them the origin and reason for this study. Furthermore, I displayed honesty and value for my participants' willingness to share their stories by reporting these holistically.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data collected from both the interviews and the participant picture submissions using a two-cycle coding process. I used the In Vivo Coding Method and the

NVivo 10 ethnographic software to code the data first. This First-Cycle method was appropriate because it prioritized and honored the terms and words participants used themselves (Saldaña, 2013). NVivo 10 helped me keep track of words and phrases that were salient and important to the participant, and thus, created participant-inspired codes. This type of coding was particularly useful because of the nature and focus of my study on how participants make meaning of a specific term, *status ownership*. Using the participant's actual words to code gave me a more authentic definition to this term. I followed the In Vivo Coding Method with a post-coding transition, Code Landscaping, as a means to recode and reorganize the data in preparation for the Second-Cycle Coding. Code Landscaping is a visual method with the purpose of allowing the researcher to see the most frequent words or phrases used by making these appear in larger text than the less frequently used phrases. I ran the Code Landscaping using the NVivo 10 software, but this process did not generate a rich post-coding reorganization of the data. Thus, this method did not enable me to organize codes and visually identify the most prominent as much as I had expected.

Nevertheless, I followed the First-Cycle coding with the Second-Cycle Method, Pattern Coding. Pattern Coding was appropriate to use because of its purpose to develop major themes and examine social patterns of human relationships (Saldaña, 2013). Pattern Coding is also used as a “stimulus to develop a statement that describes a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of interrelationships, or a theoretical construct from the data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 212). The Second-Cycle analytic process benefited my study in that I was able to holistically see the major themes that came from my participants' answers as well as find relationships between the codes. I applied the Second-Cycle

analytic process twice and got thirty-six categories from the transcription and data analysis of eight interviews. From these categories, six themes became visible from the data.

Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity in qualitative research can be supported through four concepts that promote trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). I addressed credibility in this study through my commitment to report findings congruent to the participants' social reality. The credibility of a study is damaged when the researcher includes revised data and revises or leaves out information to make it fit to the study. I approached the data analysis in good faith to meet the ethical standards required of the researcher to holistically report the stories of the participants in this study. Triangulation of the data supported this process because I gathered the data from different data sources: in-depth interviews and the participants' photographs and reflections. Furthermore, I did not seek to deceive my participants nor the readers about my background and experience as a former undocumented student. I disclose how my experiences may affect this research study in my positionality statement (see Appendix). In addition, I used member checking and consulted the participants during the analysis as a way to validate my interpretations of the findings. Every one of the eight participants received a list of my findings with the quotes I used to support those findings. I gave them an opportunity to voice any discrepancies or misinterpretations of their experiences in the findings I shared with them. Two of the participants responded confirming their acceptance of the findings without edits or modifications. Lastly, the study underwent peer scrutiny. I requested the

fresh perspective on my coding processes from a peer review, and many of the peer reviewer's codes were congruent with mine.

I pursued the transferability of this study, which refers to the extent to which findings can be used in other contexts, through my extensive description of all the processes involved in the study. These processes include a detailed description of the different contexts, participants, data collection, and data analysis processes. Furthermore, I was committed to the trustworthiness of my study by promoting dependability, meaning I described the research design in detail for the purpose of its replication in another context by other researchers.

Lastly, the credibility of my study was reinforced with the concept of confirmability. I have been honest about my own predispositions and preconceived notions regarding this topic and how they might impact my study (see positionality statement in Appendix). To improve my neutrality, I engaged in triangulation of data collection types and committed to the technique of member checking to maintain the focus on my participants' meaning-making while being mindful of my own.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis and Interpretation

One of the goals of this research was to look closely at the role of college with specific regards to the new social identity students incur from being a college student. Moreover, this study sought to answer the question “What is the role of college in how an undocumented student defines *status ownership*?” by exploring the impact of college on undocumented students’ legal status identities. The following sub-questions guided the data collection process, analysis, and interpretation:

- (1) What aspects of the college environment have an impact on undocumented participants’ self-perceived legal identity?
- (2) Do undocumented participants’ experiences in higher education change the way they make meaning of their legal status?
- (3) In what ways and for what reasons do participants expose their undocumented status?
- (4) What does “status ownership” mean to undocumented participants?

In this section, I describe six findings that answered the sub-questions and are key to understanding the role of college on the participants’ self-perceived undocumented identities. First, students in this sample reported the impact of institutional support on how they perceived themselves. The second section highlights the contrary: the impact of the absence of undocumented student support. Third, participants revealed the factors that influence self-disclosure of their undocumented identities within the context of higher

education. Fourth, participants experienced social confinement as a result of their legal status. Fifth, participants in this study perceived college as an opportunity for equality. Finally, participants faced a conflict between the expectations of being in college and the constraints of their undocumented status. The findings intersected with each other, and thus, should not be considered mutually exclusive.

Presence of Undocumented Student Support

The presence of support for undocumented students had a positive impact on the way most of the participants constructed their self-perceived identities. In some cases, participants reformulated their self-perceived abilities because they interacted with supportive staff and peers that validated them. The presence of social support for undocumented students helped the majority of participants construct a new social identity. They were more confident in taking action for others, transformed shame into empowerment and pride, and felt like actual people.

Sophia, a student at a public, medium-size institution in the South, described her new social identity as one that changed as a result of her college experience. In part, this change was due to the fact that her institution provides opportunities and staff that help undocumented students gain a sense of agency:

It actually makes me feel good just because for so long, I didn't know what it meant to be undocumented, and I was ashamed of it at first. So, now being able to go and inform the campus about, you know, even though I am undocumented, I still have all these different possibilities that I'm able to achieve. So it makes me feel good that there's awareness of that on campus.

Sophia transformed the shame she felt from being undocumented into action by taking her story and using it to inform her campus about undocumented students. She explained that two Latina staff members, whom she described as passionate about the

advancement of the Hispanic community, empowered her to be a part of the awareness on campus. Similarly, the presence of supportive staff and their social interactions with students positively impacted six out of the eight respondents, allowing them to reconstruct their perceptions of themselves. In Sophia's case, the support from staff motivated her to take on a leadership role and to develop a new social identity, one that was empowered to advocate for change. Another participant at the same institution, Julieta, had a similar change in perception about her undocumented identity:

I was ashamed. I would never tell anybody, and I would go, and I was like, "No. I'm American. I'm American." And now, I'm more, like I still consider myself Mexican-American just because I was raised in America, so I have that pride of being American, but now it's more like "No. I'm Mexican too."

Julieta's involvement in ethnic student organizations fortified a newfound confidence in her Mexican identity. She states, "being in [Latin American student organization] definitely made me more aware and more proud." The shame that came from her undocumented status was transformed into pride. Both supportive staff and peer interactions helped her formulate this change. Yovanna, a student at a small, Catholic college in the Midwest, also had change in self-perception, though hers was defined by moving beyond her undocumented status rather than a point of pride:

The last couple of years have been the ones where I've actually felt like, well my status can't define me. And I'm another human being. And I deserve to be happy. And I deserve to get an education, and so that's the same thing. You're not a number. You're an individual.

Yovanna was the only respondent that had a personal relationship with the President of her institution and who stated that she receives "100% support" from her institution. Feeling supported and safe legitimized her presence on campus and granted her a perceived ability to move beyond letting her legal status define her. The positive

social environment she is in legitimized her humanity because she felt she could be open about her status without consequences. She stressed the significance of her institutions' support:

I always had the 100% support from my institution. And so for me, that's big, like, really big. You usually don't get that kind of stuff. And so, it's a privilege. And also you know that you are comfortable. I know that I can be very open about my status, and I feel safe. And I don't think that a lot of students get that.

Institutional support was the bridge between another participant's change in perception regarding her undocumented identity. In the West Coast, public institutions began to allow undocumented students to receive the Board Of Governors (BOG) Waiver, state financial aid that was originally only awarded to U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents. Although the qualifications for state financial aid are normally out of the institution's control, when legally allowed to award this aid, institutions can keep a budget specifically for undocumented students. Providing this type of support can have an effect on the students' social identity. Prior to receiving any state aid, Jasmine had to tell her peers that she did not receive any financial aid because she was undocumented, which made her feel like an "outcast." After the BOG Waiver was extended to undocumented students, her responses to her peers' questions changed, and thus, this new institutional support provided her with a new way to interact that has consequently allowed her to think of identity in a way that is more like that of her peers:

You kind of feel like you're not an outcast pretty much because you, although we don't receive the hundreds of dollars that other students receive in financial aid, but we do receive the BOG Waiver, so it does make us feel like we're actual how do I say it...not students, but actual people.

In addition, the support from staff members at her institution has also helped Jasmine construct a new perception about her undocumented status identity:

A lot of the staff members that I work with, they try to let us know “we're here to support you,” and they have a way of showing us that just because you're an AB540 student doesn't mean that you can't go out there and travel and do all of these things. By that I'm talking about that D.C trip. I had never traveled before. I had never gotten on a plane. I had never left the state, and I remember that I wasn't going to go because I was like, “I can't do that.” I have this perception that I can't do anything sometimes, and I was not going to go on that trip. But because the staff was like, “no, just because you're undocumented doesn't mean you can't go out there and do these things.” So I went, and if it wasn't for staff, I really wouldn't have gone.

Jasmine highlighted this college experience several times, an indication of the significant impact it had on her perception of her legal standing. She emphasized that the trip changed her perception of what she could and could not do. Prior to getting on a plane to D.C., she had always been afraid to travel because she had heard immigration was at the airport. In her case, the interactions she had with staff at her institution helped dismantle the preconceived social labels she held about herself and her understanding of her limitations, real or not. In addition, these interactions challenged her to expand her view of the limitations she perceived she had as a result of her legal status and consider ways in which she could live a life similar to her peers.

The presence of social support for undocumented students helped the majority of the participants to construct a new social identity that was different from the one they held prior to the social support they received at their respective institutions of higher education. Participating in college exposed the respondents to experiences and social support they may not otherwise have encountered had they not enrolled in college. For some, this new sense of self was characterized by developing advocacy. For others, the interactions helped transform their shame into pride by means of participation in cultural student groups, and yet others realized new ways of fitting into their college community and society as a whole.

Absence of Undocumented Student Support

When social interactions were not supportive or ignored the existence of undocumented students, a contrast in self-perceived identities emerged. Participants described how the absence of faculty, staff, and peer support silenced and isolated them.

Natalie, a student at a university in the Northeast, described her experience as one where she felt like she was still “hiding.” She stated, “Do they know that, that we're in here? I don't know! Nobody really talks about that.” She emphasized that the issue of undocumented students, if talked about, was only discussed in general terms and never from a personal perspective. This included herself, as she avoided implicating herself by not personalizing the topic to her own life. Natalie described many of her experiences as feeling “out of place.” When telling a story about an experience in college that changed the way she saw her legal status, Natalie described her first time navigating the uses of her Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) permit. She explained that she went to the international office to try to get a job, and the staff member there had never seen a situation like hers and did not know what to do. Natalie stated, “So then she gave me her card, and I was like ‘Oh [pause] Thank you,’ and she was like, ‘if you figure it out, let me know because I think I'd like to know.’” This was the first time Natalie had to figure out what her legal status meant because in the past, she had always had help from mentors and peers who had experienced it before her. Since DACA was new, there was no rulebook, and her interaction with a staff member that she perceived as unwilling to help made Natalie feel unsupported and out of place:

At that moment it was just kind of, like, I really felt like this... at least the institution was not, just didn't want to open their eyes to it. Didn't want to deal with it aside from just letting me in and helping me out financially. So, I guess that was that, and that was when I felt the most out of place in the country because

then I'd see "international office," and I'm like "nope, that's not for me." The regular office, also not for me. That's citizens and residents, so I was just kind of like nope, there's nowhere on campus specifically to deal with this.

The absence of support from faculty and staff and the lack of visibility and awareness on campus that would otherwise start conversations around the issue kept Natalie isolated. Furthermore, her unrecognized status at her institution impacted the way she conceptualized her place in the country and how she perceived her legal standing in relation to it.

Andrea, a student at another prominent institution in the Northeast, had a similar experience that affected the way she viewed herself as a result of an interaction with a staff member unaware of the particular needs of undocumented students:

A few months ago, I went to the career services and asked them to help me edit my resume, and so I wasn't sure if other... before I had the work permit, I used to work just as a cashier at my mom's place, my mom's work. She works at a cleaners. And small things like that, just babysitting. So the person who was editing my resume, she looked at me, and she was like, "you can't do better than that?" and I was, I don't know. I wanted to tell her but, you know, at the same time just, like [sigh], you won't understand me.

This was an emotional experience for the respondent because the interaction she had with this staff member had a negative impact on the way she viewed herself; she felt like she was not doing enough and was incompetent. Although the work experiences Andrea had on her resume were a result of the legal constraints on the job options she had because of her legal status, the social expectation the career counselor pressed upon Andrea silenced her and isolated her. She submitted the following reflection with one of the pictures of a place on campus that was important to her:

...the center of campus.... represents how I feel in comparison to when I'm at [Latin American theme house]....alone. Despite [prestigious institution in the Northeast] being so beautiful, sometimes I feel alone. I can't completely share or

be who I am, and it's frustrating because there are occasions when I can't explain my situation so I'd just rather people think whatever they want.

Another participant's experience further illustrates the contrast between the social identities constructed when institutional support for undocumented students exists versus when it is absent. It was not until recently that Yovanna felt comfortable and safe being herself at her small, Catholic college in the Midwest. Having personal relationships with staff at her college created a perceived shield that allowed her to speak openly about her experiences as an undocumented student and allowed her to feel like her status did not define her. However, this was not always the case:

When I was in community college, I really didn't talk to anybody, and I was very isolated. So, the only people I talked to was on the computer [laughs]. With somebody that's, like, miles and miles away. I feel like that was the reason why, because I was trying to find somebody where I could be accepted. Somewhere I could actually fit in.

Before attending her current institution, Yovanna did not have a place to belong, and she felt isolated at a community college that did not provide the social support she now receives. These participants' experiences demonstrate that a lack of staff awareness about undocumented students has a negative effect on students' perceptions of how they fit into their campus communities. The participants' stories illustrate that the absence of institutional support negatively impacted the way they perceived their legal identities, contributing to feelings of isolation and identity concealment behaviors.

Factors That Impact Self-Disclosure

A third theme that emerged was that participants revealed their undocumented status based on the factors that constituted their environments. The openness of the physical location, the focus of the conversation, and the people in the space were all

components of the dynamics that created the environment. The majority of the participants were more likely to share their stories within enclosed physical locations that allowed for structured conversations such as forums, conferences, or workshops on the topic of undocumented students. The exception, however, was the classroom. Most participants reported avoiding exposing their legal status in class or in academic environments. Furthermore, some of the participants referenced a religiously-affiliated environment as comfortable for sharing their legal status identity. On the other hand, unstructured environments that were physically open spaces where unplanned, daily interactions occurred caused most respondents to be cautious about exposing their legal status. The degree to which an undocumented student deemed a particular space suitable for exposure depended on the perceived social implications associated with the direct or indirect interactions that would result from sharing their story.

Structured Environments

Six out of the eight participants talked openly about the topic of immigration and their experiences as undocumented students within the context of organized events that took place in enclosed physical locations. The extent to which participants deemed the opportunity worthy of exposing their status depended on their perceived social implications associated with it. The majority of the respondents were comfortable sharing their experience to invalidate the stereotypes and labels imposed on them by society, and they usually had the opportunity to do this within the structured conversations that happened in forums, workshops, or conferences. One respondent utilized the social label of “illegal” to educate her campus on the topic of undocumented students:

Another event that my sorority and another fraternity on campus put on was a True Life event. And I was actually, I kind of came up with the idea along with other sisters. It was called "True Life: I am an Illegal Immigrant." And the main reason we said, instead of saying "undocumented," that was a huge controversial issue with other students... The main reason why we chose, "Illegal Immigrants" is because that's how people see it. They don't see you as "oh, you're undocumented." They see it as "oh, you're illegal." And so basically it was a forum-type event that was held in the movie theater, and we had a really good turnout.

Sophia perceived the social implications of educating others important enough for her to disclose her legal identity, and thus, she took action in creating a time and space to facilitate her reveal in the form of a forum. Similar events had a common effect on other participants:

At the conference, I went to one of the workshops, and it was all about telling your story. When I got into her office, I told them my story of coming. Well, I didn't come over. I was brought over when I was two months, and I told my story, my struggles, and my difficulties. Everyone in that room was crying, and that wasn't my intention, but it was very empowering.

This experience illustrates that the topic of the conversation and the perceived expectation to tell her story facilitated Jasmine's disclosure of her identity. In this case, the expectation of the space she finds herself in also allowed her to develop a voice that not only represents her but the experiences of other undocumented students as well. In addition, Jasmine put an emphasis on her experiences in her Student Government meetings. She submitted, as a physical artifact of this study, a picture of the "Board Room" where they meet to make decisions, as a place on campus that is significant to her. She described her responsibility to represent the voices of the undocumented students at her college, further illustrating that the opportunity of the space she finds herself in allows her to feel a sense of empowerment and be open about her legal status identity. In another case, both the structure of the event and the peers within the space

helped facilitate a participant's decision to expose her identity. Julieta tells a story about the first time she made her undocumented status public:

I remember I went to a [Latin American organization] program. It was Hispanic Heritage month. A guy from another fraternity came and spoke about his story how he was in jail. He got pulled over at a stop sign, and he almost got deported because of that, and at the end he was like "raise your hand if you're undocumented." And I raised my hand. And it was a good number of people that raised their hand, and I was surprised.

Her experience illustrates the power that social interactions within a particular confined space can have on an undocumented student's level of comfort in exposing their identity. Julieta expressed that she first looked around to gain the courage to raise her hand, suggesting that she began by evaluating the social implications of exposing herself. Seeing that others, including some of her friends, raised their hand, enabled her to be public about her status. This confidence was born from the environment constructed by both the enclosed physical location, focused conversation on the topic, and the people present.

Opportunities to discuss the topic of immigration within structured environments had an impact even on the participant who had the least institutional support. Natalie described one of the only situations when she felt proud:

I felt like this would be a safer place, but also I didn't want to national, like, on camera say anything just yet because that's a lot. That's going to go online. I could be traced if my name is on there. And so, I also just vaguely referenced my family...like, I have family members, and I have friends. I just kind of spoke about it a bit more distant. But then I felt like I did implicate myself a bit because I did state my view on it, and that made me feel really proud. I felt great after that...I felt like in those moments is the best place to openly have that discussion.

For Natalie, the social implications of exposing her identity would have been detrimental, especially because she attends an institution where there is an absence of support for undocumented students. It was no surprise that she would speak about the

issue in generalities, but it is important to note that this was one of the only times she referenced feeling “proud” and “great” after stating her view. This was also the only time she expressed being public about her views on the topic, and she attributed this to the place and moment that allowed her to do so. Another participant emphasized the importance of the components of the environment, including the audience, in deciding on whether or not to expose her status. She said, “If it’s in a big group of people that I know won’t, they won’t give me this bad backlash, and if they are, they’ll do it in a respectful way, so I’ll do it. But other than that, I can’t really do it.” Paola’s reference to a big group of people further demonstrates that the environment would need to be structured enough to accommodate a big group of people interested in respectfully learning about the issue for her to feel comfortable enough to expose her legal identity.

The classroom. Seven out of the eight participants did not expose their undocumented student identities in the classroom. For some, a relevant topic that would have allowed them to do so did not come up. Those who had the opportunity to make their identities public, however, avoided making the conversation personal and did not implicate themselves. Although the classrooms are structured physical locations with potential for intentional conversations, the majority of the respondents did not deem an academic space as one where their undocumented identity was the most significant. Andrea, for instance, mentioned forgetting about her undocumented status when taking the role of student: “when I’m in class I forget that I’m undocumented.” Other participants expressed similar feelings. Julieta stated, “It’s never in an academic environment like when we’re studying for a class, study groups, but it’s always with just friends or when we’re discussing an event that we’re going to do.” Academic structural locations, such as

the classroom and even the library, enabled the participants to enact the role of a student and fostered this student identity so that it became more important than their legal identity. However, this was not the case for all of the participants. Thus, whether they considered their student identity more important than their undocumented identity or whether they judged the social implications of their peers' perceptions as more important than disclosing their undocumented identity was unclear. For instance, Andrea emphasized that she did not want to be seen as less intelligent than her peers if she were to expose her identity. Jasmine was also worried about what her peers would think about her, and as a result, she avoided confrontations:

Especially in those sociology classes. There's people who have been socialized to think a certain way, and I don't want to get myself into a confrontation with...let's say there's a person who totally disagrees with someone being undocumented taking away jobs, and then I put myself in situation of conflict. So, in classes, I don't do that. I don't say "well, I'm undocumented," and things like that, but I do express "you know that's not right."

Yovanna was the exception to the rest of the participants. She was the only one to openly expose her undocumented status in class.

I'm very open about my status. So one time I actually did a paper on it, which I had to present in front of my whole class. And the responses you get are, "wow, we didn't know this was an issue," and "if I saw you there, I would've never thought, guessed you were undocumented." It just proves the point. We're all equal [laughs] and then your status has nothing to do with your academic performance or how you are.

Yovanna's decision to be open about her status in class can be associated with her self-perceived social position at her institution. She described undocumented students at her college as "special" because the support they received was personalized. She also noted that to this day, she had not experienced any negative consequences at her institution from her openness of her undocumented status. Despite the fact that some of

the other participants also received institutional support, the level of support varied. Yovanna received individualized attention from staff, including the President of the institution. The distinctive support she received fostered her confidence to continue to be open about her status, even when the other participants did not.

Spiritual spaces. Four of the eight participants disclosed their undocumented identities within a religious context. The religious context of the structural location allowed the participants to be open about their status, despite the types of people they perceived to be in the space with them. This context also had an impact on their self-perceived identities.

When I'm with this organization [Christian organization], I really don't think of myself as an undocumented student. This is because the people in this organization genuinely care and love each other. Therefore, even when I tell people at [Christian Organization] that I'm undocumented, I'm not afraid of whether or not their faces will cringe.

Paola became unafraid to tell others about her status and even dismissed her undocumented legal identity within this space. She based the social implications of exposing her status on her judgment of how the people around her would perceive her. She was not the only one that felt comfortable exposing her status within a Christian environment. Juanita referenced an experience she had at meeting with a Christian student organization: "They shared their stories with me, and I can tell that they were being honest and everything and I just felt comfortable telling them." The meetings created a structured environment that supported the respondent's decision to disclose her undocumented legal status. The environment as a spiritual structural location also had an impact on two participants' self-perceived identities.

Sophia was an advocate for educating others about undocumented students. She described herself as “empowered” to disclose her identity even in situations that were not “organized” and regardless of the social implications that could result from sharing her story:

It was basically going to tell your story in front of a church and an [East Texas] Church like they're really small-minded. You know? Like there's people who have an open mind, but majority of them are closed-minded. So like that wasn't really organized. She called it a Dream Act Sabbath where you just go, and undocumented students go and just tell their testimony there.

The respondent did not perceive her audience as one that was open to the idea of immigration, yet she told her testimony. Consequently, the spiritual context within a structured location, in isolation from the personal interactions within the space, had an effect on the participants; it enabled them to be open about their undocumented status. Lastly, for one participant, the structural location of the Chapel at her campus became an important place in her college experience that impacted the way she sees herself. She submitted a picture of the Chapel as one of the places on campus that is significant to her:

The Chapel- This place is important to me because [small Catholic college in the Midwest], especially the Liberal arts building, was built around the chapel. To me this means that religion or faith is the supporting foundation. I believe that because of my faith, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to obtain higher education.

Unstructured Environment

Seven out of the eight respondents were more cautious about exposing their legal status in unstructured environments constituted of open physical locations not intended for conversations on the topic of immigration. These included places and spaces where participants had every day conversations with their peers outside of class, courtyards, or open fields. The perceived social consequences of exposure outside of organized events

influenced the majority of the participants' decision to expose their undocumented status.

Andrea worried about the social repercussions of telling any of her peers about his part of her identity:

If someone asked me or someone needs help or they just want to hear someone else's experience, like, I'm willing to talk to them about me being undocumented. But I don't feel comfortable being in a group of people and saying, "I'm undocumented." Especially at my school because I'm afraid of how, I guess, my peers will look at me. How they will perceive me.

She emphasized that she is willing to expose her identity if it will help another person; however, in an unstructured situation where people are gathered in a group, the social stigma associated with her undocumented status reduced her level of comfort in exposing her legal status. This same fear prevented Natalie from telling any of her peers about her undocumented legal identity for a very long time:

With peers, there was kind of, like, it took about three years for me to tell any of them because I had to make sure that it was going to be okay. Because otherwise, that could ruin friendships. That could raise legal issues. Put my family at risk.

Both Natalie and Andrea stressed a concern for the effect their undocumented status would have on their relationships with their peers. Contrary to feeling empowered and confident when sharing their stories within organized events, some of the respondents were concerned about exposing their status in a context they perceived would have social implications. One of the participants compared this concern to "being gay." She stated:

I don't mean to offend you or anyone, but sometimes, I feel like it's kind of like being gay. They always have to, being gay doesn't mean you come out once and that's it. You have to come out several times to several different people and you have to strategically tell them "I'm gay." It's kind of like that. You have to think, "well can I trust this person or are they going to see me differently?"

It was important for the respondents to be strategic about whom to “come out” to. In addition, one participant described her ability to adapt if those around her were not comfortable with her undocumented status. Juanita said, “Whenever there's a person that they're not used to being around people that are not legal so they act differently but I'm used to it because that's who I am and that's who I'm going to be.”

Non-environmental Factors

Not only were the social implications for being open about their legal status an issue, but four of the eight participants also highlighted not wanting to put their families at risk. Paola explained having to mask the truth in order to avoid the risk of legal problems:

She [referring to her mom] doesn't want to be put in a situation where we're put in danger just because we told somebody that we were undocumented. So after that, I had to be really careful ... masking the truth so that we don't get in trouble.

For these four participants, exposing their identities was not an individual decision but one that involved other people's lives as well, most notably, their families. As a result, they could not simply share this part of their identity in every day conversation and in environments where there is no structure or control of the conversation because doing so would be inconsiderate of the risks it would bring to their families.

Status Confinement

A fourth theme that emerged from the analysis is the idea of *status confinement*, which I define as the participants' gravitation to faculty and student groups from minority ethnic backgrounds. Several of the participants found comfort associating and staying

close to the Hispanic and/or ethnic minority communities due to their lack of knowledge about or preconceived notions regarding the white majority. They demonstrated this by engaging more often with faculty and staff of ethnic minority backgrounds and distancing themselves from their white counterparts.

Two students specifically addressed their level of comfort with their professors. Paola, for example, made it a point to develop relationships with professors from minority backgrounds. She stated, “There's not a lot of Latino or black professors, professors of color over all. When I try to choose my professors, I try to choose them.” When describing her interactions with faculty, Paola emphasized that she was inspired by faculty of color whom she perceived as having an impact on the world because they helped students like her in higher education. She also mentioned that she tended to be more open about her identity to her Latino professors. Natalie, on the other hand, did not feel comfortable talking to her professors about her identity. She said, “A lot of them are the just the typical white, I don't know, just the typical, there's just very little racial diversity on professors for some reason, and they're a lot older so I definitely don't know how they would feel.” Her response demonstrates a perceived disconnection with faculty who are not from similar ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, the perceived differences discouraged participants from engaging with their professors and indirectly confined the relationships they built with them.

When participants were asked about the impact of staff on the way they see themselves, several students' responses described ways that they gravitated towards professionals from similar ethnic backgrounds. Among the four participants that

highlighted support from Latino/a advisors, Sophia underscored the impact of two Latina professionals on her identity:

[East Texas] is so small, and they're all white people. They all have one focus, and one generalized thing of Hispanics, and that's illegal. Which is not the case at all because there's Hispanics who have their papers. Hispanics that are citizens. So, being able to, being able to associate myself with them [referring to her Latina advisors] it has made me, I don't know, different.

Sophia's statement shows that she credited her connection with Latina advisors, who were passionate about bringing awareness of the Latino community to campus, as something that made her feel "different" and gave her a sense of agency to share her story with a community she perceived as homogenously unwelcoming of undocumented individuals.

The second way in which participants demonstrated status confinement was by distancing themselves from their white peers. Some of the respondents perceived rejection from their peers and were concerned of the consequences of disclosing their undocumented identity to them. Julieta, for instance, stated the following when describing her first experiences in college: "I saw a lot of the American population, I mean like, the white population and stuff like that, so it kind of put me back and made me kind of hide my status for a long time." The respondent's perceived need to hide her status demonstrates that she did not sense her white peers as trustworthy. Andrea also expressed mistrust towards her peers when describing why it was difficult to disclose her legal identity. To explain her hesitation, she described a conversation she once overheard between two peers:

He said, "it's because I'm afraid that they might take my financial aid away or that if the other students, the white students, hear that [prestigious university in the Northeast] has undocumented students, that they'll tell their parents or sponsors to take the scholarships away.

As a result of this conversation, Andrea constructed a perception that donors, who she associated with the white majority, would not approve of undocumented students benefiting from their money. So, she stayed away from disclosing her legal status to her white peers. Natalie was also concerned about the repercussions of others knowing undocumented students attended her institution; she worried her peers would feel like the undocumented students were taking the financial aid money and the spots of citizens at her institution. Both respondents perceived a threat to their financial aid, which confined them to engage in social interactions that would keep them from risking their funding for their education.

For the participants, hiding their undocumented status from their white peers was a decision founded on a sense that the potential consequences were unknown. They found it easier to look for peers whom they perceived would understand them better, such as those who come from similar backgrounds and were also from their same ethnic group. The majority of participants looked for peers and student groups that shared their backgrounds and with whom they could connect. For example, five of the eight participants were involved in student organizations or student groups that serve the Hispanic population. Andrea explained the type of peer interactions she felt most comfortable with:

Students of color [laughs] yeah mostly the Latino students...And one of the spaces I took a picture of is the [residence hall with a Latin American theme]. I lived there for about a year and a half. It's a really nice space and there I met a lot of students who I can, who I feel comfortable sharing my story with, and I feel that they're not going to judge me, just because if it's not them, it was their parents the ones who went through that. Well not through the college experience, but immigration.

Other students sought to start their own organizations when they did not find one at their institution:

We started an organization because we were Latinos, and we were all the undocumented. We just called it the [student organization name] and now we're kind of pushing for the whole college thing. Our goal is to get a scholarship going so that we can give it to somebody, documented or undocumented. We just wanted more Latinos to come to campus because they usually don't.

Participants commonly engaged in student organizations that served the Hispanic/Latino population either because they felt more comfortable with others who they perceived would be more accepting of them or because the mission or purpose of their organization allowed them an opportunity to help other undocumented students. Undocumented students' problems are rarely associated with only one part of their identity. Their legal status affected their perceptions about the white majority and indirectly confined their circles of interaction.

College: An Opportunity for Equality

The fifth theme that emerged was that college was a privilege that provided an opportunity for equality both on campus and in society. When taking on the role of college student, participants saw themselves as equal to everyone else; their legal identity was not one that mattered in this role. Most of the participants referenced having reached a place of perceived equality with their peers even though they recognized they had to go through many barriers to get to that point and they might continue to encounter more struggles:

You can come from wherever you come from, you can come here, still be low-income, still be minority and you can get to that place and start on equal footing. Although it doesn't always feel like equal footing in terms of the training that they've gotten or the exposure that they've gotten like culturally or whatever that

may be, but then also just feeling like you've made it into a place where now you are at equal par.

Natalie perceived college as a place to start anew and at the same level as her peers. She perceived her acceptance into the highly competitive institution as an “accomplishment in itself” because all students were accepted under the same merits despite the disparity in resources and assistance they each received to get there. Furthermore, many participants conceptualized the role of student as one that put them at the same level as everyone else, regardless of their legal status. For example, one respondent described her identity as a student as “one [that] should not be discriminated; like that one has no discriminatory purposes. At all times I can do that.” This conceptualization of student as an equitable identity was also evident in other participants’ responses. For example, Yovanna stated, “We're all equal [laughs] and then your status has nothing to do with your academic performance or who you are.” Participants suggested that their academic and student abilities have no relationship to their legal status, and that college provided the opportunity to explore this sense of equality. Yovanna further stated:

Well just feeling like you can compete with everybody else. I feel like when I was in high school, I always felt like I was less because of my status. Or that I couldn't be as smart as I should have been, like getting good grades and all that. So now, it's more of a leveled field.

The concept of college as a leveled field where everyone has the same opportunity to excel was common among participants all across the nation: the Northeast, Midwest and the South. Julieta defined being undocumented at her institution this way:

I'll define it as just kind of doing the same thing everybody else is doing but just in a different way with more obstacles ahead...it's just through a whole different process, so it's just different tackles to go through to get in the same level of playing field as everybody else.

Although participants described having to overcome different hurdles to be on the same “playing field” as the rest, they perceived their time in college as a place where they had the same opportunities as their documented peers. Furthermore, the opportunity to be in college was a privilege that would also give them a chance to gain equality in society. This benefit was social, as well as individual: participants saw college as a way to help their families. This goal is illustrated by several responses, including Andrea’s:

I feel really blessed to have that opportunity, and I feel that I’ll be prepared, like I tell you, to help my family. But at the same time, I don’t want to be too, how do you say it in English, not snobby, but to be humble, you know, with your experiences too because other people didn’t have the same opportunity as you did.

Andrea emphasized the idea of financially assisting her family after college, a common goal of the majority of the respondents. Contributing to their family was also an opportunity to improve their quality of life and college would give them the privilege to do that. Andrea also stated, “To be a college student, to me it means a way out of the situation that we are in right now,” which demonstrates a perceived financial and perhaps social advantage that comes from participating in college for those in difficult economic circumstances. Another participant’s response highlighted this concept by comparing economic systems: “In third world countries, you can work all your life but because of the economic system, you can’t move on in life.” This participant’s perspective reflects a belief that the United States provides opportunities for social mobility. Financially supporting their parents would help the participants out of their current situation, and thus, an opportunity for equality in the United States that is not seen in other countries. Juanita shared a similar sentiment:

It’s a privilege because not everybody gets to go ahead and achieve their dreams, and go after their dreams, and get an education and choose studying [rather] than going to war. Well in other countries, you don’t really get the privilege to go to a

university or anything. It's so competitive or you don't have the money or you don't even get into the universities because like I said it's competitive. Right here we have a lot of opportunities to achieve your dreams.

The privilege to attend college is not only a privilege many youth around the world do not get to have, but it was also a perceived privilege that many other undocumented students in this country do not have. Yovanna states:

The privilege to have an education as well as the support to do it. Because, like our parents can say we brought you because we want you to have an opportunity to have a better future, but if you don't have the right doors open for you, as undocumented youth, it's really hard and you get discouraged. Not everybody has the same opportunities, so we are privileged in the face that we know we are undocumented. However, we know that those doors are open for us. Whereas, some youth don't know that they have the opportunity or actually never come up. Like, I never expected that to happen to me. Somebody to come up to me and say "You're what our school is looking for and we want to make that dream happen." And that's the sad part. I wish we could do that for a lot of people, but it's all a part of the privilege that you get.

Moreover, participants shared the view that succeeding in college represented their family's sacrifices were worth immigrating. A quotation from Natalie illustrates this: "I have to make sure that what I do with my status as being in the country has to be enough to make their decisions worth it." Graduating from college would legitimize the decisions of their parents, and it was important for many of the participants to maintain and uphold what their parents set out for them to do. Jasmine, for instance, describes the significance of her college education:

My favorite quote that my parents have told me explains how "they can try to take anything from you, but they will never be able to take away your education." This quote has really stuck with me because being an undocumented student in this country, I never knew when my whole life could be taken away from me if, God forbid, I ever had to be deported. Making sure I'm in the library all the time, and not letting my studying slack gives me such great satisfaction knowing I'm not disappointing my parents.

Her perceived value of an education was one that was non-discriminatory, as previously noted by Natalie as well, and one that could not be taken away.

A college education gave participants something intangible and permanent that they could own. Having something that belonged to them was an important sentiment shared by several of the respondents. Two participants noted a desire to make a “proper” name for themselves. A college diploma, in the case of Sophia, was the document that would provide an opportunity to be considered an American: “You have something to your name and that feels good because you're not a number anymore, you're a person. You're considered an American.” Having a degree with her name on it would be like becoming a person, validated her existence, putting her at par with the rest. Natalie’s concerns were similar. She told a story about her first time receiving her social security number after her DACA application was approved: “Whenever I did get my social security number I went, I was like ‘I want to put in my social security number now for my financial aid because I need to start building some kind of history of my being’.” Natalie wanted to ensure her institution had a history of her existence. Both cases describe situations where participants looked for a way to have something to own, to give them a sense of feeling like they are a person, and a history of existence, and therefore, give them an opportunity to be just like everybody else in this country.

The participants recognized that college was not an opportunity every undocumented student received. Furthermore, they perceived their college participation as a privilege that gave them an opportunity to be on the same level as their peers, to help their parents and legitimize their move to the United States, and a chance to make a name for themselves.

College Expectations and Constraints

The last theme that emerged from the analysis is the dichotomy between the social expectations of college graduates and what college actually allows undocumented students to do. Although participants perceived college as an opportunity for equality, the reality was that there was a disparity between the expectations associated with their future occupation and the constraints they faced when considering what they are allowed to do as undocumented individuals. The uncertain entrance into an occupation after graduation impacted many of the participants' perceptions that college did not give them a social status, or at least one equal to their documented peers. Andrea's response illustrates the conflicting interaction between the social labels and expectations pressed upon her identity as a college student and the constraints she faces due to her undocumented legal status:

I am restricted from what I can do, but the college student is telling me "go for everything that you can" and "you have all these opportunities," especially at [prestigious university in the Northeast]. They keep telling us: "You're here for a reason" and "You have so many opportunities" and "You have to go to Wallstreet or the government or politics or do something really big."

The tension participants felt between what they thought they were expected to do and what they can actually do had an effect on how they constructed their social identities associated with their future. For instance, participants demonstrated a concern for how they would achieve their goals to financially assist their families and accomplish their career goals after college: "How am I going to help myself help my family if I can't work or get internships?" said Andrea. Other respondents also questioned how they would reach their future goals. Paola had been impacted by the professor of a "Black Empowerment" class and was motivated to pursue a career that would help her

community while still making a living. The social cues she received from her professor about the possibilities and expectations of having a college degree, however, resulted in dissonance because of the restrictions of her legal status. When I asked how she views herself as a result of being in college, Paola stated that sometimes she gets worried about her undocumented status and her ability to reach her career goals: “I also need to think about my undocumented status. Think of ways of how I can help my community but trying to figure out if I can even have a job sometimes in those fields I want to work in.”

Several participants expressed similar concerns about their perceived expectations of what a college degree should allow them to do and the restrictions of their legal status identity. When I asked if she saw a relationship between how she saw herself as a college student and her legal identity, Juanita responded: “Because it's a status and it keeps us from maybe some things you want. Maybe after we graduate we might not be able to find a job or anything because of our status.” This response illustrates again that participants have hopes for professional careers but are constrained to certain occupations. To summarize this point, Natalie stated, “I feel like I know my place and I know where I want to go in terms of my future and my career and all that but then trying to find the way to do that within the law.” The conflicting signals undocumented received from the social expectations of having a college degree and what the law allows them impacted the way they perceived their social status. Natalie further questioned why her institution would allow her and other undocumented students to receive a college education if they were not willing to be open about it. She concluded that,

As long as they have the money, they just want bright students that can then carry their name far out, and that they believe will be successful, and will make a good name for them. But somehow, that's not something that they want to openly say.

Natalie's view of her institution is consistent with the idea that colleges and universities have certain expectations of their students, such as having a positive impact on society by means of their professional occupations and positions in society. However, undocumented students' future social identities cannot be validated due to the constraints of their legal status, which results in an uncertainty of their entrance into a professional career. In addition, the lack of opportunities for professional experiences to build their resume while in college constrains them from being as competitive as other candidates. As a result of the constraints undocumented students face, the social status they acquire in college is not comparable to that of the rest of their peers.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This chapter presents a summary of the research findings, compares them to the framework analysis and proposal, discusses the limitations of the study, and reviews the implications of the findings of the study. Studies have previously addressed undocumented students in higher education and their experiences. However, none of these had used a framework that drew upon Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) study in order to understand the social impact of the college experience on an undocumented student's perception of his or her legal status identity. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, using the Kaufman and Feldman's felt identity framework offers new insights into this student populations' social and legal identity construction. I conclude this discussion by proposing an undocumented student social mobility model that may help researchers, practitioners, and students better comprehend the complex role of college participation on undocumented students' identity formation.

Kaufman and Feldman (2004) sought to understand how students formed a particular sense of self in and through college and referred to this new self-perceived identity as *felt identity*. One aspect of their work highlighted the extent to which students reconstruct a sense of self by acquiring a new social status from the reinforcement of social norms and environmental cues they receive in college. My research drew from Kaufman and Feldman's framework and focused on legal status as a sub-set of the "status and positional identities" component of felt identity. I presumed the role of college as an

entrance to a new social status would have a unique effect on undocumented students because they face a distinct intersectionality between an identity that can give them a social status by entering college (Feldman, 1972), and one that carries a social stigma from the label of “undocumented” (Fig. 2.B). This is the first time an investigation examined this student population from such a framework and approached college as a structural location that allows undocumented college students to enact the social label of “college student” while confronting their legal identity. I sought to explore the intersection between the social status entered by being in college (Fig. 2.C) and the social implications of an undocumented student’s legal status (Fig. 2.B) through the use of the term *status ownership* (Fig. 2.D). Furthermore, this inquiry sought to understand said interaction through the participants’ interpretation of the *status ownership* concept.

Summary of Conclusions

From the findings, I draw five conclusions addressed in the rest of this chapter, structured around the four research sub-questions I sought to answer. First, the findings regarding the impact of the presence of support for undocumented students reinforce Kaufman and Feldman’s (2004) earlier assertions. Their research proposed that the labels imposed on a student by his or her peers, faculty and/or staff validate the student’s new collegiate self-constructed social identity. The second conclusion I draw is that college can be a critical factor in the way undocumented students make meaning of their legal status. The third conclusion of this inquiry underscores the importance of the dynamics between the components in a physical space and the degree to which an undocumented student deemed the place appropriate for disclosing their undocumented identity. Fourth, I explain the term *status ownership* using my proposed framework and interpretations of

the findings. In addition, I conceptualize the participants' verbalized definition of the term from which two themes emerged: be yourself and be unafraid. I concluded that students engage in *status ownership* when given the opportunity to develop a voice and contribute back to their communities. Finally, as a result of additional findings related to social mobility, I propose a new framework of undocumented student social mobility as an opportunity for further research.

Conclusion One: The College Environment and Undocumented Students' Legal Identity

I sought to explore the ways in which college impacted undocumented students' self-perceived legal identity and focused on the students' legal status as a sub-set of their felt identity. My findings echo Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) recognition that a student's new-formed identity is dependent on the specific social interactions experienced by each individual participant. Indeed, many of the participants in my study reformulated their self-perceived identities and abilities as a result of the social norms and environmental cues they encountered. An undocumented college student can formulate a new self-perceived legal status identity provided a college environment that is supportive of his or her needs. For the six participants who were in a supportive environment, the realization that they could take on a leadership role and bring awareness to campus was new. Faculty, staff, and peers helped them, to a certain extent, remove their perceived limitations of the social label of "undocumented." The validation participants received from their peers, faculty, and staff regarding their social abilities legitimized a reconstructed sense of self. These six participants further experienced a newly perceived position within their campus community and took on a new social role as agents of change. An example of this is Sophia's story of feeling empowered to inform her campus

about undocumented students. On the contrary, in the cases where social support was absent, participants like Andrea reported a sense of isolation at their campus.

In summary, the findings are congruent with Kaufman and Feldman's general concept that validation and social interactions impact students' construction of how they see themselves. In the case of the undocumented student, the presence of social support from staff and peers facilitated many of the participants' formation of a new identity; they were often more confident in themselves and empowered to engage in activities to bring awareness of the topic of undocumented students to their campuses.

Conclusion Two: The College Experience and the Meaning-Making of Legal Status

The second conclusion I draw is that college can be a critical factor in the way undocumented students make meaning of their legal status. Within a higher education context, most of the participants highlighted a perceived equality of access to degree attainment. Although the majority of the participants perceived they were on the same level as their peers when taking the role of college student, all of the participants were aware of the unequal opportunities attached to their legal status. This awareness is significant because in their role as college students, they often dismissed their legal status. At the same time, all of the participants acknowledged that their undocumented status put them at a disadvantage for opportunities such as study abroad and summer internships. Their perceived equality, thus, was not reflected in the reality of their experience. This apparent incongruence can be explained by separating the physiological from the sociological. As students, the participants had equal opportunity to succeed academically because of their cognitive abilities. Socially, they were at a disadvantage because of the limitations of their legal status. For the majority of the participants,

however, the value of receiving a college education and a college degree seemed to take precedence over the barriers they acknowledged they had. Barriers, such as the unequal access to experiences (internships, summer positions, and others) that would further their careers, appeared to be less important than completing a college degree.

The participants' high regard for academics and degree attainment was significantly related to the way they made meaning of their legal status. In fact, several participants spoke of the importance of their college education and college degree because it gave them something to own, a history of existence, perceived equality, and a way to demonstrate their parents' decision to immigrate was worth the difficulty. The findings of my research align with that of Pérez' (2012) in that respondents pursued self-determination and sought to live their lives beyond the hurdles of their undocumented legal identity. However, contrary to the respondents in Pérez' (2012) study who coped with their undocumented status psychologically by self-decriminalizing and perceiving their reasons for immigrating as compelling enough to legitimize their circumstances, my findings provide a sociological component. That is, college legitimized the participants' current place in society. As a result, I propose that for undocumented students in this study, the psychological attribute of self-determination Pérez (2012) identified lead to *self-positioning* (the act of placing oneself) in society by means of what a college degree represented to the participants. The meaning that my participants attributed to a college degree had a sociological implication: it confirmed the participants' existence in society. College became a means to redefine their legal identity because college validated their existence in a way that the government has not been able to do by means of legalization.

Furthermore, my study's findings add to Pérez' research in that sense of self-determination, which is psychologically formulated, is only one factor that helps students achieve a college degree. My findings suggest that self-determination is significantly promoted or restricted by the influence of environmental and social interactions. A great number of my participants emphasized the importance of socially- inclusive environments and supportive interactions with faculty and staff as factors that impacted their confidence and their college experiences. Lacking this social support, two participants felt isolated, alone, and like they did not fit in their community. An absence of sense of belonging can put any student at a risk of leaving the institution, forgoing his or her opportunity for degree attainment. As a result, self-determination is not the only factor that affects an undocumented student's probability of degree attainment. The sociological aspect of this conclusion therefore adds to the existing literature.

Conclusion Three: Disclosing Undocumented Status

The third conclusion stresses the importance of the dynamics between the components in a space (the people involved and structure within the space) and the degree to which undocumented students deemed the space appropriate for disclosing their undocumented identity. Many of the participants' level of comfort to disclose their identity was often based on the social interactions and perceived social implications of the space they were in. My findings indicate that the dynamics in an enclosed physical location were perceived as suitable for disclosure when the conversations were structured in the form of a forum or are pre-arranged for a listening audience. On the other hand, the majority of the participants did not perceive physically open spaces where unplanned, daily interactions occurred as suitable for legal identity disclosure.

The distinction between suitable and unsuitable spaces for disclosing legal status identity adds to Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) interest in "the degree to which college as a particular structural location fosters the formation of particular felt identities" (p. 465). They were interested to know if there was something in particular about the college experience that fostered the formation of individuals' self-perceived identities as a social construct (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004, p. 465). In defining "college" as a particular location, I found that the dynamics of the components within this space do indeed foster the formation of particular felt identities. My research further adds that certain formations of felt identities for some people depended on the components within the smaller spaces that constitute the larger physical conglomerate that is the college campus. For instance, when the dynamics within an enclosed physical space were deemed appropriate for disclosure, participants formed a self-perceived, socially empowered self. When the components of the physical space were deemed unsuitable for disclosure, some participants constructed a solitary self-perception of their identity.

I had originally suggested in my framework that there might be different social implications associated with the direct and indirect interactions students experience within the institutional context due to the social and environmental components unique to each institution. Indeed, my findings aligned with my expectation that there would be different social implications associated with the interactions students experienced. However, specifically regarding when a participant decided to disclose her undocumented status, the type of institution did not generally make a difference. What mattered most in many of the participants' decision to disclose their status was the intersection of the components in the space, rather than the type of institution. The small

Catholic college was the only exception to this claim because the college's mission and perceived social interactions within it may have had an impact on the participant's decision to disclose her legal status. Nonetheless, the perceived right combination of people, format, and structure of a space gave many of the participants an opportunity to disclose their undocumented status, as was the case with Sophia, Julieta, Yovanna, Juanita and Jasmine. The opposite was true when the dynamics of the space were not perceived as suitable or relevant to their undocumented identity. In these situations, participants like Andrea and Natalie perceived seclusion from their universities.

The participants needed to have a certain level of education and awareness of the law in the situations when they decided to disclose their undocumented identities. Abrego (2011) defined *legal consciousness* as the way an undocumented person understands, interprets, and applies the law everyday. My findings were consistent with Abrego's (2011) previous claims that the extent to which a person voices his or her concerns requires that person to be aware or be informed of their existing rights. My findings add to Abrego's research in that the extent to which a person makes claims also requires a particular structural environment-person combination. Furthermore, my findings add to this existing research by focusing specifically on environments within higher education and their impact on how an individual experiences legal consciousness.

In every day conversation and in open physical spaces, students did not usually perceive the components of the environment as suitable for self-revealing their legal identities. Although there were two exceptions, most participants were more cautious about to whom and for what reasons they would make their legal status evident. For some, the social stigma and concerns about how others would perceive them were more

significant than the benefits of sharing their reality as undocumented students. Others shared concerns about putting their families at risk. Both concepts of social stigma and risk are consistent with Pérez' (2012) finding that undocumented youth begin to form a sense of embarrassment and that the thought of facing discomfort from exposing their legal status encouraged avoidance of the situations that would put them at risk. Several of my findings were also consistent with Pérez' (2012) assertion that the most evident of the social constraints were tangible, such as getting a drivers' license. However, Pérez (2012) described the consequences for not being able to do these tasks from a psychological perspective. My findings suggest there are sociological consequences as well. Within the context of higher education, the "tasks" and the implications for not being able to accomplish said tasks were displayed differently. For instance, "tasks" were often exhibited in the form of social tasks, such as taking a trip, attending a party, or getting a drink. Not being able to do these things had social implications for the participants because it affected the types or relationships they would form with their peers as well as the social groups they associated themselves with.

Most of the participants also refrained from disclosing their undocumented legal identity in class. Within the classroom and academic structural locations, participants often overlooked their undocumented legal status, an indication of the value they held for their identity as a student. I asked all of the participants to submit pictures of places on campus that were important or meaningful to them. Six of the eight participants submitted pictures of academic locations, such as the building that housed their major or the library, as places on campus that had had an impact on their identities. Evidently, their student identity was important, so they generally did not disclose their

undocumented legal status in these spaces if they perceived it would have social implications. In fact, one participant did not want to face “confrontation” with her peers by revealing her undocumented status. She demonstrated concern for what her peers would think about her and how they would react towards her, a common issue for many of the participants. Although the social stigma may have impacted the students psychologically, my findings demonstrated that it also affected the participants’ social identities.

Conclusion Four: Status Ownership

Fourth, I conclude that students engage in *status ownership* when given the opportunity to develop a voice and contribute back to their communities. In addition, two themes emerged from the participants’ conceptualization of the term: *be yourself* and *be unafraid*. I will first define the term *status ownership* based on my analysis of the findings. Then, I will describe how the participants defined *status ownership* for themselves. Finally, I will note connections between their meaning-making of the term and my own.

Status ownership: Framework perspective. In my framework, I referred to *status ownership* as the interaction between undocumented students’ self-perceptions of the social position they enter in college and the often negative social implications of their undocumented status identity. In my first conclusion of this discussion, I proposed that positive social labels associated with college attendance had a beneficial effect on the way in which an undocumented student experienced the socially constructed labels of being undocumented. Having the acceptance from institutional agents provided

participants with an opportunity to reconstruct their perceived negative legal status labels. As a result, many participants acquired a social position within their campuses as leaders, representatives for the undocumented student, and agents for bringing awareness to their communities. The opposite was true when the social context within the structure of the higher education institution did not offer opportunities for social support or ignored the existence of undocumented students at their institution. In these cases, students felt isolated, excluded and questioned their place in their college community. Thus, college is a place where undocumented students may have the opportunity to engage in a new process of defining or redefining their conflicting legal and social identities. With sufficient institutional support, this process of identity clarification can result in significant contributions to the campus community as one expression of *status ownership*.

Status ownership: Student perspectives. I also sought to explore undocumented students' self-perceptions of *status ownership*. At the end of each interview, I asked the participants: "What does the term *status ownership* mean to you?" Several participants noted they had never heard the term before. Others mentioned having thought about it when they read the consent forms before the interview, but did not know how to define it. I did not seek to explain the concept behind the term because I was interested in their organic answers. Due to the open-ended question and exploratory intent, participants reached different conclusions about the meaning of the term *status ownership*. Nevertheless, two themes emerged from their responses: *be who you are* and *be unafraid*.

In the first theme, five of the eight participants defined *status ownership* as something related to who they are and the ways they accept their legal status in their lives. Juanita hesitated when answering, but then suggested that she perceives *status*

ownership as something that comes from within oneself. She said *status ownership* to her is “who we think we are and how...I don’t know how to phrase this...like what we own and how we are.” Jasmine defined it in a similar way, as something that comes from within, but she also explained it requires social and personal awareness:

Status ownership, again, you have to be [hesitates] confident. I guess, that this is your status, whether it be citizen, resident, or how they call us “aliens.” I think it's just a matter of being aware of who you are, what you are, and what you can and can't do.

Along the same lines, Natalie explained that *status ownership* is a part of your life and requires a sense of awareness because you have to figure out how to work with it:

Not accepting it in the long term. Not saying that's a definite for forever and always, but just kind of, at the moment taking that status. Accepting it into your life, and just kind of, working with it instead of against it.

Paola’s response was related to the other two participants’ responses. However, she described *status ownership* as something more than who she is; it was connected to her role in society:

What am I doing to, kind of, earn my place in a sense in the U.S...Being something positive for society, and then, even though you did something illegally, you're still a blessing to your community and not bringing your community down. That's what comes to mind when, status ownership. Owning your status by making a positive impact.

The responses imply that *status ownership* is something internal that describes who participants are, but that can be displayed in a way that positively impacts society.

Yovanna’s answer further describes it as getting to a place where the undocumented status does not influence her meaning making of her purpose and role in society:

I think as long, once you figure out who you are, and what your purpose is, whatever it might be. Whether you're going to become an activist, a doctor, a lawyer, whatever it is that you are trying to find, as long as you find it, or you're in the path towards it, you're immigration status has nothing to do...it can be a part of your identity, I think we wouldn't be who we are if it wasn't for our status;

however, we can't let a piece of paper, one word, really define you. Which, the fact that, in some ways that means you're unafraid and you take ownership of your story. So, in a sense you do take ownership of your life and your story and you need to know whatever makes you happy. And so it's overcoming all that, and becoming a stronger individual. I think that's when you really own your status. You no longer say, "Well I can't do these things because I'm undocumented." Once you're in that place, I feel like you own it.

The participants' definitions of the term *status ownership* present a connection to my analysis of the findings. Interestingly enough, the participants did not know that I had originally defined the term as the interaction between the socially constructed implications of the label of *undocumented* and the formation of the social status that comes from being a college student. They defined *status ownership* as something that came from within them and can have an impact on society; the former aligns with how they perceived their label of undocumented and the latter with the formation of their perceived social position in their communities. In this first theme, the participants' suggestion that *status ownership* is, in part, something that comes from within relates to their perceptions they hold about their undocumented status. My findings illustrated that the presence or absence of certain factors (faculty, staff, peers, and the dynamics within physical spaces) of the college environment significantly impacted many of the participants' perceptions of their undocumented legal identity. Thus, the impact of the environmental factors on how the participants' formulate *status ownership*, though perhaps invisible to students, cannot be ignored.

In the second theme, two of the participants defined *status ownership* as being unafraid to be open about their undocumented status. Julieta's definition was: "I guess not just being, not being afraid of actually saying 'I'm undocumented.' I see it as

someone actually standing up and saying ‘I’m undocumented’ even in a room full of people that disagree with it.” Andrea’s response was analogous:

You're not afraid to say that you're undocumented, so I guess I would say that I don't own my status [chuckles] most of the time, especially at school. Like, it's easier to like here in [large city in the South] to say “I’m undocumented” because a lot of people are undocumented. But in [small Northeast town] there's not a lot of us [pause] so it's harder to say that you don't have that documentation.

Like Julieta, Andrea attributed not being afraid to say “I’m undocumented” to her meaning of *status ownership*. It is important to also note that her response implies that the environment has implications on whether or not she perceived herself as having *status ownership*. Lastly, to Sophia, *status ownership* meant “having something to your name and proving people wrong.” Her definition of the term combines both themes in that it associates college to her role in society and has an action associated with it. The idea of having something “to her name” is connected to her a place in society, and the idea of proving people wrong is related to the second theme of not being afraid. Being unafraid implies there is a certain level of agency and openness about their legal status that is required to prove people wrong.

These three participants suggest there are actions associated with *status ownership*: “not being afraid” to disclose one’s undocumented legal status and “proving people wrong.” According to my findings, the participants that engaged in action to bring awareness about undocumented students to their communities were those who felt empowered to be agents of change; furthermore, they were also the same participants that benefited from supportive social environments. As a result, it is important to acknowledge the impact of the environmental context on a students’ perceived *status ownership*. In addition, my findings showed that the dynamics within a space and the

perceptions participants associated with those spaces also impacted their decision to disclose their legal identity. As such, the findings further imply that students can be unafraid *but not take action* when they perceive that the environment is unwelcoming.

For the students who engaged in *status ownership*, the case can be made that they did so because they were in supportive environments. Though the environment does indeed impact *status ownership*, an undocumented college student does not necessarily need to be in a supportive environment to engage in *status ownership*, though he or she may perceive it differently. Andrea's story is an example of this. She did not perceive herself as having *status ownership* because she did not openly say, "I'm undocumented." Her perception can be attributed, at least in part, to her unsupportive environment. However, her self-perception is inconsistent with her actions and willingness to talk to incoming undocumented students, one-on-one, about what it means to be undocumented at her institution. As a result, *status ownership* does not equate to disclosing one's identity to the masses, though two participants perceived it that way. *Status ownership* does however, have a relationship to how an undocumented student finds ways to contribute to his or her community.

These contributions can take different forms and depend on the type of environment the student finds him or herself in, thereby suggesting that *status ownership* is not something that can be easily plotted to a specific point. Rather, an undocumented student engaging in *status ownership* is on a continuum. The continuum reflects the intersection between the two students' identities this study focused on: the social implications of their legal status and the social position they enter by means of their college participation. The way in which an undocumented student makes meaning of

these identities, as discussed, depends largely on the social interactions and the types of environment they encounter in college. Undocumented students are most fully and successfully engaged in *status ownership* when the institution provides social support for this student population, and they perceive themselves as mattering to the institution. Therefore, an undocumented students' place on the continuum also significantly depends on the institutional support, or lack thereof, they receive. Furthermore, the supportive environment (social or spatial) and the students' perception of it also define the ends of the continuum. Because the level of institutional support an undocumented student receives is not in his or her control, one position on the *status ownership* continuum is not better than another. As Yovanna so eloquently stated, "Once you're in that place, I feel like you own it." In other words, once the student comes to a place where he or she perceives a sense of confidence in contributing to his or her community, then he or she would have placed him or herself on the *status ownership* continuum.

Limitations

The restricted timeline of this study was a limitation to the research. Given an extended period of time, follow-up interviews could have added to the trustworthiness of the findings. Furthermore, more time would have given more students the opportunity to participate. This would mean more data for a richer data set that could add nuance to what we know about undocumented students' *status ownership*. Nevertheless, the sample size I use is sufficiently large and diverse to result in data saturation and is appropriate for a phenomenological study.

A related limitation to this study was due to the nature of the "snowball" technique I used to find participants. Four participants volunteered to participate in the

study on their own. These participants demonstrated more advocacy and signs of activism than those who were personally approached to participate. As a result, half of the findings may reflect the stories of a select group of undocumented students who tend to be more confident about their legal identities. In addition, two of the participants were at the same institution and involved in some of the same student activities. While these two participants generally may have interacted with a common social network, which could be considered a limitation to the findings, their interviews did not reflect homogenous perspectives.

Another limitation is that a male perspective is not reflected in the findings. Although their experiences and perceptions could have added richness the findings, I did not make gender a key factor to this study. Furthermore, though an all-Hispanic female sample can be viewed as a limitation, the sample can also be considered a strength of the study.

Lastly, as a former undocumented student, my own interpretations could reflect the inevitable biases that come from my predisposition on undocumented students' experiences (see positionality statement in Appendix). However, my experiences may have also strengthened the experiential and interpretive insight of the data analysis and conclusions. The fact that I could relate and understand my participants on an intimate level may have also lead to a wealth of information and observations not documented before.

Implications

A Proposed Framework: The Case for Social Mobility

This study did not focus on social mobility, but my analysis of the findings illustrated a great number of connections to the impact college can have on an undocumented student's sense of social mobility. All of the participants had aspirations for professional careers after college. Several aimed to further their education in graduate school, and they often placed an emphasis on a desire to help their parents financially after college. Their dreams and aspirations demonstrated a hope for making their lives better and an opportunity for social advancement. In his study of change of stability, Feldman (1972) references certification and labeling in college as associated with life-cycle movement:

This orientation [one that tends to be indifferent to a developmental framework] employs a social-structural or systems analysis. Theorists concentrate on the distinctive life-cycle and social-system context of college students by emphasizing the societal functions of higher education. The impact of college is analyzed in terms of the movement of students within a general, national social system in which college is a subsystem in interaction with other sub-systems. (Feldman, 1972, p. 11).

Feldman (1972) further focused his approach on the ways in which higher education serves as a gatekeeper that separates the middle and upper class from the lower class by certifying students for positions in middle and upper class occupations in society (p. 11). Despite what college can do for individuals and their social advancement, undocumented college students' social mobility is constrained in several ways: (1) their own perceptions of acquired social status, (2) the relatively limited social capital they acquire in college, and (3) the restricted opportunities for professional occupations after college.

The lack of opportunities to engage in ways to enact the social labels related to their future occupations, such as *future doctor* or *science major*, that Feldman (1972) suggests channel students and certify them for entrance into these occupations, discouraged most of the participants from perceiving they acquired a social status. Although several participants stated that college certainly put them at a different “level” than their non college-going undocumented peers, some participants did not feel comfortable stating that they were, as a result of their college student status, better or at a higher social status. In fact, some participants openly stated they did not perceive their participation in college as putting them at a higher social status than those who did not have the opportunity to attend college. The majority of the participants described their aspirations for future professions, but they did so accompanied by a concern for how to achieve these positions while recognizing the legal implications of their undocumented status. It is crucial to note, however, that the social status that they acquired but did not perceive, had been mitigated by their undocumented legal status and not necessarily because college did not impact their social status. Furthermore, their own perceptions about their acquired social status, in addition to their restricted opportunities and their relatively limited acquired social capital, impacted their social mobility.

To illustrate this, think of a students’ time in college as a ladder with three steps (Figures 3 & 4). When students are at the bottom of the ladder, they enter college on what they perceived as equal footing. In fact, participants described their college participation as being on par and equal to their peers. Although this may be true in terms of their cognitive abilities and psychological formation, their legal status had social implications that resulted in a disparity in social movement when compared to their documented

counterparts. For the purposes of illustrating this example, I use the term “documented counterparts” to refer to all students who have legal documentation to live in the U.S. in a general sense. I recognize that different categories of students are involved within the group of documented students (students from different socio-economic and/or ethnic and racial backgrounds for instance) and social mobility within the different groups of documented students may also be unparalleled, impacting their future occupations and place in society. An example to this disparity is that of the unequal upward social mobility of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in relation to their high socio-economic status counterpart (Walpole, 2003).

Drawing from the ladder example, to get to the next step, undocumented students first have to dismantle and reconstruct their perceived legal identities to realize what college allows them to do. The formation of a new social identity is possible when they have opportunities to interact with faculty, staff, and peers who are knowledgeable of the unique support undocumented students need (Figure 3). While the first step (Fig. 3A) for undocumented students is to reconstruct their perceived social identities by receiving positive social labeling from supportive institutional agents, their documented counterparts benefit from the social labeling that begins to channel them into certain future occupational positions (Fig. 4A). The documented students enact the social labeling they receive from those around them by pursuing internships, studying abroad, and taking on opportunities that will help them enter into said future occupational positions. The documented students, thus, advance to the first step of the latter with opportunities that have larger implications when they graduate from college.

The social capital acquired in college is often a factor in the social mobility of an individual. To get to the second step of the ladder (Fig. 3B), which would be equivalent to the first step of the ladder for their documented counterparts (Fig. 4A), institutions of higher education have to have informed faculty and staff that can help undocumented students pursue internships and opportunities that will help channel them into their future occupations. Three factors limit this student population's opportunities for advancement: the lack of institutional agents aware of their needs, legal status implications that limit the opportunities for enacting the social labels of their future occupations, and perceptions of what is possible that limit both sense making and behavior. One example of how undocumented students are limited in enacting the positive social labels for future occupations is that they cannot travel abroad and have fewer internship options.

Status confinement is a related theme from this study's findings. Participants gravitated to faculty, staff, and student groups of ethnic minority backgrounds because of their perceptions of the white majority. Assuming that white privilege is associated with social capital, undocumented students sacrificed some social capital by gravitating to the ethnic minority. However, this does not mean that they did not gain social capital by associating more frequently with faculty and staff of color. As a matter of fact, this was the principal way to reach the second step of the ladder. As undocumented students are deciphering ways to pursue opportunities that can make them competitive graduates (Fig. 3B), many of their documented peers (particularly those from upper class families) have already done that in the first step and are now at a point to either pursue other opportunities or build on their social capital by means of networking (Fig. 4B).

The last and final step of the ladder is entrance into an occupational position that secures a middle or upper social class status in society. Documented college students are ensured an opportunity to reach this step (Fig. 4C), but undocumented college students face uncertainty (Fig. 3C). The unpredictability of their temporary DACA work authorization, if they have one, restricts their opportunities for professional occupations.

As this framework illustrates, undocumented students have a potential for social mobility, but it is not comparable to their documented peer's opportunity for social mobility, similar to the experiences of low socio-economic status students (Walpole, 2003). In addition, the role of institutional agents who are knowledgeable and aware of how to support undocumented students is significant in the social impact that college can have for this particular student group. When this support is absent, it can possibly leave students at the bottom of the ladder. As such, this proposed framework on the impact of college on an undocumented students' social mobility indicates a direction for further research.

Implications for Research

Although this research study focused on the impact of the social context within the context of higher education on undocumented students' self-perceived legal status identities, it did not ignore the implications associated with the larger social structures in the United States on the formation of their legal status identities. In fact, the findings of this study stress the significance of legal standing in the United States on the way participants constructed their legal identities.

The recent passing of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals in 2012, which postpones removal action from the United States and allows qualified undocumented

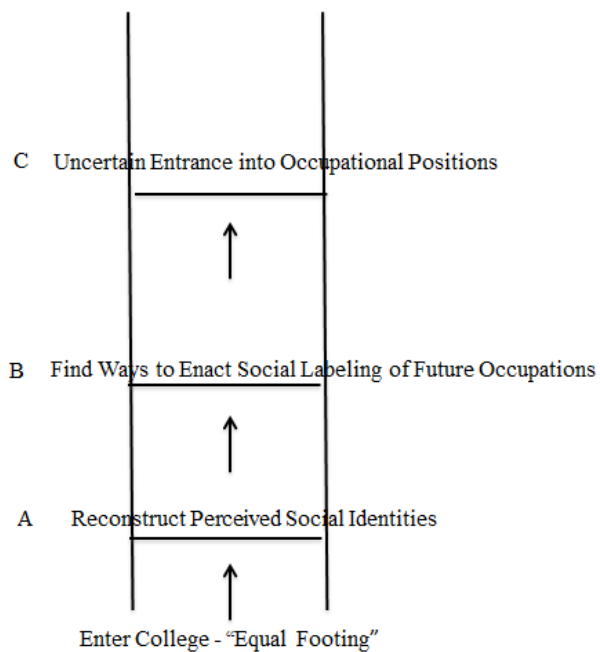


Figure 3. The Case for Social Mobility: Undocumented College Student

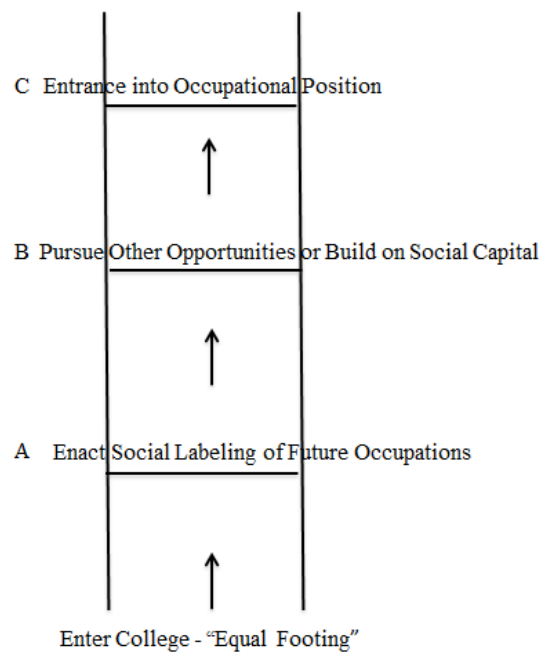


Figure 4. The Case for Social Mobility: Documented College Student

students work authorization, was a salient common denominator in the respondents' experiences. Seven out of the eight respondents had approved DACA permits, which put them at yet another level of legal standing, caused some identity confusion, and further complicated institutional support from uninformed staff. One of the participants described that her institution did not know what to do with her when she presented her new social security number and explained she was approved under DACA. Other participants expressed relief for not being considered first in deportation proceedings and glad to have work authorization. However, participants also revealed a concern for the uncertainty of DACA due to the U.S. governments' unresolved immigration policies. For instance, several participants communicated a concern for the level of honesty they should have with potential employers. They were unsure if they should mention their work permit is only valid for two years and explain their situation knowing it may keep

them from getting the job. Their only other option was to avoid explaining their situations and simply provide their social security number to their perspective employer, which would mean they would have to deal with the consequences later. DACA also had implications on the participants' perceptions of their future occupations. Many had questions about how their new situation under DACA was relevant when considering graduate school and professional licenses, such as passing the bar exam or nursing examinations. Because whether or not they will keep their work permit is up to debate in the U.S. government, participants' futures remained uncertain.

Despite the limitations and concerns regarding DACA, this same permit provides new opportunities for undocumented students that they did not have before. Some examples of these opportunities include applying for internships and getting a drivers license, both of which have social implications on the way they interact with their peers in college. The governments' upcoming decision on the future of DACA will provide an opportunity for future research because if the uncertainty of it is removed and students have a permanent work permit, the impact of college using Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) framework could have yet another effect on this student population.

Furthermore, another area for current research is exploring the impact of college on undocumented students from this same framework but with a focus on DACA as a factor on the undocumented students' self-perceived identity. The one participant that had not received her DACA approval stated, "My friends that I know are undocumented, they've received their permit and stuff like that, so they're kind of on a different level already. So, they have more freedom, and I'm still kind of like on the bottom." Her

statement implies there is a social status associated with DACA for undocumented college students, and thus, an area for further research.

Finally, the dynamics within an environment, including the physical location and the people involved in the space, had an effect on whether or not undocumented students in my study disclosed their undocumented status. The impact of the environment on the participants' self-perceived identities was largely significant. A further focus on the structural, physical location and its impact on this student populations' agency is an area for further research (Alleman, N., Holly, L.N., & Costello, C.A, 2013).

Implications for Practice

Significant recommendations for institutional policies and practice result from the findings of this research study. The first and most important of the recommendations echoes a call that is supported by existing research about the importance of hiring and retaining faculty and staff of color. In addition, hiring faculty and administrators that fully understand the diversity of their student populations and are willing and open to support *all* of their students is also a recommendation for institutional leaders in charge of hiring practices. This may seem evident, but it is not often the case that institutional agents represent the changing diversity of their student populations. The benefits of these hiring practices will not only benefit undocumented students in higher education but students who are often underrepresented as well.

Second, the analysis highlights the importance of connections and relationships for building social capital and sustaining social mobility. Because identifying an undocumented student is visually impossible, postsecondary educators should have posters or items in their offices that signify they either have had training on the topic of

undocumented students or are an ally to support undocumented students in higher education. Something as simple creating an inviting environment within an office can create a connection with undocumented students who would otherwise be hesitant to openly discuss his or her needs. Moreover, this can be the start of a relationship that will foster the student's development of social capital.

Third, higher education student affairs professionals should not shy away from programming that addresses the issue of immigration in the United States. The analysis of the findings suggests that programming on campus that acknowledged undocumented students had a positive impact on the undocumented students attending the institution, even those who did not perceive to have institutional support from their institutions. As a result, whether or not undocumented students are a part of the programming, I recommend that events, forums, and expert speakers are invited to educate the campus community from an unbiased perspective and in a structured, educational setting. Furthermore, if higher education professionals value holistic development and student support, they should make an effort to humanize the college experience for all of their students. One way they can do this for undocumented students is first through their programming, and secondly, by being conscious and aware of what their students say. If a student constantly makes excuses about why he or she cannot travel to a conference, go out with a group, show his or her government issued I.D., apply for an internship or a travel abroad opportunity, student affairs professionals should make an effort to form a trusting relationship with the student in an attempt to support him or her and be the bridge between the resources and support the student requires. For administrators who know

undocumented students, validation, support, and genuine care about their success are further recommended.

In addition, communication between admissions, financial aid, and career services needs to be enhanced. Two participants noted their institutions provided services specifically designed to support undocumented students. For instance, at one institution, the participant disclosed that her institution considers undocumented students “special cases” from the start of their admissions process. From then on, students who were considered “special cases” received the support they required from trained staff assigned to work with them. At another institution, the participant was assigned a financial aid advisor that she saw every year. Thus, the participant did not have to worry about the social implications of having to disclose her legal status to staff that may or may not be knowledgeable of her needs. I recommend similar partnerships between admissions and financial aid in which certain advisors would be assigned to specifically work with the undocumented students at their institutions. Such partnerships would maximize undocumented college student support and minimize the resources necessary to train departments in their entirety.

Furthermore, I suggest the aforementioned partnership recommendation include the career services department. Life after college is unquestionably a challenge for undocumented students. It is no secret that they will have inquiries and concerns about what they can and cannot do when they graduate. Career services at every institution therefore play an important role in the social formation of this student population. By providing advice that guides undocumented students into occupations that can both fit

their goals and their legal standing in the United States, career advisors can maximize the social mobility of this student population and the impact they can have on society.

Finally, institutions of higher education that currently assign undocumented students to their international office should be aware that doing so can have social implications on the way their students' perceive their legal status identity and their sense of belonging at their institutions. One of the participants expressed feeling "out of place" because she did not belong at the international student office. These offices are designed to support international students and their needs; however, undocumented students do not have the same legal or social needs as international students because they, more often than not, have lived the majority of their life in the United States.

Implications for Education and Training

Informed faculty and staff are important institutional agents in the college environment that impact undocumented college students. My findings suggest that this student population benefited from two types of support: social support, which included validation and personal relationships, and guiding support, which included educating students on the opportunities available to them within the law. Institutional agents provided social support to several of the participants that was significant in the students' reconstruction of their identities. As a result, I recommend that trainings currently focused on best practices for student support in the non-academic, social, and extracurricular aspects their lives do not ignore the needs of this particular student population. Furthermore, if the institution does not have a large population of undocumented students, already existing diversity trainings should also include the topic of undocumented students because these trainings generally focus on every other aspect

of a student's identity except their legal status identity. Secondly, faculty and staff that were able to provide factual information and guidance to several of the participants about what an undocumented student can and cannot do within the law were also significant contributors to how the participants redefined their perceived possibilities and hence, their legal identities. Therefore, institutions of higher education should develop trainings that specifically educate faculty and staff on the intricate legal situation of undocumented students so that when necessary, they are informed and able to provide information to undocumented students on the opportunities available to them within the law.

Lastly, and as part of training of future administrators, program directors and leaders of masters programs in Higher Education and Student Affairs should consider revisiting their curriculum to include this student population. Although support does not necessarily mean advocating for undocumented students, trained and informed faculty and staff can avoid situations that isolate students or make them feel out of place during some of the most formative years of their lives.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Positionality Statement

The phenomenological approach I adopted focused on the individual's understanding and meaning-making based on how the individual thinks about his or her experiences. I was especially interested in using this approach to explore how undocumented students make sense of the social status that comes from being in college in conjunction with how they perceive their undocumented status. I believe personal experiences affect one's perceptions and understanding; it then follows that my knowledge, perceptions, and meaning-making on the topic would also be affected by my previous lived experiences. As a result, it is essential to reveal my once undocumented status as an undergraduate student as well as my perceived preconceptions on the topic that may have influenced my research interest, findings, and conclusions of this study. I first disclose my reasons and interests for pursuing this study followed by presumed biases that may have influenced my research process. Lastly, I discuss how I addressed the natural influence my personal experiences could have had on my study.

Personal History and Relationship to the Study

Growing up as an undocumented student in the United States and experiencing college as an undocumented college student in 2004-2008 significantly influenced my interest in conducting this study. At the time, undocumented students in college were a new phenomenon since the DREAM Act's recent introduction in 2001. Many aspects of the college experience shaped the way I created meaning about my status. Very few

college administrators were aware of undocumented students, and those who were not aware of our existence, were unsure of how to approach me when they met me. The ways in which I disclosed and/or exposed my legal status was dependent on the social context I was in. There were certain social contexts within my college experience where I did not embrace my legal status, as it was easier to avoid the stigma associated with it. On the other hand, there were times when the social context called for me to disclose and take full ownership of my undocumented status. The concept of dual identities and the speculation that college had anything to do with one's undocumented identity was further evident for me with my observations of the way my brother approached his legal status. There was a distinct difference in our approach towards our legal status and how we chose to act based on how we perceived our undocumented status. His experience as an undocumented student at Stanford was different than my experience at Texas A&M University. My brother seemed to have had more opportunities to advocate for himself by engaging with other undocumented students in the Bay Area. I, on the other hand, had very few opportunities to embrace my undocumented identity at Texas A&M University. I believe the college environments and the people we associated with in college shaped the way we each made meaning of our undocumented status. We were at opposite ends of the spectrums: he in total ownership and I, a more conservative owner of my legal status.

Influences on the Research Process: Biases

My position as a former undocumented student impacts the way I observe and perceive the undocumented student population. It also influences the way I approach the meaning-making of the literature and the findings in this study. For instance, my preconceived understanding of the role of college in an undocumented student's "status

ownership” could have possibly impacted my focus on specific aspects of the college experience as I performed the research process. Other biases that could have influenced the way I thought about my study could have resulted from my understanding of the college under the lens of a future student affairs professional. “The researcher is a product of his or her society and its structures and institution just as much as the researched” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 120). My current social reality is multidimensional and complex because I am a product of both my social context as an undocumented undergraduate student and a documented graduate student in higher education and student affairs. Therefore, my attitudes and values when approaching the study could reflect my preconceived understanding of the college experience from both a higher education administration perspective and an undocumented student perspective.

Addressing My Positionality

An honest approach to the research study is the responsibility of the qualitative researcher. This standard allowed me to have a more personal interaction with my participants in openly acknowledging our similarities and differences. Honoring their experiences above mine as well as validating them as the knowers and experts in the study was of utmost importance for me in this research process. In addition, I minimized the hierarchy between me, the researcher, and them, the researched, to encourage a more objective conversation. I created an atmosphere that was comfortable and promoted value for their stories by asking open-ended questions and allowing participants to tell their stories fully. Furthermore, I shared my findings with the participants to give them an opportunity to make changes to anything I may have misconstrued. Lastly, I committed

to the exploratory nature of my study and focused on the phenomenological approach in an attempt to center my attention on the lived experiences of my participants.

Conclusion

The goal of my study was to give a voice to undocumented students' college experiences and meaning-making process of status ownership in light of these experiences; however, it is important to note that the overall sensemaking of these stories was a co-creation of meaning due to my personal experiences that influenced how I understood their stories. Although my position may have resulted in limitations to my study, the fact that I could relate and understand my participants on an intimate level may have also lead to a wealth of information and observations not documented before.

APPENDIX B

Alejandra Muñoz
Baylor University
Interview Protocol

Instructions to the Interviewer

Preparing for the interview:

- Schedule interview in a setting that allows for minimal interruptions
- Bring two copies of consent form
- Bring recording device
- Decide how much to share with the participant regarding your relationship to the topic

Things to keep in mind: BE PROFESSIONAL

Ensure the participant understands confidentiality and ability to remove consent to participate at any given time.

- Review the consent form.
- Remind the participant that the interview will be recorded.
- Remind the participant of the expected length of the interview.
- Ask participant for questions after reviewing the consent form.

During the interview.

- Note social cues: body language, voice, intonation, etc.
- Create an inviting and comfortable environment.
- Remember to engage in active listening—build rapport

- Examine markers closely
- Be comfortable with silence

After the interview:

- Do not forget to ask if there is anything else they would like to add at the end of the interview

Research Question: What is the role of college in how an undocumented student defines “status ownership”?

Sub-questions:

1. What aspects of the college environment have an impact on undocumented students’ self-perceived legal identity?
2. Do undocumented participants’ experiences in higher education change the way undocumented students’ make meaning of their legal status?
3. In what ways and for what reasons do participants expose their undocumented status?
4. What does “status ownership” mean to undocumented participants?

Topics to Learn About

- The impact of college on undocumented students
- How participants define “status ownership”
- The aspects of higher education that influence undocumented students’ perceptions of their legal status identity
- The influence of the institutional type and its geographic location on the way an undocumented student defines their “status ownership”
- The experiences of undocumented students in higher education

Tradition: Phenomenology

Type of question: Open-ended; semi-structured

Study Protocol

Thesis: What is the role of college in how an undocumented student defines status ownership?

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my study on the role of college on your perceptions of your legal status. As you read in the informed consent document, this interview will take between 45-90 minutes to complete. I will be asking you questions about your undocumented legal status, your college experiences, your perceptions of the role of college on your legal status, and your thoughts about what the term “status ownership” means to you. Remember that your participation is voluntary and you may choose to end the study at any time. Do you have any questions about the study or this interview before we begin?

Section 1: The Impact of College Environment on Self-Perceived Legal Identity

This first set of questions relates to your college experiences and self-perceived identity. I would like to start by asking you a few questions about your college experiences.

1.What aspects of the college environment have an impact on undocumented students’ self-perceived legal identity?

- a. What does it mean to you to be a college student?
- b. What about college makes you define it this way?
- c. How do you view yourself as a result of being in college?
Probe: Do you see yourself differently since you’ve been in college? What aspect of the college environment makes you view yourself this way?
-look for markers on changes student has gone through

Next, I would like to ask you a few questions about how your college experiences have impacted how you make meaning of your legal status identity.

2.Do undocumented participants’ experiences in higher education change the way undocumented students make meaning of their legal status?

- a. In what ways, if any, does your institution acknowledge undocumented students?
Probe: how does this make you feel? How does this relate to how you view your legal identity/how you view yourself as an undocumented student?
- b. Can you describe the types of interactions with peers, faculty, or staff you have had in college and how these have had an impact, if any, in the way you see

yourself with regards to your legal identity? Probe: Can you tell me a story about an experience in college that changed the way you see your legal status?

Probes: if no experiences, then ask: can you tell me about a time in college where your undocumented status came up in a conversation and how this experience was different from other times you had to deal with your legal status?

Look for markers on social interactions with peers, faculty, staff

- c. If you had to define what it means to be an undocumented student at your institution, how would you define it?

(What does it mean to be undocumented at your institution?)

Section 2: Undocumented Student Identity- Self-Perception

Next, I would like to ask you a few questions about your undocumented identity and the ways you expose your undocumented status.

3. In what ways and for what reasons do participants expose their undocumented status?

- a. People have different social identities (for example, I am a wife, sister, daughter..etc) Can you list some of what you see as your social identities?
Probe: From your perspective, which are more important and when and where are they most important?
 - 1. they don't mention college: can you talk about why you did not include college as one of most importance?
 - 2. If they do not mention undocumented: can you talk about why you did not mention undocumented as important?
- b. In what situations do you find your identity as an undocumented college student most important?
Probe: in what situations do your identities in conflict?
- c. Has there ever been a time when your undocumented status label determined your actions?
Look for markers on social context, social interactions that have influenced meaning and action
- d. Describe ways in which you expose your legal status, if any.
If needs clarification: ways in which you make your legal status public, if any
Note markers on visible actions where student demonstrates undocumented identity

Probes: can you tell me more about what led you to act that way? If the participant does not normally make his/her undocumented status evident: can you talk about why you don't normally make your legal status evident?

- e. Are there ever times when you forget you are undocumented? Where and with whom?

Note markers with regards the environment they were in

Probe: Can you tell me more about why you think your undocumented status did not matter in the context you were in?

If participant says no: Do you see your undocumented status as something always present? Can you tell me why being undocumented is something that seems to always be present?

Section 3: Status Ownership

Our last section focuses on how you define your legal status.

4.What does “status ownership” mean to undocumented students?

- a. Is your undocumented status ever a topic of conversation? What kind of social environment makes these conversations easy? Difficult? With whom? Where?
- b. Earlier you mentioned that being undocumented at your institutions means....How does this change the way you perceive your undocumented status identity? What does being an undocumented student mean to you?
- c. What does the term “status ownership” mean to you?

We are now at the end of the interview. But first, is there anything else you wanted to add?

Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. Again, if you have any questions about this interview or the study, please feel free to contact me or the contacts listed on your consent form.

APPENDIX C

Findings: Themes, Categories, and Codes

Research Question: What is the role of college in how an undocumented student defines “status ownership”?

Presence of Undocumented Student Support (theme)

Presence of Events-Structured Conversation (category) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Empowered to share stories (code)
Presence of Student Organization Involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feel at home• More self-esteem• Pride• Have a voice
Presence of Supportive Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special• Understanding (#2 Perception regarding institution acknowledgement)• New-found abilities and changed perceptions (#8)
Presence of Institutional Services <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You’re not just a number but an individual #7• No shame• Changed perception of what can and can’t do #8• Special
Presence of Supportive Peers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Burden of explaining is lessened• “backed me up constantly” #7
Presence of Other Undocumented Students <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support -#2 (secret meeting)• Role models• Not alone

Absence of Undocumented Student Support (theme)

Absence of Events- Structured Conversation (category) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distant story telling #3 (code)• No sharing of story #2 (did not go to support UT event)• Left out (not international)
Absence of Student Organization Involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Silence - #3
Absence of Supportive Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forgotten- #3 “it didn’t want to deal with it aside from letting me in”• “Pave the way” - #3 institutional services for DACA
Absence of other undocumented students <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Out of place• Trailblazer - #3 institutional services for DACA
Absence of Institutional Services <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shame- career services• Silence• Still hiding- #3• Out of place- #3• Forgotten- #3 “it didn’t want to deal with it aside from letting me in”

Factors that impact Self-Disclosure (theme)

Structured Times and Spaces

To Teach Others (category) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• empower other undocumented students (code)• educate faculty, community, and peers about undocumented students
Job/University Role <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions• Student Government
Not in the classroom <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “It’s never in an academic environment”• Impersonal/Philosophical Participation• “Unless I write a paper about it” #7

Day-to-day Interactions

Careful/Strategic <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Like being gay• Prefer one on one• Not around the media #7, 3, 1• Social media
Masking the Truth <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shortened/modified versions of where they're from• Making excuses or lying
Barrier for Participation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study Abroad• Traveling- road trip, flying

Self-Confinement (theme)

Faculty/Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Of ethnic minority backgrounds• “Little racial diversity on professors...a lot older...don't know how they would feel” #3
Conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only open up to trusted peers• Latino students or students of color
Student Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traditionally Hispanic serving• Religiously affiliated• “You are limited to who you're hanging out with and what you're doing too” #2
White people <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceived as having a generalized perception of Mexicans/Hispanics #4• Intimidated by the number of white students at institution, “hide my status” #5• Afraid of losing financial aid if white students tell their parents• Not mentioned around white students• White professors

College: Opportunity for equality (theme)

College defined

- college as an investment
- college as a privilege
- provide for their family
- not about the money
- can come from anywhere and be on “equal footing”
- degree as something in their name
- making a proper name for yourself #3
- the American dream

Make it “worth it”

- make parents’ struggles and sacrifices (to immigrate, to pay for college) worth it
- “pursue the American dream dad put out for me”
- help parents financially
- make my parents proud

Expectations vs. Constraints (theme)

College Expectation

- do something “big”
- “carry their name”
- Perceived Social status of the institution

Constraints

- job opportunities are non-existent, limited, or uncertain (i.e. certifications, DACA)
- limited opportunities for social capital gains (economic barriers)
- limited internship and study abroad opportunities

Additional Findings

Self-Perceived Legal Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a normal person• accomplished/break the stereotypes• empowered (varying degrees: empower others, you have to be the change, etc)• technically I'm DACA (not a status, midway, more stable, special status, uncertain, safer)• more American• not international
Challenged views <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "but you look white"• met people from different backgrounds• don't want to make assumptions• social economic status differences• eye opening
More Confident <ul style="list-style-type: none">• more social• no more shame• more empowered• more diplomatic• proud
Not Stuck up/Snobby but... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• have more options• "don't want them to think I'm more than them"
Self-Discovery <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finding place within the law• Finding place within institution, fitting in• easier (DACA)

Dealing with Legal Status

- accept it
- finding my place within the law
- remind myself there's always people trying to help me
- "empower myself"
- Make a difference (empower others, miss school to be an activist, etc)
- don't take education for granted
- just have to be patient; there's a time for everything
- trust the system
- standing up for my family
- the problem is bigger than yourself

Stigma

- looked down on
- others perceive them as "illegal immigrants"
- feeding off of the economy
- must want to get married

Fears

- family risk
- underrepresented (i.e. in a classroom, avoid conflict)
- Perception of peers
- Treated differently/ruin friendships
- Loss of financial aid
- Legal issues (i.e. partying, participating in activism)

Status Ownership

Be Yourself

- Positive impact
- Earn your place

Be Unafraid

- Be unafraid
- Work with it
- Look past it

Both

- Degree
- Make a name for yourself

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