

“DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?”: IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES OF
UNDOCUMENTED 1.5-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS

by

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“Do You Know Who I Am?”: Identities and Experiences of Undocumented 1.5-Generation
Immigrants

Dissertation Directed by Dr. Christina A. Sue and Dr. Janet L. Jacobs

ABSTRACT

This dissertation draws on participant observation, observation, and interviews with forty-five undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants to investigate how DREAMer activists use narratives to construct their identities, as a mechanism to understand their complex experiences with illegality, and as a tactic in social movement activism. Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants channeled their assimilation into American culture into successful social movement activism. While their activist strategies were successful in garnering support for the DREAMer movement and creating a collective identity around the 1.5-generation experience, their narratives inadvertently perpetuated stereotypes, obscured intra-group inequalities, and silenced experiences with violence and trauma. Undocumented youth were taught by other activists how to talk about their experiences to convince non-immigrant audiences to support immigration reform. Activist coaching helped these youth craft narratives that accomplished specific goals. Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants deployed their narratives in diverse settings, such as protests, legislative hearings, and theater performances, in ways that communicated messages about identity to different audiences. Although these narrative strategies garnered political success and aided in the creation of collective identity, they came at personal costs. Undocumented youth avoided narrating experiences that did not fit into dominant movement discourses, which reproduced inequality in interaction. In particular, their public narratives

obscured experiences with family violence. Undocumented youth publicly silenced narratives of family violence to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes about Latinos, but this silence had the unfortunate effect of maintaining gendered inequality in undocumented immigrant families. By analyzing multiple sources of narrative construction (participant observation, observation, and interviews), I began to understand what was or was not being said in different contexts.

Ultimately, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants challenged hegemonic, racist narratives about undocumented immigrants while simultaneously reproducing intra-group inequalities. This research shows how marginalized groups reproduce broader cultural narratives while constructing new, more inclusive discourses. This work contributes to the literature on illegality, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, narrative and identity, and social movements.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		
1.	Introduction	1
II.	Methods	21
III.	“It was Like a Spark”: Learning to Tell the Narrative of Being Undocumented	40
IV.	“Do You Know Who I Am?”: Scripted Narratives in the Undocumented Student Movement	71
V.	“I Would Say It’s a Struggle”: Legal Status and the Transition to Adulthood	105
VI.	“How Would I Describe My Family? Broken”: Narratives of Family Violence and Trauma	138
VII.	Conclusion	164
REFERENCES		177
APPENDICES		192
A.	Interview Guide	192

LIST OF TABLES

2.1 Selected Interviewee Demographic Characteristics	28
5.1 Discussed Victimization in Interview	138
5.2 Type of Victimization	138

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION¹

An estimated eleven million undocumented immigrants live in the United States, approximately three million of whom are members of the 1.5-generation² (Krogstad, Passel, and Cohn 2017; Migration Policy Institute 2013). The experiences of immigrants who migrated as adults (i.e., the first generation) dominated early research and debates surrounding undocumented immigrants. However, the experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants are, in many ways, distinct from their undocumented first generation counterparts. Writing on the emergence of the undocumented student movement³ Steven Nicholls (2013) observes that the 1.5-generation garner more sympathy from the U.S. public and are less stigmatized than their first generation parents. They are the “poster children” of the general immigrant rights movement Nicholls (2013:32). Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants are sometimes referred to as the “DREAMers” in reference to the DREAM (Development Relief and Education of Alien Minors) Act, a primary goal of the student movement. DREAMers utilized their markers of American-ness, such as English fluency, U.S. education, and knowledge of the U.S. political landscape to construct a successful narrative that they are “American in all ways but one” (Pérez 2009). The so-called “DREAMer narrative,” details how DREAMers had no say in the migration decision; have worked hard to assimilate into American culture and excel at school; and are in desperate need of immigration reform (Fiorito and Nicholls 2016). As I will

¹ My research project involved human subjects and thus required the approval of the CU-Boulder Institutional Review Board. I have had continuous IRB approval to conduct observation and interviews since November 2011 (protocol reference #11-0623).

² Although exact definitions of “1.5-generation” immigrants differ, the term broadly refers to anyone born in another country who migrated to the U.S. in childhood (Rumbaut 2004). Scholars have also called this group “undocumented youth” and “1.5-generation undocumented immigrants.” I use these terms interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

³ This movement has also been called the “DREAMer movement” and the “Undocumented and Unafraid” movement. I use all three terms to avoid repetitiveness.

detail, this narrative strategy has been successful in garnering support for the DREAMer movement. However, being the poster child of a movement has particular consequences.

In this dissertation, I use participant observation, observation, and in-depth interviews to understand how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants use narratives as a tactic in social movement activism, as a mechanism to understand their complex experiences with illegality, and to construct their identities. To investigate these areas of study, I engage with the literature on illegality, the 1.5-generation, and the relationship between narrative, identity, and social movements. The undocumented youth in this study channeled their experiences of being “American in all ways but one” (Peréz 2009) into successful social movement activism that expanded the boundaries of the “American mainstream” (Alba and Nee 2003). While their activist strategies were successful in garnering public support for the DREAMer movement, their narratives obscured inequality, perpetuated stereotypes, reinforced notions of “good” and “bad” immigrants, and silenced experiences with violence and trauma.

Current literature on the impacts of illegality frequently oversimplifies the complicated and varied experiences of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. Restrictive immigration policies and national discourses about immigrants create conditions wherein undocumented immigrants are legally, socially, and culturally excluded (Coutin 2006). Constructing groups as “illegal” is a robust legal and discursive mechanism for producing and reifying perceived categories of difference and entrenching boundaries between “Americans” and “immigrants” (Ngai 2004). Existing scholarship has identified how illegality functions as a discursive mechanism, a tool of regulation, and a marker of boundaries of belonging and exclusion (De Genova 2002, 2004, 2015; Hiemstra 2010; Willen 2007). However, this body of literature examines the impacts of illegality for undocumented immigrants as a group, often assuming a homogenous experience

resulting from being constructed as an illegal population. However, whereas first generation immigrants experience illegality primarily through fear of deportation and a shadowed existence (Chavez 1998), 1.5-generation immigrants go through the U.S. school system, have U.S. friends, and speak English fluently, which leads them to experience illegality in a different way (Flores-González 2017). Compared to their parents, they have greater educational access, are less likely to be perceived as “foreign,” and are more actively engaged in political activism (Ábrego 2006; Nicholls 2013).

Some scholars have recognized the uniqueness of the 1.5 generation experience and made this population the focus of their research (e.g., Ábrego 2001; Gonzales 2011; Gonzales and Chavez 2012; Négron-Gonzales 2013; Pérez 2009). The emphasis has primarily been on how 1.5 generation immigrants navigate illegality while having spent a significant portion of their lives in the United States. In contrast to the first generation, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants negotiate their inclusion in political debates on immigration reform, suggesting that their agency, while constrained, is not absent due to illegality (Heyman 2014). Although scholars studying the 1.5-generation have de-homogenized the “undocumented population,” some of this work still obscures diverse experiences *within* the 1.5-generation, such as those related to family violence and trauma.

I aim to further contribute to conversations surrounding the experiences of 1.5-generation immigrants by examining how this group constructs narratives that create personal and collective identities in the context of advocating for social change and describing traumatic life experiences. Scholarship on narrative and identity has not been adequately leveraged to examine the experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants. Social movement scholars have identified how DREAMer activists use narratives to negotiate strategy and influence public

policy (Nicholls and Fiorito 2016; Swerts 2017). Scholars of race, ethnicity, and immigration have examined how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants experience liminality due to their legal status (Gonzales 2016; Flores-González 2017). Despite these insights, scholars have not analyzed how undocumented youth use narratives in the creation of both personal identities and collective identities. I build on prior studies, using a combination of data gathering methods (participant observation, observation, and interviews) and site selection (organizational meetings, public presentations, protests, theatrical performances, and one-on-one interviews), to analyze how narrative functions in the undocumented student movement and the lives of the 1.5-generation. I argue that undocumented youth adopted broader social movement narratives of perseverance, struggle, and acculturation to create positive personal identities. However, their success came at the cost of reproducing intra-group hierarchies and obscuring narratives of family violence. An additional contribution is that I study this population in Colorado,⁴ where the fluctuating political landscape means that DREAMer activists potentially can have a much more significant impact on political discourse and outcomes than in other locations. Although I use the case of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, this research can also be useful as an example of how marginalized groups use narratives to advocate for themselves and their communities, and the consequences of their narrative strategies. In this sense, I fill a void in existing scholarship by critically examining how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants reproduce hegemonic narratives while simultaneously constructing new, more inclusive discourses.

BACKGROUND

COMPETING NARRATIVES OF BELONGING AND EXCLUSION

⁴ A majority of the existing studies on the experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants and the DREAMer movement took place in Los Angeles and Chicago (e.g., Ábrego 2011; Gonzales 2016; Nicholls 2013; Pallares and Flores-González 2010; Swerts 2017). Compared to Colorado, these areas are more consistently politically liberal.

The experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants unfold under broad cultural narratives that structure how people understand and talk about their lives. An everyday discourse in the U.S. is that we are a “nation of immigrants.” The “nation of immigrants” discourse represents what Cornell and Hartmann (1998) call a “symbolic repertoire”: histories and narratives that bond diverse groups together under a collective identity (237). While immigrant rights supporters drew upon this narrative to expand the boundaries of who gets included in the nation, opponents used this narrative to entrench boundaries between deserving and undeserving immigrants further. Regardless of the political goal, implicitly embedded in this narrative is the legality of previous waves of (predominately European) immigrants, as compared to the illegality of today’s migrants who are primarily from Latin America and Asia.⁵ This discourse constructs immigrants who came to the U.S. “the right way” (i.e., with authorization) as “good,” “moral” immigrants deserving of rights and inclusion. In contrast, immigrants who entered without authorization are deemed “bad,” “immoral,” or “criminal” and therefore undeserving of rights or social inclusion.

Some American citizens (and even immigrants) utilize narratives of coming to the U.S. “the right way” as a form of boundary work to construct symbolic boundaries between deserving “legal immigrants” and undeserving, racialized “illegal immigrants.” Symbolic boundaries are distinctions that categorize people, places, or objects. Once agreed upon, symbolic distinctions transform into social boundaries, which result “in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources” (Lamont and Molnár 2002: 168). Under the “dangerous immigrant” narrative, immigrants are a threat to the laws and culture of the United States and must be kept out or removed. This discourse solidifies boundaries between the “us” (U.S. citizens and authorized

⁵ Before 1917, there were virtually no restrictions on migration from Europe (Golash-Boza 2012; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003). While this narrative holds political weight, it is a myth.

immigrants) and the “them” (people physically outside of the nation-state and unauthorized migrants within national borders) to determine who deserves to be a part of the nation and political process (Cook-Martín and Fitzgerald 2010). This oft-repeated discourse becomes a racialized common sense or taken for granted “truths” that specific people do not belong. Common sense ideas about “dangerous immigrants” permeate policy debates, media portrayals of immigrants, and everyday dialogue about immigration (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003).

To counter hegemonic discourses of the supposed danger of undocumented immigrants, the DREAMer movement formulated a narrative of its own. Given their higher degree of visibility and assimilation (in contrast to their parents), undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants have become the public face of the immigrant rights movement. A significant reason for this was their ability to construct a group narrative that connected their experiences to cultural tropes of the American Dream, meritocracy, and immigrant exceptionalism (Ábrego 2011). The “DREAMer Narrative” (Fiorito and Nicholls 2016)⁶ includes several themes. Among these themes are that DREAMers arrived as children with no choice in the migration decision; they work hard and contribute to American society; and yet they are blocked from integration by outdated immigration policies.

Scholars argue that the framing of a particular narrative, grievance, or goal is integral to the success of movements (see Benford and Snow 2000; Klandermans 1984; Snow and Benford 1986 for reviews of framing processes). Activists must “make attributions regarding who or what is to blame,” (*diagnostic framing*), “articulate an alternative set of arrangements” or solutions to the problem (*prognostic framing*), and “urge others to act in concert in order to affect change”

⁶ Other scholars researching undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants found similar narratives in their studies (Ábrego 2006; Gonzales 2011, 2016; Gonzales and Chavez 2012; King and Puntí 2012; Swerts 2017). To my knowledge, Fiorito and Nicholls (2016) were the first to name this well-documented discourse formally.

(*motivational framing*) (Benford and Snow 2000:615). The DREAMer narrative succinctly covers all three elements. First, activists assign blame to the failed immigration system (*diagnostic framing*). Then, they propose solutions such as the DREAM Act, immigration reform, or lowering deportations to solve the problem (*prognostic framing*). Finally, undocumented students ask citizens to act on their behalf and get involved in the political process (*motivational framing*). Additionally, this narrative pulls on broader, accessible cultural tropes (known in framing literature as *frame alignment*) that enable undocumented youth to convince others that they are deserving of rights. These tropes include emphasizing their “hard work” and their belief in the “American Dream” (Snow and Benford 1986). The DREAMer narrative forms the foundation of my research. Throughout the dissertation, I identify, interrogate, and theorize about the relevance and limitations of the DREAMer narrative to understanding how illegality impacted the lives of undocumented youth.

My research reveals how the DREAMer narrative has been effective in garnering support for public policy and countering discourses of immigrant criminality. However, it also reproduces hegemonic divisions between “good” and “bad” immigrants and further marginalizes undocumented immigrants who experienced family violence. While the undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants in my study used narratives to push back against dehumanizing anti-immigrant rhetoric, they reproduced some aspects of this same discourse in interaction. In other words, they pulled simultaneously from competing cultural discourses when talking about their lives in ways that both benefitted and hindered efforts to create positive identities and work toward political reforms (Swidler 1986).

POLITICAL CONTEXT: THE DREAM ACT AND DACA

Cultural narratives, especially dominant ones, influence public policy. The competing narratives about the 1.5-generation as a “threat” or as “American in all ways but one” are reflected in various political gains and setbacks over the last decade-and-a-half. The passage of the DREAM Act remains the primary goal of the movement as it would allow for undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants who met certain criteria, such as length of stay in the U.S. and no criminal record, to be eligible for a pathway to citizenship. First proposed in 2001, the bill has repeatedly stalled in Congress. Most recently, it was re-introduced in 2017 but failed to come to a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives. Although there is widespread public support for the legislation,⁷ the closest the bill came to passing was in 2010 when it fell five votes short in the Senate (American Immigration Council 2017). Recent scholarship suggests that upwards of 2.2 million undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants would be eligible for legalization if the DREAM Act were to pass (Kerwin and Warren 2018). Given their English proficiency, high levels of participation in the labor force, and educational attainment, they would be poised to contribute positively to the U.S. economy (Kerwin and Warren 2018). Despite its ongoing lack of political success, the introduction of the DREAM Act was important in creating nationwide recognition of the 1.5-generation and establishing the “DREAMer” as a political group (Nicholls 2013).

Another critical piece of legislation was the implementation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). This 2012 Obama-era policy allowed qualifying 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants who were able to prove residency since 2007 and were under the age

⁷ A Pew Research Center (2018) poll found that 74% of Americans favored granting “permanent legal status” to undocumented youth. Likewise, a 2018 Monmouth University poll found that 73% of Americans supported “allowing people who illegally immigrated when they were children to automatically become U.S. citizens, as long as they do not have a criminal record.” While neither of these two polls detailed what would be offered to DREAMers if the act were to pass, they demonstrated general favorability to a program of this type.

of 30 to apply for a two-year renewable work permit to temporarily avoid deportation. Over 750,000 undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants benefitted from the program (UCIS 2016).⁸ In late 2014, President Obama proposed an expansion of the DACA program to include undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants entering between 2008 and 2010 who were under the age of 31 (NILC 2014). This proposal included a DAPA program, or Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, which would provide temporary renewable work permits to first generation undocumented immigrants with citizen or lawful permanent resident children. However, on February 17, 2015, a Texas Federal District Court halted the implementation of the new DACA and DAPA programs. In a split decision (4-4) handed down in June 2016, the Supreme Court (*United States v. Texas*) sent the case back to the lower court of appeals where it remains. Despite the program's shortcomings (for example, no pathway to citizenship and no relief for the first generation), the DACA program provided legal protection that undocumented youth used to gain access to better-paying jobs and higher education (Wong et al. 2017). These gains, however, were short-lived as a new and decidedly anti-immigrant administration assumed power.

Within a week of officially assuming the presidency, President Trump announced the "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements" order which included an increase in immigration enforcement agents and authorization to construct a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Suggesting a softer approach to the DREAMer issue, President Trump claimed in a February 2017 press conference that he was "gonna deal with DACA with heart," citing his role as a father and grandfather in shaping his desire to support the DREAMers (McCaskill 2017). Despite stating that he would support DACA students, the Trump administration announced the end of the DACA program in September 2017. During the announcement,

⁸ Immigrant rights groups referred to recipients as "DACA-mented," a play on "documented."

Attorney General Jeff Sessions (a long-time opponent of the legislation) stated, “The compassionate thing is to end the lawlessness, enforce our laws” (NBC News 2017).⁹ The administration’s rhetoric pulled upon broader cultural tropes that undocumented immigrants were criminals who did not belong in the United States; thus justifying the termination of the policy. It is under this political, social, and cultural context in which the lives of the undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants in this study unfolded. Before discussing the outline of the dissertation chapters and their findings, I will turn to a discussion of the relevant literature on illegality, the 1.5-generation, narrative, identity, and social movements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ILLEGALITY, EXCLUSIONARY CITIZENSHIP, AND THE 1.5-GENERATION

My dissertation draws and builds on the literature related to illegality and the experiences of 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants in multiple ways. Scholars of immigration have emphasized how restrictive immigration policies have constructed the illegal alien as a “*legal and political subject* whose inclusion within the nation was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility—a subject barred from citizenship and without rights [emphasis in original]” (Ngai 2004:4). Undocumented immigrants are physically present within the borders of the nation, but legally, socially, and culturally invisible (Coutin 2000). Illegality translates socially into essentialist categories of racialized difference that define socially-constructed community membership (Chavez 2008). Groups rendered illegal become the embodiment of the border—culturally marked as a foreign threat to national unity (Varsanyi 2008). Given that the bulk of attention to borders focuses on the U.S.-Mexico border and the threat of Mexican and Central American migrants, racism and legal status are closely intertwined (De Genova 2002; Ngai 2004;

⁹ I will return to the issues facing undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants in the Trump era in the conclusion.

O'Connor 2013). While the construction of the illegal threat to the U.S. has changed over time (see Ngai 2004), Latin American immigrants and U.S.-born Latinos/as bore the brunt of this distinction. Mexicans and Mexican Americans, in particular, were “the quintessential ‘illegal aliens’” whose cultural identity in the U.S. was “plagued by the mark of illegality” (Chavez 2008:3). Latinas/os thus embody illegality/as through this racialization process—immigrants and even native-born citizens are “Othered” and criminalized regardless of their behavior or legal status (De Genova 2002, 2005; Hiemstra 2010).

Despite these critical insights identified in the literature, the impacts of illegality are more varied and complex than existing scholarship suggests. This dissertation examines the unique experiences of the 1.5-generation who grapple with structural barriers imposed by illegality yet have a considerable degree of social and cultural integration compared to the first generation. While studies of undocumented first generation immigrants highlight disenfranchisement resulting from illegality, studies of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants show diverse experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and political influence (Ábrego 2006; Chavez 1998; Flores-González 2017), as detailed below.

THE 1.5-GENERATION

Studies of the impacts of illegality point to the salience of age at migration in shaping undocumented immigrants’ experiences in the U.S. (Chavez 1998; Gonzales and Chavez 2012). Some studies (e.g., Massey and Sánchez 2010) contend that illegality, anti-immigrant sentiment, and blocked opportunities keep immigrants from wanting to adopt an American identity. However, others note that undocumented youth want to adopt an American identity, but are blocked from doing so (Ábrego 2006, 2011; Pérez 2009; Flores-González 2017). This

dissertation contributes to this body of research by interrogating how perceived inclusion and exclusion impacts the identities and experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants.

For undocumented youth, their home lives and school experiences from K-12 were similar to their co-ethnic, documented peers, given the guarantee to education that was provided to them by *Plyler v. Doe*.¹⁰ However, they found that their desires for continued education and entry into better-paying jobs than their parents were limited beyond high school (Ábrego 2006; Gonzales 2011). While some undocumented youth were always aware of their legal status, others were not and were therefore shocked when they could not obtain driver's licenses or apply for financial aid for college (Gonzales 2016; Négron-González 2013; Pérez 2009). Gonzales (2011) describes the transition to adulthood as “learning to be illegal,” when undocumented youth realize they could not work specific jobs, obtain driver's licenses, or apply for college scholarships because of their legal status. During the transition to adulthood, some youth reported feelings of helplessness and did not finish high school (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). Others attended college despite structural barriers; however, legal status barred them from prospective jobs post-graduation, and they often worked in similar work conditions as their parents (Gonzales 2016).

Illegality can create conditions where youth are immobilized—cut-off from an American identity or feeling that they have no prospects for advancement (Ábrego 2006; Gonzales and Chavez 2012). Simultaneously, the contradictions between their experiences in childhood and the newly-intensified consequences of illegality in emerging adulthood motivated undocumented

¹⁰ Although immigrants are constructed as “non-persons” at the federal level, the Supreme Court has routinely ruled that states must provide equal protection to immigrants within their borders in line with the Fourteenth Amendment (Varsanyi 2008). In one such case, *Plyler v. Doe*, the Supreme Court ruled that California's proposed ban on providing K-12 education for undocumented children was unconstitutional. Thus, across the U.S., undocumented youth intermingle with their documented classmates without being required to reveal their documentation status.

youth to engage in political activism (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). Activists drew on their experiences of being American “in all ways but one” and their acculturation into American values of hard work and patriotism to advocate for themselves and their parents (Ábrego 2011; Nicholls 2013; Pallares and Flores-González 2010). This suggests that experiences with simultaneous exclusion and inclusion among the 1.5-generation provide unique contexts in which they mobilized their identities for social change (Nicholls 2013).

While existing scholarship has described varied experiences among undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, they focus either on individual experiences *or* collective action. My research combines these two sites of identity construction. Furthermore, the effects of family violence and trauma is a hidden narrative that existing research overlooks, much to the detriment of fully understanding how violence impacts undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants’ mixed experiences with illegality. I document and analyze the importance of narratives of family violence, filling a significant gap in the literature. To understand how undocumented youth construct their identities and experiences, I draw on research on narrative, identity, and social movements.

NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

Early studies of identity conceptualized shared similarities or attributes within groups as innate; however, subsequent sociological scholars argued that identities are socially constructed (Cerulo 1997). Individuals negotiate personal identities in interaction with other people and the social environment (Howard 2000). People negotiate a sense of self by engaging in a variety of activities and self-reflection to create personal identities (Goffman 1959; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1986; Snow and Anderson 1987). One mechanism used to construct and reconstruct personal identities is narrative (Olick and Robbins 1998). People use narratives to describe their

goals and intentions, connect disparate or contradictory experiences, and impact the direction of their lives (Richardson 1990). By narrating their lives in particular ways, people understand how they are supposed to act, feel, and think about their personal identities (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Individuals construct narratives that help them explain their positionality in complex racialized, gendered, and classed hierarchies (Wilkins 2012) and to realign their lived experiences with the identity goals they want to embody (Hochschild 1983).

The process of negotiating and constructing personal identities also involves reconciling inconsistencies between ideas and experiences. For example, Dalessandro and Wilkins (2017) argued that college-age women and men used narratives of overcoming “bad relationships” to assert mature identities, but that these same narratives obscured gendered inequalities that persist in heterosexual relationships. Harrison and Lloyd (2013) found that dairy farmers created boundaries between themselves and their mostly immigrant Latino/a workforce through narratives about their lives. These narratives allowed the farmers to assert privileged classed, gendered, and raced identities while justifying exploitative labor conditions facing immigrant workers. Sue (2013) found that aligning personal narratives to hegemonic discourses solved identity dilemmas resulting from the contradictory experiences of racial discrimination and national colorblind ideologies, but perpetuated silences surrounding racial and ethnic inequality. As the above research demonstrates, narratives can, intentionally or not, also justify, normalize, and reproduce inequality.

In their most basic form, a narrative is a sequence of events in a culturally-relevant structure (Polletta 2006). However, scholars recognize that analysis of narratives goes beyond what people say. Various agents of socialization (e.g., family, school, the media) teach people how to narrate their lives (Richardson 1990). Among other purposes, people use narratives as a

tool for creating identities and constructing the reality of lived experiences (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001; Wilkins 2008). Narratives may be passed down through families (Jacobs 2002) or told by interviewees about themselves and others (Peek 2005; Snow and Anderson 1987). For example, Irvine (2000) found that organizations provide institutional anchors and legitimacy to personal narratives teaching participants not only what to say, but how they should feel about themselves and their relationships. Narratives are thus imbued with culturally-determined emotions and can be used to create the self that a person wants to be (Irvine 2000). Beyond the implications for individual identities, people create narratives to express their sense of group membership (Polletta 2006). People become authentic group members and connect themselves to communities by narrating their lives in particular ways (Hunt and Benford 1994). I build upon this research by interrogating how undocumented youth use narratives of their experiences to construct personal and collective identities and as a tactic in social movement activism.

NARRATIVE, IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Narratives shape self-concept as well as collective identities and can motivate social movement participation (Polletta and Jasper 2001). After the so-called “cultural turn” in social movement studies, scholars called for research on the role of narratives in social change and collective identity formation among activist groups (Davis 2002; Jasper 1998; Polletta 2006, 2008). Social movement studies of narratives came from scholars who felt that overly-structuralist social movement theories, such as resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1973) or political process (McAdam 1994; Tarrow 1989) ignored important cultural, emotional, and social-psychological factors (Fominaya 2010). Narrative shapes self-concept as well as collective identities, which David Snow defined as “a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences” (2011: no page). Taylor and Whittier (1992)

argued that emergence of a politicized collective identity requires constructing boundaries differentiating group identity, shared consciousness and goals among group members, and politicizing the groups' minority status. Alberto Melucci (1998) argued that unity is not a given; instead, collective identity results from activism. Although perceived shared characteristics, experiences, or grievances may inspire people to join movements, a shared sense of "we" must be negotiated and integrated into movement activities, the lives of participants, and their sense of self for movement success (Melucci 1995; Fominaya 2010). Rather than treating collective identity as stable, I treat collective identity as being recreated and altered in the context of movement participation.

Individual and collective narratives in social movements serve three primary purposes: creating and shaping identities for movement participants; mobilizing movements and allies; and, engendering political change (Polletta 2006). Movement narratives are public performances that signify group membership to others (Bernstein 1997). Social movement narratives may transform mainstream culture and politics, transform participants, or challenge popular perceptions of the group (Bernstein 1997). Movements teach participants to become political selves by politicizing identity through group narratives. In learning to craft narratives, people first tell them to sympathetic listeners. Then, activists adapt narratives for a public audience who participates in this process by affirming, challenging, or ignoring these narratives as legitimate sites of knowledge (Polletta 2006). The tone, word choice, and delivery of narratives changes depending on the intended audience and the goal(s) of the narrative. For example, an activist might refer to members of a countermovement in derogatory terms when among other activists but portray them in a favorable light publicly in an attempt to reach across political lines for a common-ground solution.

The narratives people tell in the context of social movement participation shed light on larger processes through which they make sense of themselves as a part of a group or collective. Thus, narratives are essential in understanding both personal and collective identities (Polletta et al. 2011). Activists narrate their lives, the lives and actions of others, and the political struggles in which they are engaged, which shapes the content of collective identities (Hunt and Benford 1994). Many narratives will appear to be purely personal; however, participants learn to tell them in the context of a social movement (Benford 2002; Davis 2002). Thus, the boundary between a personal narrative and a collective narrative is often blurred.

Scholarship on personal and collective identities have demonstrated that identities are not stable; instead, they are contingent upon multiple structural and cultural factors that play out in interaction in diverse ways. For scholars interested in immigrant identities and experiences, studying narrative is a way to understand how people present themselves to others and articulate self and group identities. This dissertation analyzes narrative in a variety of contexts: one-on-one interviews, participant observation of movement events, and observation of a theatrical performance. By analyzing narratives undocumented youth tell in multiple settings, I can theorize how and why they deploy particular facets of their identities in particular circumstances and for particular audiences.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this dissertation, I build on the theoretical foundations outlined in this chapter to situate and analyze my data. Each of my data chapters analyzes how undocumented youth used narratives of their experiences to negotiate their place in American society and attempt to influence positive social change. Undocumented youth told narratives that reflected broader discourses of hard work and the “American Dream” but also deconstructed popular myths that

immigrants were a threat to national security. In the chapters that follow, I explore how undocumented youth pushed back against gendered and racialized stereotypes about undocumented immigrants and created positive personal and collective “DREAMer” identities. However, in doing so, they constructed narratives that reproduced cultural silences around family violence and maintained intra-group divisions.

In Chapter Two, I describe the methodological choices I made to understand how undocumented youth utilized narratives to cultivate personal and collective identities and advocate for social change. I outline the research site and research participants. Additionally, I explain my positionality and methodological issues that arose when studying this population. I describe my multi-methods approach which enabled me to analyze how my participants constructed and deployed narratives in similar and dissimilar ways across multiple settings. Additionally, I discuss how, by using participant observation, observation, and interview data, I was able to uncover narratives of family violence and trauma that activists silenced in social movement narratives.

In Chapter Three, I examine how the DREAMer narrative is taught to undocumented students by more seasoned activists. I show how this narrative was learned, deployed, and reflected upon by those who told it. I also describe the potential and limitations of this particular narrative regarding broader social movement and identity goals. Although activists have political success in deploying these learned narratives, I argue that they came at personal costs. Undocumented youth avoided narrating experiences that did not fit into dominant movement discourses, which reproduced inequality in interaction.

In Chapter Four, I build upon the analysis of Chapter Three to explore how undocumented youth publicly perform the DREAMer narrative through theater. The theater

project represented a culmination of the narrative training analyzed in Chapter Three, albeit in a dramatized format. In this chapter, I analyze how five undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants scripted and performed their narratives in English and Spanish. I pay careful attention to the importance of emotions in the creation of a “good narrative” and how the theater performance reproduces and expands the boundaries of the DREAMer narrative. Using the performance as a case study, I argue emotions are essential in narrative construction and deployment.

In Chapters Five and Six, I shift my focus from participant observation and observation data to an analysis of interview data, which revealed the complex processes through which undocumented youth conformed to and rejected the DREAMer narrative in their individual accounts of their lives. In Chapter Five, I build upon my analysis in Chapters Three and Four. I engage with literature on emerging adulthood to examine how undocumented youth used narratives of struggle (a vital component of the DREAMer narrative) to create positive self-identities in the transition to adulthood. Over-arching narratives disseminated by the undocumented student movement permeated how undocumented youth described themselves in one-on-one interviews, suggesting that the DREAMer narrative limits not only collective but also personal narratives. I argue that undocumented students normalized social inequalities by using the DREAMer narrative to describe their lives. In Chapter Six, I discuss a hidden narrative of family violence that was mostly silenced in the undocumented student movement and is also missing from scholarly analyses of the lives of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants. Undocumented youth publicly silenced narratives of family violence to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes about Latinos, but this silence has the unfortunate effect of maintaining gendered inequality in undocumented immigrant families. Making family violence visible in

interviews provided a mechanism for undocumented youth to break out of the confines of the DREAMer narrative when discussing their lived experiences.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, I discuss the theoretical implications of this research and summarize how it contributes to the scholarly literature on illegality; 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants; and narrative, identity, and social movements. I conclude with suggestions for future research, including the importance of emotions in the creation of personal and collective identities and the study of narratives and discourse in an era of increased nativism and “post-truth.”

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

This research is based on forty-five qualitative in-depth interviews, participant observation, and observation of undocumented student organization activities in the Denver-Boulder metropolitan area of Colorado. In this chapter, I provide detailed descriptions of the site selection, sample population, data gathering, and data analysis. Finally, I discuss methodological issues associated with researching violence and trauma and my positionality as a researcher in this project.

In the fall of 2011, I began conducting participant observation and interviews for what would become my dissertation project on undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants living in Colorado. Broadly, my purpose was to understand, describe, and theorize about how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants use narratives to understand their experiences with illegality and create personal and collective identities. I structured the research design around four general questions (see Appendix A for interview guide):

1. How does illegality impact the lives and experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants?
2. What kinds of identity work are involved in the narratives undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants tell?
3. How does identity work involved in telling narratives vary, if at all, by context and audience (e.g., an invited panel at a university, a legislative hearing, or a one-on-one interview)? What does this tell us about narratives and identity in these different contexts?
4. How does social movement activism influence undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants' narratives, experiences, and identity work?

Using these questions as a starting point, I investigated how undocumented youth use narratives to construct identities and make sense of their complex positionality in the United States. Additionally, I examined the use of narratives as a tactic in social movements to sway opinions on immigration reform and challenge popular stereotypes about immigrants.

SITE SELECTION

I chose to conduct interviews and observation in the Denver-Boulder metro area in Colorado. Colorado is an interesting location for studying undocumented youth activism because of its history of Mexican migration and activism, mixed political character, and thriving immigrant rights movement. While previous Mexican migration waves settled primarily in traditional locations such as Los Angeles, Chicago or El Paso, between 1990 and 2000 migration to other areas rose dramatically (Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). Southern states like Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia saw significant increases in Mexican migration and states like Colorado, which had received some historical flows but where migration had stalled, received renewed flows during this time (Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). Historically, many Mexican Americans in Colorado emphasized their Spanish (European *white*) origins (Muñoz, Jr. 1993; Martinez 2008). However, there was also a thriving Chicano movement presence in the state in the 1960s-1970s, and many of its activists were involved in politics and other forms of Latino/a advocacy (Martinez 2008). Thus, Colorado has a historical foundation upon which the present-day immigrant rights movement can build and thrive.

Colorado is a “purple state” (or a state divided between conservative “red” areas and liberal “blue” areas). Similar to national-level politics discussed in Chapter One, activists in Colorado often organize in unfriendly political environments. While many immigrant-friendly policies have stalled in the Colorado legislature, policies benefitting the 1.5-generation have had greater success. In 2006, the legislature passed SB 90, referred to pejoratively by activists as a “show me your papers law,” which enabled local law enforcement agencies to report those suspected of being undocumented to immigration authorities. After heated debate, the legislature voted to overturn the policy in 2013, despite strong criticism from conservative representatives. In 2014, a coalition of immigrant, labor, faith, and Latina/o organizations successfully lobbied to pass the Colorado Road and Community Safety Act (RCSA) (SB 13-251). This law allowed undocumented immigrants to apply for driver’s licenses in the state. Four offices were designated to provide licenses; however, Republicans regained

control of the Colorado legislature after the 2014 elections and passed a resolution shutting down all but one of these offices. In 2016, the law was altered to allow only applicants that can prove “temporary legal presence,” to apply for a license. This made the program unavailable to anyone who did not have a temporary visa, work permit, or unexpired I-94 form (for international travelers). In contrast to this anti-immigrant legislation, Colorado ASSET (Advancing Students for a Stronger Economy Tomorrow), which grants pro-rated, in-state tuition to eligible undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, was passed in 2013 and remains unchallenged by state Republicans. However, the process of winning tuition equity in Colorado was far from simple. The bill was heard seven times before it passed, including when it passed its first hearing in 2012 only to be rushed through a separate, non-essential committee a couple of weeks later where it failed. However, compared to the driver’s license bill (SB 13-251), the backlash from the public and the legislature post-passage is virtually non-existent, illustrating the greater public sympathy for undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants.

In addition to being a hub for Colorado state politics, the Denver-Boulder area hosts several major pro-immigrant organizations and related advocacy campaigns. The metro area is arguably the most progressive region in the state. Many public officials, including the mayor of Denver during the time of my research, have emphasized the openness of the area for immigrants and pledged support for immigration reform. The Denver-Boulder metropolitan area also boasts multiple student groups for undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, participants from which comprise the bulk of my sample. Given this complicated history, Colorado provides an ideal setting for studying undocumented youth activists as there is space for influencing state and local politics alongside anti-immigrant sentiment and political opposition.

SAMPLE

To gain entrée into the immigrant youth community, I relied on my social networks and ended up making contact with Claire, a white woman involved in local immigrant rights activism.

With her help, I began attending meetings and events of a local undocumented student organization. During this time, I also conducted five interviews: three with undocumented youth activists, two with white women, and one with a U.S.-born Latina married to an undocumented man. At the onset of this project, I was interested in how identity work differed between undocumented immigrants, citizen Latinos/as, and white “allies”¹¹ in the immigrant rights movement. Although I ultimately decided to focus specifically on the narratives undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants tell about their lives, the two white women I interviewed (Claire and Katherine) were well-connected to immigrant rights organizations and provided invaluable background information on state politics. In the spring of 2015, I received \$800 from the Sociology department to compensate interviewees. I gifted participants a \$20 Visa card. I would present the gift card at the end of the interview as a “thank you” for participation. Researchers caution not to make research incentives coercive when studying vulnerable populations (Waters 1999). Although many participants were aware of the incentive before agreeing to be interviewed, several said they would have done the interview without it. Two of my participants even said they were going to donate it toward the movement. Ultimately, no one declined the gift. Additionally, many of my interviewees regularly “tell their story” as a part of immigrant rights activism and expressed excitement at the opportunity to talk more about their lives. Thus, while it is possible that people may have decided to do the interview solely because of the money (which is possible for any research study including monetary incentives), I do not believe it negatively impacted the research.

The sample population for this research is 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants living in Colorado who are over the age of 18 and had lived in the U.S. for at least five years before the interview. The term “1.5-generation” is somewhat problematic because it can refer to anyone who entered the U.S. before the age of 18. However, the experiences of a twenty-year-old person who

¹¹ An “ally” is anyone who is not an undocumented immigrant, although the term is most commonly used to describe non-Latina/o white people involved in the movement.

entered when s/he was an infant will likely be different from a twenty-year-old who entered when s/he was fifteen. Because of this, in line with other scholars (e.g., Rumbaut 2004), I use “1.5” to refer to those who first entered the United States at or before sixteen years of age. I originally intended the starting age for participation to be thirteen; however, after carefully reviewing the literature and observing movement activities, I focus on those who have graduated high school since existing research suggests legal status becomes increasingly salient during the high school years (Ábrego 2006; Gonzales 2011). There was no maximum age parameter. Interviewees ranged in age from eighteen to thirty-two at the time of the interview, with most interviewees in their twenties. Due to my desire to examine varied experiences among undocumented youth, I interviewed people who entered the U.S. at different points in their lives. However, because I also wanted people who were culturally assimilated (e.g., English language fluency and at least a portion of their K-12 schooling completed in the U.S.), I set a cutoff limit of having been in the U.S. for at least five years. As Table 2.1 shows, there was some diversity in the sample in this regard, although the majority of participants have lived in the U.S. for at least ten years.¹² Additionally, the vast majority of my interviewees were members of an immigrant rights organization (91%).¹³

Based on population estimates¹⁴ and my interest in studying racial and ethnic identities, I initially only intended to interview undocumented Mexican immigrants. However, I encountered difficulty recruiting participants in 2015 due to dwindling membership in the organizations I was observing. At this point, I decided to include undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants of any

¹² This mirrors existing data on undocumented immigrants, which suggest that over 60% of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. have lived here for ten or more years (Pew 2015).

¹³ At the end of each interview, I asked interviewees if they knew someone who might be interested in participating. If the recommended interviewee was not involved in activism, they were still included (four total, or 9%). These interviewees were asked questions as to why they were not involved in any organizations, what they knew about the immigrant rights movement, and other questions to gauge how their views and narratives may differ from those who were involved (see Appendix A for full interview guide).

¹⁴ Approximately 72% of undocumented immigrants in Colorado are of Mexican origin (Pew Hispanic Research Center 2017). When I began data collection in 2011, estimates were over 80% (Terrazas 2012).

nationality, as long as they met the age at arrival and time in the U.S. requirements. Nevertheless, most of the undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants in this study were of Mexican origin (33), four people from Central and South America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean¹⁵, and one woman from Mongolia (a full profile of which I include in Table 2.1 at the end of this section). In addition to thirty-eight undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, I interviewed one U.S.-born Latina of mixed Mexican and Guatemalan heritage who married an undocumented man and had undocumented parents, two white women, one white man active in the movement, and two documented 1.5-generation immigrants (one from Cuba and one from Mexico). I only included interview data from the immigrants in the dissertation.¹⁶ However, the other interviews provided insight into how people learn and deploy narratives, how people construct and negotiate their identities, and what motivates people to get involved (and stay involved) in activism.

Although I was primarily interested in issues related to racialization, immigration status, and gender, I included additional demographic questions in the interview guide. For example, I asked participants about their parents' educational attainment levels and employment before reaching the United States to determine their class backgrounds. I also found it much easier to recruit women to participate in the study compared to men (sixteen men compared to twenty-nine women), a gender balance which is typical of many qualitative samples. I hypothesize that this was not due to lack of interest from men but reflective of the study population. With one exception, women outnumbered men in the organizations I studied (based on my visual observations of different groups), which suggests that there were more women than men in the recruitment pool.

¹⁵ One woman included in this group, originally from Peru, has since gained U.S. citizenship. However, she was undocumented for many years and spoke about those experiences at length in our interview, so I included her in this category.

¹⁶ Except for María, who was born in the U.S, but has undocumented parents, is married to an undocumented man, and is active in a local undocumented student organization. She self-identified as part of an “undocumented family.”

I drew participants in my sample (including the pilot interviews and several interviews later on in the research process) from organizations affiliated with Rights for Immigrants Colorado, or RIC.¹⁷ After expanding recruitment, my final sample was relatively evenly-split between RIC-affiliated and non-RIC affiliated organization members (eighteen RIC-affiliated, twenty-three non-RIC affiliated). RIC, formed in 2002, is a statewide coalition comprised of immigrant, business, faith, and ally groups. I focused on one RIC-affiliated organization, Metro DREAMers (MD), which formed in 2014. Before the existence of MD, there were several local youth organizations, including one group started at a local high school. In 2014, these groups came together under the umbrella organization MD. Their social media page describes them as an organization of “youth advocating in the community for social justice and equality. We empower youth to look inside themselves to find the leader within.” MD is an affiliate of United We Dream (UWD), a national coalition of youth-led immigrant rights groups founded in 2009 by activists trying to pass the DREAM Act.

In addition to MD, I contacted several undocumented and Latino/a student organizations at community colleges and four-year universities. I also utilized flyers and online recruitment through the UWD listserv, which proved unsuccessful for recruitment. In my experience, emailing organizations worked far better than online recruitment or flyers. I recruited all non-RIC affiliated participants through emailing contact people from different organizations. Of those participants, twenty-three were members of student groups on local college and university campuses. Through asking interviewees if they knew anyone else who might be interested in the project (i.e., the snowball method), I also recruited four undocumented youth not affiliated with any organization. I include selected demographic characteristics in Table 2.1 below.

¹⁷ Local, state, and regional organization names are pseudonyms. When referencing national organizations, I use the given name.

Table 2.1: Selected Interviewee Demographic Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Birthplace	Age arrived	Years in US¹⁸	DACA	Movement Participation	Narrative Training
Julie	late-20s	Mexico	8	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ana	mid-20s	Mexico	6	16	Yes	Yes	Yes
David	early 20s	Mexico	<1	24	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marta	early-20s	Mexico	3	19	No	Yes	Yes
Enrique	late-20s	Mexico	12	15	Yes	Yes	Yes
Miguel	late 20s	Mexico	15	15	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reynaldo	mid-20s	Mexico	7	19	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jesús	late-20s	Mexico	13	14	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carmen	late teens	Mexico	14	5	Yes	Yes	Yes
Manuel	early-20s	Mexico	1	19	Yes	Yes	No
Carlos	early 20s	Mexico	4	17	Yes	Yes	No
Estefany	late teens	Mexico	3	16	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gabriela	early 20s	Mexico	12	10	No	Yes	Yes
Sandra	early 20s	Guatemala	16	6	No	Yes	No
Teresa	late teens	El Salvador	14	4	No	Yes	No
Alejandra	late teens	Mexico	12	6	No	Yes	No
Fatima	early 20s	Mexico	4	18	Yes	Yes	No
Guadalupe	mid-20s	Mexico	9	14	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sara	early 30s	Mexico	<1	30	Yes	Yes	Yes
Manuel	early 20s	Mexico	6	16	No	Yes	Yes
Rita	early 20s	Mexico	4	18	Yes	No	No
Isaías	late teens	Mexico	6	13	Yes	No	No
Josefine	late teens	Mexico	<1	19	Yes	No	No
Luz	early 20s	Mexico	3	18	Yes	Yes	No
Jessica	mid-20s	Mexico	2	22	Yes	Yes	Yes
José	early 20s	Mexico	9	12	Yes	Yes	Yes
Edgar	mid-20s	Mexico	7	16	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jacqueline	early 20s	Mexico	12	8	Yes	Yes	No
Rosa	mid-20s	Mexico	6	18	Yes	Yes	No
Dani	early 20s	Mexico	4	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
Abel	mid-20s	Mexico	6	18	Yes	No	No
Adan	Late-20s	Mexico	13	15	Yes	Yes	No
Jasmin	early 20s	Mexico	4	16	Yes	Yes	No
Karla	early 20s	Mexico	4	16	Yes	Yes	No

¹⁸ Based on self-reported age and first entry into the U.S., as reported in interview.

Nora	late teens	Mexico	4	14	Yes	Yes	No
Ivan	early 20s	El Salvador	5	15	Yes	Yes	No
Ivette	early 20s	Mexico	5	16	Yes	Yes	No
Batbayar	early 20s	Mongolia	5	16	Yes	Yes	No
Cristina ¹⁹	early 20s	Peru	6	15	N/A	Yes	No
Jorge ²⁰	mid-20s	Mexico	7	16	N/A	Yes	Yes
Amanda	mid-20s	Cuba	5	17	N/A	Yes	Yes
María	Mid-20s	US	N/A	All	N/A	Yes	Yes
Katherine	late 30s	US	N/A	All	N/A	Yes	Yes
Claire	40s	US	N/A	All	N/A	Yes	Yes
William	early 20s	US	N/A	All	N/A	Yes	Yes

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

I chose to conduct participant observation, observation,²¹ and semi-structured, in-depth interviews for this project. Lofland et al. (2006) stress that participant observation and interviewing can be used together in a project and that there is often overlap between the two methods. Researchers use participant observation and observation to identify, describe, and accurately represent actors' perceptions of their actions and the meanings they ascribe to them (Becker 1996; Emerson 2001). In addition to the data collection element, participant observation enabled me to be a "familiar face" to many of the undocumented youth I would later interview. Qualitative interviews are especially good at describing social processes, experiences, and events in which you did not participate or are trying to understand better (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Other researchers have similarly relied on a combination of participant observation and interviews to study DREAM Act-eligible youth (Ábrego 2006, 2012; Gonzales 2016) and the immigrant rights movement in Colorado (Martinez 2008); thus, my methodological approach aligns with others who studied similar populations.

¹⁹ Previously undocumented, but has since gained U.S. citizenship

²⁰ Jorge and Amanda (directly below) are documented immigrants.

²¹ I use the term "participant observation" to describe instances, such as protests or organizational meetings, where I participated in movement activities as a researcher. I use the term "observation" to describe instances, such as the theatrical performance analyzed in Chapter Four, to describe instances where I did not participate beyond watching what was happening.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Data collection for this dissertation began in the fall of 2011 when I took a qualitative field methods course taught by my advisor. My advisor introduced me to Claire, a white woman who connected me with local immigrant rights organizations. From 2011-2017, I observed multiple events: conferences and meetings with only group members and supporters present, legislative hearings where undocumented students provided testimony in support or opposition to various state-level policies, invited panel discussions at local schools and community centers, theatrical performances, protests, and informal conversations before and after the events mentioned above. After 2015, I scaled back on participant observation in order to turn my attention to identities and experiences of undocumented youth more broadly, which I felt interviews better captured. Despite this, I continued to attend events, especially the theater performances described in Chapter Four, until I completed data gathering in the spring of 2017.

The participant observation and observation data come from field notes I took at various events. I kept a small notebook with me and jotted down notes—groups and people present, crowd sizes, and any standout interactions (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). After leaving the event, I expanded upon these notes while my memory was still fresh. On rare occasions, I would record events or use publicly available recordings. For example, for a short period following the RIC conference sessions I attended, RIC staff published recordings of the sessions on a streaming site. Although I had taken handwritten notes at these sessions, I watched and transcribed the sessions in more detail based on the recordings. From 2015 to 2016, I attended weekly MD meetings held in the basement of a local church on Thursday nights. Each meeting lasted roughly two hours. I took notes each week of what happened during the meetings. Upon arriving at one meeting, I learned that narrative training would be taking place. I asked if anyone would object to me recording the meeting. As no one objected, I was able to record the meeting, transcribe what was said, and quote directly

from people's narratives during the training. Where a recording (whether mine or someone else's) was available, I make a note of this throughout the dissertation.²²

GAINING ENTRÉE

Scholarship on first and 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants documents the difficulties researchers face in recruiting these vulnerable populations (Chavez 1998; Gonzales 2016). To help establish rapport, I presented myself as a student interested in learning more about their organization and interviewing them for a project. I took care not to over-dress during events as to not appear too "professional" or "out-of-touch." I also made sure to reference relevant people in the movement that I knew. Overall, I did not have difficulty gaining trust and entrée into this community in the way other researchers detail in their work on first generation undocumented immigrants. I believe this is due to the more considerable degree of visibility of undocumented youth vis-à-vis the first generation and participants' desire to share their narratives, which corresponds to broader student organization goals and tactics.

INTERVIEWS

I collected interviews in three waves: (1) seven interviews between 2012-2014; (2) thirty-two interviews between 2015-2016; and, (3) six interviews in the spring of 2017. Of the forty-five total interviews, I transcribed forty and outsourced the final five interviews for transcription. All of my interviewees consented to tape-recorded interviews, so transcripts were verbatim.²³ In addition to the interview audio files, I made general notes about the tone of the interview, characteristics of the interviewee, and where the interview took place. As mentioned, all names of organizations, participants, or anyone else mentioned in the transcripts are pseudonyms.

²² All names of organizations, participants, and anyone participants mentioned (excluding well-known public figures) are pseudonyms in all field notes, interview transcripts, and final write-up of data to protect the identities of undocumented participants.

²³ Except for erasing any identifying information mentioned during the interview per IRB protocol.

In the interviews, I asked broad, open-ended questions about participants' migration histories, racial, ethnic, and national identities, why and how they got involved in activism (or why they did *not* get involved), and the challenges they faced in their lives. I designed these questions to ascertain how undocumented youth made sense of their experiences and identities, as well as provide insight into social movement activism. I also conducted interviews with participants of a local community theater project that five MD members—four undocumented men and one US-citizen Latina—performed around the state. I asked the five performers additional questions about the performance that I did not ask others who were not involved (see Appendix A for full interview guide).

By using participant observation, observation, and interviewing in tandem, I observed and interacted with undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants in a variety of settings. These settings included one-on-one interviews, closed meetings for movement participants, activist conferences, testimony given at legislative hearings, information sessions on policies, invited presentations on college campuses, protests, and theater performances. The diversity of settings provided me with a rich set of data to analyze how narratives are constructed, understood, and deployed by participants in different contexts. Although I draw on this data throughout my analysis, I present most of the participant observation data in Chapters Three and Four, which analyze the construction of movement narratives in the context of activism and a theatrical performance, respectively.

A NOTE ON NARRATIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Key themes of this research involve understanding how narratives are constructed, deployed and integrated into how people see themselves, their communities, and their lives. Although the narratives my participants shared may have been learned and practiced in the workshops detailed in Chapter Three (or in similar workshops where I was not present), I can make distinctions between different goals and types of narratives participants deploy in distinct settings, for different audiences. Additionally, narratives—whether deployed in the context of activism or shared among friends over coffee—are about producing and reproducing identities in social interaction. How people want to

present themselves to an audience of potential movement supporters may be similar to, or different from, how they want to present themselves to their friends and co-activists. However, telling narratives is an attempt to portray a particular sense of self (both to oneself and to others) and connect individual narratives to others in the group(s). I treat all of the interactions between myself and participants in this study, whether in front of a formal audience or one-on-one interactions, as narratives that are used to signify and create individual and group identities (Wilkins 2012). I am not concerned with identifying which are the “true” narratives and which respondents may have fabricated. Instead, I am interested in how people talk about themselves, what these narratives do for the people who tell them, and how these narratives create and sustain individual and collective identities (Holstein and Gubruim 1995). Additionally, narratives are told strategically in different contexts, with different audiences in mind, so there is no single narrative for any participant in this study. Instead, narratives are an amalgamation of what people remember, how they remember it, how they want to talk about it, and how they want to present themselves in a given context. By saying this, I am not invalidating respondents’ lived experiences. Rather, I am interrogating how people use narratives to construct the reality of their lived experiences. I use participants’ interpretations of their experiences to understand how they create narratives about themselves, other people, and their lives, and how these narratives shape their sense of place in American society. The undocumented youth in this study learn to interpret their lives in ways that align their values, aspirations, and broader social movement goals. By integrating participant observation, observation, and qualitative interviewing, I captured the complexities in individual narratives as well as nuances in the broader deployment of the DREAMer narrative.

DATA ANALYSIS

I began data analysis by focusing on observations of the theater performance and interviews with the performers. However, I analyzed all of the data similarly. I began by coding several interviews and observation field notes line-by-line to establish a general coding scheme. Using this coding scheme as a guide, I coded the remaining interviews, adding new concepts and themes that arose. After coding several interviews, I copied relevant sections into broader theme memos. After compiling the interview and participant observation data for each of the more substantial theme memos, I wrote a summary on each theme. In the summaries, I included what I thought was happening, why it was happening, and how it related to the overall goals of the dissertation.

POSITIONALITY AND ETHICAL ISSUES

Of critical importance in researching vulnerable populations is that researchers should “do no harm,” or not further exploit, harm, or endanger participants (Hernández et al. 2013; Naples 1996). Because undocumented immigrants may be fearful of police detection and distrustful of outsiders, I established rapport with participants through regular attendance at meetings and events and made my position in support of immigration reform known to those with whom I had close contact (Gonzales 2011). Beyond issues of trust, there are real concerns about anonymity and confidentiality when researching undocumented immigrants (Gonzales 2011; Hernández et al. 2013). In line with other studies (Hernández et al. 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011), I requested a waiver of written consent for all interviewees not born in the United States and had immigrant participants provide verbal consent instead. I also used pseudonyms in all field notes, interview transcriptions, and formal writing. Talking publicly about their experiences of “coming out” as undocumented was something that many in my sample had done (twenty-six out of the forty-one participants involved in movement activism). While many recounted feelings of nervousness about narrating their lives publicly, they believed it was an important tactic in the push for immigration reform. This dynamic, coupled with a greater acceptance among the public of 1.5-generation immigrants compared to their parents, made it easier for me to find people to interview. Several expressed that they did not care if I used their real

names. Because my IRB protocol required it, I used pseudonyms at all times. However, issues of confidentiality and anonymity were not an expressed concern among my interviewees. Part of the narrative of the undocumented student movement is being “undocumented and unafraid,” so participants were open and, as I will detail in Chapter Five, proud of their identity as an undocumented person.

In addition to concerns of anonymity and trust in researching undocumented immigrants, researchers should reflect upon how their race, class, gender, and citizenship status influence the research process. Sociologists have long grappled with the dynamics between “insiders” and “outsiders” in qualitative research. As a U.S.-born white, college educated, middle-class woman, I recognize the vast structural and power differences between myself and the undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants in this study. While some argue that only racial and ethnic “insiders” should be researching minority communities (Wilson 1974; Baca Zinn 1979), others suggest both “insider” and “outsider” knowledge is needed (Merton 1972). Still, others question whether anyone is truly an “insider” or “outsider” in any given context (Naples 1996; Winddance Twine 2000). Rhodes (1994) argued that people of color’s mistrust of whites generally extend to the researcher and distort the quality of the research. Others point to the political need to amplify the voices of marginalized researchers of color (Winddance Twine 2000:7).

I utilized my participation in and support of the immigrant rights movement to gain rapport due to my lack of “insider” status. I believe that stating that I was supportive of their goals of immigration reform likely made respondents open up to me, a non-immigrant, non-Latina white person, in ways that they may not otherwise have done. Scholars caution that insider status can create additional burdens on the researcher. For example, fears of presenting his/her co-ethnics in a negative light (Islam 2000), limiting with whom they may speak (Facio 1993), and making it difficult to ask culturally sensitive or taken-for-granted questions. By contrast, outsiders can present themselves as novices with limited knowledge and thus produce detailed responses from the interviewees who, at

least temporarily, take on the role of “expert” (Reed 2000). Interviewees may, paradoxically, provide detailed opinions on controversial issues to “outsiders” since they do not fear judgment from a co-ethnic (Rhodes 1994; Tinker and Armstrong 2008). Finally, “outsider” researchers may not be pressured as much by their participants (or feel internal pressures) to conform to cultural norms surrounding age, gender, or class dynamics (Facio 1993). For example, I could ask for an explanation of a phrase in Spanish (even if I knew the translation) and was not expected to serve the older Mexican men at immigrant rights events where food was being served and could move more freely around the space. There were no language barriers in this study because interviewees were fully bilingual (which is typical of the 1.5 generation) and I conducted all interviews in English.

The participants in my research, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, were a particularly vulnerable population. Throughout the research, I struggled with issues related to power and researcher positionality. I was honest with my participants about my role as a researcher in an attempt at transparency. However, the “researcher role” was not always clear. At different times I was an academic, a student, a participant, an interviewer, and a listener. Despite my good intentions, interactions with participants had asymmetrical power imbalances.²⁴ I felt a strange familiarity when I interviewed participants and attended movement events, much of which I attributed to my background. When participants recounted their mothers cleaning homes, I was reminded of when I was a young child sitting on a couch at someone else’s house while my mother cleaned it. Participants’ friendliness, strong ties to extended family, and belief that you should “put your head down” and get through whatever happened to you reminded me of my own Midwestern, working-class family. Although my participants’ narratives reminded me of my upbringing, our experiences were not the same. This served as a constant reminder of my privilege in the field (Huisman 2008). From this research, I will complete a doctoral degree. In some way, I used my participants’ lived

²⁴ Feeling conflicted about the research and researcher role is not uncommon, especially in qualitative research (Reinharz 1991; Stacy 1988; Jacobs 2004).

experiences to improve my status (Langellier 1994). I attempted to mitigate potentially exploitative researcher-participant interactions by being kind, being a good listener, and representing my respondents' words in a way I believe honors their narratives. However, the power differences between us cannot be ignored or removed. Although the lines between "insider" and "outsider" are complex and at times blurry, researcher positionality matters. Throughout the interview process, I used my "outsider" researcher status strategically. I believe it was particularly useful when an unexpected theme emerged in the interviews: exposure to violence and trauma.

RESEARCHING TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE

I went into this research with a pre-existing set of research questions, so I did not anticipate using a Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz 1995). However, during the second round of interviews, unexpected themes emerged that resulted in new ideas and questions for the project, such as the centrality of violence and trauma to the experiences of undocumented youth. This theme was unexpected because the literature on the 1.5-generation scarcely mentioned family violence and, consequently, I did not ask questions about violence or trauma. The narratives of violence emerged when I asked interviewees to talk about why they came to the U.S. and when talking about their families. The question on family, designed to explore background information on siblings, which family members lived in the U.S., and whether or not they were a mixed-status family,²⁵ resulted in more information than I anticipated. Because this was an unexpected finding and I had not adequately analyzed the data from my interviews, I did not make any changes to the interview guide when these narratives surfaced. I also may have been somewhat ill-equipped in these interviews, as I had not researched trauma and violence before entering the field. However, I almost immediately began researching trauma for insight into analysis and methodology, when I noticed the prominence of the theme.

²⁵ A mixed-status family includes both documented and undocumented family members.

From a methodological standpoint, interviews with trauma survivors can be challenging for the interviewee and the researcher, who bears witness to recounting of horrible, violent events (Weine and Laub 1995). I deliberately lowered my voice and sat neutrally when participants talked about trauma (I otherwise tend to speak loudly and use exaggerated hand movements). I would inquire if they were comfortable with me asking additional questions about the violence (all agreed) and offered to come back to it later in the interview rather than discussing it all at once. I also paid particularly close attention to not only what people said, but what interviewees did not say about trauma and violence. For example, I would make notes of changes in voice, body language, or anything else during this portion of the interview. Several interviewees told me this was the first time they had talked about what happened to them, one even saying that it was “therapeutic” to talk about it. Research suggests that talking about trauma can be a means of healing (at least in some contexts), which perhaps the interviews accomplished (Laub 2002). I also took breaks during the transcription process and did not transcribe multiple interviews discussing trauma in a row (Beck 2005). I believe my positionality worked in my favor in instances where interviewees talked about violence. Research suggests that interviewees are more likely to discuss issues of trauma and violence with women, so being a feminine-presenting woman likely resulted in more discussions of violence (Beck 2005). Additionally, several of my respondents mentioned that Latino/a families are uncomfortable talking about family dynamics with others, so my status as a non-Latina, U.S. woman could have facilitated a more open sharing of trauma and unpleasant family dynamics. I discuss these dynamics in-depth in Chapter Six.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I outlined my research questions and methodology. In the following chapters, I detail the findings from this research. The next chapter focuses on how undocumented youth are taught by others in the movement how to narrate their lives. I will show how, even if a narrative appears to be personal or non-political on the surface, the process of learning and sharing narratives

about what it means to be undocumented is a collective process that politicizes identity. I will also detail the positive and negative impacts of the types of narratives deployed by the undocumented student movement.

CHAPTER 3

“IT WAS LIKE A SPARK”: LEARNING TO TELL THE NARRATIVE OF BEING UNDOCUMENTED

The process of individuals telling their personal narratives to others is far from mundane. Instead, individuals’ narratives help them to construct and give meaning to their identities and communicate those meanings to the listeners as well. However, little research has explored the role of strategic coaching in individuals’ personal narratives. For undocumented youth, their narratives must be carefully crafted due to their vulnerable status in society. Activist coaching helps these youth craft narratives that communicate messages about identity to different audiences and help the youth accomplish certain goals. Their narratives also help in the creation of collective identity and the identification of undocumented youth with a movement greater than themselves.

In this chapter, I analyze how undocumented youth are taught by trained undocumented student activist leaders how to tell narratives about what it means to be undocumented. I explore how they are taught what to say (and not to say), how to say it, and how to deploy these narratives in different spaces and with different audiences. I compiled data for this chapter from participant observation of undocumented student activists and allies²⁶ in a variety of contexts: protests, invited presentations, legislative hearings, organizational meetings and conferences where activists taught each other how to tell narratives, and other locations where participants deploy the narratives they learned to tell. Although the level of participation in the movement varied among my participants, RIC-affiliated organizations had regular trainings where participants practiced a “good narrative.” As such, of the forty-one participants in this study who

²⁶ In the context of the undocumented student movement, the term “ally” refers to any participant who is not undocumented that is involved in the movement. Although allies are involved in the training, I focus on narratives told by undocumented student activists, as they are the subject of this dissertation.

were involved with the movement, twenty-four of them had formal narrative training.²⁷ Although not everyone in the study had formal narrative training, all knew the dominant narratives put forth by the undocumented student movement. Below, I identify the processes through which undocumented youth activists were taught to tell their narratives, paying close attention to how the participants learned a structured narrative about individual and group identity. Then, I showcase examples of how undocumented youth deployed these narratives in different contexts. I argue that the DREAMer narrative was successful in garnering support for political reforms benefitting the 1.5-generation and creating positive personal and collective identities for participants. However, the strategic narrative has the potential to further marginalize members of the community whose narratives do not fit. Thus, the narrative ultimately reproduces hegemonic discourses of “good” and “bad” immigrants.

NARRATIVE IN THE CREATION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

As detailed in Chapter One, identity work is what people do to help communicate their identities to others and to themselves (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1986). Individuals can make sense of their lives and construct a collective identity through narratives (Melucci 1995). In line with Polletta and Jasper (2001), I define collective identity as “the individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or thing” (285). Personal narratives may precede movement involvement, but are shaped by movement participation and told in the context of how involvement impacts their individual lives (Benford 2002; Davis 2002). Personal and collective narratives can transform individuals’ experiences, creating a sense of collective identity through the creation of shared narratives, interpretations, and performances (Polletta 2006).

²⁷ An additional seventeen were members of an organization that was in the process of bringing in a UWD representative to conduct a training.

Scholars of social movements argue that a robust and unified narrative and public voice is vital for movement success (Fominaya 2010; Polletta 2006; Snow et al. 1986). Scholars pay considerable attention to analyzing public narratives; however, scholars know less about how activists negotiate their public narrative behind closed doors (Fiorito and Nicholls 2016; Haug 2015). Analyzing how activist groups create collective identities and unified public narratives are important because this process is not “natural.” Even when group members have common grievances, they had different understandings of these grievances, disagreements about how to best communicate these grievances to the public, and different ideas of the best solutions to the problem (Carastathis 2013; Fiorito and Nicholls 2016). Moreover, the construction of a unified public voice limits what participants can say and functions as a mechanism of internal group control. What may be successful for movement-building can be unsuccessful in creating positive self and group identities (Benford 2002).

As detailed in Chapter One, strategic narratives are a key tactic for activists in the immigrant rights movement, especially undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants. Crafting and deploying compelling narratives to represent themselves is a central task of the DREAMer movement (Nicholls 2013). The collective narrative deployed by the undocumented student movement, known as the DREAMer narrative, constructs undocumented youth as innocent in the migration decision, working hard to achieve the “American Dream,” and in desperate need of immigration reform to enable their full integration into American society (Fiorito and Nicholls 2016). Undocumented student activists grappled with, critiqued, and negotiated this discourse to varying degrees (e.g., Nicholls 2013; Swerts 2017; Unzueta-Carrasco and Seif 2014). However, during my six years of data collection, participants told this dominant narrative publicly and in

interviews.²⁸ In this chapter, I analyze how others involved in the movement taught undocumented student activists the DREAMer narrative. I pay careful attention to how the undocumented student movement politicizes the identity of DREAMers and the implications of this politicization regarding identity goals and social movement strategies. While this particular narrative is successful in garnering wide-spread public support for undocumented students (Matthews 2018), I argue that it alienates undocumented immigrants whose life narratives do not fit neatly into the DREAMer narrative. This narrative also reproduces hegemonic cultural narratives of “good” and “bad” immigrants.

LEARNING TO TELL THE NARRATIVE OF UNDOCUMENTED 1.5-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS

In the course of observing undocumented student activists in meetings, legislative hearings, invited panel presentations, and conferences, I observed multiple instances where more seasoned activists taught other undocumented youth how to construct a convincing narrative. Undocumented student activists also taught each other how to fit their experiences into the dominant DREAMer narrative for ultimate political and cultural impact. Formal narrative training and informal conversations about narratives and public speaking provided important framing contexts where activists involved with the movement for an extended period encouraged new members (and each other) to reflect on their identities and learn to tell a successful narrative. In addition to having undocumented student leaders teach each other how to tell a narrative, youth in attendance also learned that telling their narratives was essential and necessary for social change. In other words, the trainings politicized identity as a means to enact immigration reforms and create a sense of group identity among participants.

²⁸ I detail the reproduction of the DREAMer narrative in individual accounts in Chapter Five.

To better understand how the trainings worked, I attended a two-hour session at a state-wide conference in 2011. The conference was in a hotel located near a national park. In-between sessions, people walked through the trails leading in and out of the lodging. Attendees varied in age, from children to senior citizens. All of the participants were involved with, or supporters of, the approximately two dozen RIC-affiliated organizations. The lodging fee cost seventy-five dollars, although RIC utilized fundraising efforts to provide lodging for those who could not afford it. Individual attendees also had the option to sponsor an undocumented activist to attend. Throughout the weekend, I also saw attendees wear various politically-themed attire, such as “No Human Being is Illegal” t-shirts from a local faith-based organization, or shirts with the logo of their organization emblazoned across the chest. Although I attended multiple sessions during the weekend—including how to recognize your privilege, informational sessions on immigration policy, and how to fundraise successfully—I was most interested in learning about the process of narrative construction. The title of the workshop, “Storytelling and Social Change,” signaled that attendees were learning tactics for creating political change. The session was quite large. Over two dozen people sat around tables organized in a rectangular shape, with open space at the front for the moderator to move about and for people to enter and exit the room comfortably, as there was little space on the sides of the room between the tables. The room was a mixture of immigrants, U.S.-born Latinos/as, and Anglo allies. Before the session began, people were busy conversing with each other in English and Spanish about the sessions they attended or would attend that day, what they were going to do in the evening, details about the organization/s they were with, and other forms of small talk. The session began with a reminder that translation from English-to-Spanish was available, and a woman who was sitting two seats down from me raised her hand for translation assistance.

Once everyone was settled, the session began. Gabriel, a queer undocumented Latino in his mid-twenties who worked full-time with RIC as an LGBTQ coordinator, stepped to the front of the room. He tore off a sheet of paper with material from the previous session to reveal a blank sheet of paper. After stating the name of the panel and making a joke about getting started on “Chicano time,”²⁹ he smiled and began to tell those of us in attendance his narrative:

I made the decision to cross the border and come to the U.S. when I was 16 years old. I didn’t tell my mother I was leaving. Even though I knew I would miss her, it was time to be a man and go to the United States. I set out with a group of men and women accompanied by a *coyote* [human smuggler] across the desert. I remember the first day was so hot, and we could not stop for food, but it was the nights that were the worst. When nightfall came, the temperatures dropped very low, and I did not have a coat. At one point, I just stopped and lied down on the ground—I was shivering so much, and I didn't think that I would make it. I thought I was going to die. Just then, at that moment, the older women in the group gathered around me, like mothers, to keep me warm. One of them gave me a coat. I had renewed faith in humanity at that moment. I was cold, and someone gave me a coat.³⁰

At the end, he paused for dramatic effect, placed his hand over his heart, softly patted his chest, and ended his narrative: “That was all I needed to go on—a coat.” Those in attendance clapped as Gabriel smiled and said “Thank you, thank you,” while laughing and taking a mini-bow. Although this was in jest, and possibly due to applause from those in attendance, it was a reaction expected from an actor in character—not from a person spontaneously telling her/his narrative to others. His response, therefore, suggested an awareness that his narrative was a performance for the audience.

As he spoke, people in the audience murmured along with the narrative, providing positive and supportive feedback. For example, a Spanish-speaking immigrant woman near me

²⁹ This was a reference to sessions, meetings, and other events typically beginning behind their scheduled start. It was an interesting choice of words, as “Chicano” is used to describe U.S.-born Mexican Americans. By using this term, he attempted to position himself (an undocumented immigrant) as a part of the U.S.-born second generation.

³⁰ As a reminder from Chapter Two, I had a transcription of this session available.

exclaimed “Oh!” and shook her head as Gabriel detailed feeling scared and alone on the migration journey. Others began to share their own experiences after he finished. For example, a middle-aged immigrant man remarked that the narrative reminded him of his journey to the U.S. when he was 19. After taking a couple of short comments, Gabriel transitioned back into the training by telling those of us in attendance that a “good narrative” details a time you had with a problem, needed to make a choice, and overcame obstacles you were facing. As he told us the elements of a good narrative, he wrote them on the paper behind him while drawing a small stick figure to represent the narrator traveling through the narrative process. Gabriel’s narrative described gendered processes of becoming an adult (“be a man” and leaving home), making familial-like connections with others on the migration journey (who were “like mothers”), and the promises of humanity and community. Gabriel bridged dominant narratives of change while connecting his narrative to a migration experience that was familiar to the immigrant audience. He used his narrative to attempt to engender solidarity between immigrants in attendance who had similar experiences. Gabriel also demonstrated the talking points he was teaching us through action. Gabriel learned to tell a strong narrative and showed us that everyone else could learn to do this as well.

Narrative training also took place at other venues, such as an MD meeting. During a weekly meeting in Spring 2016, Metro DREAMers held a mini-narrative training called the “Story of Self.”³¹ The leader of the training, María, is a U.S. citizen in her mid-twenties who married another undocumented student activist, has undocumented parents, and had been involved with the student movement for over five years. Other seasoned activists, three of whom worked full-time for RIC, also assisted throughout the training and feedback session.

³¹ This was the narrative training referenced in Chapter Two for which I received consent from participants to record. Thus, all quotes were verbatim from the meeting.

Approximately one dozen people attended this meeting. In addition to the activists I mentioned above, several other undocumented students were present. There was also a Chicana organizer, Monica, who worked full-time with RIC. I was one of three white allies who attended; the other two were members of a non-RIC affiliated student organization at a local university. While everyone participated in the training, the leaders focused on the narratives of undocumented students. The rest of us were there as supporters.

After making several announcements about upcoming events, María stood up and taped a long piece of white poster paper to the wall while Sara, another group member, passed around a bin of markers and blank sheets of notebook paper. After each person had paper and markers, María, whose sharp infectious laugh echoed throughout the meeting room, gave the instructions for the activity. Reading from a guide that she received during a training by UWD (a national undocumented student organization), María told everyone to split a sheet of paper into three sections: column one labeled “Self,” column two labeled “Us,” and column three labeled “Now.” After pausing to make sure that everyone had folded and written down the first set of instructions, María wrote the same statements on a large sheet of paper taped to the wall. María told us to write down the following questions in each column and answer them: (1) Self: “What experiences and values call you to leadership?” and “What struggles have I faced?” (2) Us: “Who is ‘us?’” (3) Now: “What to do?” “Hope?”

Before we broke off individually to fill-out our narratives, Monica asked “And *why* do we tell our stories? What does it mean to show as opposed to tell?” People looked at her quizzically, and she answered, “We tell them so they know us. So they do something about it!” She told us that we needed to be able to “get into an elevator with a *Republicano* and tell ‘em in two minutes why they should support immigration reform and what we’re about.” She also

reminded us to talk about different things in different places to different people and that we needed to put “a human face on *reforma*—paint a picture! Use your emotions!” These additions suggested to those of us participating in the training that learning to be succinct in your narrative was an important skill. It also suggested that the “us” (people involved in the movement, especially undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants) needed to be able to positively portray the movement and broader immigrant community in interactions with others.

As was evident in Monica’s narrative and María’s instructions, people were being taught to tell a *collective* narrative; not just the narrative of “self” or “me,” but the narrative of *us*. We learned that our narratives might seem to be purely personal, but were political because we can deploy them to convince others to act in ways that benefit the movement. Although this was a structured narrative workshop, the focus on connecting individual experiences to broader struggles for social justice mimicked consciousness-raising efforts during the second wave of the American feminist movement. By telling narratives of their own experiences together, women came to understand the issues in their lives were *not* just personal, but instead, political problems that resulted from living in a patriarchal society (Echols 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Through consciousness raising, women began to see themselves as part of a group, much in the way that undocumented student activists learned that their struggles were not individual. Personal narratives represented the collective struggles of undocumented people living in the U.S. The activity was a mechanism to train activists on how to tell a personal narrative that they could connect to the broader struggle for immigrant’s rights. In this way, narrative training functioned to construct personal and collective identities and acted as a consciousness-raising exercise.

After giving us about five or so minutes to write, María told us to: “Imagine you are in an elevator with a *Republicano* and have to convince them to support us.” She solicited volunteers to practice telling our narrative of self and reminded everyone else that their job was to listen and provide feedback once someone had finished. Miguel suggested that, in the interest of time, we should find a few volunteers and exchange feedback. Edgar and Enrique agreed and thought that someone who had not told their narrative before should go first to get practice. Edgar, Enrique, Miguel, María were seasoned activists. They were all involved in the movement for more than five years. Edgar and Miguel had full-time positions with RIC since having their DACA applications approved, and all three told their narrative publicly on multiple occasions.³² Everyone else nodded their heads in agreement with these suggestions and Francisco, an undocumented man in his early twenties who had only been attending meetings for a few weeks, went first. He began by saying,

Hi, my name is Francisco, and I'm with Metro DREAMers. I have had family members and family friends deported who aren't doing anything wrong and aren't criminals. My cousin, he had a broken tail light and was deported. Now his family is broken up, and kids are here without their fathers, and that's not right. That's why you should support the bill, which will stop deportations and breaking up families.

After he finished, everyone clapped, and María asked for feedback. Enrique said the narrative was good, but that he should start with, “Hi, my name is Francisco, and I'm undocumented [people snapped, clapped, and smiled]. Tell them who you are!” In this case, Enrique wanted to teach Francisco a narrative that not only described problems the undocumented student had but that helped create a sense of self. According to Enrique, being undocumented is “who you are,” and people needed to know that. Undocumented youth disavowed the stigma associated with

³² As I will discuss in the next chapter, they also participated in a local community theater project where they scripted and performed narratives of what it meant to be undocumented.

being undocumented by openly embracing their legal status and refashioning it into a positive identity they shared with others in the movement.³³

Francisco also focused on minor traffic violations that led to deportation, which is an essential RIC narrative. Most people view traffic infractions as a minor offense. Therefore, deportation is an over-reaction by the state. Throughout the push to overturn various state and national-level immigration enforcement policies discussed in Chapters One and Two, activists focused on minor infractions. Francisco, despite being relatively new to the movement, already understood this was a key narrative strategy. After Enrique finished his feedback, Monica interjected and instructed Francisco to say: “Can we count on you for your support,” and reminded all of us to end on a “positive [note] and leave ‘em with something that they can do to help!” Francisco’s narrative identified the problem (deportations), explained why it was unjust (deportees were not criminals), identified a solution (overturning anti-immigrant legislation), and with Monica’s help, motivated people to get involved. His narrative thus hit on the framing elements (diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational, respectively) that scholars argue are integral in creating a coherent public message (Benford and Snow 2000).

³³ A note on collective identity in the undocumented student movement: although the organizations I observed had members who were undocumented immigrants, documented immigrants, and Latino/a and non-Latina/o citizens, my observation of various student groups and review of relevant literature suggested that the student movement conceptualized itself as somewhat separate from the immigrant rights movement as a whole (Nicholls 2013). While they worked broadly on issues related to immigration reform and regularly spoke about the importance of advocating for their parents and other undocumented immigrants who remained “in the shadows,” undocumented youth were politically-savvy enough to understand the unique position that they were in vis-à-vis the rest of the movement. At times, the “we” was the entire undocumented immigrant community, at other times the “we” was Latinos/as generally, but in most cases the “we” was the student movement. The narratives undocumented youth learned in the training learned were adapted to speak narrowly to the experiences of undocumented students, more broadly about undocumented immigrants, or even more broadly about experiences being an immigrant and a person of color in the United States. Different situational contexts provided different sense-making tools for narrators, but the training provided the underlying narrative that youth reproduced in different settings.

After discussing Francisco's narrative, Monica joked that we were behind schedule again and asked Sara, a more seasoned activist, to share her narrative to end the meeting. Sara said:

Hi my name is Sara, I'm here representing MD, and I am undocumented and a single mom. I want to better myself and get my American Dream, but I can't. America is the land of opportunity, but as a single mom struggling to raise two kids while being undocumented while going to school and working, it's tough to finish my education and provide for my kids. I am too much of an American for Mexico because I have spent so much time here. I want to belong here—do not deport a single mom and break up a family. That is why you need to support the bill and immigration reform so that single moms can stay here in the country with their kids who need them.

Everyone clapped after Sara finished and the meeting quickly came to a close. Because Sara was a bit older than the average student member (in her thirties), she also talked about her role as a parent which was less common among the student activists I interviewed who tended to be in their early-to-mid-twenties and childless. In addition to reproducing the significant elements of the DREAMer narrative, such as feeling like an American, working hard, getting an education, and needing reform, she also pulled on cultural tropes of being a “good mother” to elicit sympathy from an audience (Johnston and Swanson 2003). Her narrative further illustrated the genuine threat of deportation that separates parents from their U.S.-citizen children and how illegality can create a sense of liminality or in-betweenness for undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants (Ábrego 2006; Boehm 2012). After concluding, everyone applauded Sara. Monica thanked her for her “powerful voice.” By having Sara close out the narrative training, the more seasoned members were showing newer members how, with practice, their narratives could become stronger.

In narrative training, undocumented student activists learn the mechanisms of a good narrative, how to talk about specific experiences in particular ways, and reasons and motivations behind why they should tell their narratives. Participants in the undocumented student movement

were trained by other activists and later become the trainers, demonstrating through action that anyone can learn to tell their narrative successfully. Narrative training taught student activists how to describe their personal experiences and connect them to the broader DREAMer narrative. This is a personal and collective narrative that can be used, in different contexts, to build solidarity among members, recruit potential undocumented students or allies to the movement, educate non-immigrant audiences about the struggles undocumented youth faced, and pressure policy-makers for legislative reforms. This section detailed what people were trained to say, which was crucial in constructing a homogenous and coherent public narrative. However, the trainings also focused on what *not* to say or how *not* to tell a narrative.

LEARNING WHAT NOT TO SAY AND HOW NOT TO SAY IT

Narrative workshops not only taught people what they should say and how they should say it, but they also taught people the *wrong* way to present themselves and tell their narratives. In this context, undocumented students were told to avoid specific conversations altogether if they would reflect negatively on undocumented immigrants or change their tone of voice, body language, or emotional displays to create a more appealing message. Taken together with the previous section, people learned what they are supposed to say, the appropriate tone of voice and body language, and which narratives to silence or avoid.

In the 2011 conference workshop detailed in the previous section, Edgar volunteered to share his narrative. Edgar stood at the front of the room, arms folded across his chest, leaning slightly on the table behind him. His brow furrowed above thick, black, square-framed glasses as he expressed anger over Arizona's passing of SB 1070.³⁴ He told the workshop attendees that he was "so pissed off that I had to leave my hometown because of some bullshit, racist law" and

³⁴ This policy was colloquially called the "show me your papers" law. It allowed law enforcement officers to stop, question, and detain anyone they presumed to be in the U.S. without authorization (Golash-Boza 2012).

said that he understood why his brother dropped out of high school because of the challenges of being undocumented. After Edgar finished, Gabriel called everyone's attention to the poster board where he reminded us that a good narrative involved being faced with an obstacle, making a choice, and figuring out a solution to the problem. He instructed us to break into small groups and take turns practicing our narrative. Gabriel reminded us that our narratives must be quick so everyone could get a chance to speak and practice. Although this was due partially to the time constraints of the session, trainings emphasized that a good narrator made an impact in a short amount of time. Edgar was initially in my group but halfway through the activity Gabriel walked over, asked to talk with Edgar, and they spent the rest of the time in the corner together, presumably going over Edgar's narrative.

After giving the attendees time to work on their narratives in small groups, Gabriel asked for volunteers to share their narratives. A Mexican American girl in her late teens volunteered and discussed how seeing the struggles of her undocumented parents inspired her to get more involved in the movement. Everyone clapped, and Gabriel thanked her for sharing. He then said, "I think we need one more, why don't you [gesturing to Edgar] come up again." Edgar proceeded to tell a narrative that, although similar to his original narrative at the beginning of the training, was different after working one-on-one with Gabriel. This time, as Edgar told his narrative, his "anger" over Arizona's SB1070 became disappointment and feeling "unwelcome in my own state." As he discussed his older brother choosing to drop out of high school "just two months before graduation," his voice cracked as he said "it broke him down. I don't want to be like that." While the overall content of the narrative was virtually the same, Edgar's voice and body language shifted, he avoided profanities when describing what happened to him, and he emphasized details of his narrative that fit best within the DREAMer narrative. When he and

Edgar worked privately during the break-out, Gabriel taught Edgar how to encourage positive effect from an audience. When telling his narrative a second time, Edgar did not cross his arms, changed his tone from one of anger to expressing one of vulnerability and sadness over his blocked opportunities, and emphasized the aspects of his narrative that fit clearly within the DREAMer narrative. Gabriel taught Edgar not only a different way to tell his narrative, but a different way to present *himself* to the audience. Edgar's new narrative strategy would likely be more palatable to non-Latina/o, white, non-immigrant audiences at legislative hearings, invited panel presentations, and local community events.

As detailed in the preceding section, Edgar was involved with MD and RIC for many years. At this training, in 2011, he was still in the early stages of movement involvement and had not yet perfected the narrative of his life. By the time of the MD training session in 2016, Edgar was a participant in a local theater production detailing the life experiences of undocumented youth and a full-time RIC employee. I was able to see his progression as a narrator from early training where he learned how to tell his narrative to later training where he took on the leadership role of teaching others how to do the same. In all of these contexts, Edgar was “undocumented and unafraid” (as the movement saying goes), but expressed this identity and orientation toward immigration reform differently depending on the context. In particular, Edgar learned to manage gendered emotional displays differently, which was a trend I observed on several occasions and something of which seasoned undocumented student activists were quite aware.

Reflecting on managing racialized and gendered emotions in public narratives, David, who was who is in his mid-twenties and actively involved in the movement, recounted a time

when he went to the state capitol to speak with a politician who had anti-immigrant views. He explained that he was so angry that he,

.... wanted to just like, flip out on him, you know? Like I know I shouldn't, but when you are in there, and someone is saying things like that to you [calling undocumented immigrants criminals], it's just, it's so hard not to get angry....so, I mean I controlled my temper. I don't want to be the angry Latino.

David was well aware of how his classed, gendered, and racialized positionality makes him appear angry or potentially threatening. Immigrant men had to constrain their emotional repertoire in interactions with non-immigrant white audiences. David carefully controlled his emotional expressions so he would not alienate potential supporters by invoking gendered and racialized stereotypes. Overarching stereotypes about immigrants constrain emotional displays and shape the types of narratives immigrant men, like David, tell (Purser 2009). While managing anger and negative emotions can be beneficial, in this case, it negatively impacted David.

Although controlling emotional outbursts has the potential to positively impact immigration reform efforts, this type of control can have negative impacts on undocumented youth.

Undocumented young men in this study had to allow white lawmakers and other audiences to say derogatory things to them while reacting calmly. This served to maintain racial, ethnic, and immigrant hierarchies wherein people of color, immigrants, and other marginalized groups are expected to react with deference in the face of oppression (Higgenbotham 1993).

While I have thus far examined formal narrative trainings or instances where entire meetings or conference workshops were devoted to a structured training, training also happened informally between activists as they conversed with one another before and after events. Here as well, people were advised on what to say, what not to say, and why. Before a meeting with local city council candidate hopefuls, Claire and Julie discussed what they could talk about:

Claire told everyone in attendance that we should go over again what we were going to talk to the candidates about once they arrived. Julia chimed in that she could tell a few narratives about people she knew who had been deported and had their families broken up. Claire interjected to ask why they were deported—she specifically wanted to know if anyone was deported for routine traffic stops. Julia replied that she did know someone, but (she looked down sheepishly as she continued) it involved alcohol. Claire let out an uncomfortable giggle and told Julia, “We might not want to include that one!”³⁵

Julia and Claire wanted to talk about people being deported for minor traffic violations because it highlighted the inhumane practices of immigration enforcement. They suspected that the politicians with whom they will be speaking were not sympathetic to someone getting deported after committing a serious crime. However, they reasoned that getting pulled over for a broken taillight was something the average person would not construct as a serious criminal offense and therefore not worthy of deportation.³⁶

In this exchange, Claire also reminded Julia of what types of narratives should *not* be told: in this case if a traffic stop involved an intoxicated driver, it was unlikely to be well-received. Claire instructed Julia not to tell this narrative. Despite this advice, Julia told the candidates the narrative of the traffic stop that involved alcohol. Although Claire said nothing, her turn of head, pursed lips, and lack of eye contact with anyone in the room suggested that she was frustrated that Julia broke from the script of the “good immigrant” by highlighting law-breaking behavior. While lawmakers were likely sympathetic to a father with a broken taillight who never returned home to his wife and children, a drunk driver (who could potentially harm or kill American citizens) was a threat and should be deported. Although citizens and non-citizens

³⁵ Author field notes.

³⁶ During this time, activists were working to overturn SB 90, a state policy that required cooperation between local law enforcement agencies and ICE. By focusing on minor traffic violations that led to deportations, activists hoped to convince legislators that more discretion was needed when deciding who should be detained and taken into ICE custody. By the 2016 MD narrative training when Francisco referenced this issue, proposals to make local law enforcement cooperate with ICE were back on the table and activists once again focused on this familiar movement narrative.

and documented and undocumented immigrants alike drive under the influence, the good immigrant narrative requires that people be unblemished, upstanding members of the community. No other narratives were permitted because they risked alienating the entire group.

The narrative emphasis on hard work, proper speech, appropriate dress, and educational achievement echoes earlier strategies by Civil Rights activists to convince white people that Black people are “respectable” and thus deserving of rights. Termed (pejoratively) “respectability politics,” critics contend that this rhetoric places the responsibility for ending prejudice and discrimination on marginalized people rather than on the state, institutions, and influential groups and further marginalized members of the community who most need political reforms (Harris 2014).³⁷ As I will detail in Chapter Six, this silencing strategy has significant implications beyond movement goals, notably when undocumented youth refrained from talking about the violence they experienced. Nevertheless, activists were committed in public narratives to maintaining the image of the “good,” worthy immigrant and often avoided these uncomfortable conversations in organizational meetings.

Learning what narratives not to tell were as integral to narrative training as learning the DREAMer narrative. Activists were coached formally and informally on tone of voice, speed, and body language in addition to the mechanics of a good narrative and significant movement talking points. As Edgar’s narrative and David’s reflections demonstrate, Latino men must be particularly careful when talking with non-immigrant audiences to control displays of aggression, anger, or even aloofness (such as leaning on a table or crossing your arms across your chest) to avoid activating racialized and gendered stereotypes of Latinos (Chavez 2008). Similarly, Claire instructed Julia not to tell the narrative of the man pulled over for driving while

³⁷ Civil Rights Activists also later used these strategies to distinguish themselves from more radical activist groups, such as the Black Panthers.

intoxicated because it had the potential to activate gendered and racialized stereotypes that Latino men were criminal threats and abuse alcohol at higher-than-average rates. In order to situate themselves within the boundaries of “American” and outside the boundaries of the “Latino threat narrative” (Chavez 2008), it was important for the Latina/o activists here to control what was said and how it was said, including changing body language, eye contact, tone of voice, and other cues for audience members.

Undocumented youth came into the movement having been labeled by society as illegal, outsiders, and as a threat. Through the context of participation in the undocumented student movement, they learned that their negative experiences with illegality were not unique. Their personal struggles were emblematic of the broader struggles undocumented people faced in the United States. Undocumented youth also encouraged each other to claim the term “undocumented” for themselves, something I discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Five. Overall, the undocumented student movement deliberately and strategically politicizes the identity of undocumented youth for social change and collective identity formation. Organizations actively produce good narrators through narrative training and informal conversations which are deployed in various public settings to garner support for immigration reform. Undocumented youth are trained on how to present their experiences, emotions, and bodies in particular ways and then go on to train others to do the same. This process discourages specific emotional and bodily displays and creates a homogenous DREAMer narrative that marginalizes undocumented youth and others whose narratives did not fit. Although this narrative has been successful in garnering support for policies benefitting the 1.5-generation and creating a collective identity of “undocumented and unafraid” among movement participants, it also serves as a mechanism of internal and external social control for people who tell it (Benford 2002).

DEPLOYING THE DREAMER NARRATIVE

The purpose of the narrative training is to enable undocumented student activists to deploy the learned narratives publicly to garner support for immigration reform. Social movement scholars stress the importance of a homogenous and coherent message to achieve movement goals (Benford and Snow 2000; Polletta 2006). Furthermore, a lack of coordination of movement narratives leads some movements to fail to gain public recognition (Fominaya 2010). Activists need to learn the narrative of what it means to be an undocumented youth and appropriately deploy it in public settings to achieve movement goals. In this section, I demonstrate several instances where undocumented youth reproduced elements of the DREAMer narrative in public settings. I will detail several examples, such as talking to politicians and invitations to speak on local college campuses. Although the specific audiences differed, strategies learned in narrative training enabled these undocumented student activists to adapt their narratives to diverse audiences seamlessly.

In the same meeting with city council candidates detailed earlier in the exchange between Claire and Julia, undocumented youth activists reproduced the DREAMer narrative to the prospective candidates. As people went around in a circle telling their narratives, elements of the DREAMer narrative emerged. Carla, who was in her late teens and had only recently been attending meetings at the encouragement of her immigration lawyer, told those in attendance: “I think that a five-year-old can’t break the law. I am not five now, but I was then. Why should we be punished for something we had no choice or no fault in?” In an even more aggressive statement Sanaa, a South African woman in her early twenties, exclaimed: “Some of us were brought here against our wills as babies and can never get citizenship now!” Carla and Sanaa emphasized that they were not responsible for entering the U.S. without authorization, although,

they implied that their parents entered illegally. Ernesto emphasized the second element of the DREAMer narrative, hard work. Here, he explained: “I went to school. I did it right. I served in the military—you could do that back then; the laws weren’t as strict. I contributed. I still contribute, you know, I do all of these programs with kids in the school.” He hit on elements, valuing education and the military, that resonated with the audience as quintessentially American. He told this narrative to position himself within the boundaries of the “us” as opposed to the “them,” or the “Latino Threat” (Chavez 2008). Finally, Lana discussed the broken immigration system. She said “We know that the national system is broken. But that is why we need to work on the state and local level, and that’s why we need you guys, to help us fix a little bit of this national problem. They tell us to get in line and get documented—but where is the line? There is no line!” Lana emphasized that she wants to be legal, she wants to earn legal status the “right way,” but is barred from doing so. She also implored the candidates to do something to help her; thus appealing to their moral identities and desire to do the right thing for undocumented youth.

In each of these quotes, undocumented students referenced cultural discourses of fairness, contributions made by immigrants to society, and innocent youth to convince future city council representatives to vote in their favor once in office. By telling these narratives, they not only presented their community in a positive way to the potential candidates, but they created a positive sense of self by describing themselves as honest and hard working. I purposefully chose excerpts from multiple people to show how, when deployed successfully, the DREAMer narrative is interchangeable among undocumented youth. Although the specific examples told in this meeting varied, they fit into a collective, trained narrative.

In another observation of a classroom presentation at a local university, Julie, an undocumented immigrant woman in her late twenties, talked to the education majors in attendance. Julie told them how she found out she was undocumented when she tried to get a driver's license: "I'm a good kid! I get good grades! I was begging them [my parents] to tell me why I couldn't get one. I was going through point-by-point, really making good arguments about how good I was. Then they told me—I was not living in the United States legally. I was shocked!"³⁸ Julie went on to recount other experiences where her legal status became salient, such as trying to get a library card and register for classes at a community college. She finished by explaining: "I don't know any country but this one, really. I was a kid when I left Mexico. I don't want to go back—my whole family is here! This is why I really need immigration reform." She also emphasized what those in attendance could do to help immigrant students when they became teachers.

Julie's narrative contained all of the critical elements of the DREAMer narrative: going from being an average kid to finding out her legal status was going to impact her life negatively; struggling to get an education; and the importance of immigration reform. Julie emphasized that she lived in the same town as her audience, attempting to position herself as the same as any other student on campus, except for her legal status. She implored the students in attendance to help her and emphasized the importance of each person doing what s/he can to make a positive change in the world. Despite the challenges she presented, Julie's narrative was a positive one. She positioned herself as working hard to overcome the obstacles in her life. She did not dwell on negative experiences or call out any politicians or policies by name. Julie constructed her experiences positively and appealed to meritocratic notions of working hard to overcome

³⁸ With the permission of Julie and the professor of the class, I recorded Julie's presentation but shut the recorder off during the Q&A at the request of one of the students in attendance.

personal challenges. Julie used her narrative to humanize undocumented immigrants to a non-immigrant audience and raise awareness around issues of immigration. Telling her narrative in this way also enabled Julie to highlight her accomplishments and de-criminalize herself. Julie was not to blame for her circumstances, she wanted to “do the right thing” and she just needed assistance to make it a reality. In order not to alienate her audience, which was predominately non-immigrant, Julie also avoided being too critical of American citizens.

As the above excerpts demonstrate, undocumented youth deployed the DREAMer narrative publically to raise awareness around immigration reform, deportation policies, and the lives of immigrant students. By emphasizing their hard work, educational achievements, and activism in the community, undocumented youth construct a collective identity of the student movement as hard-working, educationally-gifted, and socially conscious. Telling their narratives in this way provides a mechanism to push back against the “Latino Threat” narrative and nativist sentiment that defined immigrants as lazy, criminal, and a cultural threat to the character of the nation (Chavez 2008). Instead, these immigrants’ narratives have the potential to construct positive personal and group identities and deconstruct hegemonic nativist narratives. However, as was also evident, their narratives did not allow space for immigrant youth to deviate from the high-achieving, exceptional immigrant, “talented tenth” image they were trying to portray (Du Bois 1903).³⁹ By fitting their narratives into hegemonic narratives of hard work, the “American Dream,” and notions of respectability, undocumented student activists marginalized other

³⁹ The “talented tenth” was a term W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) used to describe the future of social, economic, and political integration of Black Americans. According to Du Bois, the “talented tenth” were the most educated, well-connected, and socially-conscious African Americans. Du Bois believed they would be the ones to create a better future for the entire community. Although people criticized Du Bois’ perspective as elitist, similar narratives persist today in the African American community. While the experience of Black people in America is distinct from non-Black communities of color, I observed overlap between the narrative strategies of the undocumented student movement and this classic sociological concept. The DREAMers are the “talented tenth” of the undocumented community and bear the responsibility of pushing for legal, political, and cultural inclusion.

members of their community who did not measure up, including their parents who were inadvertently criminalized by narratives of the “innocence” of the 1.5-generation. Despite these negative implications, the DREAMer narrative and the student movement had positive impacts in terms of garnering widespread support for immigration reform and by empowering undocumented youth.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN THE LIVES OF UNDOCUMENTED 1.5-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS

The student movement has been enormously influential in shaping public opinion about undocumented youth and immigration reform. (Pallares and Flores-González 2010). 1.5-generation immigrants are more visible than the first generation (their parents) in public discourse, undertaking dramatic “die-ins” at congressional offices, speaking publicly in local, state, and national legislative hearings, and conducting marches across college campuses (Nicholls 2013). Undocumented students in this study were directly and indirectly influenced by the national student movement’s message of pride in themselves and their families and the importance of organizing for political change. Although most of the participants in this study were in some way involved in the movement (forty-one out of forty-five), the level of participation varied: some were heavily involved in active organizations, some had narrative training, and some participated in groups that no longer had meetings but communicated via email. Regardless of the level of participation or years involved in the movement, participants in this study pointed to the immigrant rights movement generally, and the DREAMer movement specifically, as a catalyst for how they viewed themselves and their legal status.

Miguel, the full-time RIC employee with over seven years of movement involvement, responded in the following way when I asked how he thought about being undocumented: “To me being undocumented it’s [pause] it’s just with the movement that I’m with, fighting for

immigration reform, be proud of who you are. Be proud of who you are as in this is me. I'm a human being, and I'm just trying to do what everybody's trying to do—survive.” Here, Miguel framed himself as being “just like anyone else” in terms of goals and dreams, but being an undocumented person meant more than just a piece of paper. Being undocumented meant taking pride in “who you are.” Miguel credited the immigrant rights movement for inspiring him to take pride in himself and, by extension, other undocumented immigrants who shared similar experiences.

Similarly, Jessica, a single-mother in her mid-twenties who worked at a RIC-affiliated organization, highlighted how the movement shaped her understanding of her experiences, herself, and her future. She stated:

Now, since I've been involved in the movement, it's been a complete life-changer, and it's been an eye-opener. Well yes, I am undocumented, that doesn't mean I have to stay quiet, that doesn't mean I have to stop doing the things I want or believing in the things that I want. It means no, I can't vote but I can push somebody else to vote. I can push somebody else to see a different view or a different perspective of the real world. So, I mean now it's given me a strength and a lens of umm...I'm not alone more than anything. I'm not alone, and it doesn't stop here.

Involvement in the push for immigration reform inspired Jessica to advocate for change and was a source of personal strength. Earlier in the interview, she recalled feeling afraid and alone after her mom was deported to Mexico. As she becomes a mother herself, she remembered her high school years and early adulthood as a period of shame, fear, and anger at the U.S. government for splitting up her family. The movement not only provided a means for her to advocate for change, but was a way for Jessica to channel her previous feelings of anger and shame into a sense of pride, strength, and a feeling that rather than being *powerless*, she was powerful. The movement also created a collective identity for Jessica: she was not alone and there were others

like her. This sentiment is dramatically different from the loneliness and isolation many undocumented students reported feeling when they were children.⁴⁰

Jessica and Miguel were both employees of immigrant rights organizations with over a decade of involvement between them and who had experience learning and telling the DREAMer narrative. By contrast, Jasmin, who was in her late teens at the time of our interview, had just started college and was not very involved in activism. She had not told her narrative publicly and did not actively participate in the movement. However, the national DREAMer narrative still impacted her life. After she described that she was less afraid of being undocumented now than when she was younger, I asked her why. She provided the following explanation:

I think seeing support for undocumented students and seeing—I think the biggest thing was the Undocumented Unafraid movement, just because it’s okay...like, it’s okay to be proud of that. You know what I mean? Being undocumented has made me the person that I am...And so it’s just seeing other people see the beauty in it and see—be authentic and not see that as a bad thing. Seeing other people embrace it really helped me be like, ‘Okay, I’m done. I want to feel this way.’

Although Jasmin was not involved in the student movement to the same degree as others in this study, she still cited the student movement as the impetus for her changing mindset about her legal status and her experiences as an undocumented person. She framed the student movement as an “authentic” representation of the experiences of undocumented youth and as a result claimed that she was inspired to view herself differently.

Among participants in this study, the importance of the student movement was evidenced by their understanding of the movement as having a significant impact on their lives, even if they were not directly involved. In addition to the tangible impacts resulting from tuition equity and DACA, the “Undocumented and Unafraid” student movement also inspired undocumented 1.5-

⁴⁰ I detail this narrative strategy more thoroughly in Chapter Five.

generation immigrants to take pride in their identities, experiences, and community. People entered the movement wanting something; they were labeled negatively by others and experienced blocked opportunities as a result of their legal status, and the movement offered some hope. By participating in the movement, they gained something positive with which to identify. Telling the DREAMer narrative grounded them in an identity that they did not have before and through participation, they created new, positive personal and collective narratives. While not everyone in this study participated in activism or narrative training, it was clear that the dominant DREAMer narrative impacted the narratives they shared and how they interpreted their own experiences and identities. In this way, the DREAMer narrative was successful in creating positive personal and collective identities.

CONCLUSION: THE DREAMER NARRATIVE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

This chapter demonstrated how participants in the undocumented student movement used narrative training to politicize identity in the push for immigration reform. By learning this narrative and deploying it in the context of activism, the undocumented student movement created a collective identity around what it means to be a DREAMer. The immense efforts to train student activists were successful insofar as they readily reproduced the learned narrative, used it to impact state and national policy, and created positive personal and collective identities. Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrant activists successfully lobbied through the course of this research project for in-state tuition, driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants, an end to a state bill that required law enforcement to cooperate with ICE, and the implementation of DACA on the national level. These successes should not be discounted and were due, at least in part, to the successful deployment of the DREAMer narrative. By talking about themselves and their communities as hard-working, law-abiding, and positive contributors to American society, the

1.5 generation also felt good about themselves and pushed back against stereotypical narratives that construct immigrants as lazy and a threat to American society. However, there are limitations and unintended consequences to the DREAMer narrative, in terms of both identity development and the achievement of desired movement outcomes.

Although telling the DREAMer narrative is a successful mechanism for social change and collective identity formation, there are consequences to having to tell “your narrative” in this way. First, the narratives of undocumented youth that did not meet the standards of the DREAMer narrative, people who had gotten into trouble with the law, were victims of violence (as I will show in Chapter Six), and had not gone to college, were silenced. Thus, undocumented student activists only told certain narrative and included only some undocumented immigrant youth in the immigrant rights project. Rather than situating exposure to violence, low-quality schooling, and under-employment within broader systems of inequality, activists silenced these narratives in an effort to maintain and portray the image of the good, respectable immigrant student.

Second, undocumented student activists (especially young men) carefully controlled their presentation of self in public narratives to avoid alienating or frightening mostly white, non-immigrant audiences. This was especially important, as studies suggest that white people (often the presumptive audience for these narratives) attribute individual acts to entire groups of color (Pettigrew 1979). While men can benefit from learning to recognize their privilege in a patriarchal society, forcing people who were victims of violence (whether familial, cultural, or state-sanctioned) and discrimination to stifle their anger to placate their audiences is damaging and ultimately reinforces dominant racial and nativist hierarchies. Finally, as was evident in Carla and Sanaa’s accounts of deploying the DREAMer narrative, narratives about the supposed

“innocence” of the 1.5-generation inadvertently constructed the first generation (their parents) as culpable for the choice to migrate without authorization, thus criminalizing them. If DREAMers are “innocent,” then their parents are, by implication, “guilty.” This rhetoric has the potential to reproduce negative stereotypes about their families, other undocumented immigrants, and thus, themselves. This narrative strategy serves as defensive othering (Ezzel 2009) whereby youth distance themselves from negative stereotypes about their group by downplaying their involvement in stigmatized behaviors. Although claiming innocence for themselves has the potential to create a positive personal identity, it necessitates pulling upon and reinforcing negative stereotypes about the collective and their parents.

Also, 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants’ narratives of innocence have negative impacts on the push for immigration reform. Here I quote David, who spoke about this issue at length:

A lot of times when people talk about the DREAM Act, they forget about our parents. And Deferred Action is one of those things, you know? I’m driving around able to work legally, and my mom is in the shadows still. While I’m proud to be undocumented and unafraid, what about my mom? Even today our movement is oppressing theirs. It’s saying ‘It’s OK to be a DREAMer, we were here without any fault of our own.’ It’s this huge movement that is being demolished like comprehensive immigration reform is not on the lips of anyone’s mouths because we have...we’ve kind of just given up on the idea that anyone is gonna give any kind of relief for our parents. It’s like we’re not willing to fight for them.

As David’s quote encapsulates, undocumented youth in this study were well aware that their adherence to the DREAMer narrative left their parents in the shadows. They knew that by focusing on the “innocent youth” they were potentially harming efforts for immigration reform, which would benefit all members of the community. While the rhetoric of “innocent youth” was successful in garnering public support for the 1.5-generation, broader efforts at immigration

reform collapsed, due in part to the space left open in the DREAMer narrative that, while *they* were excellent and deserving immigrants, their parents were not.

Struggles around identity and constructing a cohesive group narrative are not distinct experiences of the undocumented student movement. Marginalized groups grapple with counter-hegemonic and hegemonic ideologies regularly in the process of identity deployment and development (Gamson 1995). Classic studies of the women's movement (Freeman 1984; Whittier 1995), the LGBTQ movement (Bernstein 1997; Tarrow 1994), and struggles for rights for African Americans (Higgenbotham 1993; McAdam 1994) found that people regularly vacillated between challenging and reinforcing dominant narratives. For example, LGBTQ activists, while having varying degrees of success in obtaining marriage equality, adoption rights, and rights in the workplace, often relied on a narrative that insists "we are just like you, only gay," which conceptualizes "gay" identity as mainstream, white, gender-conforming, cissexual, and middle class (Tarrow 1994; Duggan 2002). Similarly, by dressing in their "Sunday Best," Civil Rights activists in the 1960s historically portrayed a particular public image that garnered support from white allies. This approach, however, created intra-group tensions with more radical activists and marginalized Black Americans whose style of dress, speech, and mannerisms did not conform to middle-class, white norms of "respectability" (Harris 2014; Higgenbotham 1993).⁴¹ Like other marginalized groups struggling for economic, political, and social change, undocumented youth expressed frustrations at the conventions of dominant cultural narratives, and broader ideologies about immigrants that structured how they narrated their lives (Fiorito and Nicholls 2016; Polletta 2006). While this idealized narrative has created a space for challenging hegemonic, nativist rhetoric about immigrants, the DREAMer narrative

⁴¹ This approach also further solidified popular stereotypes about the "wrong" kind of activists, namely, the Black Panthers. Civil Rights leaders were constructed by whites as deserving of rights, whereas Black Panthers and other radical Black activists experienced further criminalization.

has ultimately reinforced the stereotypes that undocumented students attempted to deconstruct (Ezzell 2009).

As I have shown and will continue to emphasize throughout this dissertation, undocumented student activists were well-aware of the potential shortcomings of the DREAMer narrative. Activists have tried, with varying degrees of success, to challenge this omnipresent discourse. However, the DREAMer narrative is embedded in the public imagination and the psyche of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants and is difficult to deconstruct. Although DREAMer activists now deploy more nuanced narratives than when I first began this project, the ubiquitous DREAMer narrative remains intact. Undocumented youth must still include specific themes in their narratives, such as not having a choice in the migration decision and working hard to get a college education, as Nicholls detailed:

This new generation of DREAMers has, therefore, celebrated the new discourses and messages within the movement, but they have continued to exert control over how they craft representations of themselves in the public sphere, carefully choosing to highlight specific attributes of this complex group while silencing others (2013:138).

The data in this chapter demonstrated how undocumented students are taught to tell their narrative and the positive and negative impacts of this social movement tactic. In the next chapter, I analyze another movement strategy undocumented youth utilize: a community theater project where undocumented students scripted narratives of what it means to be undocumented. As in the case of non-scripted public narratives, scripted narratives were used by undocumented youth to create positive personal and collective identities and inspire social change.

CHAPTER 4

“DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?”: SCRIPTED NARRATIVES IN THE UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT MOVEMENT

Thus far in this dissertation, I have examined how activists are taught how to tell movement narratives and deploy them in the context of social movement activism. In this chapter I analyze how five self-proclaimed “undocumented Americans” script and perform their narratives in a community theater performance. There are two versions of the play: *Do You Know Who I Am?* (performed in English) and *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* (performed in Spanish). I observed six performances of *Do You Know Who I Am?* and one performance of *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* In addition to observation data, I interviewed the five performers. Although the primary focus of this chapter is the play itself, by integrating interviews with the performers, I was able to analyze the cultural knowledge they use to make sense of the performance and their experiences with it (Pugh 2013). By utilizing observations of the play and in-depth interviews with the performers, I can detail the interaction between the performers and audiences, how audiences react to the play, as well as how the performers make sense of what participating in the play means to them. In this chapter, I show how scripted narratives are used by participants to craft identities, as a tactic in social movement activism, and to engender solidarity between performers and audience members.

The play detailed various events in the lives of the five performers, such as coming to the United States, getting into a car accident, going to college, and dealing with the death of family members. *Do You Know Who I Am?* / *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* is applied theater, a performance with the broader goals of empowerment and social change (Baldwin 2009). The play lasted one hour, followed by a “talkback” where audience members provided their reactions to the play and asked questions of the performers. The play is a scripted *testimonio*, or a space to document silenced

histories (Beverly 2004). In the tradition of Chicano/a activist theater,⁴² the experiences presented in *Do You Know Who I Am?* and *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* empowered the undocumented activist performers to script their powerful narratives into life.

The performance is a unique repertoire of activism for the undocumented student movement which, as detailed in Chapter Three, use narratives to enact positive social change (Negrón-Gonzales 2014). The performers use scripted narratives to politicize social movement goals, create personal identities through emotion work on the self, and deploy emotions to connect with audience members.⁴³ The English and Spanish versions of the play aimed to inspire emotional connections between performers and audience members for different purposes. For non-immigrant audiences, the English-language version of the play provided a window into the lives of marginalized groups (undocumented 1.5-generation Latina/o immigrants and their families) that members of the dominant group (Anglo citizens) do not regularly see. The undocumented performers educated this audience and pushed back against conditions of illegality by narrating blocked educational opportunities and racist scapegoating to redefine undocumented immigrants as deserving of rights. In contrast to the English-language play, *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* used language to create and sustain collective identities through shared emotional narratives. Although the content of *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* was virtually identical to *Do You Know Who I Am?* the Spanish-language performance was about more than getting support for immigration reform. *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* was performed by undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants for themselves, their families, and their community and thus had different goals and impacts than *Do You Know Who I Am?*

⁴² Use of activist art has a long history. Most notably for this chapter, *El Teatro Campesino* and the Farm Worker's Movement. I detail this legacy later in the chapter.

⁴³ In *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* narratives are also used to create collective identities with other undocumented immigrants in the community. This was not the case in the English version.

In this chapter I analyze the performances and talkbacks of *Do You Know Who I am?* followed by the performance and talkback of *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* I pay careful attention to how the performers used narratives and emotions to manage others' impressions of them and create positive self and group identities. Despite the positive impacts of both versions of the play, the performers pull on culturally-available tropes in the performance in ways that may (unintentionally) reinforce nativist sentiment. Activist art has the potential to create positive social change. That having been said, there are lessons to be learned from the shortcomings of the performance as well. Below, I turn to the literature on applied theater to situate the performance in broader activist traditions.

THEATER AS ACTIVISM

Theater can carve out space for members of marginalized groups to present themselves and their issues (Polletta 2006; Sandhal 2003). Performance monologues are thought to “privilege ‘reality’ over ‘fictionality’” in that “the author is present onstage in the body of the performer” (Peterson 1997:12). Audiences give autobiographical performances, like *Do You Know Who I Am?* and *¿Sabes Quién Soy?*, a degree of authenticity which results in considering performers “authentic representatives of the social group to which they belong” (Sandhal 2003: 29). The performances are applied theater, a type of theater in which performers transform autobiographical narratives into political activism (Boal 1985). Applied theater asks audience members to put themselves in the shoes of the performers, think about the consequences unfolding in the stories for their own lives, and become active participants in the theatrical process (Taylor 2003). *Do You Know Who I Am?* and *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* accomplish these goals by connecting emotionally with the audience, raising awareness of issues facing undocumented immigrants, and encouraging audience participation in the struggle after the play ends.

The performance amplifies the narratives of undocumented youth and owes a debt to the legacy of *El Teatro Campesino*, which began in the 1960s as a “cultural arm” of the United Farm Workers’ Union (Mündel 2007). *Actos* (the name of early sketches) performed by farmworkers showcased daily indignities and racist stereotypes of Mexicans common in the U.S. *Actos* were about the reality of the lives of farmworkers but were also, according to founding member Luis Valdez, an “emblematic presentation of what the farmworker feels” (Bagby 1966). *El Teatro Campesino* was a tactic to organize workers to combat the injustices they faced. I interpret the centering of undocumented Latino/a experiences, written and performed by undocumented Latinas/os as continuing this form of activism. *¿Sabes Quién Soy?*, in particular, was performed for Latino/a audiences, by Latina/o performers, with the goal of representing the feelings and experiences of the community to inspire solidarity and increased visibility of community issues.

The performances reproduced the DREAMer narrative, as outlined in Chapters One and Three. The DREAMer narrative, while identifying problems and solutions with current immigration policy, risks reproducing hegemonic narratives of “good” and “bad” immigrants. I argue that the “good immigrant” narrative scripted in *Do You Know Who I Am?* and *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* has the potential to recruit new movement allies and disrupt nativist rhetoric about the so-called “dangers” of undocumented migration/immigrants. While DREAMer movement activists often transgress hegemonic narratives of the “good immigrant” (e.g., Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 2014; Negrón-Gonzales 2014), the conventional narrative structures of the theater reproduce inequality in interactions between immigrant performers and non-immigrant audiences. What is missing from analyses of the DREAMer narrative is the role that emotions play in structuring the content, delivery, and reception of this particular narrative. Given the

centrality of emotions to a quality theater production, the performances are an ideal setting to analyze these dynamics.

EMOTIONS AND NARRATIVES

The performers and audience members use emotions throughout the play and talkback to construct positive personal and collective identities.⁴⁴ Despite the importance of emotions in constructing the self, scholarly research on the role of emotions in narrative and identity work is underdeveloped. Emotions are not just spontaneous; they are structured and influenced by cultural and social contexts, including race, gender, and class (Wilkins 2008; Wilkins and Pace 2014). Situational contexts provide cues as to appropriate and inappropriate emotional displays, as well as constrain how people interpret their own bodily experiences of emotions (Illouz 2007). Hochschild (1983) argued that our emotions, behaviors, and actions are expected to align with the normative expectations for a given social setting, something she calls “feeling rules.” These feeling rules guide how we feel, what we feel, where we feel, how long we can feel, and how strong our emotional displays can be. Thus, narratives and emotions in day-to-day interactions structure and reinforce self-concept or identity. Beyond the implications of emotions in personal identities, emotions and affective ties inspire people to get involved in enacting social change, sustaining movement participation, and create group identities (de Volo 2006; Fominaya 2007; Jasper 1999). The creation of shared outrage over a particular event(s) can unite community members together or reinforce social movement participants’ connections to one another (Jasper 1998). Research on narratives and social movements recognize that part of the success of a particular narrative lies in whether or not it is culturally recognizable to the audience, such as

⁴⁴ The performers also hope that the audience members are inspired to get involved in the push for immigration reform after the play is over. However, because I did not interview the audience members, I cannot say whether or not this goal was particularly successful. Instead, I focus on what the play and talkback accomplish in and of themselves for both versions of the play.

pulling oneself up by the bootstraps on the way to achieving the “American Dream” (Polletta 2006). The cultural recognitions audience members make are often *emotional* ones, an area that remains understudied (Jasper 1998). The English-language play, from the introduction to the concluding line— “Will you help me?”—tells the audience that the performers see them as kind and helpful. Audience members are motivated to maintain these activated identities and have positive affect toward the play and the performers (Robinson 2014). In the Spanish-language performance, performers connect emotionally with the audience to create and sustain a collective identity. Both versions of the play use emotions to construct positive self and group identities through performance. Throughout the chapter, I detail how emotions are performed, constrained, and negotiated in interactions between performers and audience members, paying careful attention to opportunities where hegemonic cultural narratives are deconstructed or reinforced.

SETTING THE SCENE: SCRIPTING THE NARRATIVE OF “UNDOCUMENTED AMERICANS”

Several activists I met through this dissertation research became involved in the theater production. These include Miguel, Enrique, Edgar (who are brothers), David, and María. The four men are undocumented, and María is a U.S. citizen with close ties to undocumented immigrants via her marriage to David and her undocumented parents. The performers were in their early to late twenties at the time of the performances. Time in the U.S. among the four undocumented performers varied. David has lived in the U.S. since he was eight months old, whereas the other performers ranged in age of arrival from seven to fifteen years of age. At the time of the production, all performers had lived in the U.S. for over ten years and were heavily involved with MD. Post-DACA, Miguel, Edgar, and David had all taken paid, full-time positions with RIC. The five performers were active participants and trainers in the narrative workshops detailed in Chapter Three. I

observed each of them multiple times throughout the years provide congressional testimony, speak to the media, and discuss immigration issues with students on local college campuses. Perhaps it was due to being seasoned activists or their close ties to one another that led to these five activists creating and participating in the play.

THE ORIGINS OF *DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?* AND *¿SABES QUIÉN SOY?*

According to the participants, involvement with the theater company began when they were contacted by Samantha, a white woman in her early forties who worked with a local theater company. Samantha asked them if they wanted to participate in a narrative workshop. Approximately twenty undocumented youth attended the first workshop. At the onset, they were not sure whether or not it would become a full-blown performance. Enrique remembered thinking, “it was something, like, we were just going to have her [Samantha] show us how to write our story and that’s it. She was just asking questions [like]: ‘What about if someone called you illegal or something?’ I started writing all of these things about it.” After the first session of getting to know each other and doing several writing exercises, only Enrique, his brothers, David, and María returned. Each of the performers was given a notebook to write down their thoughts and experiences. They did exercises in the workshops with Samantha where she provided them with prompts, such as “what was an important event in your childhood?” They would take their notebooks home, write about the prompts, and discuss them during the next session. María remembered having a “notebook full of stories” from which to craft her monologue.

As the workshops and rehearsals progressed, Samantha asked them to choose excerpts to script. Samantha wanted Miguel to include a narrative describing when his grandfather died, along with a photograph of Miguel’s grandfather as a background image. Miguel told Samantha

he needed to ask his mothers' permission. Miguel remembered that he asked his mom for permission to use her father's picture. He said,

I didn't know how she was going to react because that's the only picture we have. Samantha was insisting like, 'Can I do it, can I do it?' I kept putting it off because I didn't know how to talk to her, you know it was just a hard conversation to have with my mom. I talked to my mom, and she gave me her blessing.

As Miguel explained, Samantha took input from everyone as to which experiences to include and how to best present their narratives. This process was collective, if not somewhat hierarchical. Samantha told a local radio station that each of the five "wrote a monologue that consisted of stories they felt would really help people to understand what it is like to be undocumented" (KGNU 2013). While Samantha was integral in weaving the monologues together, the five performers collectively chose which narratives they were going to tell. Although there was a lot of "coaching" (i.e., practicing the script and learning how to leave and enter the stage), the five performers had creative control over what they wanted to say. Thus, the play progressed in a more bottom-up manner than the narrative trainings from Chapter Three.

The first performance was unique compared to the others because each performer delivered his/her entire monologue before the next person spoke. In all other performances, regardless of whether performed in English or Spanish, the monologues were woven together into one narrative. The five performers took on roles in the different narratives as classmates, parents, or teachers. While Samantha may have had other goals in weaving the monologues together,⁴⁵ the performers saw this as a way to connect emotionally to the narratives. According to David, talking about your life "gets stale after years and years and years of doing it; you lose

⁴⁵ In an interview with a local radio station about the performance, Samantha said: "my background is in autobiographical monologue work, so helping people to tell their stories is kind of my forte." She went on to say that she wanted to "weave these stories together into a drama instead of leaving them as monologues...In the theater world, monologues only go so far—they're not seen as full drama—so we decided to weave them together" (Interview on KGNU, 2013).

that spark [snaps his fingers] that really hits home.” He went on to say that he got involved in the performance:

...not to share my story, because I was already sharing my story, but to share it in a way that’s new every time and to impact people that way every time...The performance was meant to be a monologue, and then it became this performance that was weaved together of our five monologues. That connection that we made with each other’s stories and that vulnerability we built into it made it fresh every time. The way that we learned, the way that Samantha taught us, it’s really about feeling each other’s story in different ways each time.

David was experiencing a form of activist fatigue. He was burnt out from working as a full-time community organizer for several years. The final format of the play allowed him to connect to the emotions of his narrative (and those of the other performers) rather than merely the content. This quote also demonstrates that scripting narratives, akin to other forms of publicly talking about their lives, is a collective process. The process came together differently in the theater performance, but their prior narrative training prepared them to transition from unscripted to scripted performances.

When crafting the script, the performers also took into consideration how they experience their own emotions about what they perform. Edgar explained that talking about specific life events, such as finding out he could not continue with ROTC in high school because he is undocumented, can be emotionally challenging. It is not just the content of the narratives that impacts his emotional response. As he explained: “I think [it is] the questions that we’re asked, the people that we’re speaking to, the people we have in mind when we do it.” For Miguel, the most rewarding part of the play was when their narratives not only “open minds, but open hearts.” As the performers made clear, emotions matter not only regarding connecting with the audience (something I will detail later when discussing the talkbacks) but in motivating themselves to continue the performance.

PRODUCING THE PLAY: LOCATION, STAGING, ADVERTISING, AND AUDIENCES

The location of the performances varied and included churches, conference rooms on college campuses, libraries, and small theaters. The play was advertised in local activist listservs, fliers, and on local public radio, newspapers, and magazines. The town where the theater company is based houses a flagship public university with a reputation for liberal politics. In addition to a more pro-immigrant political orientation, the surrounding area also has an active artist community, so turnout at many of the performances was quite high. The performance even sold out a theater in the smaller town where the performers live. The size of the audiences varied depending on the size of the performance space. Most of the performances had audiences of around 50 people, although two English-language performances in larger theaters (one campus-based and one community-based) had audiences of well over 100 people. The demographics of the audience also changed depending on the setting. For example, the campus performance was almost entirely college students, whereas the performance at a local library was primarily those middle-aged and older. While there were some age and gender variation, the audience composition reflected the broader community, which is relatively racially homogenous, according to U.S. Census (2015) data (seventy-eight percent non-Hispanic white). The notable exception was the sole Spanish-performance of *¿Sabes Quién Soy?*, where the majority of audience members were Spanish-speaking Latinos/as.

PROPS

During all of the performances, the five participants dressed simply: the four male performers wore black short or long-sleeved t-shirts and pants and María wore a plain black dress with black leggings. The props were minimal, as this was a low-budget, community theater project. At the back of the stage was a construction blockade reading “Road Closed.” In addition,

there was a white graduation cap used when people detailed their high school graduations, a red scarf that María took out of her back pocket and wore each time she played David's mother, a cowboy hat Miguel wore to honor his grandfather, and a soccer ball that was kicked and thrown around at several points during the play. The only other props were five rectangular blocks: black on one side and a mixture of solid blue and red-and-white striped on the other. At different points in the script, they were used for chairs, podiums, or slammed down for emphasis. The red-and-white striped sides created a visual block when performers described obstacles they faced. In the closing scene, the blocks were placed together to create the shape of the American flag. The sound person had a guitar, an old-school boom box that played a nursery rhyme at the beginning of scenes one and two, a folk ballad to honor the brothers' deceased grandfather, and a celebratory song during graduation celebrations. He also slammed a mock door shut several times and walked to the front of the stage at the beginning of scenes one and two with a clapperboard that had the name of play on it. In each performance, the props, background images, music, and sound effects were the same. The only notable change was that in two of the English-language performances, a larger theater setting allowed for a spotlight on the individual performers and shifts in background lighting when the scenes changed. Having described the production aspects of the play, I now turn to an analysis of the impacts of the play. I will begin with the English-language performances of *Do You Know Who I Am?*

DECONSTRUCTING AND REINFORCING NARRATIVES ABOUT UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN *DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?*

The narratives performed in *Do You Know Who I Am?* provided audience members with insight into the daily lives and struggles of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants and their families. The most memorable narratives were those with the strongest emotional impact: stories of violence, loss, and perseverance in the face of massive obstacles. By balancing narratives of

victimization and courage, the performers named and performed their pain while also shielding themselves from potentially adverse audience reactions when marginalized groups present narratives of victimization (Polletta 2006). Throughout the play, performers drew on culturally-relevant American narratives of perseverance, hard work, and patriotism which undoubtedly aided in audience support. Despite positive impacts of this version of the play, their narratives often confined the discourse of deservingness to only *some* immigrants (like the youth on stage), further alienating those who do not conform to these norms.

In several scenes, performers acted out narratives commonly experienced by undocumented immigrants. The play began as the lights dimmed on a sold-out crowd at a local theater. The five actors sat silently on small, black, wooden boxes. The sound effects person walked to the front of the stage with a clapperboard and said “The Little Walk to School, Scene 1,” as he smacked it together. As the lights came on, we heard a popular Mexican children’s song, *Caminito de la Escuela*, playing as the actors pretend to drive in their cars. The nursery rhyme continued while the actors occasionally took sips from imaginary cups and pretended to look into mirrors at the cars behind them. Without warning, the music screeched to a halt and all five jolt forward from the impact of a car accident. In the next scene, the audience learned that this occurred when María and David were in a car accident. From the opening sequence of events, it was not immediately clear to whom these experiences belonged. While this happened explicitly to David and María, the dramatization suggests it could happen to any of them. The opening scene set the tone that the performance will be representative of a collective undocumented youth experience.

In the closing sequence of scene one, Miguel took the stage. I detailed the scene in my field notes:

As the lights dimmed on the other performers playing the roles of his family, a spotlight shone down on Miguel, who was holding an imaginary diploma up to the sky. “This is for you, abuelito. This is for you grandpa,”⁴⁶ Miguel said, slowly bringing his arms down to his sides, removing the cowboy hat he chose to wear instead of the customary graduation cap. He briefly held the hat over his heart, with his head bowed and a tear barely falling from his eye. A Mexican folk ballad played as the performers walked out of the light, leaving only the image of Miguel’s deceased grandfather on the stage, staring back at the audience.

During this scene, the audience learned that Miguel and his family could not visit his grandfather in Mexico before he died for fear of being caught crossing the border without documentation when returning to the U.S., a common fear of migrants.⁴⁷ Much like the reenacting of David and María’s car accident, this scene was designed to represent the collective experience.

Scene two of the play opened (again) with a bang, as the five actors re-stage David and María’s car crash. Afterward, Enrique walked to the front of the stage, staring at the audience. He paused at center stage and asked, “Do you know who I am?” He continued walking slowly across the stage, pointing to individual members of the audience and asking again, “Do you know who I am... [pointing again at an individual audience member] ...Do you?” He stopped walking, pointed to a small tattoo on his forearm, and said people assume he is in a gang because he has tattoos. He said softly, “I am not a criminal,” then again louder as the single spotlight shone down on him in the middle of the stage. He repeated this phrase several more times until he shouts: “I am NOT a criminal!” Enrique paused for dramatic effect before bringing his voice down to a calmer tone as the lights turned to a soft, bluish hue. He stood near the left corner of the stage and said he wants to help people in the community, to give back. He wants to work

⁴⁶ All quotes were verbatim from the play. I provide English translation following Spanish lines in brackets where necessary.

⁴⁷ The United States has militarized the southern border with Mexico since the 1980s (Golash-Boza 2012). While migration used to be seasonal and circular, restrictive immigration policies and heightened border enforcement increased permanent settlement of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003). Undocumented immigrants miss important family events in Mexico because of the dangers involved in re-crossing the border into the United States (Boehm 2011).

with children, maybe as a counselor or a psychologist because “family is the most important thing.” He shook his head and again repeated, “I am not a criminal” in a soft, almost dejected voice as he walked out of the light.

Enrique is in his late twenties and migrated from Mexico to the U.S. with his family when he was twelve years old. He speaks English with a noticeable accent. His accent and darker phenotype signify to non-immigrants that he could be a part of the “Latino threat” (Chavez 2008). Whenever Enrique speaks with someone, his accent immediately marks him as a Spanish-speaking immigrant and activates stereotypes that he is lower class, “illegal,” and dangerous. Enrique emphasized family values, hard work, obeying the law, and wanting to help the community through his portion of the performance. He used his narrative in an attempt to counter the classed and racialized stigma of illegality to convince the audience that he is deserving of their respect and political inclusion.

Enrique told me that his motivation for this narrative came from another undocumented immigrant. In a narrative training in which he participated, this woman told him she was pulled over and wanted to tell the police officer that she was not a criminal. After listening to her experience, Enrique thought to himself: “Yes! You’re not a criminal! She’s not a criminal. We’re not criminals!” Enrique strategically used this narrative to highlight his (and other undocumented immigrants’) positive contributions to American society, which he hopes will inspire audience members to engage in political action. Popular rhetoric regularly dehumanizes undocumented immigrants as “illegals” and suggests that they have few redeeming qualities. Enrique pushed back against this discourse by performing his narrative. At a college campus theater, Enrique smiled at chuckling audience members after he told them he wanted to be a psychologist to help all of the people who think he is a criminal. In this exchange, the audience shows they believe

Enrique when he tells them he is not a threat. He could be their friend or just another “average American” college student.

By emphasizing his positive contributions to society and talking about positive life experiences, Enrique asserts what Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2011) call “intersectional dignity.” Intersectional dignity describes the mechanisms through which immigrants emphasize positive aspects of their identities to counter the indignities they experience in everyday life. Enrique stakes a claim that he is not a criminal and the audience reciprocated this claim by laughing and clapping. This particular narrative also has important emotional consequences for Enrique, because his identity construction is undertaken in a social environment that paints him, his family, and other undocumented immigrants as “criminal threats” to the U.S. (Chavez 2008). Enrique asserts that he is not a criminal; instead, he is a loving son and brother who wants to contribute to the U.S. economy. From our interview, I learn that he intended to represent all undocumented immigrants in his narrative. The design of the play, however, requires him to individualize the narrative as *his* experience. Thus, it leaves space for observers to interpret that while he is not a criminal, others may be. Missing from the context of Enrique’s narrative, due in large part to the format of theater, is the broader political and legal context under which *all* Latinas/os (especially men) are considered suspect. While Enrique’s performance deconstructs this discourse to some degree, the personalized way in which he presents it risks activating nativist stereotypes that some immigrants (college students like Enrique) are far more deserving of rights than others.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ There are also important political consequences to this rhetoric. Anti-immigrant policies, such as Arizona’s infamous SB 1070, allowed law enforcement officials to target anyone who “looks” undocumented. These policies are based upon the perceived criminality of undocumented Latinas/os. By potentially reinforcing this rhetoric, Enrique’s performance may paradoxically provide justification for the policies against which he is fighting.

In another moving scene from the play, David came to the front of the stage and talked about his abusive father. The lights were low, except for a spotlight on María, who donned a red headscarf to signal to the audience she was now playing David's mother. David narrated how his mother stayed with a violent man. We heard a loud *smack* into the microphone as María turned her head as if being struck. David said: "finally she said *enough!*" María yelled in unison, "*¡ya basta!*" stomped her foot down firmly and looked straight at the audience. As I watched this fictional representation for the first time, I felt goosebumps rise on my arms as María yelled and turned to face the audience, forcing us all to consider the strength and perseverance needed to take care of her sons on her own in the U.S. María's performance highlighted David's mothers' hyper-exploited status as a poor, undocumented, woman of color who did not speak any English. This narrative described the compounding impacts of gender, class, language, and legal status in shaping women's decision-making for themselves and their families in situations of intimate partner violence (Erez, Edelman, and Gregory 2009; Salcido and Adelman 2004). By framing his mothers' experiences this way, David wanted the audience to avoid feeling pity and instead feel compassion.

The narrative also had emotional impacts on David. He told the audience: "I want to make my mother proud of me because I am proud of her...everything she put up with from my father, it can't be for nothing!" By giving voice to his mothers' experience, David paid homage to her and processes his own emotions regarding his tumultuous childhood. David struggles with his history of family violence but believes the performance was a way to fashion a positive narrative of his childhood and himself as a man. When the audience reciprocated by crying, shaking their heads in sadness or disbelief, or commenting on his mother's strength, David inspires compassion in the audience for not only his mother but other undocumented women in

similar circumstances. Despite the positive impacts of his narrative, without a broader context of how intimate partner violence functions, audience members may associate Latinos generally with the violent image of David's father. What makes this narrative work is what may reinforce racist and gendered stereotypes about Latinos and justify deportation policies that tear immigrant fathers away from their families.⁴⁹

Performers can enact negative emotions in the controlled, theatrical context in ways that did not trigger fear or distrust from the audience. This is particularly important for the male performers who must contend with racialized, classed, and gendered stereotypes that paint Latino men as “macho” and violent. Later in scene two, we returned to David's narrative and watched as María (playing David's mother) softly sang the nursery rhyme from the opening sequence: “Caminito de la escuela, apurándose a llegar...” as she mimed making burritos and tamales. There were no props—we knew this was happening because David told us: “Every day my mother would wake me up at 3 am—3 am! We were a two-person burrito factory [audience laughter].” He recounted a day where they did not sell many burritos. David shouted at his mother: “Why can't you get a real job, like my friends' moms? I'm tired of selling burritos and being looked at like we're begging for money!” She responded that they are undocumented and cannot get jobs like everyone else. María smacked her hands together as she shouted how important it was for David to get an education: “No quiero que trabajes con las manos como yo!” David repeated his mother's words for the audience in English: “I don't want you to work with your hands [long pause as he stares at his outstretched hands] like me.” He continued: “it was quiet the rest of the ride back home. I had told my mom that I wasn't proud of her. The next day,

⁴⁹ While all undocumented immigrants are subject to the threat of deportation, research suggests that immigration enforcement is *gendered*, with more men facing deportation than women (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013).

she didn't wake me up to help her, but I got up anyways, and when I joined her in the kitchen, she just smiled." As he said this, María smiled and took his hand.

While for the audience, this scene might demonstrate how hard undocumented immigrants work to provide a better life for their children, for David the scene had a different impact. He acted out an experience where he felt angry with his mother. He was ashamed that they "beg" for money and embarrassed by the work his mother did. David has lived in the U.S. since he was eight months old and is confused and angry that his family is different from his documented peers. Performing this narrative impacts David emotionally. He said that "the thing that makes it fresh for me every time is to see the sadness in it and to see the happiness and the tenderness that it takes to talk about my mom that way, you know? To lift her up, the inspiration." When David later discusses how important his mothers' sacrifices are to him, the audience *feels* this to be true—they have seen them yell, cry, and hide in fear from abuse. Audience members gasped as María turned away from being struck and smiled as she hugged David at his high school graduation, so proud of the first person in her family to finish high school. The theatrical context enabled David to reenact uncomfortable emotions while deflecting negative stereotypes about undocumented immigrants.

During the play, the performers were able to feel all of the emotions embedded within their narratives and deploy them to "lift up" their parents' experiences. Undocumented youth are in a privileged position vis-à-vis their parents, who are received less warmly by the American public (Ábrego 2006). As such, youth often speak about and *for* their parents, who remain in the shadows. *Do You Know Who I Am?* attempted to bring the parents "out of the shadows" through their children's reenactment of their narratives. The performance accomplished this by appeals to the emotions of the audience, who legitimize the performance of their families' experiences. This

becomes apparent when analyzing the talkbacks. Although performers and audience members work together toward mutual understanding in the talkbacks, performers cannot fully control audience's interpretations their narratives. As I will show, the talkback restrained performer and audience member interactions through the conventional raced, classed, and gendered emotional scripts.

“I JUST FELT SICK”: THE *DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?* TALKBACK

Audience members authenticated the performers' emotional performances during the English-language talkback sessions. The emotion *works*. When called upon, audience members show the performers that they were willing to act by sharing narratives of their own, responding in emotional ways to the narratives presented by the performers, and in one case, “protecting” the performers from an audience member perceived as antagonistic to their aims. As with the play, emotions took center stage in the talkback sessions. In the English performance, the actors used emotions as a means to bridge the perceived differences between themselves and audience members. Unlike the performance, where the actors displayed a variety of emotions, performers restrained their emotions in the face-to-face interactions in the talkbacks. The actors also understand *Do You Know Who I Am?* as being *for the audience*, and present themselves in particular ways that align with broader movement goals of immigration reform.

At one talk back at a performance at a local library, Samantha took center stage and began the talkback by asking the audience to sit silently for a few minutes and think about how we feel. She told us that part of the theater is to “feel your feelings” and that is what makes it so powerful to watch. At one point during the discussion, a woman in her early 60s, with cropped, curly black hair and a slight accent raised her hand to speak. She told those in attendance that she migrated to the U.S. with her family when she was a child. She teared up, placed her hand over

her stomach, and said that when thinking about the lives of the performers, “I just felt *sick*.” She cannot imagine the additional struggles she and her family would have faced had they been undocumented. She thanked everyone and reminded the audience that this was real not “just stories,” and she knows this because she is an immigrant herself. This exchange demonstrated how audience members could reciprocate the emotions presented by the performers and authenticate their narratives. The white immigrant woman in attendance, although recognizing that her experiences were different from the undocumented immigrants of color on the stage, explained how emotional the performance was for her. She instructed the rest of the audience to understand that the performance was “real” and important. By saying the performance was not “just stories,” the woman claimed authenticity on behalf of the performers and also of her own experiences as an immigrant. Through this exchange, fictionalized narratives were given political power.

This talkback was unique because additional undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants in attendance came on stage and participated in the talkback session. Yesenia, an undocumented Mexican woman in her mid-twenties, told the audience about her family. Her mother is undocumented, she and one of her sisters are undocumented, and a younger sister and brother are US citizens. She said that one of the problems they have as a family is that the two younger siblings do not speak Spanish well and their mother barely speaks English. Yesenia remembered a time when they were all sitting around the kitchen table while their mother was cooking in the background. The kids were all joking and laughing about things that had happened throughout the day. Yesenia started to explain how her mom reacted and then began to cry with loud sobs, putting her hand over her mouth and turning her head downwards toward her lap. She apologized

to the audience, while others on the stage snapped their fingers to give her support as she fanned the tears falling down her cheeks.

After taking a moment to collect herself, Yesenia continued. Her mom asked why they were all so happy, and she tried for a minute to translate from English to Spanish for her, but it was too challenging. Her mom eventually went back to preparing dinner and started singing a song in Spanish. Yesenia cried as she tells us that the song is about how a mother's children have grown up and forgotten her language, so she can no longer talk to them. Still wiping away tears, she smiled and said that after this exchange she and her sister tried harder to teach their younger siblings Spanish. She laughed, telling us that her mother now uses the song to make the kids feel guilty if they are talking too much in English. The cast members and several people in the audience chuckled and smiled.

The above narrative had a profound impact on the audience and other performers. As Yesenia was talking, María looked down at her lap and shook her head slowly back and forth, her eyes glazing over with tears. When Yesenia first began to sob, the woman next to me in the audience started to sniffle softly and wipe away tears. She was not alone; I observed other audience members wipe tears from their eyes throughout her narrative. The audience and other performers reciprocated the unexpected emotion from Yesenia by comforting and encouraging her. The performers created an environment in which those present could openly express their emotions. Although Yesenia is not a performer, the theatrical context enabled her to express sadness, regret, and shame over the experience in an environment in which the audience supported and encouraged her.

At another talkback session, an elderly white man stood up and began speaking softly to the audience. He said that he used to be the type of person who thought that undocumented

immigrants were “illegals [using finger quotes]” but changed his mind. As he spoke, the five performers smiled and nodded along to what he said. He shared his thoughts on immigration reform and ended his comment by claiming that what changed his mind about immigration was putting himself in someone else’s shoes. He said that people need to think about how sad and frightening it would be to make a journey to another country. He believes if more people could see this performance and hear about the struggles of undocumented immigrants they would do the same thing. He thanked all of the performers and sat down. The ideas expressed by this audience member highlight the potential the performance has to change the perspective of people who take a nativist stance on immigration. Although this man had already changed his mind about immigration, he believes this particular form of activism has the potential to engender social change because it reaches the hearts (not just the minds) of people who watch it.

In reference to the above audience member who claimed the play changed his mind about immigration, Miguel described him as “a lawyer or something... [he said] ‘You guys make me cry and I’m a Republican in recovery.’” Miguel laughed and said, “it’s just like, he’s going to think before he says something to someone now. It’s really cool, really cool.” Enrique reflected on the same exchange: “it’s really heartfelt...when people have those kinds of comments, it makes me realize that you are planting a seed.” The performers saw the play as something that reached people on an emotional level and stuck with them long after they leave. Describing one performance at a local university, María said:

[T]here was this big, hulky white dude that when we were done he literally wiped his eyes. I was like, whoa! He didn’t come up to us and say anything to us, but him wiping his face told me that he felt something. I don’t know what it was, and I probably won’t ever get to talk to this person, but I felt strongly that a little bit of us went with him...I don’t know where that’s going to go, but it’s still in him.

Thus, while the performers cannot be sure that audience members were motivated to act after the play, they are confident that *Do You Know Who I Am?* has “planted a seed” that will positively impact immigration reform.

While the majority of the interactions between audience members and performers were supportive, there was one instance where an audience member challenged a core theme of the play. Performers’ responses were constrained in this interaction in a way that other, more supportive exchanges, were not constrained. During a sold-out talkback session held at a local theater, a white woman in the audience asked how the performers can claim they are not criminals while working in the U.S. without authorization. She talked about her own experiences as a human resource manager, saying that she would not allow something like that to happen. She constructed herself as someone who follows the law. The undocumented youth on stage, by contrast, are criminals. The audience response was swift: several people “booed” or “hissed.” A male voice called out from the back corner of the room, “Don’t answer that!” A woman shouted: “I think we need to stop blaming the victim here!” People continued shouting in agreement until David responded: “[to the audience] Hold on, hold on [moving his hand downwards to quiet the growing audience disapproval]. Ma’am—what is your name, ma’am?” When she answered, he addressed her by name and was calm and polite, allowing her to finish her thoughts without interruption unlike the outbursts from other audience members. He told her that it was understandable she would feel that way and asked if she would be willing to talk one-on-one after the show, which she agreed to do.

The performers all remembered this interaction during our interviews. Miguel said animatedly, “It was like, something else, you know? We’re all ready to *go* and David, I think it was David who answered her question, but that guy shut her *down!*” Enrique laughed as he

recalled the audience reaction to the woman's question: "it is a good feeling when the audience gives you that response that they have your back. It's like 'Umm, so you were saying?'" The performers felt happy that the audience "had their backs" during uncomfortable and confrontational questions. Positive audience reactions (laughter, clapping) during the play extended to the talkback session where they showed their support by criticizing an audience member who did not authenticate the performers' narratives. While the theatrical performance created space to express anger over abusive families, blocked access to education, repressive immigration policies, and racist taunting from U.S. citizens, undocumented youth must control their emotions in the talkback session. The actors must conform to racialized, gendered, and classed expectations of emotional behavior during the talkback session to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes about Latinos/as. The English performances of *Do You Know Who I Am?* enabled predominately non-immigrant, non-Spanish speaking audiences to connect emotionally with undocumented youth across social distances. As is clear from scenes in the play and the interaction between audience members and the undocumented youth during the talkbacks, these narratives would not be successful without appealing to emotions. The Spanish-language performance and talkback, detailed below, differed significantly from the English-language performance and talkback. Whereas *Do You Know Who I Am?* reached out to audience members who were presumably different from the performers, *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* used shared language and a subtle alteration to the script to create collective bonds between the audience and performers through shared experiences.

¿SABES QUIÉN SOY?: THEATER IN THE CREATION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The Spanish-language performance of *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* [*Do You Know Who I Am?*] stood in sharp contrast to the English-language performances. The English performances worked

to humanize undocumented immigrants to non-immigrant audiences by creating shared emotions between performers and spectators to encourage political action. By contrast, the Spanish performance fostered collective identity and countered the multiple stigmas of illegality through cultural affirmation. Individuals generate a collective identity through narrative and affective ties. As Francesca Polletta and James Jasper noted: “we know little about the emotions that accompany and shape collective identity. Collective identity is not simply the drawing of a cognitive boundary; it simultaneously involves a positive affect toward other group members” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 299). *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* unites immigrant performers and audiences together through sharing collective narratives and providing a space for enacting emotions that are culturally-constrained in day-to-day interactions.

Upon entering the theater and being handed a flier by a Latina in her mid-twenties, I immediately noticed a significant difference in this performance: the performers had accented their names, which did not occur English fliers. Presenting their names this way emphasized their Mexican-ness among co-ethnics. By contrast, presenting non-accented names to English-speaking audiences was an attempt to minimize differences between the performers and a mostly Anglo audience. The play began in the same way as in the English language version, with only one significant change to the dialogue.⁵⁰ The change was essential and highlights how the emotion work in the Spanish-language play differs from other versions.

In Enrique’s monologue, “Do you know who I am?” was changed to “¿Saben quién soy? [Do *they* know who I am?]”⁵¹ The change may appear minor but was hugely significant. In the English version, Enrique directed the statement *at* the audience. Enrique looked out to the

⁵⁰ Not including, of course, words or phrases that were not exact translations but are the closest available. I mean intentional changes to the *meaning* of the lines.

⁵¹ The title of the play was the same as the English version: *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* [*Do You Know Who I Am?*].

audience, pointed at individual audience members, and asked, “Do you know who I am?” The implication was that the “you” do not know who Enrique is and, by extension, does not understand the immigrant experience. In the Spanish performance, he looked out to the audience and asked: “¿Sabén quién soy? ¿Sabén? [Do they know who I am? Do they?]” and did not point to individual audience members. In this case, the audience was *not* the target of the question. The audience and Enrique (the “we”) are the same as opposed to different (the “them”). This moment in the play constructs a shared identity between the audience and performer. They are the same; they have the same experiences; it is others who do not “know” them.

During other scenes where the dialogue was the same, the contrast between Spanish and English was emotionally powerful in ways that were not evident in the English version. Hearing the exchanges in different languages allowed the performers and the audience of Spanish speakers to identify, feel, and own their shame from similar encounters. For example, in one scene Edgar’s parents spoke with his teacher about his mischievous behavior. David and María (in the role of his parents) stood on the left side of the stage, trying to discern what the teacher was saying. Enrique played the teacher and spoke only English. As the scene unfolded, the volume of his voice raised to a yell: “Does your son act out at home?!” María looked to David quizzically, who said quietly, “No sé [I don’t know].” “You need to give him more discipline,” Enrique shouted. Again, David and María exchanged nervous looks. Enrique shouted “What do you have to say?!” several times, punctuated by dramatic pauses. David answered with eyes downcast and a thick accent, “Edgar [long pause] he is a good boy. He [pauses and shakes his head] thank you.” In another scene, Miguel recalled (in Spanish) when he first came to the U.S. at fifteen years of age, unable to speak any English. He described other students at school taunting him. Miguel sat on a wooden stool in the center of the stage while the other actors

loomed in a circle around him, taunting him in English: “stupid Mexican!” “Are you dumb or something?”

The language differences in these scenes of the play were striking and took on new meaning and importance compared to the English-language version where the majority of the play was in English. The performers translated the Spanish lines in *Do You Know Who I Am?* for the presumably English-speaking audiences. The differences between the performers and their Anglo counterparts was clear and stark. In these instances, language was operating as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991). Spanish-speaking immigrants were made aware of their Otherness through their inability to communicate and understand what others said to them. They could ascertain that they were being taunted, scolded, or questioned, but were unable to respond adequately. The consequences of this can be seen in parents not teaching Spanish to their children, and the internalized shame immigrants may experience around their native tongue.

In an interview with Enrique, the importance of the Spanish-language play for the performers was obvious. When asked how he felt about performing in Spanish as opposed to in English he said, “It felt more powerful, more powerful for me to say it in Spanish...Just because it was my own, my first language.” By being able to perform in Spanish, Enrique was able to connect emotionally to the play in ways that were not possible in English. He continued to discuss the experience:

Most of the people were talking Spanish, and I felt more connected because they knew what we were talking about. Like when David was saying about his mom... [the other moms] have to get up really early to do this, like food, and go and do all those things...like in English it's for this audience, the people who don't know these issues.

Enrique felt more connected to the Spanish language performance because performing it in Spanish was a way to maintain his connection to his Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrant

family, as well as to other Mexican and Latino/a immigrants in the room. He saw the goals of the two performances as different: the English performance was for non-immigrant, Anglo audiences.⁵² By contrast, the Spanish performance was for themselves and others who share a common, collective, racialized undocumented immigrant identity.

¿Sabes Quién Soy? bonded the audience and performers together through shared emotions of collective experiences. Echoing his younger brother as to the importance of the Spanish-language performance, Miguel talked about how much it meant to him that his mother fully understood the Spanish-language version of the play. His mother attended several English performances and somewhat understood his re-telling of the day they found out his grandfather died. For him, “the most special one” was in Spanish because his mom “just cried and it was just an amazing feeling for me [when] she told me that she was proud of me. She just hugged me and gave me a kiss, and I think that was the most amazing feeling I had after a play.” Miguel used this narrative to process his own emotions about not being able to travel back to Mexico to see his grandfather before his death. It was painful for him, and he must relive those emotions each time he performs, but he owed it to his mother to keep the family narrative alive. The performers all expressed a stronger emotional connection to the Spanish-language performance compared to the English-language version and talked about how important it is for themselves, their families, and the undocumented immigrant community. The Spanish-language talkback was also imbued

⁵² Although native-born Americans of different races express negative views on immigration (for example, see Waters, Kasinitz, and Asad 2014 for a nuanced look at the history of solidarity and animosity between immigrants and African Americans) the performers saw the play as being for “white people,” as María put it. The differences in the English language performance were not only native versus foreign-born but racial differences between white, Anglo audience members and Latino/a performers. It is possible that if the presumed audience were non-immigrant people of color, the narratives they chose and emotional displays might be different. Since this was not the context of the play, I cannot speculate as to how that might look.

with emotions for performers and audiences; however, the impacts were entirely different, as I will show.

THE ¿SABES QUIÉN SOY? TALKBACK

The talkback session for the Spanish-language performance differed from the questions and comments from (mostly) non-immigrant audiences in the English-language performance. Although the actors discussed similar policy initiatives after each performance, the language used for the Spanish-speaking audience was “helping us” (performers *and* audience members) as opposed to “helping immigrants” or “us” (only the performers and other immigrants) for the English-speaking audience. Audience questions and comments were also different. While many of the English-speaking audience comments described feeling as if the play opened their eyes to the inner lives of undocumented immigrants, audience members at the Spanish performance recounted times they were made fun of for not speaking English, or when they were afraid to go somewhere because they might be deported. The audience for *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* identified not only with the emotions in the play but the content of the narratives as well. Several of the women and men who spoke during the talkback were in tears recounting these experiences. At one point, a woman in the audience shared that she could not visit her sick mother in Mexico. As she spoke Miguel, who performed a similar experience, began crying on stage. His brothers gathered around him in a tight embrace. As the brothers hugged and supported one another, audience members shouted words of encouragement in Spanish, and I observed several wipe their eyes. The young couple next to me hugged each other tightly, while the woman shook her head and told her partner about a family she knew who had a similar experience.

It was clear as I observed this performance and talkback that the themes of the play were not abstract for the audience. They were shared experiences, as interviews with the performers

suggested. While the English talkbacks were a space for audience members to demonstrate what they learned from the play or extend their support to the performers, the Spanish talkback engendered mutual respect based on shared experiences. María told me that she thinks people from “Latin America—especially men—they’re not going to acknowledge it or say thank you outright. It’s more of like a different respect that they show you, a silent respect...I saw that in him after the play.” While she was speaking directly to her stepfather’s reaction to hearing her talk about his hard work in the play, the performance gave the audience a space to express gratitude, sadness, and other emotional displays that are culturally-constrained in day-to-day interactions. Miguel similarly talked about his oldest brother, who does not participate in the movement because he “is married, he has a job, he has a kid to take care of.” He became emotional when telling me how important it was to him that his brother could attend the play and hear it in their native language. He said that “as guys, we don’t really talk about our feelings with each other [laughs] you know? It’s just, it’s not really within us, but in the play, we talk about how we felt...and this is who we are, and we’re proud of that.” The play allowed the Latino performers and audience members to transgress hegemonic masculine norms and display vulnerability during the performance and talkback.

In the Spanish-language performance, the play and talkback transformed shared emotions into a group identity. The different emotional displays in *Do You Know Who I Am?* compared to *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* show how audience membership impacts emotional strategies and how activists present their narratives in different contexts (Jasper 2011). While both settings enabled the performers to express emotions and detail the experiences of undocumented youth, the Spanish performance bonded the performers and audience together over collective experiences. Performers’ emotions were also constrained during the English talkback sessions, as they needed

to maintain emotional standards to counter negative cultural stigmas about undocumented immigrants. By contrast, the performers showed more profound emotions during the Spanish performance, with many crying at some point during the play and talkback in response to audience comments. All of the performers expressed in interviews that the Spanish performance was “deeper” for them, showcasing how critical emotional bonds are in creating and sustaining collective identities (Polletta and Jasper 2001).

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICAL POSSIBILITIES OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT THEATER

Throughout this chapter, I examined how *Do You Know Who I Am?* and *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* provide a mechanism for undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants to deploy their narratives to enact political change. Scholars lag behind in identifying and analyzing the emotional dimensions of protest (Jasper 1998; 2011). The theatrical performances were a unique repertoire of activism that highlights the centrality of emotions in narrative and social movements. As I argued in Chapter Three, there is scholarly merit in examining how social movement participants use narratives to achieve movement goals. *Do You Know Who I Am?* demonstrated how the creation of and appeals to emotions drew in potential movement allies and convinced them to think (and potentially act) in ways that benefit the performers and other undocumented immigrants. The play allowed the performers to script, express, and relive a variety of emotions, but illegality still constrained non-immigrant audience interactions and racialized, classed, and gendered emotional scripts.

The same performance took on different and nuanced meanings via the audience reactions as well as the linguistic context in which the play took place. *Do You Know Who I Am?* humanized undocumented immigrants for non-immigrant audiences and made emotional appeals to inspire political action. By contrast, the emotional displays in *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* sustained

solidarity and built collective identities among undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants and others in the community. Performers were also able to connect more deeply to their narratives through shared emotional responses from audience members. Whether various audience members were inspired to act after seeing the play is unknown. Nonetheless, the emotions that were created in the space engendered bonds between performers and audiences in a way that other movement mediums cannot.

The English-language audience, having established emotional connections to the performers throughout the play and talkback, can tap into a feeling of satisfaction for “doing the right thing” for undocumented immigrants. In some ways, this appeal to moral emotions also risks further stigmatizing undocumented youth or reinforcing their Otherness. The performers must carefully negotiate how to maintain authority over their own narratives while also appealing to paternalistic help from U.S. citizens, which in turn reinforces existing racial, ethnic, and immigrant hierarchies. This dilemma is not new; social movement groups often attempt to shake stigmatizing stereotypes and categories while simultaneously drawing upon them as a source of mobilization (e.g., Gamson 1995 and the discussion in Chapter Three). Through this performance, undocumented youth attempted to get audience recognition of their and their parents’ fundamental humanity, while also having to highlight their Otherness to inspire moral emotions in non-immigrant audiences (de la Torre and Germano 2014). While the broader undocumented student movement rearticulates notions of “innocence,” “victimhood,” and illegality while challenging narratives of immigrant criminality (Seif et al. 2014), the scripted boundaries of the theater relied on choosing the most emotionally-salient and culturally-relevant narratives to be successful. Ultimately, this limited the performers’ ability to overtly challenge hegemonic norms in a performance designed for non-immigrant, Anglo audiences. However, *Do*

You Know Who I Am? also provided space for the performers to lift up and advocate for their parents, who remain “in the shadows.” Alternatively, *¿Sabes Quién Soy?* was a unique opportunity for the first and 1.5-generation to connect emotionally to one another and uplift the entire community.

In both versions of the play, the audience watched the youth perform their parents’ setbacks and joys and responded with positive emotional displays. The audience expressed compassion for David’s mother in an abusive relationship, sadness when Enrique, Edgar, and Miguel’s mother cannot go to her father’s funeral, respect for the back-breaking agricultural work described by María, and smiled when everyone’s parents celebrated their graduations. The performers used scripted narratives to subvert stereotypes of immigrant criminality and present a more nuanced view of Latino/a immigrants while bringing the consequences of illegality to the forefront. In this way, the plays continue the tradition of *El Teatro Campesino* and other activist theater productions that use art for social change.

It is also important to point out that the research in this chapter took place during the Obama administration. Although immigrant rights groups widely criticized Obama-era deportation practices, activists seized this new political opportunity to destigmatize immigrants and affirm the cultural rhetoric of inclusion emphasized by the Obama administration. The election of Donald Trump in 2016, who utilized anti-immigrant rhetoric throughout his political campaign, added additional tension to the debate on immigration reform.⁵³ Questions remain regarding how activism of this type may be a viable model in the current political climate. More research is needed on non-traditional forms of activism (such as theatrical performances), particularly the degree to which they can be used to reach potential allies in the increasingly

⁵³ I will return to the issues facing undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants in the Trump era in the conclusion.

tense political climate surrounding immigration reform and other progressive issues in the United States. Millions of Americans heard Donald Trump refer to Mexican immigrants as “rapists, murders...and maybe some good people, too” and voted for him *because of* (not despite) this rhetoric.⁵⁴ Clearly, racialized stereotypes about the supposed criminal, economic, and cultural threat that Latinos/as (immigrant and native-born) represent resonate with many Americans. Scripted narratives have the potential to restructure the political debate. They lie somewhere in the liminal space between “fiction” and “reality” that enables this form of activism to reach audiences on an emotional level not always possible in other areas (Swerts 2017). However, activists must be careful, especially in the current political climate, to consider the narratives carefully they tell (or do not tell) to not reinforce nativist rhetoric that criminalizes Latinos/as and ultimately stalls conversations on immigration reform.

Thus far, I have detailed how undocumented youth learn to tell their narratives and deploy them in the context of social movement activism and how people script and perform narratives in theater. In the next chapter, I transition to a close examination of interview data to ascertain how participants reproduced learned narratives in one-on-one interviews and how they differ from scripted narratives.

⁵⁴ Research suggests that people who voted for Donald Trump were more likely than non-Trump voters to believe undocumented immigrants commit crimes at higher rates than other groups, want to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, and score higher on measures of symbolic racism (indicating prejudicial views toward people of color) (Gramlich 2016; Griffin 2017; Wood 2017).

CHAPTER 5

“I WOULD SAY IT’S A STRUGGLE”: LEGAL STATUS AND THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

I always knew I was born in Mexico. I always knew I wasn't from here. It wasn't until the end of middle school and then high school where I realized that I was undocumented. My parents started talking to us about it in middle school, and it was mostly like, "If this ever happens, then you'll be going to your aunt's house," or something. Like if they were to ever to be deported then we should get up to—well, then our aunt would take care of us. And that's when I started realizing, "Oh my gosh, we are undocumented." It was really scary! Being at school, I always hoped like, "Oh, I hope I see them [my parents] tonight." If they would come home a little later than usual, I would get really anxious and wonder, "Are they coming home? What should I do?" I couldn't fall asleep or anything because I would be very anxious about deportation and stuff like that (Ivette, early twenties).

To me, it [being undocumented] means a lot of strength because it's not easy, and it means that there are obstacles and different pathways that you need to take to protect yourself both mentally, but also—I mean, you do not have a legal status, so deportation is very real. It's not some theoretical thing like, "Oh yeah, I might..." and it might happen, and it's one in a million—no! There's immigration policy that is very scary and very...you're very vulnerable. I think being undocumented is being very vulnerable, especially openly undocumented (Jasmin, late teens).

Scholarship on illegality has identified myriad consequences resulting from lack of legal status: constrained job availability, blocked educational attainment and opportunity, limited (or no) access to social services, exploitation from employers, racist scapegoating and prejudice, and fears of being deported (Chavez 1998, 2008; Gonzales 2011, 2016; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014). Exemplified by the above vignettes, undocumented youth fear for the safety of themselves and their families due to the reality of immigration enforcement and deportation. While existing scholarship provides valuable insight into the obstacles undocumented immigrants face, I am interested in how narratives of struggle are used by undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants to construct personal and collective identities and make sense of their complex positionality in the United States. As discussed in Chapter Three, undocumented students are taught by other activists how to tell their narratives to garner support for public

policy reforms. Undocumented students reproduced public narrative strategies in one-on-one interviews. The narratives undocumented youth tell about themselves in one-on-one interviews simultaneously deconstruct hegemonic narratives of undocumented immigrants as a threat while reproducing intra-group hierarchies by constructing narratives of the “right kind” of immigrant.

In this chapter, I examine how undocumented youth construct their identity as “undocumented” and how they use narratives of experiencing and overcoming obstacles in this process. In the remaining two data chapters, I shift my focus from participant observation and observation data to an analysis of interview data. Undocumented youth revealed complex, personal experiences in interviews that conformed to the DREAMer narrative in some regards. However, their narratives also diverged from dominant social movement discourses in significant ways. I narrow my focus in this chapter to one element of the DREAMer narrative discussed in the previous chapters: the struggles undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants face as a result of their legal status. I asked participants several questions centered around their experiences of being undocumented. Data for this chapter came from the following questions: (1) What does being undocumented mean to you?; and (2) Can you give me an example of an experience in your daily life where you feel that being undocumented makes a difference? After asking these general questions, I probed for narratives at different points in their lives⁵⁵ to assess how people constructed the significance of legal status throughout adolescence and early adulthood.

From the above questions, I identified a clear narrative of the importance of experiencing and overcoming adversity on the pathway to adulthood. In addition to the genuine threat of deportation illustrated in the opening vignettes, undocumented youth discussed day-to-day interactions, such talking with teachers and peers, going to school, and applying for jobs, which

⁵⁵ For example: Did you feel the same when you were younger? Are your experiences similar or different now that you have graduated high school? See Appendix A for full interview guide.

became a struggle due to their legal status. Overcoming struggles associated with shame, loss of agency, and liminality as children and adolescents transformed into a sense of pride in themselves in emerging adulthood. Experiencing and narrating these struggles and fears paradoxically created positive identities centered around being strong in the face of adversity.⁵⁶ Narratives of experiencing and overcoming struggle had positive impacts by creating a mechanism to describe themselves and other undocumented immigrants as resilient and capable. On the other hand, these same narratives reframed systematic exclusion as an inevitable part of life immigrants must overcome, thereby downplaying the degree of exclusion they continue to face (Watson and Hunter 2016). Additionally, undocumented youth constructed others who had not achieved the same educational goals as not working hard enough. This discursive strategy reproduced meritocratic rhetoric that relegates structural exclusion to a secondary position in shaping people's lives and access to resources (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

As narratives of struggle emerged in my data, it became clear that youth saw overcoming obstacles as something they owed their parents for all of the risks and struggles they faced silently while in the shadows. Undocumented youth told narratives of feeling scared, helpless, and excluded as children. However, as they matured, they began to understand themselves as strong and grateful for their parents' sacrifices. In this way, narratives of overcoming obstacles were also narratives of transitioning out of youth and into adulthood and praising their parents' sacrifices in the process. To be an undocumented person living in the U.S. meant to struggle against economic and educational obstacles and deal with racist scapegoating. Being a 1.5-generation undocumented immigrant meant having to push through these obstacles to create a cultural space for themselves and their families.

⁵⁶ See Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2007 for how this narrative functions similarly in Black women's self-narratives.

In this chapter, I use interview data to demonstrate how undocumented youth utilized narratives of overcoming struggle to process negative experiences resulting from their legal status. Undocumented students transitioned from feeling “just like anyone else” in childhood to being reminded of the opportunities denied to them because of legal status in emerging adulthood. The contradictions between their experiences as being treated nearly the same as their documented peers in childhood and the newly-intensified consequences of illegality in emerging adulthood were a source of mobilization into political engagement to challenge their exclusion from the American mainstream (Gonzales and Chavez 2012).⁵⁷ Narratives of overcoming struggle created positive identities by constructing themselves as strong and capable in the face of adversity as they enter adulthood. However, these narratives, like those discussed in previous chapters, also normalized broader systems of inequality and created symbolic boundaries between “good” and “bad” immigrants.

STRUGGLES, IDENTITY, AND THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD FOR UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH

A changing economy, increased access to higher education, and shifting gender roles all contribute to the period known as “emerging adulthood,” which scholars typically define as anywhere from late teens to late twenties (and even into the early thirties) (Setterson and Ray 2010). Criteria that mark the transition to adulthood include starting a career, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having children (Arnett 1998; Nelson 2003). Researchers argue that moving from adolescence into adulthood is less clear than in the past, as people delay “traditional” markers such as marriage, childbirth, and independent living more so than previous generations (Arnett 2004; Henig and Henig 2012). Scholars caution that what constitutes emerging adulthood will vary widely depending on cultural background and

⁵⁷ I discussed these issues in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

positionality in racial, class, and gendered hierarchies. For example, working class emerging adults lack the economic means to access middle-class financial independence and stability. To make up for this, they focused on symbolic markers of adulthood, such as discovering a life purpose or making independent decisions to redefine themselves as “real adults” (Silva 2012). Existing definitions of “emerging adulthood” may need to be altered for cultural relevancy (Cheah and Nelson 2004; Nelson, Badger, and Wu 2004). For example, unmarried Latino/a children often continue living with their parents into adulthood. While this may appear to a cultural outsider as someone not fully transitioning into adulthood, Latina/o families do not construct it as abnormal behavior. Despite these cautions, emerging adulthood is a useful concept for this research, as the immigrant young adults in my study highlighted this transitional period as an important time in their lives. As they graduated high school and entered adulthood, they confronted new challenges, but also constructed a new sense of “who they are.” As I will detail, this process was complicated by the challenges they experienced resulting from their racialized legal status.

For members of marginalized groups, societal discrimination, prejudice, and harmful “controlling images” (Collins 1991) make adolescence and the transition to adulthood a contentious process. Undocumented youth contend with broader cultural narratives about immigrants and Latinos/as that make creating positive personal and collective identities difficult. Nativist rhetoric constructs immigrants as unassimilable, criminal, and a cultural threat to the nation (Ngai 2004; Chavez 2008). Politicians and pundits alike decry the supposed lack of interest in school among students of color as colorblind justification for unequal access to higher education for Black and Latina/o students in the United States (Flores-González 2005). In addition to broader cultural stereotypes, parental expectations and intra-group tensions impact

the lives of young Latinos/as. Peers taunt children of immigrants for being “too ethnic” or “whitewashed,” the former denoting being not assimilated *enough* and the latter *too* assimilated or Americanized (Pike and Dang 2003). Immigrant youth also grapple with shifting gendered, racialized, and cultural norms as they navigated different expectations of their immigrant parents and the dominant society in which they grew up (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Various exogenous and endogenous factors complicated the transition to adulthood for the 1.5-generation, an experience exacerbated by legal status (Negrón-Gonzales 2013).

Undocumented youth “learn to be illegal” in the transition to adulthood (Gonzales 2011, 2016). Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants expressed frustration when they entered the same occupational categories as their parents, despite having gained higher educational attainment (Gonzales 2011). The experiences of the youth in my study mirrored those discussed in previous works: feeling left out as their documented peers obtained driver’s licenses and applied for college and jobs; concerned that they or someone in their family could be deported; and feeling as if they did not belong because of their legal status (Ábrego 2006; Chavez 1998; De Genova 2002; Massey and Sánchez 2010). Illegality can create conditions where youth became immobilized; left out of an American identity or believing they did not have prospects for advancement (Ábrego 2006; Gonzales and Chavez 2012). However, the undocumented youth in this study emphasized how their struggles made them “who they are” and channeled their frustrations into political engagement.

The transition to adulthood presents new opportunities and a host of challenges as people leave adolescence, particularly for the young undocumented immigrants of color in this study who faced additional barriers due to legal status. In the following section, I discuss how undocumented students struggle to process shame and anger over blocked opportunities they

encountered in childhood and adolescence and how these experiences end up constituting the foundation of a positive identity in emerging adulthood. Feelings of liminality, fear, and exclusion pushed them to reconstruct childhood experiences as shaping them into proud, strong, capable adults who were grateful for their parents' decision to migrate and obligated to give back to the broader immigrant community.

FEAR, SHAME, AND BLOCKED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN ADOLESCENCE

In this section, I detail the various struggles undocumented youth faced because of their legal status and how that shaped their understanding of what it meant to be undocumented in the United States. I focus specifically on school experiences for two reasons. First, when asked about instances when they became aware of their legal status or of day-to-day instances where their legal status mattered, undocumented youth frequently described interactions with teachers, peers in school, counselors, and the school environment. Second, from a developmental perspective, going to school is the first step a child takes in separating from the family and developing autonomous identities. Peer opinion and influence becomes increasingly important and teachers, counselors, and other adult school personnel factor significantly in how adolescents see themselves, how they think about broader issues in society, and the goals they set for their future (Davidson 1996; Harris 1998; Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma 2006). School has the potential to be a nurturing environment for young immigrant students. However, the narratives recounted here relate to experiences of exclusion, racism, and blocked opportunities that created feelings of shame, anger, and embarrassment during this period in the life course.

For Jasmin, the experience of exclusion due to her legal status began with negative interactions with teachers when she was a young child. Jasmin recalled being in first grade and asking a classmate how she got a scar on her knee. Her classmate told her it happened when she

crossed the border and got caught in a fence. Jasmin remembered her teacher interjecting to tell the young girl to stop talking about it and that “what you did was illegal.” Jasmin explained, “that was the first time that I remember asking myself if I did something wrong...it’s like, OK, don’t tell anyone. First of all—don’t tell anyone! Don’t mention it! It’s not something to be proud of! You need to be as low as you can, you have to not be on the radar. You need to be perfect.” The interaction made her feel fearful that someone would uncover her legal status and ashamed that she was undocumented. Reinforcement from her teachers that immigrant students, particularly undocumented immigrant students, were low achievers resulted in Jasmin channeling feelings of shame and fear into being the “perfect student,” so no one would suspect that she was undocumented. Paradoxically, racist rhetoric about under-performing Latina/o students pushed immigrant students, like Jasmin, into educational achievement. However, it came at the personal cost of internalizing negative stereotypes that undocumented immigrants were not good students. This led them to see themselves as “exceptional” or different than others in their group.

While Jasmin’s sense of fear over her legal status first came from a teacher, Rosa’s came from her parents and followed her into her school experiences. Rosa recalled her parents instructing her not to tell anyone about their legal status because they could be deported. She also remembered hearing one of her teachers in middle school talk about not wanting “illegals” in the classroom. She described how these experiences led her to avoid interactions with her peers out of fear and shame: “I kind of felt like I couldn’t have like, really true friendships or anything because you can’t be open about it [legal status]. In a friendship, you tell each other everything and I can’t. If something got me upset about that [legal status], I couldn’t tell them why I was upset and stuff and so I kind of just kept to myself during those times.” Rosa’s parents told her

that she should be careful not to reveal her legal status because it could harm the family, she then heard racist rhetoric about “illegals” when she enters adolescence. The combination of these incidents led to feelings of shame and isolation as she distanced herself from her peers. The above narratives from Rosa and Jasmin illustrated the feelings of loneliness, shame, and isolation that resulted from being undocumented. Illegality did not just create political or economic exclusion; it also created social and cultural exclusion. Feelings of exclusion, as Rosa and Jasmin’s narratives showcased, began early in the school experiences of undocumented youth and followed them through adolescence.

Although my respondents pointed to many instances where being undocumented impacted in their lives, most cited high school as the time when the differences between themselves and their documented peers became visible and salient. Some undocumented youth learned about their legal status when they attempted to participate in teenage milestones like getting a driver’s license. Although the majority of my respondents were always aware of their legal status, it was not until high school when their status started to impact their lives significantly. In addition to her experience in middle school, Rosa explained that being undocumented started to make a difference in her life:

...mostly during high school when everyone’s getting their permit, and I couldn’t do that. Everyone’s getting jobs and I couldn’t do that. I was trying to get into college. I would get really angry because like I was trying really hard in school, I get good grades, I’m really trying, but it’s so hard! That was really trying for me, that time.

Rosa reflected on her high school experiences as marred by struggles to fit in and be like her peers, but feeling that her options would be limited after she graduated. She also presented herself as someone who was doing everything right by getting good grades and trying hard in school, but unable to access the resources she felt she deserved. Rosa experienced a sense of

liminality, or in-between-ness, as a result of being undocumented. She was succeeding alongside her peers and eagerly awaiting important adolescent milestones like getting a driver's license. However, she came to realize that she was not like her peers. Her legal status blocked her from full participation in the institutions and rituals that shape the transition to adulthood.

Fátima, a woman in her early twenties who was attending community college at the time of our interview, reflected on her high school experiences as follows:

I felt like in high school that I was really embarrassed and ashamed just because I wasn't, I mean I took AP and honors and did all these activities, captain of the soccer team—I felt like I was doing so much. Then, out of nowhere, I was excluded, I felt like my counselor only gave me the option to go to the community college, but I wanted to go to State, and I wanted to do this and do that, and it's like, why can't I?

As Fátima's quote illustrated, exclusion not only impacted educational and job opportunities for undocumented 1.5.-generation immigrants, it also created a sense of shame and embarrassment about themselves. Fátima's comments reproduced the hegemonic DREAMer narrative in some respects: she was a high-achieving student barred from realizing her full potential, but the interview context presented some variation to the public narrative. Generally, feelings of shame and embarrassment were not a part of public narratives (see discussion in Chapter Three) as they were potentially alienating for non-immigrant audiences. By contrast, in the interview context, Fátima and others expressed feelings of anger, embarrassment, and shame about themselves, their families, and their situation. Fátima believed her counselor suggested community colleges despite her stellar academics and extra-curricular activities "because I'm Mexican, because I'm Latina." Although she was not openly undocumented during high school, Fátima felt that broader stereotypes about Latinos/as and Mexicans not succeeding academically caused her counselor to take little interest in her dreams of higher education. Here, Fátima's goals and dreams were re-

structured by influential Anglo adults who set low expectations for students of color seeking their guidance during this critical stage in the life course.

While the above narratives point to liminality, anger, and embarrassment resulting from interactions with peers, teachers, and counselors, Enrique focused on how the physical environment of his high school created feelings of exclusion. Enrique described not being able to park in the school parking lot because he and his brothers were undocumented and could not obtain driver's licenses, which were required to park in the school lot. Enrique angrily discussed the inconvenience of having to park several blocks away and walk to school rather than parking in the school lot with his friends. "I think that's when it got me," he started, "how come we cannot get a driver's license? Like it's messed up that we can't park at the school even though we're going to the same school. So yeah that's kind of when it hit me first about my status." Enrique said this became "like a spark" for starting to think about all of the different ways that being undocumented created additional burdens on him and his family. The parking lot was symbolic of Enrique and his brothers' outsider status. They were still "in the shadows" compared to their documented peers, despite feeling as if they belonged and deserved full integration in the school environment. While he knew his legal status before this realization, his interactions in high school shaped what it meant to be undocumented.

Rosa, Fátima, and Enrique's narratives were not unique among my respondents. The undocumented youth in this study frequently spoke about feeling left out or left behind when they could not apply for jobs legally, could not get a driver's license, and became fearful they would not be able to go to college because of their legal status. Undocumented youth grew up hearing the promises of the "American Dream": if you work hard, have the right attitude, and do well in school, anything was possible. Undocumented students transitioned from feeling "just

like anyone else” to being reminded of the opportunities denied to them because of legal status. Newly-found consequences of being undocumented in high school created feelings of anger and embarrassment that they would not be able to continue the pathway into emerging adulthood in the same manner as their documented peers. As I will discuss in the next section, the obstacles continued once they graduated high school and entered college. During this transition, they began to frame their understanding of what it meant to be undocumented differently. Rather than something to be ashamed of, they learned to take pride in their undocumented status and reframed it as a source of strength. Feelings of exclusion, shame, and fear in adolescence form the basis of the struggle narratives described above, which undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants rearticulated as sources of strength and pride as they entered college.

COLLEGE AND THE TRANSITION TO UNDOCUMENTED ADULTHOOD

Except for two young men, all of the undocumented youth I interviewed had attended at least one semester of college. Regarding those who were not currently attending, one had already graduated, two had taken full-time jobs with RIC and decided to delay classes for a few semesters (but expressed intentions to return), and one had stopped taking classes to work full-time with RIC but later re-enrolled at a community college. Although nearly all of the youth in this study had been able to attend college, they pointed to many struggles to gain entrance, pay for school, and complete their degrees. Francisco, one of the two men who had never attended, expressed that his legal status was keeping him from being able to attend school. He said that being undocumented meant:

...not having the same privileges as a lot of people pretty much. I mean, it's not that we're any different, we just don't get the privileges that everybody does; for example, school-wise and that's very important for me because I really want to be in school. I like school, I really, really like school and being undocumented has stopped me from attending school.

In line with public narratives of the DREAMer movement, Francisco emphasized that he is “just like anyone else” except for his legal status and that he had a strong desire to further his education.

For the majority who attended college, they emphasized that being undocumented made pursuing education difficult. Although undocumented students can attend college in the U.S., they are ineligible for student loans and grants, which made the cost of college out of reach for many. For multiple undocumented students in this study, it was not until Colorado passed a tuition equity bill in 2013 that they were able to attend school full-time or close to full-time. Jesús, who re-enrolled in a community college after several years said, “I had to pay out-of-state tuition. In fact, I had to pay as an international student which is, I don’t know, three times more. I couldn’t afford it, so I had to leave school for three years until the DACA and ASSET thing opened up.” Jesús pointed out how legislation like ASSET and DACA helped undocumented students pursue higher education. His narrative also showed the financial blockages undocumented youth continue to face in states that have not passed tuition equity bills. Miguel, who was in his late twenties and working full-time for RIC at the time of our interview, recounted “I should be done with school by now, but through all the laws that were against me I wasn’t able to finish school. I’m still there right now. It’s like a little stone or rock in my path that I have to overcome.” He thinks to be undocumented means that “you pretty much are blocked from being able to develop your full potential.” The three men quoted above all point to barriers in starting and continuing their education. These narratives mirrored the public DREAMer narrative of nativist laws keeping qualified undocumented immigrant students from reaching their full potential. Utilizing discourses of higher education aspirations also enabled undocumented youth to challenge

cultural narratives that Latinos/as, particularly young men, do not value education (Chavez 2008; Flores-González 2005).

The importance of scholarships and financial aid were also prevalent in the narratives undocumented women told about their transition from high school to college. Estefany did not have much knowledge regarding how to apply for school. She explained, “I didn’t know that I was allowed to get scholarships. When I was in high school I was told that I wasn’t allowed to get any money, you can’t go to school, just because of who you are.” Carmen said, “I knew this girl at my high school, Danielle, who got like a full scholarship and I’m not able to even apply for that scholarship...the scholarships, the grants, I’m not able to apply to them.” Carmen and Estefany used the example of loans and scholarships to showcase their systemic exclusion from higher education. This narrative, when coupled with their continued pursuit of higher education, served to demonstrate their willingness to work hard to overcome the barriers they faced. By talking about themselves in this way, undocumented students constructed themselves as high-achieving, hard workers who were willing to overcome any obstacles in their path.

Undocumented young adults used these narratives to position themselves as deserving of citizenship, rights, and inclusion in U.S. society.

In addition to costs, undocumented students could not participate in the same college activities as their documented and citizen peers. Ivan, for example, pointed out that he earned “all or mostly As in my classes” and wanted to study abroad with his friends. He explained that he could not study abroad because he could not re-enter the U.S. because of his legal status. Gabriela, who did not have DACA, struggled because, “I can’t just leave my job because I don’t know if I’ll be able to get another job. I can’t do work study in school like every other student because I’m not eligible... You just have to push. You just have to keep pushing!” The narratives

related above mirrored those told publicly in Chapters Three and Four and found elsewhere in the literature on undocumented students (Ábrego 2011, Perez 2009). DREAMers are smart, capable young people who wanted to attend college and create a better life for themselves and their families, but outdated immigration policies kept them from doing so. Decisions like where and how to find a part-time job on campus, whether or not they should study abroad, and how to find scholarships to help pay for school, were difficult for undocumented youth because they did not have access to the same options as their documented peers. This exclusion was yet another reminder that although they may have gained access to institutions of higher education, they were on the outside looking in. Despite their best efforts, they did not transcend the liminality of adolescence.

When told as a part of a broader activist agenda, narratives of educational achievement and struggle served as a tactic to garner support for immigration reform. DREAMers portrayed themselves as “deserving immigrants” who struggled in their quest for the American Dream. When shared in the interview setting, these narratives of struggle function similarly. However, the interview narratives also explained why the participants had not finished school in a time frame that was culturally expected in the U.S., connecting their personal experiences to the collective narrative of the educational struggles of undocumented students. In this way, the personal narratives of college struggle were contextualized by the themes in the larger collective narrative. Although the individual narratives pointed out the negative consequences of being undocumented, as the last quote from Gabriela expressed, financial struggles and other blocked educational opportunities became a means to push harder to achieve their goals. This was in contrast to their descriptions of adolescence when their struggles were sources of shame, anger, and embarrassment that led to feelings of isolation.

Further, one interesting theme that emerged from narratives of struggle centered on forging strong identities in the face of adversity. Ivette, whom we met at the beginning of the chapter, spent most of her childhood in fear of deportation and kept her legal status a secret. However, as she reflected on what being undocumented meant to her now, she explained:

There are just more barriers to jump through [because of her legal status]. I think that's one of the things that being undocumented means to me is jumping through more barriers, but it also makes me feel like I'm stronger because there is such large amounts of fear that you have to have. But if you let that consume you, then that's all you're ever going to be thinking. So definitely, I guess fearful but stronger.

Similarly, Nora recounted that being undocumented was a “constant battle for me because I’m not going to have the same opportunities. I’m not going to have those same opportunities, but I guess I just have to prove [to] myself and prove to others that I am capable of doing what they’re doing and I am strong, and I deserve those opportunities too!” Nora pulled on broader narratives of hard work and the “American Dream” to assert that she deserved rights of citizenship and inclusion. Nora and Ivette framed their legal status as a constant struggle and saw this struggle as a source of strength. Knowing that they had overcome so many obstacles on the pathway to higher education became a way for these two young women to take pride in themselves and their accomplishments. It also enabled them to stake a claim as deserving of the same rights and privileges as others. However, framing their struggles in this way also normalized and minimized the hardships they experienced. Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants emphasized how crucial it was to remain in control of your own emotions and responses to unequal access to higher education. Blocked educational opportunities and the inability to travel freely and procure stable employment were framed as “just another obstacle” that undocumented students must overcome on the transition to adulthood.

In a few cases, undocumented students interpreted their struggles (and their ability to persevere through them) as evidence that they were doing *better* than their documented or citizen peers. Alejandra said that “I feel like we [DREAMers] have less opportunities, but I also feel like it makes us better because we have less, but we can do more. There's people who have everything, they have a social security number, and they don't do anything. We didn't have any of that, but we still kept going.” Similarly, Jacqueline, who received a private scholarship that paid for her tuition, housing, books, and a small stipend for spending money, explained, “I'm already a step ahead of all these other people who are Americans, who have a social security number, and don't take advantage of it.” Dani also claimed that:

I see a lot of my friends that didn't want to pursue higher education who were U.S. citizens, who were born here, I kind of feel like they weren't trying as much. I don't want to say that, but I kind of saw it like that. Why am I working so hard when some people who have it easier than I do aren't taking advantage of those opportunities? Why aren't they taking advantage of their financial aid? Why aren't they trying to work?

The accounts cited above were an attempt to reverse the dominant narrative. Whereas nativist rhetoric claims immigrants come to the U.S. to take advantage of the system and not work, these young women believed they were succeeding even further than their documented and citizen peers. On a personal level, narratives of accomplishing more than others who have legal status created positive self-identities of resilience, achievement, and ability.

This identity work, while successful in creating positive personal identities, also minimizes the impact of educational inequality that undocumented immigrants as well as U.S.-born Latinas/os face. By suggesting that “if they can do it, anyone can,” these narratives reinforce meritocratic, individualistic ways of explaining inequality in education and employment. In addition, they also served to marginalize undocumented youth who were unable to attend college. Although this “achievement” narrative allowed youth to emphasize one area

where they faced structural blockages (legal status), this approach also reinforces colorblind rhetoric that anyone can succeed if s/he tries hard enough. This discourse, which appears to function as a positive and motivating force in the students' lives, does so by ignoring the structural forms of inequality that work to undermine their goals. In reproducing hegemonic themes of individualism, hard work, and the United States as the "land of opportunity," the use of these narratives by the 1.5 generation minimizes the obstacles to quality education and employment for working-class men and women of color (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

Although most of the youth expressed feeling optimistic for the future as a result of the struggles they overcame, several took a more pessimistic view. For example, Teresa reported:

Without the social security number sometimes we feel like we don't belong here...I feel sometimes that I don't belong here. But around people like them, around my teacher in high school, they supported me. But, sometimes people being so racist and all of that I say to myself, 'I should have never come here.' I sometimes feel like I do belong and I sometimes feel like I don't belong.

Teresa struggled with feelings of liminality, or simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, that other youth also described. However, in contrast to most, her overall view was that American citizens would be unlikely to vote to change conditions for undocumented immigrants like herself.

Similarly, Sandra explained, "I want more opportunities, we [undocumented immigrants] want to do more things and we can't. We try to do it—we have many goals, we have many ideas, and then we say we are going to have this in the future. Without any social security number, it's not going to happen!" Sandra again pointed to her legal status as ultimately blocking any chances she had for success, even as she continued to attend college and expressed a desire to get her degree to have a better life.

Compared to the majority of undocumented students interviewed for this study, Sandra and Teresa were unique. They had lived in the U.S. for less than ten years, were not eligible for

DACA, fled violence in their home countries (discussed in Chapter Six), and were Central American (Salvadoran and Guatemalan, respectively). Also, Sandra was one of only three women interviewed in this study who was a mother; her four-year-old daughter was born in the United States. The combination of these factors may help to explain why they focused less on the positives of being undocumented and more on the continuing struggles they faced compared to other youth in this study who have resided in the U.S. longer, had DACA, and did not have to provide for children. Yet, despite expressing negative feelings regarding their legal status, the two women also expressed feeling pride in themselves for deciding to migrate alone as teenage girls to secure a better life. They emphasized that they were going to continue going to college, as Sandra stated: “No matter what! No matter what I am going to keep going to school and finish my education!” Even as these young women espoused a less optimistic view of their opportunities than other participants, they nevertheless maintained that their struggles were essential and they took pride in their accomplishments.

Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants created narratives of struggle to express frustration about the impacts of their legal status on their daily lives. On the one hand, narratives of struggle provided a sense of personal strength for continuing to pursue their goals given all of the barriers they faced growing up and continued to face in higher education. They also used these narratives to connect their own experiences to the collective narrative of the undocumented student movement, which emphasized the college dreams of undocumented youth. On the other hand, DREAMers’ also focused on their hard work in the face of prejudice and discrimination. In this respect, discriminatory experiences contributed to the creation of positive self-identities that reflected hegemonic images of the “good immigrants” (who deserved rights) and the “bad immigrants” (who did not).” While undocumented students can create these positive self-

identities from narratives of struggle, in doing so they unintentionally may undermine the goals of the student movement by reproducing intra-group hierarchies (the achievers and non-achievers) among undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants.

In addition to constructing collective and personal identities, narratives of struggle also served as a mechanism for undocumented youth to make sense of the transition to undocumented adulthood. Much like the working class youth in Silva's (2012) study, narratives of "overcoming" and self-growth through struggle were used to overcome their inability to achieve traditional markers of adulthood due to their legal status. In the following section, I will discuss how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants used this narrative to create the foundation for actively embracing their legal status and became "Undocumented and Unafraid."

BEING UNDOCUMENTED AS A MASTER STATUS AND SOURCE OF PRIDE

In his oft-cited work on undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, Roberto Gonzales noted that as undocumented youth transition out of high school their legal status becomes more salient. In Gonzales's study, the undocumented 1.5 generation saw their legal status as a barrier and found many of their hopes of progress stifled by illegality. In contrast to Gonzales' accounts, many of the youth in my study pointed to emerging adulthood as the time they became *proud* and open about their legal status.⁵⁸ The undocumented students in this study actively took on their undocumented identity as a "master status," or perceived identity or status overriding all others in importance (Hughes 1945). Being undocumented became a way to describe how they saw themselves fitting into the world. In contrast to the negative associations with their legal

⁵⁸ Although there were similarities between my work and that of Roberto Gonzales, my study took place during and after the implementation of the DACA program (detailed in Chapter One), which provided new political opportunities for undocumented youth to work legally and attend college. Thus, people were able to utilize their educational credentials for higher-paying jobs. Additionally, most of my participants (all but four) were involved in the undocumented student movement which pushed a narrative of pride. The combination of these factors helps to explain the differences in the narratives told by my interviewees compared to those in Gonzales' 2016 work.

status in childhood and adolescence, undocumented students in emerging adulthood reclaimed this identity as a source of pride in themselves, their families, and their communities.

In an interview in the cafeteria of a local university, Dani explained, “So, that was [being undocumented] always in the back of my mind...but at the same time, it’s [my] identity. Rather than seeing it as a pushback I see it as something that makes me who I am. I’m learning slowly to accept it.” As Dani’s quote illustrated, taking on an identity as an undocumented person was not a decision arrived at immediately. Embracing her identity as an undocumented person was a process of changing her mindset from being afraid and ashamed in childhood to see the struggles of being undocumented as a source of strength and pride in emerging adulthood. Similarly, Fátima, who earlier discussed feelings of shame and exclusion during high school, became emotional when she discussed how she viewed her legal status now:

I was always ashamed but the older I got, the more I saw that I shouldn’t be embarrassed [voice breaks and she starts to cry] I shouldn’t be embarrassed because my parents brought me here! I was a kid, and it’s not like I chose to come here, my parents brought me for a better future, so I feel like that’s who I am, and I shouldn’t be embarrassed...And I feel like I shouldn’t blame my parents or feel bad about it, you know? That’s who I am. I’m undocumented.

She framed shame and embarrassment over her legal status as something she struggled with as a child. As an emerging adult, she reconstructed the struggles she faced as part of what made her who she is today. Her parents, far from deserving the moniker “illegal,” made the correct decision to bring her and her twin sister to the U.S. for a better life. In the social movement activism detailed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, undocumented youth told narratives of migrating for a better life to convince audiences that undocumented immigrants deserved rights and respect. In one-on-one interviews, the same narrative allowed Fátima to process feelings of anger and embarrassment that she felt about her family. Rather than being angry at her parents

for their decision (as she implied she might have felt in the past), she embraced her legal status as a positive aspect of her identity through which she resolved feelings of anger.

David, who was working full-time with RIC at the time of our interview, explained, “I’ve really come to terms with my identity; I am an undocumented person.” I asked him, “What does that mean to you,” and he replied:

It means that I’m a fighter, that I’m willing to do what it takes to protect my family. And, that I’m hopeful—being undocumented is hoping that something will come along, that our sacrifices won’t be for naught. That something will happen, that’s what being undocumented is to me.

David framed being undocumented as a master status. For David, being undocumented meant that he fought for what he thought was right, protected his family, and was hopeful for a better future. David demonstrated through his account that he did not always feel the same way. During the interview, he discussed feeling shame around his legal status as a child and embarrassment regarding his family’s economic struggles. As an emerging adult, David reframed his struggles and those of his family as empowering. Whereas illegality was a status conferred by the state, David believed his reactions to illegality were entirely under his control through self-reflection (Illouz 2007). He also used his narrative to reaffirm his masculinity. He went from a vulnerable, helpless child to a proud, strong man. One interpretation of his narrative is that David was attempting to conform to the norms of hegemonic masculinity (the “protector” of his family); however, it was not that simple. Undocumented men, due to their precarious employment, often cannot meet the expectations of masculinity, particularly economic stability. Asserting himself in other ways, such as being a source of strength for the family, became a stand-in for economic contributions (Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2011). Throughout his interview, he discussed undocumented women as strong and capable and how he wanted to be a better person than his father, who was an abusive parent. Given this broader context, I interpreted David’s statement as

less about asserting hegemonic masculinity and more about reclaiming his humanity amidst the tremendous obstacles he had faced in life due to his legal status.

While David generally spoke of how he came to embrace his legal status, Rosa pointed explicitly to the context of college and adult independence as impacting what she believed it meant to be undocumented. She said, “I’m kind of more proud of it now that I’ve started college and know more. I have all these things going against me, yet I’m overcoming them and making a better life for myself.” Much like David, Rosa emphasized newfound agency and control over her life after graduating high school, two important elements of emerging adulthood (Arnett 2004). Overcoming struggle, making empowered decisions about her future, and becoming “proud” of her undocumented status were markers of Rosa’s transition into adulthood. Rosa also claimed that without the struggles she faced she would have never realized that she should be proud of herself. She reframed the barriers she faced growing up as a necessary part of her path in adopting an undocumented identity as a source of pride. Through this, Rosa created a positive self-concept and connected herself to other 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants in her student group who had similar experiences. However, by conceptualizing blocked opportunities and discriminatory immigration policies as necessary obstacles on her pathway to a positive self-concept as an adult, she normalized the conditions of inequality that marginalized her and her family, much like narratives of individual effort and exceptionalism from the previous section.

In addition to self-reflection on how entering college impacted their understanding of what it meant to be undocumented, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants cited legislative changes as shaping their orientations toward their identity as an undocumented person. As discussed in the opening chapter, one significant policy change that unfolded during this research was the implementation of the DACA program. Although DACA did not provide a pathway to

citizenship, it did provide perceived protection for recipients that they would not be deported.⁵⁹

As José's quote will illustrate, having DACA not only allowed undocumented youth to work legally in the U.S., but also shaped how they understood their legal status and their responsibility to fight for others in the community who did not have the same privileges. José explained:

Well, in my view of being undocumented is completely different now than it was back then because back then I had the same idea that my parents had—we're nobody, we're just in the shadows, we don't have no voice, we can't do this or that. I remember I couldn't even go out because my mom would say no because it was dangerous or she would say 'No because if the police catches you, you're going to get sent back [to Mexico]!'

But now, um, we're considered DACA-mented because we have DACA, but I still consider myself undocumented because of my family, because my parents still have nothing. But what I see now is that we do have a change, we do have a voice, and we are somebody.

Despite having only temporary legal protection, José's mindset toward what it meant to be undocumented has changed. As a child with no legal protections, he saw being undocumented as a source of fear and powerlessness. After the implementation of DACA the year he graduated from high school, he reconstructed himself as occupying a position of power and privilege compared to his parents and other undocumented people who did not have DACA. He also framed this new power and privilege as something he needed to use to give back to the entire community (the collective "we" of all undocumented people). As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, part of the work of the undocumented student movement was creating positive collective identities out of personal experiences with inequality and blocked opportunities. José's explanation of the importance of DACA in his life demonstrated that this strategy works.

Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants reframed being undocumented from a source of shame to a source of pride under the changing legal and social contexts post-DACA. Narratives

⁵⁹ As detailed in the introduction, the DACA program was rescinded in fall 2017, after I concluded data-gathering. Because of this, I could not ask participants questions about how the end of the DACA program impacted their lives. I speculate more about these consequences in the concluding chapter.

of struggle provided the foundation for coming to view oneself and community positively. After interpreting the struggles as necessary for shaping their adult selves, undocumented youth embraced their legal status as a source of pride in emerging adulthood. They also actively embraced being undocumented as a master status.

Much like José, Carlos also claimed that he will always be undocumented. Sitting in a lounge area near a coffee shop at a local college, he smiled as he told me, “I’m no longer afraid of who I am anymore, I’ve embraced it. I embrace it for myself, you know? I think it’s always going to be a big part of me. I think, even if I obtain legal status, I’m always going to remember.” Carlos embraced his undocumented status as a master status—it is who he *is*. His process of self-reflection on the vital role that being undocumented played in his life led him to claim that he will continue to self-identify as undocumented, even if he gained documentation. Another undocumented student shared a similar outlook. Cristina, who was forced to return to Peru alone for more than two years while she waited for her eventual legal status, claimed that she still considered herself undocumented. Echoing Carlos, she explained:

It’s such a big part of my identity now. I mean, even though I’m not undocumented now, I still say that I am. It’s like was, but I’m *undocumented*, you know? This is what I went through. I kind of came back from Peru with this weird sense of duty, like I had something I had to do. My voice had to get out there, and I had to make a change. That’s kind of really where that pride comes from.

Although Cristina gained citizenship, her experiences of being undocumented profoundly impacted her life and self-concept. Cristina and Carlos both explained how being undocumented was more than just whether or not someone had documentation: it was their identity. Cristina saw herself as needing to give back to the undocumented community by telling her narrative. She hoped that talking to young people about her experiences would create positive change in the community, much like José’s sense of power and obligation after becoming “DACA-mented.”

In the previous sections, I outlined the various struggles undocumented youth faced growing up in the United States. Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants told narratives of struggle to separate their ashamed and fearful childhood selves from their proud, motivated adult selves. While telling this particular narrative engendered positive personal and collective identities through overcoming structural barriers, it reinforced the “good immigrant” narrative that marginalized many in their community. Talking about their lives in this way also normalized classed, immigrant, and racialized inequalities undocumented youth faced as necessary on the path to becoming “who they are” as adults. Taken together, this narrative had positive and negative impacts on the formation of personal and collective identities for undocumented youth. In addition to being a means of identity development, other factors influenced why undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants talked about their lives in this way. Despite repeated mentions of the struggles they faced, undocumented youth regularly downplayed their struggles as not being as bad as what others (especially their parents) went through. In the next section, I will detail another critical element of undocumented youth's narratives of struggle, that which focused on their responsibility to their parents to create a better life.

WHY THE STRUGGLE MATTERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST GENERATION

While perusing social media one day, I came across a tweet posted to the Instagram account of a national undocumented youth organization. The tweet read: “My parents were tasked with the job of survival and I with self-actualization. The immigrant generational gap is real. What a luxury it is to search for purpose, meaning, and fulfillment.”⁶⁰ As I read through the comments, I noticed many undocumented youth agreed with this statement and stressed how important it was to remember all of the struggles their parents faced. Given that this tweet was

⁶⁰ Tweet originates from verified Twitter user Bo Ren, an entrepreneur and writer. She can be found at <https://twitter.com/Bosefina>.

posted after the rescinding of the DACA program when undocumented youth were in the midst of actively pushing for reforms after once again facing political setbacks, I was surprised to see how many DREAMer activists minimized their struggles. This was a paradox that I also found in my participants, who simultaneously emphasized their struggles while downplaying the significance of their struggles compared to their parents. The underlying theme of downplaying the impacts of their struggles by pointing out that others had it worse or re-framing their struggles as positive was puzzling. Why would undocumented students, who used narratives of struggle to create positive identities and advocate for social change, routinely downplay the importance of these struggles in interviews?

To fully understand this paradox, I analyze how undocumented youth talked about their parents. Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants framed themselves as being in a position of privilege vis-à-vis their parents and felt obligated to be grateful for the sacrifices their parents made. Their parents are marginalized and inadvertently criminalized by public narratives emphasizing the “innocence” of DREAMers in the migration decision. In contrast to the public deployment of the DREAMer narrative, one-on-one interviews provided a context for undocumented youth to talk about their parents’ experiences. Downplaying their struggle while giving primacy to the struggles of the first generation was a mechanism used to talk positively about their parents and construct them as ethical and moral people. At the same time, this characterization of themselves, as compared to their parents, stifled the ability of undocumented youth to express anger and discontent over their negative experiences. They qualified any discrimination, exclusion, or negativity they experienced by saying that “it was not as bad as what their parents went through.”

Highlighting this perspective was Miguel. In the midst of talking about the struggles he faced, Miguel paused and exclaimed, “the way I see it, with my parents, they’re the ones suffering!” Even though he experienced many obstacles, because he had DACA, he constructed himself as having fewer issues to overcome than his mother and father. His brother, Enrique also echoed that their parents had it much harder: “It’s something I think about every day. Right now I have DACA, and I have this work permit, and it’s going to last for two years. But now, I think about my parents as in like, I’m safe as long as I don’t get in trouble, not them.” Enrique even used the term “DREAMer” to reflect on his parents: “It’s like, our parents, they were the original DREAMers. They were the ones that brought us here!” Enrique and Miguel, both active members in the undocumented student movement, spoke publicly about their struggles of being undocumented but qualified their struggles in interviews by arguing that their parents had it much worse. They used the interview to lift up the narratives of their parents, attempting to undo some of the damage done by the public DREAMer narrative.

Reynaldo, who was working on a master’s degree in education, also highlighted the struggles of his parents when talking about his own negative experiences: “I have to work it out, just like my parents did. Obviously, they were smart enough to bring me here to have this privilege of being in school, so if [they] can survive like that, I can too!” He continued to describe the struggles his mother faced: “What makes me keep going even though I have my own challenges to face, it’s my mom. I think it’s my mom. The fact that I know America is killing her slowly, it hurts me a lot. The more I see it, the more I want to fight.” Reynaldo cited his mother as a source of his strength and explained that he was privileged compared to his parents, neither of whom had any formal education. He also minimized his struggles because he believed his parents’ lives have been more difficult. Reynaldo utilized this narrative to express

gratitude for the sacrifices his parents made. However, he diminished his struggles as an undocumented student. Regardless of what he went through, it was not nearly as bad as his parents.

Estefany's account illustrates a final example of how undocumented youth minimized their struggles. Throughout the interview, Estefany repeatedly referenced her mother's impoverished beginnings (an orphan in Mexico) in comparison to her own. She explained:

I just think of my mom, like, she doesn't have an education, and she's trying—even when raising kids and not making money at her jobs—she's trying to get better with her English and get more for herself, well for us really. I think about that when I get down. Yeah. That's what I think about when I'm feeling bad about being undocumented.

Estefany highlighted her mother's accomplishments in this narrative, which were a source of pride for her. However, as the end of the quote illustrated, Estefany framed her mother's struggles as far more important than her own. Like Reynaldo, Estefany felt a sense of pride in her family by describing their lives in this way. She was also required to minimize her struggles since they hardly compared to those of her mother.

Scholars note that immigrants have a “dual frame of reference” when thinking about their experiences: those from the country of origin and those from the country to which they migrated (Piore 1979; Reese 2001). Typically used to discuss the first generation, this dual frame of reference also existed for undocumented students, especially those who migrated to the U.S. at older ages and had memories of their lives in another country. However, even for those who migrated as infants or toddlers with no memories of their country of origin, there was a dual frame of reference as it related to the “immigrant experience.” Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants saw not only their struggles but those of their parents. As their parents struggled to gain employment, confronted rising rent costs, or faced threats of deportation, undocumented

youth came to understand their circumstances as “privileged” by comparison. While Reynaldo struggled being the only undocumented student he knew in graduate school and Fátima cried when she remembered how isolated and alone she felt as a child, they quickly pointed out that they were not angry at their parents for bringing them to the United States. They owed it to their parents to be high achievers because of their parents’ experiences in the United States were considerably worse than their own.

Undocumented youth adopted narratives of the struggles of the first generation as a part of the larger project of their identity development. Through comparing their struggles to those of their parents, undocumented youth demonstrated that they were mature, thoughtful, moral beings who understood the sacrifices their parents made. Undocumented youth fostered connections with their parents and their culture through this narrative as well. Legal status prohibited undocumented youth from fully connecting with their roots outside of the United States. Family members in the U.S.—most commonly parents—were their only tangible connection to their cultural origins as they became more acculturated throughout the life course. The militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border made crossing from Mexico to the U.S. increasingly dangerous (Golash-Boza 2012). Fears of not being able to reunite with family members in the U.S. meant that many undocumented immigrants chose to remain in the U.S., spending years apart from family members across the border (Boehm 2012). Although undocumented youth had memories of their lives before migration, many struggled to recall significant experiences. While they expressed a desire to hold onto and be “proud” of their roots, they often relied on their parents’ narratives to create memories of life before the U.S. In this way, maintaining connections with their parents filled important personal and cultural voids resulting from their inability to travel to visit family due to their legal status. Finally, narratives of differences between themselves and

their parents made the youth feel less isolated from the “American mainstream,” as the narratives emphasized their integration compared to their parents and thus aided their identity goal of portraying themselves as “American in all ways but one.” However, framing their struggles as less important than those of their parents had negative consequences as well. Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants had to deemphasize their sadness and anger so as not to appear ungrateful for what their parents had sacrificed. While narratives of their parents’ sacrifices enabled undocumented youth to take pride in their families’ struggles for a better life in the United States, they also minimized ongoing discrimination and blocked opportunities that undocumented 1.5-generations immigrants encountered in emerging adulthood. As a result of this narrative strategy, they redirected feelings of anger into feelings of pride and family commitment but were never able to adequately express the array of feelings they had regarding the impacts of legal status on their lives.

CONCLUSION

Undocumented youth are in a constant state of liminality throughout their lives, between two cultures, between two generations. Their markers of acculturation, such as English language fluency and knowledge of U.S. culture, placed enormous responsibilities on them to navigate the complexities of life in the U.S. for themselves and their families. In addition to the hardships, they also saw these experiences as making them stronger and preparing them to contribute to their families and U.S. society positively. As I detailed in this chapter, undocumented youth faced struggles throughout childhood, adolescence, and once they entered college. They constructed these struggles as a source of personal strength in the face of adversity. Additionally, struggling through economic and cultural exclusion led to a sense of pride in themselves and their community for all of their hard work. Their narratives of strength and perseverance were a

reconfigured Horatio Alger narrative of sorts, where they with managed to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” and worked hard to contribute to American society. Narratives of struggle, a key element of the national DREAMer narrative detailed in Chapters One and Three, created positive identities for undocumented students and countered dominant narratives that immigrants were lazy, unassimilable, and a threat to American society. Creating identities around being strong in the face of adversity engendered a sense of pride and connected undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants to the struggles others in the community faced. Undocumented youth created positive identities around narratives of hard work and struggle, but also maintained hegemonic discourses of “good” versus “bad” immigrants. Narratives of being the “right kind” of immigrant may create additional barriers for mobilizing the most marginalized undocumented youth in the community, who are not “high achievers.”

Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants utilized narratives of struggle to connect their experiences to those of other undocumented students and of undocumented people more generally, regardless of generation. In contrast to the public narratives in Chapter Three where the first generation was mostly invisible, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants routinely talked about how their families’ sacrifices have helped them. In many ways, the narratives undocumented youth told conformed to hegemonic narratives of the “American Dream,” even as they expressed skepticism that America was the land of limitless opportunities after they encountered numerous obstacles in the transition to adulthood. By contrast, their parents were *always* excluded and “in the shadows.” In this narrative, the first generation became the “original DREAMers.” Although I first heard the term “original DREAMers” in my interview with Enrique in the fall of 2015, activists now use it as a broader undocumented student movement narrative in the Trump era. Decreasing political opportunities for immigration reform and

increased anti-immigrant rhetoric from the Trump administration shifted public narratives in favor of more inclusivity, an issue I detail more fully in the concluding chapter.

Although the narratives analyzed in this chapter varied somewhat from the public DREAMer narrative, interviewees reproduced the DREAMer narrative as well. Broader cultural discourses permeated the narratives that people told. Once a narrative structure like the DREAMer narrative is learned and internalized, youth adapted it in different contexts to accomplish broader identity goals, such as creating positive personal identities. While the narratives in this chapter, for the most part, highlight tropes of personal strength, parental sacrifice, and individual achievement, the narratives undocumented youth shared in the next chapter reveal the “untold” narratives of undocumented youth that are frequently held from public view.

CHAPTER 6

“HOW WOULD I DESCRIBE MY FAMILY? BROKEN”: NARRATIVES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

As discussed throughout this dissertation, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants have been trained to tell narratives about what it means to be undocumented and deploy these narratives in diverse public settings. Participants in this study are trained narrators who seamlessly constructed themselves as deserving of rights and avoided reproducing negative stereotypes about their group. In my one-on-one interviews with undocumented youth, I encountered another aspect of their narratives which was not present in the public narratives detailed in Chapters Three and Four: how experiences with family violence impact their lives. As I detailed in Chapters One and Two, the literature on 1.5-generation immigrants’ experiences scarcely mentioned violence. Narratives of violence and trauma committed by family members (mainly fathers) emerged during interviews when I asked participants to describe their families. Below, I outline the rates and types of violence the participants reported experiencing.

Table 5.1: Reported Victimization in Interview⁶¹

Yes (themselves only)	5 (11%)
Yes (immediate family member only)	8 (19%)
Yes (self and immediate family member)	5 (11%)
No	25 (59%)

Table 5.2: Type of Victimization

Verbal/emotional	6 (24%)
Physical	17 (68%)
Sexual	2 (8%)
Total victimization of any type	25 (100%)

⁶¹ Both tables only include data from immigrants (n=42). The numbers for Table 5.2 do not match the sample because some people talked about multiple forms of violence.

As these numbers demonstrate, a significant portion of my sample (18, or 40%)⁶² reported being victims of physical violence and trauma or witnessing violence committed against an immediate family member.⁶³ Participants described different forms of violence and sources of trauma in their lives, for example, child abuse, exposure to cartel violence, and violence on the migration journey. In this chapter, I focus exclusively on child abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV) taking place in the family because these were the most common forms of violence mentioned. Moreover, these forms of violence were not readily discussed in public settings, as compared to narratives of cartel violence, border violence, or violence in detention centers. In contrast to these other forms of violence, which undocumented youth publicly disclosed in the push for immigration reform, they mostly silenced narratives of child abuse and IPV in public discourse. In rare public discussions, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants talked about violence occurring *before* migration, obscuring any familial violence youth experienced once they arrived in the U.S.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to document and thus disrupt the silence surrounding intimate partner violence and to understand how narratives of violence function as identity work in the narratives undocumented youth tell about their lives. To this end, I pay careful attention to the differences between the rare public talk of family violence and the numerous discussions of family violence that surfaced in the interviews. I argue that public narratives of family violence were extraordinarily selective and typically centered on how mothers' exposure to IPV forced migration to the U.S. (even if it meant migrating without authorization). These narratives worked to decriminalize their first generation undocumented

⁶² Child abuse and intimate partner violence statistics are an “iceberg.” This metaphor describes how official reports represent a small number of actual cases in the population (Gracia 2004). Thus, it is likely that more of my interviewees experience or have experienced violence but did not want to discuss it.

⁶³ Additional participants (not included in the tables) talked about violence happening to someone else outside of their immediate family.

mothers as well as to construct the U.S. as a haven for women escaping “traditional,” patriarchal cultures. However, because narratives of male violence against women and children in undocumented immigrant families risk activating racialized and gendered stereotypes about violent Latino men, I argue that participants silenced public narratives of violence in the U.S. to maintain the image of the “good immigrant.” By contrast, I believe that undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants spoke more openly about family violence in our interviews because they provided a more private context outside of movement activism where they could share experiences in their lives that did not fit neatly into the DREAMer narrative. A social consequence of the public silencing of family violence is that abusive undocumented men can maintain gendered power over the family (even as they lack structural power as undocumented immigrants in the U.S.) and undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants can maintain the movement image of the unblemished immigrant family. By disclosing family violence in interviews, undocumented youth claimed ownership of their narratives and pushed back against the ideological DREAMer discourse, which limits their ability to discuss traumatic experiences. It also enabled them to continue the identity work of constructing themselves as strong and resilient in the face of adversity (much like the struggle narratives in Chapter Five).

When participants shared narratives about family violence in the one-on-one interviews that I had not heard from my observations of public narratives, I began to consider how I functioned as an audience member in this setting. Although I witnessed undocumented youth narrate their lives in different contexts, such as organizational meetings, legislative hearings, and the theatrical performances, the trauma narratives that people disclosed in the one-on-one interview setting were different. Experiences with violence and trauma are *hidden narratives* in the broader discourse of the DREAMer movement and scholarship on undocumented 1.5-

generation immigrants. I believe that participants revealed trauma narratives to me in interviews because in this context they were not performing the group narrative for each other and political gain. Additionally, my positionality as a researcher may have facilitated the sharing of narratives of violence. Moreover, it is likely that participants were more comfortable recounting narratives of violence because I was a woman *and* a racial and ethnic outsider. As detailed in Chapter Two, violence narratives are shared more openly with women (Beck 2005), and participants do not hold racial and ethnic outsiders to the same standards of culturally-imposed silences in interviews (Facio 1993; Rhodes 1994; Tinker and Armstrong 2008). My gender *and* my race were influential in creating a research context where participants shared these narratives.

When participants shared narratives of trauma and violence, I bore witness to their experiences (Laub 2002). I did not take this responsibility lightly. By sharing their hidden narratives in this chapter, I reciprocate the trust that those who revealed these experiences placed in me. “Reciprocity” is a loaded term in sociological research (Adler and Adler 1987). I define the term as making research mutually beneficial for the researcher and participants (Huisman 2008). In this case, participants shared trauma narratives with me with the knowledge that I could publish their words.⁶⁴ In turn, by documenting their narratives in this chapter, my research takes an important first step in making visible the hidden narratives of family violence experienced by undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants.

Despite a considerable amount of scholarly research on undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, scholars have yet to detail how experiences with family violence impact the lives and, although beyond the scope of this chapter, emotional and mental well-being of

⁶⁴ Writing on hidden stories of incest and family violence in Mexico, Gloria González-López (2015) argues that by sharing these experiences, participants may help others who are in similar circumstances.

undocumented youth.⁶⁵ My research fills a significant void in this regard. Undocumented youth's gendered, classed, immigrant, and racialized positionality makes them vulnerable to violence and unable to access necessary services for themselves and their families in the U.S. In this chapter, I explore how narratives of trauma contribute to how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants experience life in the United States and to their understanding of what it means to be undocumented.⁶⁶ I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how silencing narratives of family violence and trauma impacts undocumented youth.

TRAUMA, NARRATIVE, AND IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES

Trauma, in a general sense, is an event or events that happen to someone or a group of people—violence, loss, or violation, for example—that results in long-term emotional distress (Alexander 2004). In addition to the physical and psychological effects of traumatic events, the *meaning* people attach to trauma informs their sense of who they are, where they come from, where they fit into society, and whom they want to be in the future (Alexander 2004). In this sense, narratives of trauma can be used to define personal and collective identities. Studies of trauma narratives in the creation of collective identity find that intergenerational narratives of trauma and survival among victims of ethnic cleansing, slavery, and other forms of state or extra-state sponsored violence shape how group members understand their shared history as well as their place as individuals within a broader community (Eyal 2004; Kidron 2003; Stolorow 2009).

⁶⁵ For notable exceptions dealing with mental health, see Gonzales, Suárez-Orosco, and Dedios-Sanguinetti 2013 and Potochnick and Perreira 2011. I theorize regarding the potential mental health implications of the various struggles undocumented youth face in the conclusion.

⁶⁶ Although beyond the scope of this chapter, similar to work by Gonzales, Suárez-Orosco, and Dedios-Sanguinetti (2013), the DREAMers in my study also experienced racism, dissonant acculturation, and feelings of blocked opportunities that represent another form of cultural violence or trauma. I discussed these issues in Chapter Five.

Through narratives of trauma, people attempt not only to persuade audiences of the existence of their trauma but to construct a narrative about themselves as “traumatized” or having overcome traumatic experiences (Kidron 2003). By remembering and discussing trauma, people search for coherent narratives and memories that place themselves in the context of their families and communities that suffered through the same struggles. While childhood abuse and trauma can lead to unstable and fragile identities in adulthood (Hosier 2013), narratives of overcoming abuse can construct a strong self-concept in the face of immense adversity (Crossley 2000). Being able to describe what happened to themselves and their community can be a healing mechanism whereby people move away from the suppression of trauma into a space where the trauma becomes a part of their life history. While constructing themselves and their community as strong survivors can promote positive self and collective identity (Kidron 2003), it also constrains the ability of people to construct themselves as vulnerable and to disclose emotional distress resulting from trauma and violence (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2007). In the case of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, experiences with family violence impacted how they understand themselves and their communities. Fears of reproducing controlling images about the “criminal” or “dangerous” immigrant led to a general silence surrounding family violence in public narrative contexts.

CHILD ABUSE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: SILENCE ON THE STRUCTURAL, CULTURAL, AND INTERPERSONAL LEVELS

Structural and cultural narratives frequently silence specific narratives in favor of others. For example, contributions of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups are often discounted or ignored in national narratives (Zinn 2003). Governments, institutions, and organizations promote specific topics or worldviews while silencing those which threaten existing hegemonic ideologies (Crenshaw 1997; Sue 2015). State-sponsored museums

and memorials choose particular representations of triumph, suffering, and violence (while silencing others) to uphold dominant ideologies and social hierarchies (Confino 1997; Jacobs 2017). Structural and cultural silences are reproduced in interaction when individuals do not discuss inequality in power structures or experiences with maltreatment (Sheriff 2000). Silences perpetuate inequality by driving it into the shadows, rendering it mostly invisible and resistant to change. This pattern of silencing contributes to the continuation of existing patterns of inequality (Hirschauer 2006; Sue 2015).

Of particular interest in this chapter are silences surrounding intimate partner violence and child abuse in U.S. society. Child abuse and IPV are *underreported* and infrequently discussed crimes (Gracia 2004). The silence may be particularly intense in communities of color, which are distrustful of police and other organizations that reinforce racist stereotypes and engage in racist practices (Raj and Silverman 2002). Family violence is an “open secret” (Hirschauer 2006) in that it is known to be happening but not talked about. Research suggests abuse is often known to others, but a culture of victim-blaming results in inaction and under-reporting (Gracia 2004). While abuse is prevalent throughout U.S. society, the positionality of undocumented immigrants in various race, class, gender, and immigrant hierarchies exacerbates the degree to which they are vulnerable. For example, Latino/a cultural norms surrounding *familismo*, or the importance of maintaining close ties between immediate and extended family members, can lead to avoidance of conversations that speak ill of a family member (Halgunseth, Ipsa, and Rudy 2006). Cultural silences and marginalization of undocumented communities also enable abusers to hold legal status over their victims’ heads as a means of forced silence. Fears of deportation compound the barriers that undocumented women and children face in seeking help (Erez, Alderman, and Gregory 2009; Menjívar and Salcido 2002). Furthermore, DREAMer

activists are working to portray immigrants positively to achieve immigration reform. Thus, they silence narratives that describe negative community characteristics in favor of those that portray immigrants as deserving of rights from the state, as detailed in Chapter Three (Nicholls 2013). When undocumented youth discuss narratives of violence publicly, they cautiously construct a particular narrative about their victimization to avoid adverse audience reactions and being blamed for what has happened to them (Bumiller 1988; Burton and Regan 1996; Polletta 2006).

It is under this broader socio-cultural silencing of familial violence and trauma that experiences with violence and trauma emerged in the narratives undocumented youth told about their lives. As discussed in previous chapters, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants construct their narratives in a broader cultural context that restricts the available discourses from which to construct meaning. The different narratives undocumented youth develop about themselves and their community are told in particular contexts and in particular ways that simultaneously deconstruct and maintain the DREAMer narrative. Gender, immigration status, criminalization of immigrants, and increased deportability shape which narratives get told, which do not, and why. I begin my discussion below by focusing on the public narrative of a mother fleeing an abusive relationship. I detail the potential positive and negative impacts of this particular narrative. I then describe how narratives of family violence in one-on-one interviews differed from the (limited) public narratives of violence. I argue that one-on-one interviews provide a context for undocumented youth to push back against the confines of the DREAMer narrative by narrating family violence. Finally, I argue that narratives of family violence are used to construct personal and collective identities for undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants.

(RARE) PUBLIC NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE

Although narratives of family violence were mostly absent from the public narratives told by the undocumented student movement, the rare occasions when they did tell these narratives provide valuable insight into how violence shapes identities and experiences among undocumented youth. In the limited instances where DREAMers told narratives of gendered violence in the family as a part of a broader social movement agenda, they were narratives of abuse occurring *before* migration (e.g., women leaving their abusive boyfriends and husbands for refuge in the United States). In all of the public narratives of violence, undocumented youth describe violence that happened to someone else, primarily their mothers, but never violence they experienced. In this way, the narratives positioned their mothers as “strong women” who escaped violence. Youth were able to deflect any stigma that may result from sharing experiences of victimization by only narrating others’ experiences with violence and abuse (Polletta 2006).

Speaking on a panel at a local university, Ana told the mostly white undergraduate audience how she, her mother, and her brother first arrived in the United States. She explained that her mother needed to escape a violent husband. Although migrating without authorization and the primary income-earner in the family meant a struggle to make ends meet, it was worth it to escape the violence her mother faced in their home. Ana was not sure how her mother got the money together to leave, but one day while her father was working, they snuck off to make the journey from Mexico to the U.S. Ana’s mother has been living with another man in the U.S., whom Ana said treats her well. According to Ana, her mother made the right decision by leaving her father and migrating to the U.S., even if it meant migrating without papers.

In another example, Julie presented her narrative to a large college lecture hall of future teachers. As she looked out among the approximately fifty students in the room, she paused to make sure that the audience understood the gravity of her mother's choices. After leaving war-torn El Salvador for Mexico, Julie's mother fell in love with a wealthy Mexican businessman who was emotionally cold. She explained how he forced her mother to send Julie's two older brothers off to boarding school so that he and Julie's mother would have more time for themselves. When she became pregnant with Julie, he told her to "get rid of it" by having an abortion. When she went against his wishes and carried the pregnancy to term, he broke up with her and refused to support Julie in any way financially. For several years, Julie's mother struggled to make ends meet in Mexico, and as a single mother with three children her prospects for economic advancement were few. When Julie was three years old, her mother migrated to the U.S. in hopes of finding higher paying work, leaving Julie in the care of her grandmother for five years. Although Julie has never met her father, he refused to relinquish parental control to Julie's stepfather in the U.S. Because her stepfather was unable to adopt her before the age of eighteen, her attempts to gain authorized status in the U.S. remained unsuccessful.

In both of the above cases of public narratives of violence, the young women explained their mother's decisions to leave Mexico and come to the U.S. because of experiences of male violence and coercion. For Ana's mother, IPV led her to flee to the U.S. with her children. Julie's mother faced harsh economic consequences after leaving a controlling and emotionally abusive man. While Ana remained with her mother throughout the migration journey, Julie was separated from her mother for almost five years, a typical experience in transnational families (Boehm 2012). In both narratives, men's violence against women influenced their decision to migrate without documentation, thus making them an illegal presence in the U.S.

In addition to these cases, the theater performances described in Chapter Four also included references of IPV. In these instances, David fictionalized his mother's experiences as a victim of domestic violence. He told the audience that one day after enduring abuse his mother reached a breaking point and left the relationship. David constructed his mother as a source of his strength and wanted to make her proud of him, especially because of the sacrifices she had made. By giving voice to his mother's experiences, David paid homage to her and was able to process his emotions of his tumultuous childhood. However, the narrative in the play was not the same account David gave in his interview. During the interview, David told me that he also experienced abuse:

Yeah, my family, you know, ever since my mom and dad started my family it's been one thing after another. When I was four, my dad left. He left us—me and my older brother and my mom. It was a very, very abusive relationship! He would beat my mom and us, and he left, he just left.

David struggles with his history of family violence but saw public narratives as a way to fashion a positive narrative of his mother's courage. To accomplish this, David restructured his mother's narrative. Rather than a woman who stayed with an abusive man, the narrative of the play had his mother leave the relationship. This public narrative, however, came at the cost of silencing his victimization by his father.

In many ways, public narratives of violence have the potential to humanize undocumented immigrant women to non-immigrant audiences. They provide undocumented youth with the opportunity to publicly identify with their mothers and distance themselves from abusive fathers, thereby portraying themselves as a loving immigrant family. It also enabled them to speak about problems immigrant women face in seeking help when they experience intimate partner violence (Ingram 2007; Salcido and Abraham 2004). By narrating how their mothers left a violent relationship, undocumented youth construct their mothers as strong in the

face of victimization, exploitation, and gendered oppression. They counter the hegemonic, nativist narrative that undocumented immigrants are criminals by suggesting that some situations are so dire women have no choice but to migrate to the U.S.

At the same time, there are potential negative consequences of this narrative. By discussing violence committed by their fathers, undocumented youth potentially activate racialized and gendered stereotypes that Latino men are violent, “macho,” and a criminal threat to the U.S. (Chavez 2008). This is especially problematic for young undocumented men, like David, who risk being targeted by these same stereotypes. This particular discourse also constructs the United States as a safe space for women. IPV is a “Mexican” or “Latin American” problem that needs an “American” solution, thereby reinforcing dominant rhetoric of U.S. cultural superiority. This narrative also reinforces hegemonic racialized and gendered discourses that powerless brown women need saving from dangerous brown men (Spivak 1994). Under this discursive strategy, brown men are violent, savage, and a threat to women (and to global security), whereas white men (and to a lesser extent white women) must save brown women from their own culture (Spivak 1994). This discourse has provided justification for military intervention as well as for expanding the range of deportable offenses for undocumented immigrants under the guise of “protecting women” (Golash-Boza 2012). It also impacts what undocumented youth can say and what they must keep silent to present themselves and their community in a positive light. This puts pressure on undocumented youth to understand and talk about their experiences in limiting ways in public, rather than explain the full array of their experiences with violence and trauma. This narrative also does not provide a means to process the trauma that they have experienced, as their narratives of violence are “impermissible” in public discourse.

Undocumented youth told the narratives above publicly because they describe the United States as a safe place for their families.⁶⁷ Because undocumented students attempt to construct themselves and their right to belong in the United States in a particular way, only narratives of violence *outside* the U.S. were permissible. By contrast, undocumented 1.5-generation discussed their experiences with family violence in one-on-one interviews. In the following section, I explain how narratives of abuse emerged in one-on-one interviews and how undocumented youth utilized these narratives to construct personal and collective identities.

DISCLOSING NARRATIVES OF IPV AND CHILD ABUSE IN INTERVIEWS

Unlike public narratives of family violence, multiple undocumented youth discussed family violence in the interviews. Much like public narratives, interview narratives centered on women as victims of violence. Among the three men who discussed violence in the interviews, only David described the violence he experienced. The other young men, Carlos and José, described how undocumented women were exposed to violence but did not mention violence in their own lives.⁶⁸ In this section, I focus on the importance of sharing narratives of IPV and child abuse in interviews as a means of pushing back against imposed cultural silences as well as how narratives of violence construct identities of what it means to be an undocumented woman or man living in the U.S.

Among the undocumented youth who detailed IPV in interviews, all but one discussed the domestic violence their mothers and other women in their family experienced. Only one woman, who was in her mid-thirties at the time of our interview, shared her own experiences

⁶⁷ Of course, family violence occurs in the United States, and there is no clear evidence to suggest that undocumented immigrant men commit IPV at higher rates than other groups (see Vaughn et al. 2015 for a discussion of this debate).

⁶⁸ As mentioned in Chapter Two, I did not explicitly ask about violence in interviews. It is possible that if I asked directly, more people would have discussed it. Given that violence is a gendered phenomenon (Loseke and Kurz 2005), I suspect the same general narrative (women and children's victimization by men) would be present.

with a violent husband. I interviewed Sara, the undocumented activist whom we met in Chapter Three, one night at her home. In-between making dinner for her two children, we discussed her experiences in the United States. She recounted the hardship she endured with the father of her daughter:

I mean, he was abusive in a psychological, in an emotional sense, yeah. Definitely! But it didn't get physical really, until the end when I was threatening to take my kids and go. I wanted to leave, yeah, but I mean I am undocumented, I'm a single mom—what am I going to do? How would I support my kids? So I stayed until he threatened Juan [her son from another marriage]. Then that was it! I got on the phone to his father and sent him down to Mexico to live with him; I could do that without tipping him off, right? Then we, on our own—a single mom with a small child—left in the middle of the night on a bus.

Although Sara saw her ex-husband as a threat, it was not until he threatened to abuse her children that she escaped the relationship. In addition to being thrust into a situation where she became a single parent of a young daughter, she spent several years away from her son. This created additional family stress and caused Sara a great deal of sadness during his extended absence. It also created an even more precarious economic situation for Sara after losing her ex-husband's income that she relied upon to support her family. Through telling this narrative, Sara constructed herself as a strong, protective mother. Sharing this narrative was vital because it helped her to create a positive personal identity, as a “good mother,” out of a traumatic experience.

Undocumented women like Sara are afraid to report abuse to police because they could be deported (Erez, Aldeman, and Gregory 2009). Immigrant women straddle multiple marginalized categories—women, immigrants, members of communities of color—that influence their ability to report intimate partner violence and the degree to which they trust systems with colonialist and racist histories (Abraham 2000). Undocumented women experience stagnant economic mobility, language barriers (in the case of the first generation), and social

isolation which constrain many of the potential strategies for exiting a violent relationship (Abraham 2000). Women have recounted abusive husbands or boyfriends threatening to destroy their paperwork if they have authorization, withdraw petitions for their pathway to residency, or report them to immigration officials (Menjívar and Salcido 2002). Sara's vulnerable statuses—undocumented, economically disadvantaged, and female—were exploited by a man who held her legal status over her as a means to force her to stay in the relationship. Immigration policies do not always protect women from the trauma of deportation if they choose to report victimization by their partners, so silence is perceived as necessary to remain in the U.S. (Salcido and Adelman 2004).

Even among interviewees that did not report experiencing IPV in their own families, second-hand narratives of violence were present. Undocumented youth constructed exposure to violence as a constant threat to the lives of undocumented women. Carlos explained, “A lot of stories are like, ‘She got married to this guy to get legal status, and this guy beat her,’ and normal stuff like that.” Carlos reported this in the context of hearing his family talk about how undocumented immigrants were able to legalize their status. In using the phrase, “normal stuff like that,” Carlos suggested that he believes experiencing violence was a “normal” part of what it meant to be an undocumented woman and may, in fact, be a tradeoff for gaining legal citizenship. These narratives, unlike Sara's, recount other people's experiences with violence. Like Sara, however, undocumented youth also reported experiencing violence but did not discuss it publicly to conform to the DREAMer narrative. All but one of the narratives of personal violence spoke of young women who were abused by their fathers,⁶⁹ suggesting that gendered violence extends to the 1.5-generation.

⁶⁹ The other was a young woman's narrative of being abused by her mother and a male cousin.

Although most narratives of child abuse took place in the U.S., two young women discussed paternal violence as the motivation to migrate. Teresa and Sandra, both of whom left Central America alone as teenagers, pointed to violence by their fathers as shaping their migration decision. Sandra said her mother initially left Guatemala not only for better economic opportunities but because of intimate partner violence: “My dad was so violent! That’s why my mom left my dad and came here.” When talking about her abusive father, Sandra cryptically revealed her abuse as well. She began by telling me that after her mom left, “He just continued with the violence, but with me.” After a long pause, Sandra said quietly, “I was the woman of the house now, you know?” Similar to Sandra’s narrative of her abusive father, Teresa told me that her dad began drinking heavily after her mom migrated to the United States for better economic opportunities. Her father became “scary to me...I did not know what he would do.” By migrating to the U.S., Teresa and Sandra were able to escape the violence.

Teresa and Sandra’s narratives highlighted the relationship between economic instability, family violence, and migration. Both young women recounted their mothers’ migration to the U.S. because there were no jobs to support their families in their countries of origin and because their husbands were violent. The mothers came to work in the U.S. and sent money back to the children that they had to leave behind. As their daughters increasingly became targets of family violence, the mothers encouraged the two young women to follow them to the U.S. and leave their abusive fathers. Neither Teresa nor Sandra maintained a relationship with their father since migrating. Undocumented young women, like Teresa and Sandra, knew the narratives of their mother’s trauma. They experienced trauma by watching their mothers being abused and later being abused themselves. Their mothers were both victims of violence and empowered women who left abusive relationships. By leaving their fathers to rejoin their mothers in the U.S., they

came to identify with their mothers' trauma and strength as they too left the abusive relationship. Telling the narrative in this way connects the two generations of women by creating gendered identities around violence as a shared experience for women.

Unlike public narratives, undocumented youth reported experiencing child abuse in the interview context. Despite overall declines in violent crime rates in the United States over the last several decades, studies indicate violent victimization remains high among children and adolescents (Aisenberg and Herrenkohl 2008; Jaycox et al. 2002). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017), 683,000 children in the United States were victims of various forms of child abuse including physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. Overall, girls were more likely to be victims of child abuse than boys (a rate of 9.6 per 1,000 compared to 8.8 per 1,000 for boys). The rate of abuse for Latino/a children was 8.4 per 1,000, slightly higher than non-Hispanic whites (8.1) but lower than the rates of abuse for African American and Native American children (14.5 and 13.8, respectively) (USHHS 2017).⁷⁰ Although there is the issue of underreporting, these data provide some insight into abuse rates among Latina/o children. However, government data do not distinguish between immigrant children, U.S.-born children, or the documentation status of the child and perpetrator. Limited data on undocumented youth suggests they may have higher rates of physical and sexual trauma compared to those with legal status (Dirks-Bihun 2014). These broader patterns exist in my data. Young women were more likely than young men to report personal experiences with abuse. Below, I document several narratives of child abuse that occurred in the United States and demonstrate how identity work among youth who were victims of violence after they migrated with their families differed from those who left the violence behind in their country of origin.

⁷⁰ Bearing in mind that child abuse is an *under-reported* crime, so rates are likely higher among all groups than reports suggest.

Guadalupe is a vibrant, butch-identified lesbian Mexicana. After she remarked that she thought of her dad as “angry man,” I asked her if she could provide details as to why she saw him that way. She responded:

The first thing that comes to mind is that he would physically abuse my brother and me a lot growing up. It wasn't until I turned 17 that I had to put a stop to it. My mom caught me ditching and told me that she was going to tell my dad. So, I finished the rest of the school day and I just kind of freaked out and told my teachers I was really scared to go home that day. Social Services got involved. The abuse was there, but it wasn't something Social Services could see happening. For a long time, my dad would tell us that we couldn't say anything to anyone because if we called the cops on him we were all going to get deported so that was really how he held us under. That all the things we had worked for would go down the drain and we would get deported if we said anything.

Much like women who were fearful of reporting domestic violence out of fear of deportation, Guadalupe's father held the entire family's legal status over their heads to avoid consequences, which represents another form of violence. Not soon after she turned eighteen, a confrontation with her father led her to move out:

My dad started giving me a hard time about something, and he called me a 'he' and that really saddened me because I've always struggled with that part of my identity with people not recognizing that I'm a girl and people calling me 'he,' so I was really hurt by that. So, I called him '*un pendejo*,' a dumbass, and he got really mad at me. He punched me full-blown in the back of the head and so I said this is it, and I'm moving out, and I don't care where I go!

In addition to the physical violence she faces, Guadalupe also contended with her father's homophobic insults about her gender expression and sexuality. Although Teresa and Sandra, the young Central American women we met earlier, left their fathers in their home countries and cut off all contact with them, Guadalupe told me that she has worked to repair her relationship with her father. She explained that her dad was also the victim of trauma growing up and that “my brother and me have forgiven him for a lot of the things he has done in his past...I think he has a lot of resentment toward his family too and I think that until he is able to forgive them, he is not

going to be able to live in peace.” Although Guadalupe did not excuse her father’s actions and carried the trauma with her, she contextualized his abuse by describing his victimization.

Intergenerational abuse was also present in Josefina’s life. At the time of our interview, Josefina was in her first semester of college. She told me that her mom tried to migrate to the U.S. before her birth, but an abusive boyfriend would not allow her to go. In addition to IPV, Josefina said her mother also experienced child abuse. When describing their relationship, Josefina explained that her mother’s violent behavior resulted from her victimization throughout her life:

It’s really tumultuous; I guess that’s the word. I mean, sometimes I get so angry at her [her mother] because of her abusing me or controlling me, but it’s like, that’s what her father did to her and her mother, my grandmother, too. The cycle is not going to break; you know? I understand because she grew up that way.

In addition to the physical and emotional violence that routinely characterized her relationship with her mother, Josefina also revealed that she was molested by a family member when she was five years old. Josefina remembered spending a considerable amount of time at her aunt’s house growing up while her mother worked. One day, a teenaged cousin molested her. When her aunt caught him, she reacted by blaming Josefina rather than the abuser. Josefina told me that she had not talked about her experience again until the interview (similar to experiences of incest detailed in González-López 2015). Again, Josefina’s position as a young, undocumented Mexican woman (girl at the time of her abuse) left her with few options to hold her abusers accountable. She never mentioned her aunt again in the interview, but described working to repair her relationship with her mother. She justified this through constructing violence as transmitted from generation-to-generation until someone breaks the cycle.

For those who reported violence by a parent or witnessed their fathers victimize their mothers *before* migration, they did not discuss an attempt to repair relationships with the abuser. For those who experienced abuse after migration, repairing relationships with abusive parents was an attempt to ensure their safety and buttress negative emotions from the traumatic life experiences. I am not suggesting DREAMers believed their parents' behavior toward them was justified. Instead, this narrative strategy was a way for them to make sense of *why* this happened to them and contextualize their trauma as part of intergenerational exposure to abuse. Thus, narratives of IPV and child abuse became a part of what it means to be undocumented. In viewing their abuse as a part of a larger cycle of intergenerational violence, undocumented youth were able to maintain a relationship with an abusive parent with whom they identified. By working to repair relationships with abusive parents and in reflecting upon intergenerational trauma, undocumented youth created personal identities of strength and resilience in the face of traumatic experiences.

NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE IN THE CREATION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

Thus far I have shown how narratives of violence create personal identities of strength and connect undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants to their parents through experiences with intergenerational trauma. Narratives of violence also create gendered collective identities of what it means to be an undocumented woman or an undocumented man in the U.S. Additionally, undocumented youth used these narratives as boundary work in the creation of an identity as a 1.5-generation immigrant. In this section, I detail how my participants used narratives of violence and trauma to create collective identities.

Beginning with David's account of his mother's abuse, this narrative reveals that abuse results in a different set of circumstances for undocumented women as compared to undocumented men:

My mom's always just done it on her own. What it means to be an undocumented woman, it's very hard. You have to be a nurturer, you have to be strong, you have to be a fighter, and all amongst the violence and the threat of violence that's hung over your head. It's a huge responsibility. Not to bash on men altogether, but men in my life have not exactly been accountable, period. My dad, no one ever told him he needed to take care of us.

Coupled with Carlos' earlier discussion of violence as "normal" in the lives of undocumented women, the compounding marginalization of being a poor, undocumented, woman creates additional pressures for undocumented women. Through risk of and exposure to violence, undocumented women become strong. The young women in this study connected their experiences with IPV and child abuse to the experiences of their mothers and other abused women. They used these narratives to create gendered identities as strong, empowered women who are survivors of violence (Crossley 2000). While narratives of strength can create positive identities,⁷¹ they also may normalize the violence women experience throughout their lives. However, undocumented youth took a strong stance against intimate partner violence and child abuse in their individual accounts. In particular, undocumented young men constructed themselves as a "different kind of man" than their fathers or other abusive men in the community because they had not perpetuated violence. Undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants emphasized that men and women are equals and that they believe that increased gender equality between undocumented men and women in the U.S. will help end the problems with IPV and child abuse in the community. In this way, undocumented youth used narratives of violence to create gendered identities.

⁷¹ In Chapter Five I detailed how undocumented youth use narratives of struggle to create personal and collective identities as strong and resilient.

Undocumented students told narratives of their experiences with violence and opposition to violence to create gendered identities that they believe are distinct to the 1.5-generation. I interviewed José and Jessica, two RIC-affiliated organizers, at a local coffee shop. During the interview, the two discussed their ideas about gender roles, violence, and the unique viewpoint of the 1.5-generation. Speaking about the first generation, José talked about how older undocumented men sometimes did not want their wives to work, but he believes things are changing. Jessica chimed in and added: “I think this could also be because of the culture, right? I think that now, like, the youth are just totally changing that!” I asked her how and the exchange between Jessica, José, and I continued:

Jessica: It’s no longer about men being better than women, it’s no longer about men having to just work and women being at home. Women work, women work hard, they go to school. And men do the same thing! It’s about wanting to be better for yourself and not just better than each other. I think this idea or this sigma that the culture is about men working hard and being in control and women staying at home, it’s breaking because of the youth.

José: Yes!

NL: You think so too?

José: Oh yeah! I think it’s because of the youth. I say a lot; our parents did their job, it’s up to us to do the remaining of it. I think that’s exactly what we’re doing; we’re moving forward to say that we don’t think it’s OK.

By talking openly about the violence they experienced and taking a firm stance against violence and traditional gender roles, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants situated themselves as distinct from older generations. By narrating their thoughts on gender roles and family, they positioned themselves as being more assimilated than their parents and thus as deserving legal, social, and cultural inclusion. In this way, their different orientation toward family violence and traditional gender roles became a means not only of constructing themselves as empowered and culturally American but another mechanism through which they created

collective identities. However, much like the analysis of public narratives in Chapter Three, this narrative also risks stigmatizing their parents. Youth described their parents as having more traditional, patriarchal values and as less acculturated into the cultural norms of the U.S. As a result, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants did not express these views in public narratives. In interviews, however, youth could discuss the differences between themselves and the first generation without the fear of further stigmatizing their parents or deviating from the DREAMer narrative.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I detailed silences surrounding IPV and child abuse in the undocumented student movement and the emergence of these narratives in interviews. Child abuse and IPV are under-reported crimes in the United States (Gracia 2004). Many undocumented immigrants are distrustful of police and other reporting systems that make them vulnerable to deportation (Abraham 2000). The combination of these two social realities left limited space for discussing violence publicly. In rare public narratives of violence, undocumented youth described their mothers fleeing violent men for haven in the U.S. While predominately white, non-immigrant audiences were amenable to this narrative, it could entrench imperialistic, racialized, and gendered narratives about dangerous, criminal brown men who must be kept out of the U.S. at all costs (Chavez 2008). Public narratives of violence are therefore rarely told because they could harm efforts for immigration reform and activate stereotypes that undocumented men are a criminal threat. For this reason, public narratives emphasized violence that occurred before migration and silenced violence post-migration (i.e., in the U.S.). Post-migratory narratives of violence could not be used in the push for immigration reform, because they detailed violence committed by undocumented immigrants living in the United States. To tell these narratives

publicly would be to put themselves, their families, and their communities at risk of further criminalization.

American societal norms silence conversations around IPV and child abuse (Gracia 2004). The marginalized positionality of undocumented immigrant Latinas further led to the silence around family violence (Zadnik, Sabina, and Cuevas 2014). Finally, the broader immigrant rights movement avoided public discussions of family violence in the DREAMer narrative. By creating boundaries around which narratives of violence could be told, undocumented youth and the larger undocumented community maintained harmful cultural silences that can perpetuate conditions under which undocumented women and children experience victimization. As a result, family violence remains a hidden narrative in the DREAMer movement. Undocumented youth understood that in exchange for the promise of immigration reform, specific narratives such as family violence, could not be told. Rather than situating violence within broader social structures, activists silenced narratives that did not help the movements' goals.

Interviews provided a context for undocumented youth to share narratives of their victimization, begin to process what had happened to them, and use trauma narratives to develop positive personal and collective identities. Although the DREAMer narrative has undoubtedly influenced my respondents (as discussed in Chapter Four), in the interview setting, they distinguished themselves from the public discourse by discussing violence and victimization at length. In this way, one-on-one interviews were crucial in providing a space for people to discuss issues that are often publicly silenced. Recounting trauma narratives in interviews created personal, familial, and collective identities for undocumented youth around gender, violence, and generational similarities and differences. For young women, narrating their experiences with

violence created a connection to their mothers who experienced similar conditions. Additionally, it created identities as strong women overcoming the threats of violence and male coercion. For young men, narratives of violence were used to construct themselves as a different kind of man, one who did not use violence. Narratives of abusive fathers in their countries of origin justified severing ties with their abusers. By contrast, undocumented youth used narratives of post-migratory family violence to maintain relationships with their parents by understanding violence as inter-generational. While this had positive impacts on their identity work, it created pressure for undocumented youth to “break the cycle” and forgive their parents. Finally, by constructing the 1.5-generation as rejecting violent behavior and traditional gender roles, they carved out space for themselves as assimilating to more progressive U.S. gender roles and distinguished the experiences of the 1.5-generation from that of the first generation.

Undocumented youth shared narratives of violence and trauma to construct identities around gender, culture, and generation. However, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants were still bound by hegemonic cultural silences and internalization of intergenerational trauma in ways that limited what they said in different settings. Undocumented youth in this study pointed to the importance of the student movement in shaping their identities and providing a “safe place” for them (discussed in Chapter Three). Nevertheless, the student movement has remained mostly silent on issues of family violence, to the detriment of participants. Immigrant rights organizations need to work toward openly discussing these issues in their public narratives by creating a dialogue about violence and trauma within organizations.

Finally, on a methodological note, it was only through analyzing multiple sites of narrative construction that I began to understand what things were or were not said in different contexts. Scholars studying cultural silences and inequality would benefit from utilizing multiple

sources of data to identify and theorize about the role of hidden narratives in maintaining social inequality (Murray and Lambert forthcoming). Without multiple sources of data (in this case, participant observation, observation, and interviews) silenced narratives remain invisible, and research may, therefore, perpetuate the inequalities we hope to deconstruct.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Throughout this work, I have explored how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants use narratives as a mechanism to understand their complex experiences with illegality, to construct their identities, and as a tactic in social movement activism. Undocumented youth channeled their markers of assimilation (for example, English fluency and experiences in the U.S. education system) into successful social movement activism. While their activist strategies garnered public support for the DREAMer movement, their narratives inadvertently perpetuated stereotypes, obscured intra-group inequalities, and silenced experiences with violence and trauma.

The previous substantive chapters detailed several findings. In Chapter Three, I explored how the DREAMer narrative, which emphasizes DREAMers' "innocence" in the migration decision and markers of American-ness, was taught to undocumented youth by more seasoned activists. Talking about and presenting their lives in a way that was consistent with this narrative was a successful mechanism for social change and the creation of collective "DREAMer" identities. However, there were also negative impacts of having to fit their lived experiences into this prescribed discourse. Namely, their narrative strategies silenced experiences, such as violence or poor academic achievement, that did not meet the standards of the DREAMer narrative. Moreover, undocumented youth (especially young men) had to carefully control their presentation of self to placate non-immigrant, Anglo audiences, and engage in strategies which inadvertently framed their parents as culpable (and thus criminal) in the migration decision. Undocumented youth were well aware of the shortcomings of the DREAMer narrative and worked to transcend this narrative in their individual accounts; however, their public narratives reproduced this discourse. In Chapter Four, I expanded upon my analysis of public narrative

strategies by exploring how undocumented youth performed the DREAMer narrative through theater. In the productions of *Do You Know Who I Am?* and *¿Sabes Quién Soy?*, the performers used scripted narratives to politicize social movement goals, create personal and collective identities through emotion work on the self, and deploy their emotions to connect with diverse audiences. In the English version of the play, the undocumented performers educated non-immigrant, Anglo audiences about the experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants and challenged nativist cultural rhetoric of immigrant criminality. In the Spanish-language version, the performers used language to create and sustain collective identities through shared emotional narratives with a co-ethnic, immigrant audience. Although both versions of the play reproduced hegemonic discourses about “deserving” and “undeserving” immigrants to varying degrees, the theatrical context enabled the five undocumented youth to connect emotionally with their narratives and to their community in a way other protest strategies could not. The performers could enact emotions that were unacceptable in other activist contexts, although their interactions with Anglo, non-immigrant audience members remained constrained by dominant cultural scripts. Ultimately, the performances demonstrated the centrality of emotions to narrative, identity, and social movements.

In Chapter Five, I moved from analyzing participant observation and observation data to an analysis of interview data that showed how undocumented youth used narratives of struggle to construct positive personal identities in emerging adulthood. Narratives of struggle, a vital element of the national DREAMer narrative, created positive identities for undocumented young adults and countered dominant narratives that immigrants are lazy, unassimilable, and a threat to American society. However, narratives of being the “right kind” of immigrant created additional barriers for mobilizing the most marginalized undocumented youth in the community, who are

not “high achievers.” Finally, this chapter revealed that undocumented youth simultaneously emphasized and minimized their struggles to connect with and uplift the stories of their parents. This narrative strategy helped to resolve identity dilemmas that resulted from marginalizing their parents in the public DREAMer discourse. However, it also made it difficult for undocumented youth to process and fully express negative emotions about their own lived experiences.

In the final data chapter, I discussed a *hidden narrative* in the experiences of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants that related to family violence and trauma. Undocumented youth publicly silenced most narratives of family violence to avoid reproducing stereotypes about dangerous Latino men and harming immigration reform efforts. By silencing narratives of family violence, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants and the broader immigrant community maintained harmful cultural silences that can perpetuate gendered inequality and violence in immigrant families. Undocumented youth used the interview context to push back against these cultural silences. Recounting and making family violence visible in interviews created personal, familial, and collective identities for undocumented youth around gender, violence, culture, and generation.

Taken together, the previous chapters detail the nuanced ways that people construct narratives about their lives and how these narratives both undermine and reproduce broader social inequalities. I used a combination of qualitative data sources (interviews, participant observation, and observation) to detail the political and cultural conditions under which undocumented youth are taught to tell their narratives and the implications of their narrative strategies. A strength of qualitative research is that it enables a rich description of how particular contexts influence the research findings. Colorado is an important and unique context to study undocumented student activists. Existing studies of the DREAMer movement focus primarily on

Los Angeles and Chicago (e.g., Ábrego 2011; Gonazles 2016; Nicholls 2013; Pallares and Flores-González 2010; Swerts 2017). However, Colorado politics are less progressive and activists needed to tailor their narratives to appease liberal and conservative politicians and voters in ways that are likely distinct from the Los Angeles and Chicago contexts (Burciaga and Martinez 2017). Additionally, the fluctuating political landscape in Colorado, described in Chapter Two, provided my participants with a unique opportunity to impact the political discourse. For example, during this research, U.S. Senator Cory Gardner went from opposing any immigration policies that would benefit undocumented youth to being a co-sponsor of the 2017 version of the DREAM Act. While Gardner campaigned on a strong anti-immigrant platform, years of pressure from undocumented youth activists influenced him to change his stance on the DREAM Act.

The Colorado political and cultural context also limits activists in numerous ways. Even as undocumented youth in Colorado criticized the DREAMer narrative in their individual accounts, their public narratives largely conformed to the dominant narrative to appease conservative politicians and voters. By contrast, activists in more progressive political landscapes engaged in more radical rhetoric and protests. For example, Amalia Pallares (2015) argues that Chicago-area immigrant rights activists have distanced themselves from the DREAMer narrative and started to develop new narrative strategies that are inclusive of the first generation. Influenced by the National Immigrant Youth Project (NIYA), Chicago activists developed progressive rhetoric and utilized direct action⁷² more frequently compared to UWD-affiliated youth organizations like those in Colorado. Additionally, while Angeleno and Chicago-

⁷² For example, NIYA-affiliated youth staged sit-ins at Congressional offices, infiltrated ICE detention centers in Michigan, and re-entered the U.S. without authorization to force the Obama administration to either deport them or give them a stay on deportation (Planas 2013). NIYA is no longer an active organization; however, their tactics were extremely influential on Chicago-area DREAMer youth.

area activists have access to established, influential social movement networks, the Denver-metro area is surrounded by conservative, more rural areas with few resources or political allies. Thus, activists need to work harder to create political connections, and likely lack the same institutional resources as other activist groups. In this context, utilizing strategies that emphasize their American-ness, academic achievement, and belief in the “American Dream” are necessary to create political opportunities. However, my findings showed that discourses such as these could also hinder broader efforts at immigration reform because they reproduce narratives of “good” and “bad” immigrants. Therefore, my research provides some initial insights into the political opportunities and restrictions associated with activism in “purple” states.

SOCIOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Sociological scholarship frequently analyzes persistent structural, cultural, and inter-personal inequality. Broadly speaking, my research contributes to the scholarly analysis of how individuals reproduce and challenge social inequality. In particular, my research contributes to sociological studies of illegality, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, narrative and identity, and social movements.

In this dissertation, I identified cultural spaces where undocumented youth challenged exploitative conditions. Illegality renders many undocumented immigrants invisible (Coutin 2006). First generation immigrants experience illegality primarily through cultural exclusion, exploitative labor conditions, and fears of deportation (De Genova 2002, 2004; Heimstra 2010). By contrast, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants, like those in this study, are less likely to be stereotyped as “foreign” and are more actively engaged in political activism (Ábrego 2006; Nicholls 2013). While illegality undoubtedly restricted the lives of *all* undocumented immigrants, undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants’ success in countering narratives of

immigrant criminality demonstrates how oppressive structures impact marginalized groups, but how they are also able to influence these structures to varying degrees.

Secondly, my research contributes to better understanding the experiences and identities of undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants. Similar to other scholars (Ábrego 2011; Gonzales 2016; Gonzales and Chavez 2012; Négron-Gonzales 2013; Pérez 2009), I identified how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants struggled against blocked educational opportunities and racist stereotypes. The DREAMer movement has been successful in gaining widespread support for policies benefitting the 1.5-generation and constructing a coherent movement narrative that resonated with many Americans (Nicholls 2013; Swerts 2017). However, as I have shown, movement success can also come at the cost of reproducing intra-group hierarchies and maintaining cultural silences around family violence and trauma. To my knowledge, my research is the first academic study to analyze such violence among undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants. Experience with violence played an important role in defining how my participants understood their lives in the United States as well as their relationships with the broader undocumented immigrant community.

Finally, my research demonstrated how undocumented youth could use narratives of their experiences to create personal and collective identities. In particular, I identified how more established movement participants taught new activists how to construct narratives about their lives. These findings provide insight into how social movements create a collective identity behind the scenes and then deploy it as a tactic for social change. This is a collective process wherein people are taught what to say, what not to say, and how to use emotional appeals to promote a movements' goals. Social movement scholars scarcely acknowledge the role of emotions and emotional displays in the creation of movement narratives and collective identity

(Jasper 1998; Polletta and Jasper 2001). This is unfortunate as my findings strongly suggest that DREAMer activists' political achievements are based not only on constructing a culturally-relevant, coherent narrative, which existing scholarship stresses as the most important marker of success (Benford and Snow 2000) but on making emotional appeals to different audiences and creating emotional connections between movement participants.

Taken as a whole, my research offers new information into our understanding of how undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants' identities and experiences are complicated by illegality, belonging, and social movement participation. While I cannot claim substantive generalizability, my research is analytically generalizable (see Yin 2003). In other words, my analysis may apply to other settings where marginalized groups attempt to assert positive identities in the face of social, cultural, and political exclusion (Ezzell 2008).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Throughout the research process, I uncovered more questions than I had time to answer. For example, I wished I would have asked all of my participants questions about trauma and mental health, as these were unanticipated issues that arose in the field. In addition, I would have liked to interview additional participants after the 2016 Presidential election, as the political climate around immigration has changed considerably.

Roberto Gonzales (2016) emphasized the danger of having a "single story" related to immigration, and he deliberately sampled to include "early-exiters" (many of whom exited the education system before high school graduation) and "college-goers" (those who had attended college). In my sample, only two participants had not attended any college. That said, instead of seeing my research as representing a "single story," I show how experiences and narrative strategies varied *within* "college-goers." As I demonstrated throughout the dissertation,

undocumented college students face unique challenges and their experiences, voices, and aspirations are an essential part of the broader conversation surrounding undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants. Nevertheless, I did not interview significant numbers of undocumented youth who were not involved with a social movement organization. Although I did not identify any apparent differences in narrative strategies and experiences with illegality among movement participants and non-movement participants in my study, that may be an important story to tell. Future research should include a comparison between movement participants and non-participants to assess the degree to which the DREAMer narrative impacts the lives of undocumented youth.

Furthermore, I only interviewed undocumented youth located in and around a single metropolitan area in one state. While I previously detailed the benefits of understanding how a specific geographic location shapes personal and collective narratives, there are drawbacks to this approach as well. Since I only interviewed activists in one particular political context, I could not analyze how narrative strategies, experiences, and identities were shaped differently in rural versus urban contexts or across states with diverse political landscapes. Future research would benefit from comparing narrative strategies in diverse geographic locations. In a rare multi-site analysis of DREAMer activists in Colorado, Los Angeles, and Atlanta, Burciaga and Martinez (2017) argue that political context is critical in shaping movement tactics and rhetoric. More research of this type is needed. A final study limitation is that most of the undocumented immigrants I interviewed were of Mexican-origin. Therefore, my findings cannot speak to the experiences of non-Mexican undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants. In particular, experiences of Asian and African undocumented immigrants remain understudied. Although I

believe I have worked to de-homogenize characterizations of the undocumented 1.5-generation immigrant experience, additional research is necessary.

As mentioned throughout the dissertation, I did not enter the field expecting to address issues of violence, trauma, and mental health. I struggled with how best to present and analyze these narratives. Had I asked questions specifically about these topics, I perhaps could have addressed them more thoroughly in my research. I hope that this study is the first of many where scholars think about, ask about, and analyze these experiences. At the end of our interview, I asked Cristina if there was anything else she wanted to address that I had not asked her about in the research interview. She reflected:

Immigrant mental health. I mean God! Just me having to go back [to Peru while she awaited a Visa], I went through like bad anxiety, bad depression that stuck with me even now. I see what my mom goes through and I'm like, my mom is not the only person suffering from this stuff. And I think what one of the worst things is that in a lot of these countries where the immigrants are coming from, there's a lot of stigma against mental health. So I would like to see more things opening up to break that down and just showing people that you need help, you've been through a lot, you need to talk to someone or whatever. It's like I said, it's an issue I haven't seen explored too much, and it's an issue I would like to see talked about.

Because I did not have enough data to adequately address this point (only five participants disclosed mental health issues), I chose not to explore this issue in the dissertation. Illegality, blocked opportunities, and experiences with family violence undoubtedly impact mental health and emotional well-being among undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants. Much like discussions of family violence, the broader DREAMer movement rarely discussed mental health to the disservice of creating larger cultural conversations about mental health and undocumented youth. However, the organizational silence surrounding mental health could be weakening. Earlier this year, a UWD student leader tweeted:

To the undocumented immigrant contemplating suicide, I've been in your shoes. I remember wanting to take my life at 17 because I felt alone, scared, [and] my life was filled with uncertainty. Here I am 9 years later at 26. You deserve to dream, but most importantly you deserve to live.

Hopefully, having leaders of national DREAMer organizations speak openly about mental health will inspire other undocumented youth to speak out. Additionally, researchers need to be mindful of potential mental health and traumatic experiences when they study undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants and start collecting data on these experiences. In the current political climate, I worry that the movement will once again silence these issues. On June 11, 2018, the Trump administration announced that the United States would no longer offer asylum to foreign victims of intimate partner violence. While undocumented youth pushed themselves to the edges of the mainstream during the Obama administration, I fear that anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy will drive them back into the shadows.

I finished data collection in the early months of the Trump administration. The six final interviewees all expressed outrage, sadness, and fear over what the possible negative impacts of the election could be for undocumented 1.5-generation immigrants and the broader immigrant community. Ivan, who arrived to the U.S. from El Salvador when he was five years old, recounted:

Once I found out that he won, there was just a sinking feeling. I was ready just to give up, honestly. I was ready to cry. I've never felt this before, a dreading fear of what's going to happen to my life. I have no clue what's going to happen. Sure, I had this planned out. I was going to go to vet school and all this. It was already planned out, but once he was elected president, all that went away.

Ivan was afraid that the educational gains he had made due to the DACA program were in danger of being taken away. Similarly, Jasmin expressed fears that President Trump would rescind the DACA program:

If he were to take DACA away...if he were to do that, that's it. How am I going to work to pay for college? My dreams would...if they're hard now, I can't imagine it with that taken away. That's my life. It's my life. Those are my dreams. That's going to be taken away from me. That's what I saw when he got elected. Those are my dreams. That is my life on the line.

Jasmin was in her first year of college and could only afford to attend because of her DACA work permit. She explained that she had been experiencing anxiety since the election and worried she would not be able to finish college. Similarly, Karla said that she was “devastated and just shocked” after the election. She was dismayed that: “he [President Trump could] take away DACA and this is something we all really rely on.” Having grown-up feeling culturally American, undocumented youth expressed feelings of betrayal and disbelief that Americans voted for President Trump. They worried about losing the gains the undocumented student movement made during the Obama administration. Their fears were not unfounded. As detailed in Chapter One, the Trump administration ended the DACA program in September 2017, leaving undocumented youth uncertain about their futures in the U.S. Despite broader fears about the future of immigration policy, the on-going political turmoil may galvanize the DREAMer movement to push harder for immigration reform. As Ivette remarked: “When it [the election] first happened, I cried. And then, I felt really empowered, like: ‘Okay, we have to do something about it!’”

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Social movement activists make various choices in times of decreased political opportunity (McAdam 1994; Taylor 1989). Although activists are rightly concerned with how far the Trump administration will go in keeping its promises to deport all undocumented immigrants and build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border,⁷³ unique opportunities for social movement activism exist in unfriendly political climates. While existing scholarship suggests that periods of

⁷³ President Trump made these promises while on the campaign trail.

political discontent are *not* the best time for advancing movement agendas, I disagree. Political opponents made it clear they were unwilling to pass immigration reform legislation. Thus, efforts to pass immigration reform have stalled until political opportunities shift. While possibilities for *structural* change are limited, possibilities for *cultural* change abound. Public outcry after the rescinding of the DACA program and images of children sobbing as they were ripped from their parents' arms at the Southern border suggests that the discursive climate is open for creating new, inclusive, more radical discourses regarding immigration. Rather than moderating their language in an attempt to appease politicians who will not budge on immigration reform, the immigrant rights movement should utilize pro-DREAMer sentiment to push for demands that they would not otherwise make. I am not suggesting that these demands will be met (they most certainly will not); however, activists can influence public discourse in a progressive direction in anticipation of political opportunities to come. When the political dynamic changes in the future, they will be starting negotiations closer to their original goals, rather than back-peddling to appease anti-immigrant politicians.

Finally, scholars must now, perhaps more so than in the past, address painful and stigmatizing topics in our research. Although it is tempting to write-off people's description of their lived experiences as "just stories," narratives are one of the few sense-making and strategic tools marginalized groups can deploy in periods of constrained political opportunities. Scholars need to take seriously the narratives people use to speak about their lives and further analyze how narrative strategies maintain and deconstruct hegemonic cultural discourses. Likewise, researchers would benefit from self-reflection on whether or not our scholarship perpetuates the inequalities we hope to deconstruct by maintaining hegemonic cultural silences (Murray and

Lambert forthcoming). In an era of “alternative facts,” robust, rigorous scholarship on the intricacies and impacts of social inequality are needed now more than ever.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic and Background Information:

- Where were you born?
- How old are you?
- Are you in school?
 - o Probe: Where do you go to school? Do you go full-time or part-time? What classes? What is your major?
- Are you currently working?
 - o Probe: Where do you work? About how many hours per week do you work?
- Describe your family for me
 - o Probe based on whom they mention, what they say...
- Do your parents work? What do they do?
 - o Do they ever talk to you about their job? What do they say?
- What did they do in Mexico/Country Name?
- Do you know the highest grade of school your parents completed?

Immigration History:

- How old were you when you came to the U.S.? With whom did you migrate?
- Ask if they have any memories of living in Mexico/Country Name and, *if yes*:
 - o Would you tell me your best memory of living in Mexico/Country Name?
 - o What about your worst?

If no:

- Have your parents/older siblings if applicable told you any stories about living in Mexico/Country Name? Could you tell me a story that stood out to you the most?

Ask if they have any memories of migrating. *If yes:*

- Could you tell me about what you remember from your migration to the U.S.?
 - Probe any feelings/stories/etc...

If no:

- Did your parents/brothers/sisters/whomever they migrated with ever talk to you about that? What did they say?

Immigration Experiences in the US:

- How do you feel about living in the U.S.?
 - o Probe for good/bad experiences (ask for a specific time!)
- When did you first learn about your immigration status? Could you tell me more about how you reacted?
 - o Probe based on who told them, under what circumstances, etc....
- What does being undocumented mean to you?
 - o Can you give me an example of an experience in your daily life where you feel that being undocumented makes a difference?
 - o Have you always felt this way or have you ever felt differently? *If differently*, what was going on then?
 - o How is your experience different than a man or woman?

If time permits:

- Have you ever talked about immigration issues with any members of your family? If so, can you tell me about a time when you discussed immigration issues with your family?
- Can you tell me about a time when you heard American citizens talking about immigrants?
 - o How did that make you feel?
 - o How about a time that you heard Mexicans talking about Americans, how did that make you feel?

National and Race/Ethnic Identities:

I want to talk now a little bit more about how you think about different aspects of yourself

- If someone asked you “Where are you from?” How would/do you answer?
 - o Why do you answer that way?
 - o Have they always felt this way? What has changed?
- Do others treat you like an American or an immigrant?
 - o What makes you say that? Specific conversations?

Movement Activism (if involved):

- When did you first hear about the organization/movement?
 - o What motivated you to become a part of this organization?
- What do you think it’s like for a man OR woman in the movement?
- A major part of involvement in the movement is telling others your stories. How did you learn how to tell your stories?
 - o How do you choose what to talk about? *Probe about different settings!*
- What is going on inside of your head as you are telling your story? What do you think about?
 - o What are you trying to accomplish?
- What stories *don’t* you tell? Or *wish* you could tell?
 - o Why don’t you tell them? What holds you back?
- Do you ever talk to your parents about your involvement with organization?
 - o Can you tell me about a time that your parents talked to you about your involvement? What was their reaction?
 - o Have they ever expressed worry/concern about your involvement? If so, can you tell me about that conversation?

If time permits:

- Has involvement in the movement had any impacts on your life?
 - o Probe based on what they say—positive, negative, ask for specific examples to get a story of a time something happened.
- Is there anything you think differently about now that you are involved?
 - o Could you talk to me about how you thought about it before? What changed your mind?
 - o Has how you thought about yourself/your identity changed since you have been involved?

Performance (if involved):

- What made you want to do the theater project?

- All the actors talk about different things throughout the play- how did you decide what you wanted to talk about?
 - o Were there any stories that you were going to tell, but took out? Could you tell me why you took them out?
- What has been the most rewarding part of doing the play? The most challenging?
- Have your family members come to see it? If yes, what were their reactions?