"*And I want to continue helping undocumented students like myself*": A qualitative case study of three non-status students in their encounters with higher education

by

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Abstract

I examine the beliefs of first generation immigrant students in their lived experience in accessing higher education while in situations of precarious immigration status with an emphasis on the dialogic intercultural possibilities afforded by a journey *to* and *through* university studies. I aim to raise awareness about undocumented students' evolving visions of identity and how their personhood interacts with discourses surrounding students' own efforts to widen their participation in higher education (Yosso, 2005). Participants attest that they see themselves, and arguably are, United States citizens in every aspect but on paper. A major emerging theme is the diverse ways these participants, also known as Dreamers, frame their identity as a collective effort to harmonize the integration of immigrant-origin youth into the contested spaces of belonging and exclusion constituted by higher education and join the fabric of urban and multicultural contexts in the Greater Los Angeles area.

Résumé

En mettant l'accent sur les possibilités du dialogisme interculturel offert par leur parcours vers et à travers les études postsecondaires, cette étude propose une analyse des croyances des étudiants d'origine immigrante vis-à-vis leur rencontre avec les études de première cycle lors de leur expérience d'un statut d'immigration précaire. Cette exploration du vécu des étudiants vise à rendre compte de l'évolution de leur identité ainsi que de la façon dont l'expression de leur identité s'engage avec les discours autour des efforts que ces mêmes étudiants mènent en faveur d'une participation plus élargie aux études postsecondaires (Yosso, 2005). Parmi les thèmes clefs émerge celui de la construction de la propre identité comme ressource harmonisateur qui, partagé, cherche à promouvoir l'intégration des jeunes vivant une situation d'immigration précaire au sein de la société multiculturelle, multilingue et urbaine constituée par le grand Los Angeles en Californie du Sud.

Terms

Dreamers

The noun Dreamers derives from a bill of law known as the DREAM Act, which sought to bring immigration relief to undocumented immigrants brought into the United States as children (Batalova & McHugh, 2010; Olivas, 2004; Palacios, 2010). Dreamers declare they are American because of their personal and cultural evolution in the United States. The DREAM Act has existed since 2001 as a federal immigration relief project but has met with strong opposition in the United States Congress. Dreamers are mentioned in a historic comprehensive overhaul passed by the U.S. Senate in 2013. That Senate bill now languishes in the House of Representatives. Republican leaders have not brought up the bill to a vote because they prefer separate bills to comprehensive immigration reform. Instead, the Republican House has created a number of separate amendments, preferring them to comprehensive immigration reform. My use of the word Dreamer in this thesis includes everyone brought as a minor into the US.

DREAM Act or DREAM-Act eligible student

The terms DREAM-Act eligible or DREAM-Act students appear regularly in peer-reviewed articles dealing with this multicultural population in higher education (Perez, 2012). Within the larger academic focus on the education of underserved populations in higher education, similar terms like non-status students have also been used to include both undocumented and asylum-seeking students. These terms have served to group the experience of students who, in addition to encountering the usual challenges met at university, also face reduced access because they hold no legal status in the United States. I extend the definition of Dreamers to those over 30 years of age. For the context of this study and the participants

interviewed, I use the word “student” to signify those Dreamers who are enrolled at university, have been once matriculated, or wish to do so in the future. I use this definition of student and Dreamer to challenge the discourses of exclusion that have limited access to university studies to the contingent addressed in this study. My use of the word student in secondary data, e.g. census figures,peer-reviewed journals, refers to the notions of students in a strict sense.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Rationale and focus of this study

Upon completing secondary studies in the United States, thousands of undocumented children throughout the US discover that they could be precluded from matriculating at university by state-wide legislation in states like Arizona or Alabama, or that they have little or no recourse to financial aid or scholarships (Olivas, 2008, 2009; Oliverez, 2006; Rincon, 2005; Supiano, 2010). Although the Supreme Court of the United States ruled, in Plyler v. Doe (1982), that minor children in precarious immigration situations, whether asylum-seeking or undocumented, were guaranteed access to compulsory education, the high court left unresolved the question of university access for undocumented minor entrants (Kaplin & Lee, 2006). In 2010, the U.S. Congress brought forth and turned down the DREAM Act, a comprehensive legalization measure for these youth, of whom 65,000 graduate annually from high school (Passel, 2005a, 2005b). The DREAM Act would have granted legal status to a large and vulnerable sector of the U.S. immigrant origin population. While Dreamers have varied socio-economic profiles, studies reveal that they perceive financial resources as the major obstacle to their university project (Díaz-Strong *et al*., 2011).

Given the great hardships youth experience, U.S. universities face a crucial challenge to their core mission, one with consequences for the sustainability of a knowledge society and for the engagement with their social responsibilities. Indeed, universities strive to fulfil their visions of social accountability to the communities in which they operate. The key question is how universities should mediate and respond to the encounters between immigrant origin

undocumented students and the university as an institution in a context of respect for the human rights of the individual.

The best answer may come from those directly concerned, youth who are their best advocates for full access to higher education, including loans, and scholarships (Martinez-Calderon, 2009; Moe, 1981). Dreamers advocate for comprehensive immigration reform that provides relief to Dreamers, to their families, and to those populations that struggle under the threat of forced removals after having built rich and meaningful lives in the United States (Olson, 1965). Dreamers have engaged in activisms that show a deep understanding of the political processes that must be set in motion to create change. José Antonio Vargas or Lulú Martínez, for instance, have stated in diverse media outlets that they consider themselves American and stressed that for most Dreamers the United States is the country they know best. José Antonio Vargas, asked by Chang (2012) about the evolution and direction of the Dreamer movement, illustrates the maturity reached by the Dreamers movement through a brief tautology, “We are American because we are”. My task here is to unravel that statement by unpacking the construction of this identity and examine how these understandings play into Dreamers’ conceptions of their participation in higher education and how they include identity and their experience of higher education into their integration to mainstream society (Dewey, 1954; Hall, 1996, 2003; Paxton, 2002; Portes, 1998; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001).

The DREAM Act (2010) would have granted citizenship to Dreamers under 29 years of age, but was rejected by the United States Senate. Proponents and supporters will reintroduce the bill for reconsideration. In 2013, key provisions of the DREAM Act (2010) are part of an immigration overhaul advanced by a bipartisan coalition of senators who, witnessing an

upsurge of support for Dreamers and a slightly more benign view of undocumented immigrants by American voters, advocated for changes in immigration law (Knoke, 1990). Republicans will not allow a vote on bipartisan Senate Bill S. 744 (2013), known as The Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013, citing fundamental philosophical differences with the sentiments and policies proposed there. Senate Bill S. 744 (2013) would provide immigration relief for Dreamers and offer a path for legalization for nearly 11 million people.

Dreamers have yet to be lawfully admitted into the mainstream institutions of the United States. Immigration reform should, ideally, pass in 2014 and offer immigration relief to Xavier, Jesús, and Diego, the three Dreamers I interviewed in my study. They exhibit a strong commitment to the United States and think of themselves as American. The United States is for Dreamers the country where they have forged strongest links to community and loved ones, raised children, and seen their varied involvements become richer and denser after many years spent in a country whose citizenship they claim. The Dreamers I interviewed consider the United States their country, their last port of call, their permanent home, their experiential home of Ur they have both imagined and constructed, and the realms of their lived geographies where they intend to deploy their agencies and realize their dreams. Countless Dreamers attest that they recognize themselves as United States citizens in every aspect.

I aim to present the lived experiences of three Dreamers in their encounters with higher education as undocumented immigrants and how that lived experience has helped construct their *iterations*—in its Latinate etymological sense of repetition, affirmation, performance and rehearsal—of their identities as Americans. One of my goals is to unravel how three Dreamers

have integrated their encounters with higher education, while undocumented, into their conception of their identity as Americans. American society and individual Americans face the vexing choice of enforcing immigration laws in adherence to the letter of the law and balancing the law's intent with the plight faced by immigrants whose agency did not initiate their presence within the jurisdiction of American law (Perez, 2012).

Positioning in relation to research

The issue of undocumented students pursuing higher education has touched the Hispanic community in California and elsewhere in the US rather poignantly (Perez, 2012). As a person of Hispanic descent who resided in California for several years, I have met young adults in California whose legal status precluded them from fulfilling their potential in US academe and in broader society (Mezirow, 1991). I witnessed how many youth and young adults around me, friends and family, acquaintances, colleagues from school, all faced the hardships of living and becoming educated to university level (Larson & Ovando, 2007). In this study, therefore, I focus my attention on the enduring plight of Dreamers and of adults over 29 who have not attained legal status despite many years of US residence in the landscapes offered by urban and semiurban Greater Los Angeles (Sassen, 2009). I examine in particular their journey to and through higher education through a set of preliminary guiding questions.

Research Questions and Themes

The questions I originally set out to explore in my research were:

1. How do immigrant-origin youth perceive issues of access to higher education, in terms of choice of post-secondary program and institution?

2. How do the perceptions of immigrant-origin youth on access to higher education inform moves to access higher education?

3. How do the perceptions of immigrant-origin youth regarding access to higher education relate to their notions of social justice and models of multicultural or intercultural interaction with dominant majorities?

Afer examining my data to answer these questions, I identified these emergent themes: (1) *Origin and destinations, (2) Being, belonging and becoming (3) Showing pride, (4) Fighting for a dream,* and *(5)* Claiming *their dream.* I arrived at these themes by encountering recurring metaphors in the transcripts and linking them to my initial questions. Transcripts reveal the transcendent voyage of discovery by these three Dreamers to reconcile their individual histories with their imagined futures in the United States.

Trajectories: Origins and destinations

In this study I focus my attention on the substance and tenor of the discourses and arguments these three Dreamers expressed to construct a language about their identities. The metaphor of a trajectory or 'journey' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) occurred frequently in our interviews. I have seen that identity in participants emerges partly from the social and geographical sites they inhabit. From that sense of self arises a specific set of aspirations and dispositions. In this work, therefore, I wish to explore how three Dreamers construct their

identities as Americans. I approach participants' life projects by examining their utterances in terms of spatial journeys and temporal progressions. These three Dreamers' multiple origins coincide with their struggles to arrive at a target set of destinations.

From fear to pride

Dreamers have mastered American unwritten codes, cultural and political practices for civic engagement, and the linguistic forms of one or more of the widely spoken languages in the United States. Dreamers still face, however, the possibility of forcible removal from the United States. They have transformed their fear of deportation by declaring their undocumented status proudly, borrowing liberally from strategies used in the 1960s civil right movements. Dreamers' goals have been to spur change and to construct language that fights exclusion and exposes pervasive inequalities (Pérez *et al.*, 2010; Seif, 2012).

The three Dreamers I interviewed have found that being undocumented is their most effective asset to achieve inclusion in higher education and in American society. Activism and public engagement by non-status youth in the late 1980s, for instance, coincided with a series of court decisions in California that targeted undocumented students for exclusion from higher education: *Leticia A. vs. the UC Regents, Bradford vs. the UC Regents,* and the 'Illegal' Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). These legislative antagonisms diminished access to higher education for Dreamers, but did not completely impede most Dreamers' progress towards their aspirations. Dreamers have achieved more than was expected from individuals in their circumstances and inspired civic engagements and activisms that continue to make a difference in the debate for greater access to immigration benefits for Dreamers and other immigrants (Redden, 2007). Organizations like *United We Dream* are a

major player in the advocacy for the rights for all immigrants and not just of Dreamers. Dreamers have joined efforts, supported each other, become more visible, and engaged with fellow Dreamers and allied organizations to affect a change in university admissions policies and in immigration relief.

Fighting for their dream

Crucial to this process of demystification of the Dreamer experience is the construction of counternarratives to combat nativist discourses about the presence of immigrants in the United States. The Dreamers interviewed for this study have directed their lives to transform beliefs about who they are and their actions. Xavier has, for example, done so by volunteering to tutor primary-aged school children whose lives he has touched forever; Diego's participation in public forums has made of him a seasoned activist in his early youth. Dreamers have wrought a new form of identity as Americans, through individual journeys and collective actions: theirs is an identity that obviates legal status to make an impact on fostering the incorporation of a blameless group of immigrants into mainstream American society. They advocate for immigration policies that are fairer to all immigrants. Dreamers would prefer that the more distressful aspects of their histories occur less frequently and see eventually those travails permanently banished from young people's lives in a better future.

Rationale for Study and Analysis

I hope that this inquiry can bring attention to this important issue in intercultural education and advocate for the creation of policies that promote excellence in university education and greater access to it for Dreamers (Araujo 2011; Pérez *et al*. 2010). My goal in this research is to contribute to the understanding of the educational beliefs of immigrant-origin

students who are, increasingly, an important segment of the American population and are critically underserved. In this work, I hope to open a space where these three Dreamers may have a chance to construct a narrative of their struggles to create an American identity, their fight to have access to the instruments for creating knowledge and to the transformative process that comes from engaging with one's histories, dreams, and aspirations.

Summary

In this chapter I introduced my focus on how Dreamers construct their identities as they encounter higher education and how they reconcile those understandings with their participation in mainstream society in the United States. I explained who Dreamers are and what repercussions my study might make to the study of the identity of undocumented students in higher education. My aim is to understand the beliefs Dreamers have about their identity as university students and their presence in the United States. I presented my research questions and identified recurrent themes like civic engagement, identity, and trajectory as experienced and encountered by Dreamers. In chapter two, I discuss relevant existing literature about Dreamers. I introduce the theoretical lenses I use to examine Dreamers' construction of identity and explicate how Dreamers' reconcile competing discourses about their presence inside and outside academia.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I present my theoretical framework and critically review relevant literature dealing with the concept of sociocultural identity in its intersection with the lived experiences of Dreamers. These are some of the questions that guide my discussion:

- How do three non-status immigrants self-identify, or construct their sociocultural identity when they prepare(d) to access and participate in higher education?
- How do their encounters with higher education as undocumented students shape their views of who they are and aim to become?
- What constructions of self are possible at the meeting point of their cultures of origin –those that bind Dreamers to ancestral geographical origins– and the cultures that they encounter in their new cultural geographies in an immigration receiving country like the United States?
- What are the implications of Dreamers' visions of their identities in a globalized, post-industrial and post-capitalist age?
- How have these three Dreamer participants exercised agency to foster a more harmonious integration into wider American society?
- How have Dreamers transformed their struggle against marginalization to march towards greater blending of non-majority populations into mainstream cultures?

Theoretical Framework & Research Paradigm

In this section, I discuss the theoretical framework I use in my analysis: social constructivism, cultural capital and community cultural wealth. I embrace social constructivism,

which views knowledge as constructed through social interactions in cultural, political, and economic contexts and historical moments. Within that epistemological perspective, the utterances of individuals regarding their life worlds are context-dependent and a product of shared encounters with similar lived experiences. What I call reality is a shared construct created through discourse and discursive practices. These discursive practices originate in individuals who in daily interactions are consumers and negotiators of competing social representations. These social representations, in the shape of beliefs about what is true and valuable, constitute an epistemic process in co-creating meanings. Thus, my alignment is with the post-modernist view of language as the primary source and metaphor for constructed reality. Participants express self-conceptions as an attempt to reproduce cultural artifacts, in the form of utterances. Through this dialogism, participants co-construct a vision of how their reality is constituted. Social constructivism assumes, further, that interlocutors construct their worlds with each other through a contextualized social process. These co-constructions of the world have implications for how we treat each other in our interactions and also define the realm of our actions to sustain or transform the world as we perceive it.

Cultural Capital and Community Cultural Wealth

Dreamers have needed to coalesce around their individual and collective agencies to contest alienating discourses that target immigrants and the undocumented. To explicate that process of resistance, I draw on the concept of community cultural wealth and aspirational capital (Araujo, 2011; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, Yosso, 2005). Dreamers' declarations of who they are take place against a background of forced migrations brought on by global forces operating at macropolitical and macroeconomic levels beyond their control. Dreamers have

acquired cultural capital through a long process of mastery of practices shared with native-born Americans, such as linguistic and expressive forms. These forms include the form, content and tenor of speech, partaking in a system of beliefs about democracy imbued with the power of education to transform the individual and society. I focus on one of these concepts, the aspirational quality of community cultural wealth, to situate the life projects and educational trajectories of Dreamers. I highlight the concept of community cultural wealth for the importance that peer groups and networks of support have in the lives of these at risk students. Dreamers at once struggle to claim legitimacy in the country of their residence yet are in danger of being forcibly removed from familiar spaces and loved ones. In spite of a looming cessation of presence in the United States, Dreamers retain the aspiration of becoming full members of American society, drawing strength from the rich support available in their communities.

I draw on work by Garabino (1995) and Morales *et al*. (2011) to interpret the lived experience of participants in this study and find that Dreamers constructed their experience by viewing their environment in the United States as a land of opportunity (Morales, Herrera, & Murray, 2011), harnessing optimism in the face of acutely adverse life situations. The Dreamers interviewed see their struggle in the immediacy of the present, expressing that they must contend against adversity even if their future in the United States remains uncertain (Dozier, 1993).

Agency

I view agency as dialogic and as a "link in the chain of speech communication" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91; Roberts, 2012) through which interlocutors bridge and negotiate, cyclically, their individual dialectics of naming things and their subsequent corollary of actions. Bakhtin (1981)

notes that the individual meets with the structures of power at the intersection of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses. To typify the encounter of agents unequally balanced in their reservoirs of power, Bakhtin glosses that disjunction as a process that is a "struggle against various kinds and degrees of authority" (p. 345). Scholars like Maguire and Lee (2011) note that international students encountering new rhetorical conventions in Canada need to negotiate new contact zones of discourse. To orient the site of Dreamer's agonistic struggle, I view agency as a dialectic of language embedded in social interactions and shared imagined worlds (Hall, 1996).

Literature Review

In this section I review the relevant literature on immigrant identity construction, a review of key developments in legislation affecting Dreamers. Pérez (2010) and Morales *et al*. (2011) note a paucity of scholarly literature addressing the social identity of undocumented students in today's social and political context. There is a need for more in-depth scholarly studies dedicated to documenting the voices of currently or previously undocumented students or how recent Hispanic immigrants speak of their journeys to and through higher education (Chang, 2011). Sustained attention in scholarly literature could shed light on the ways Dreamers have shaped their agency in the midst of their nested contexts (Maguire, 1992; Moreno, 2011; Sepulveda, 2011), social and political. I inscribe this study on the wider, multidisciplinary literatures addressing access to higher education and achievement gaps among students who were undocumented upon finishing high school.

Migrations

Migrations and diaspora are geopolitical phenomena and constitute a set of encontextualized sites of merged borderlands and intersecting cultural geographies (Tomlinson, 1999; Torres, 2003). Bulmer and Solomos (2009) note an upsurge of interest in migrations of large numbers of people establishing themselves in ethnic enclaves throughout the globe, a phenomenon known as diaspora (2009). Further, the Secretary General of the United Nations reports that more people are international immigrants now than at any other time of history: "The global number of international migrants increased from 155 million in 1990 to 214 in 2010 (p.3)." The United Nations (2008) notes that 60 percent of all international migrants reside in developed countries in the North. Among Dreamers, most are of Hispanic origin. There is a small though important number of Filipino- and South-Korean-origin students among the Dreamer contingent (Passel, 2003). To foreground the lived experience of two Dreamers in this study who are Hispanics and one who is Filipino, I review literature on the presence of their immigrant communities in relation to higher education (Bean, Van Hook, & Woodrow-Latfield, 2002; Massey, 2008; Massey & Capoferro, 2008; Tichenor, 2002).

Industrialized countries in the Global North find it challenging to integrate immigrant origin populations into their educational systems at all levels. Gibson and Carrasco (2009), for instance, note how educational systems in the United States and in Catalonia, Spain, are singularly unequipped to receive newcomers or address the needs of immigrant-origin students of lower and middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds. Although their work primarily addresses K-12education, their observations also apply to university aged, immigrant origin, financially disadvantaged Dreamers and other recent immigrants of low socioeconomic status. The plight

of Dreamers is part of the larger discourse surrounding immigrants and their rights within immigrant-receiving countries (Gleeson & Gonzalez, 2010; Sierra et al., 2000). The individual experiences of people living in precarious immigration situations are influenced by social and biographical factors that they bring with them from their countries of origin and interpretations of these features in the host societies. In the U.S. context, the Latin American diaspora in precarious immigration status must face the constant threat of destabilization of families. These attitudes and social structures, in symbiosis with extreme anti-immigrant attitudes, delay or prevent the resolution of social problems emanating from the exclusionary immigration policies visited upon 12 million living in precarious immigration situations.

Immigrant students of color and low socioeconomic status, regardless of legal situation, encounter acute hardships in higher education. In fact, Anaya & Cole (2003) have noted that students of color often see the university as essentially unwelcoming and not representative of their experiences. Morales *et al.* (2011) explore the social and psychological challenges Dreamers meet in the context of the DREAM Act from an ethnographic lens. In the Israeli context, Golan-Cook & Olshtain (2011), note a relationship between sociocultural identification and language fluency among young immigrant-origin Russian Israelis. Study participants self-recognize as Israelis more in direct relation to longer periods of settlement in Israel and greater self-assessed proficiency in Modern Hebrew. Thus, the identity of teenagers and young adults seems to be linked to language fluency and length of residence in their adopted countries.

The scholarly literature regarding undocumented students who have sought a university education was nearly non-existent for the California context before the mid-1980s. The decade of the 1980s and early 1990s saw an upsurge in undocumented immigration from Latin America

and the world. At present, statistical studies have estimated the proportion of undocumented immigrants in the United States who come from regions outside Latin America at forty percent (Hoefer *et al.*, 2011).

Attitudes towards the undocumented

The World Bank reports that for the period between 2008 and 2012, the United States gained nearly 5 million new immigrants, or 4,954,92 new foreign-born residents (2013). Levels of migration to the United States, including unauthorized entrants, are often divisive issues that are the object of spirited debate. In particular, attitudes towards the undocumented can sometimes be phrased in very divisive terms. The decades following the landmark Immigration and Reform Act of 1986, which granted legal status to 3 million undocumented citizens, saw increased anti-immigrant sentiments. Among these reactions were a number of citizen-led initiatives that submitted to public referendum issues like the education of undocumented children under 18, access to essential services like health care and access to higher education. Examples of those efforts include California's Proposition 187 (Ono & Sloop, 2002) and Arizona's SB 1070. Proposition 187, for instance, arose in a wave of nativist sentiments brought forth by the more strongly anti-immigrant voices in the conservative movement and by mainstream media, which portrayed immigrants and their life stories in deficit terms (Acuña, 1996).

Activists for immigrants' rights challenged Proposition 187 and SB 1070 successfully and saw most of their content rendered unconstitutional. Despite those triumphs, the most adverse effects in the lives of the undocumented and of the immigrant-origin populations came via actions taken by the U.S. Congress (Kaplin & Lee, 2006). Under Bill Clinton, for instance, the

Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, led a concerted effort to restore conservative values across the political and legislative spectrum, immigration policy included. Among these changes was the establishment of a 3-year and a 10-year immigration benefit bar for those immigrants who had accumulated unlawful presence of over 6 or 12 months. As a consequence, deportees could be separated from their families for up to ten years.

In their progress to and through university studies, DREAM Act eligible youth or Dreamers face a number of significant challenges. Although they have varied socio-economic profiles, studies reveal that they perceive financial resources as the major obstacle to accessing and completing a university education (Diaz-Strong *et al*., 2011). Students as a class of Americans face an ever-increasing cost of university studies as tuition and immigration relief are often strongly opposed (Flores, 2009; Kasarda, 2009; Millard & Chapa, 2004; Morse & Birnbach, n.d.). Some of the obstacles encountered by Dreamers include tuition fee increases for student in all categories, supplemental fees DREAM-Act eligible students, and little or no recourse to most financial aid or to privately endowed and institutionally administered scholarships and fellowships at public universities. Table 1, adapted from Herrera (2007) of the University of California, details which states offer in-state tuition relief and financial aid. Unfortunately, only a few state legislatures across the US have granted in-state tuition and financial aid to undocumented students. Although the number of such states has increased gradually, there is a need to address this fundamental barrier to college access among these at risk students.

Table 1

In-state tuition Relief and Financial Aid

State	Legislation	Year	Aid
Texas	HB 1403	2001	Yes
California	AB 540	2001	Yes
Utah	HB 144	2002	No
New York	SB 7784	2002	No
Washington	HB 1079	2003	No
Illinois	HB 0060	2003	No
Oklahoma	HB 1559	2003	Limited
Kansas	HB 2145	2004	No
New Mexico	SB 582	2005	Yes
Nebraska	LB 239	2006	No

Review of Legislation

DREAM Act eligible youth have managed for decades to graduate from university despite multiple drawbacks. Many continue on to graduate studies, but find that even after many years of postsecondary education, employment options are limited to subsistence level jobs where their talents are underutilized. The waste of potential at a personal level, as well as the loss of talent to American society, even if temporary, should give pause. In Plyler v. Doe, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled to rescue minors from the enduring 'handicap of illiteracy'. Another act of congress, the *Immigration Reform & Immigrant Responsibility Act* or

IIRIRA of 1996, was the basis for denying university-aged non-status students lower tuition benefits at universities. Throughout the United States, IIRIRA rendered undocumented immigrants ineligible for publically administered programs at national, state and local levels, including postsecondary education. This measure was strongly opposed by immigrant rights' activists for its potential to disrupt life in immigrant communities (Kaplin & Lee, 2007). In 1998 the *League of United Latin American Citizens* brought suit against the State of California's then governor Pete Wilson in hopes of securing lower tuition for students. The court dissented, and confirmed that IIRIRA harmonized with California Education Code 66010.8a, which denied lower tuition benefits to undocumented students (Kaplin & Lee, 2007).

Acuña (2004) reviews the series of early court decisions and appeals in mid-1980s California that affected access to higher education studies for undocumented students. In Acuña's assessment, the 1985 Alameda Superior Court decision made students eligible for state financial aid and allowed undocumented students to receive in-state tuition benefits if they declared intent to reside in California for more than a year. That ruling, known as the *Leticia A.* ruling, governed the residency classification of California undocumented childhood in higher education between 1985-1991. However, Bradford v. UC Board of Regents overturned *Leticia A*. The final result of these court cases was that all higher education venues, including the California State University system and the University of California system, and the community college system all implemented non-resident tuition for all undocumented students.

The Alameda County Superior ruled on Leticia A. v. UC Regents and California State University System (1985) that undocumented students who had graduated from a California high school were classified as residents for tuition purposes at California's public universities.

That ruling was in effect from 1985-1992. The Bradford Case (1990) and the decision on Association of Women v. The Board of Trustees of the California University System (1995) excluded students from University of California campuses and the CSU system.

In 2001, California bill AB 540, was reintroduced and signed into law by then California governor Gray Davis. It still in effect and grants in-state tuition to certain undocumented students who (a) attended a California high school for three years, (b) graduated from a California high school, and (c) intended to apply for residency as soon as possible. This bill made it possible for all non-status Californians who had attended high school in-state to claim non-resident tuition at all publically-funded California colleges and universities. The law was important in that it closed 15 years of bitter fights between conservative politicians and an electorate in California that has become increasingly more Hispanic and progressive leaning.

In 2011 the California legislature passed AB 130, known as the California DREAM Act, which makes it possible for Dreamers to have full recourse to state funds, in the form of education grants, and to university administered scholarship programs beginning in January, 2013. For students in that state, this law effectively alleviates one of the major barriers to obtaining a university education after the legal cases around 1985 began to surface. The approval of AB 130 was a major accomplishment for the human rights of immigrants, was arduously defended, and followed nearly 30 years of advocacy to widen participation of immigrants in university education.

On June 15, 2012 Barack Obama issued an executive order to halt the deportation of immigrants brought into the U.S. before age 16 and grant them work permits for a period of two years to applicants who meet a number of conditions. The legal action by the executive, or

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was a major accomplishment in immigrants' rights advocacy in 20 years of deadlock in immigration policy at federal level.

DREAM Act eligible youth themselves campaigned vigorously to place unrelenting pressure on the Obama administration, along with numerous immigrant rights activists, many elected politicians and supporters from allied interest groups. Despite this victory, the permanence of Dreamers in the United States is still an open question. In 2013, the United States Senate passed Bill S. 744 in a move that would have offered lawful status to many, though not all, Dreamers. When Senate Bill S. 744 was sent to the House of Representatives, Republican leadership refused to discuss the bill or bring it up to a vote. Under the leadership of Speaker John Boehner, the Republican-controlled house opted for offering a number of separate, rather than a comprehensive, bill on immigration reform. Congress in 2014 may take up immigration reform in the form of debate but not act decisively to address the urgent matter of reform, long due after 25 years of virtual legislative inaction. Crucially, youth who enter the United States as children after Obama's executive order of 2012 would not be eligible for relief, and would encounter marginalization.

Anti-immigrant legislation like Arizona's AB 1070, in the American Southwest, and HB 56 in Alabama which, sought to preclude undocumented youth from enrolling at university, among other restrictions. HB 56 expressly prohibited undocumented student enrolment at university. The ultimate goal of public appearances by undocumented students in public forums is to create a groundswell of support and transform the language of immigration law. 'Undocumented and unafraid' is the battle cry of the Dreamer movement. Dreamers reveal their undocumented status and share details about their experience of education in the United

States as new Americans. They have focused the energy of these efforts would cluster around gaining positive exposure in the media and arguing severally their case to stakeholders and decision makers.

Scholarship on the Identity of Dreamers

Identity

Hall (1996) argues that identity may be thought of in terms of the sociological subject and the post-modern subject. The concept of the sociological subject emerges from the social structures and relationships each individual inhabits. The post-modern subject is shifting, multiple and contradictory. The Dreamers I interviewed made sense of who they were by constructing narratives that incorporated multiple visions of their ideas of self. They saw themselves as partly belonging to the countries where they originated, and partly they adopted an American identity (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Suárez-Orozco, 1998). These three Dreamers often hyphenated their national identities to claim legitimacy and belonging. Issues of identity, particularly Dreamers' constructions of national and linguistic filiations, have been a recurrent theme in the discourse that Dreamers have developed to advocate for inclusion within the academy and the wider society (Holland et al., 1998). Dreamers' advocacy has centered on the promotion of comprehensive immigration reform, lowering in-state tuition fees (Feder, 2010; Flores, 2009; Flores and Chapa 2009), and securing financial support. Interviews of individual Dreamers in media outlets, by contrast, frequently touch upon affirmations of students' identities as Americans.

More in-depth scholarly is needed that discusses the identity of Dream-Act students and is authored by Dreamers themselves. Scholars have focused on the practical and more

immediate concerns of access to higher education and retention of these students within university spaces. The topics of interest to the academy closely parallel the interests of the more activist branch of the Dream Act student population. Aptly for the more politically minded among DREAM Act students, claiming an identity as Americans has meant finding ways to organize lobbying efforts directly with politicians and staging public protests to highlight the needs of students for legal immigration status. Advocacy by students themselves has been channeled into the parallel effort of securing lower resident, in-state fees and expanding financial aid. Diaz-Strong *et al.* (2011) have examined the perceived challenges of a group of Dreamers and found that financial duress is by far judged the most persistent obstacle to accessing and completing university studies.

Filipinos

Of 3.2 million Filipinos in the United States, 10% are undocumented (Hoeffer, Retyna, and Baker, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Buenavista (2010) reports that Filipino youth are at higher risk of dropping out, and generally post higher push-out rates. Filipino students encounter many of the same challenges encountered by Latino immigrants like racialization and criminalization, along with the added conflicting burden of both being part of an "ideal minority" and being perceived as distinct from the majority of other Asians.

Civic Engagement and Identity Landscapes

Civic engagement is a cultural practice that individuals or organizations embrace to show responsible citizenship (Pérez *et al*., 2010). The intensity and quality of movements promoting social justice by youth, such as the DREAM Act Movement by immigrant youth in North America, is a testimony to the resilience of young people seeking to affect positive

change while working within democratically established institutions (Jensen, 2008; Stepick & Stepick, 2002; Stepick et al., 2008). Activisms for change in adverse circumstances can provide a wealth of opportunities to help scholarship gather the aspirations of youth, their understandings of their position in relation to their communities, and their representation of their actions as agents that can work in powerful ways to transform their social circumstance and resist dominant ways of constructing and representing their experiences (Groseclose, 2010; Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss et al., 2002).

Summary

In this chapter I introduced social constructivism as my theoretical framework and discussed the theoretical constructs important in my analysis of data: community cultural wealth, agency, and identity. In chapter 3, I outline my methodology, describe my transcription decisions, and review how I gained access to participants and my process of data collection.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Felipe: *When someone asks you what your nationality is, what do you answer?*

Diego: *Um, nationality. It's recently that has become more of a complicated question for me. I don't know if you know José Antonio Vargas. Have you ever heard of him? He was a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist in the United States, and he came out as undocumented after all these years of writing for the Wall Street Journal. He always says, 'I am an American I just don't have papers,' kind of like thing. And I can definitely identify with that sort of sentiment. But then you know, at the same time, I would also respond that I am Filipino. So, you know, Filipino-American, yes, I would say.* (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

Xavier: *I was born in Mexico, but culturally I consider myself American. Like I said, I've been living here in the United States for more than half of my life.* (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my research methodology, the methods of inquiry, largely based on interviews, and my epistemological stance. I reflect on my background and role as a researcher, how my personal relationship to the participants shaped the interview process, and how it influenced my understandings of their experiences as Dreamers. I describe my data collection process and provide a theoretical basis for my methodology.

I begin with two utterances from Xavier and Diego directed at my question, "When someone asks you what your nationality is, what do you answer?" Their answers provide some insights into how undocumented students who have lived the greater part of their life in the United States might think about their national and cultural identities. They also raise these questions about identity and personal identifications:

- How does the fact that Diego and Xavier are undocumented influence how they view their presence in the United States and at American university campuses?

- What are or how do they view their right to an education and to fulfil their potentials and utilize their talents?
- How do these three Dreamers respond to challenges to their understandings of what it means to be an undocumented student and a university student?
- What has led Xavier to consider himself not only Mexican, but also American?
- What cultural features does Xavier believe characterize his vision of an American?
- How does Diego interpret José Antonio Vargas' declaration of identity?

I will attempt to answer these questions in chapter four.

Research Questions

I used semi-structured interviews as an entry-point to engage with participants and to answer the following three revised overarching questions:

(1) How do three Dreamer participants perceive issues of access to higher education, particularly in terms of choice of institution and post-secondary program?

(2) What factors influence these three Dreamers' senses of identity when they face(d) the complexities of their higher education and their decisions to pursue a specific discipline at university?

(3) How do these three Dreamers perceive access to higher education and shape their multicultural/intercultural interaction and notions of social justice?

The analysis I put forth, through clustered themes, focuses firstly on participants' constructions of personhood and identity, and the narratives they have constructed of their journey to and through university studies. I focus on their individual victories like transcending

the dearth of information available to them when they considered accessing higher education: enrolling in college or university and completing their studies. Secondly, I highlight participants' engagement in their immediate communities within the social fabric of their new country. I reference how participants reach out to those communities through consultation, establishing mentor/mentee relationships and engaging in activisms and assumed advocacy roles to widen participation in higher education.

Methodology

Through semistructured interviews, I aimed to enter the dialogic life worlds of participants. Bakhtin (1981) notes that "The word in language is half someone else's… [I]t exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own (293-94)." Bakhtin's (1985) theory of dialogism invokes a world where everything means in relation to something or someone else, and the source of meanings are these interactions themselves. Geertz (1983) describes ethnography as: "Hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole that motivates them, we seek to turn them, by a sort of intellectual perpetual motion, into explications of one another." I strive for an emic description of the life situations I explore (Geertz, 1983).

My epistemological stance draws from social constructivism to the life worlds and lived experiences of students who were undocumented in the United States at the time they considered pursuing or initiated university studies. Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1987) holds that reality emanates from mental constructions that arise from people's social interaction with each other and with objects. Central to social constructivism are the assumptions that the

words through which we understand ourselves and the world are social artifacts that have evolved through time and are culture-specific. In Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the self and the world are co-constructed through discourse. Through these exchanges human beings construct meanings to endow lives with meanings (Schwandt, 2000).

I believe human beings invoke a world through a dialogism where everything means in relation to something or someone else, and the source of meanings are these interactions themselves (Bakhtin, 1985). I assert therefore that human inquiry and interpretation of data lie somewhere between participants' words and my own. Kvale and Brinkman (2006) echo this idea when they state that the interview can serve for the public construction of the self through dialogue, enabling self-disclosure and achieving understandings. Maguire (1995) has used the term conversational interview to describe the space created by interviewer and participant. Kvale (1996) notes that creation of conversational spaces can be an entry point into individual life worlds.

In this qualitative inquiry of three non-US born immigrants who think of themselves as Americans, I focus on how they self-conceptualize. I also look at their individual histories of migration and their journey to and through university studies. I aim to understand the beliefs of these Dreamers who, brought into the US as children, encountered the possibility of a university education when still undocumented. Therefore, I aim to understand the beliefs that these Dreamers have about certain key elements in their encounters with higher education. I intend to explore Dreamers' views of access, perceived impediments to completing university studies, and their understandings of their identity within current debates about immigration.

My choice to conduct semi-structured interviews helped these Dreamers and me to engage in exchanges to answer my research questions and share insights. I am particularly attuned to how participants have helped themselves and others to reconcile the experience of exclusion with the drive to work towards building a more inclusive experience in higher education. I would like to understand how Dreamers remain generous in spirit and hopeful for the future. I sense that Dreamers have key understandings for transforming the debate on immigration and widening participation in higher education. Dreamers have engaged with their identities through a social constructionist process (Holland *et al*., 1989) that has allowed them to recreate a sense of who they are in the United States. I see the construction of identity as a multifarious process evolving within a set of historical, psychological, geopolitical and discursive practices. Hall (1996) speaks of a new historical moment where the old national, ready-made identities are no longer as certain as they were once. Rather, Hall notes, understandings of the subject are increasingly viewed in terms of a dialectic of identities and hybridity.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews and asked three individuals who approached university studies as undocumented students to think of issues surrounding that experience. I drew on Díaz-Strong, *et al*.'s study (2011), which explores the financial, legal, personal and social challenges Dreamers face with university studies. I am thankful to Díaz-Strong and her colleagues for sharing one of their research protocols when I prepared for data collection process. Dunbar, Rodriguez & Parker (2002) envision the sensitive questions raised by issues of subjectivity and race, and recommend the researchers approach carefully those areas of experience that participants might not readily disclose. Tierney & Dilley (2002) address

interviews in educational contexts and working with participants whose voices, as those of undocumented students, are less often heard in the scholarship of higher education.

Participants and I engaged in a co-construction of experiences through a dialogic process. I spent the first five minutes of the interview establishing initial rapport and reminding participants about my ethical responsibilities towards them, including their privilege to withdraw if they wish or decide not to answer questions. In the first 10 minutes of the interview I also attempted to achieve some type of conversational tenor, following Kvale's (1996) recommendations for creating a conversational space where the participant and I could engage with our life worlds and lived experiences. Semistructured interviews have been useful in helping participants reflect upon their experience of higher education (Araujo, 2011; Morales, Herrera, & Murray, 2011). In both contexts, interviewees came from underrepresented populations in higher education, had immigrant origins and were often first in their family to attend university. The results encountered revealed that societal context (political and academic), as well as guided support in managing the college admission process, are crucial for these students' success.

Conceptual Framework

As interpretive framework, I use Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth. Community cultural wealth emits a challenge to the Bourdieuian (1977, 1985) concept of cultural capital. In earlier analyses, Bourdieuian approaches proposed that capital is accumulated by middle class, dominant ethnicity populations (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001). In contrast to those ideas, Yosso (2005) creates a framework in which the richness of communities of color are valorized rather than devalued. Minority

communities possess, in that analysis, equally rich types of capital which their members deploy to gain access to education and to oppose exclusion. The different types of capital are typified as community cultural wealth embrace the different aspects of the social life of a community: familial capital, social capital, aspirational capital, navigational capital, linguistic capital, and resistant capital.

For this study, I have chosen to focus on aspirational capital, which Yosso interprets as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers (77)." Aspirational capital has often been described in terms of resiliency (Benard, 1995) in surmounting obstacles. Community cultural wealth as a construct is well suited to analyzing sites of exclusion encountered by marginalized populations like undocumented students in higher education (Aguirre & Turner, 2007; Araujo, 2011). The framework has been fruitful in helping complement quantitative data that addresses the achievement gap between majority and minority students. Thus, the many forms of community cultural wealth serve to channel resiliency in the population I study. I highlight aspirational capital and relate as needed to other forms of community cultural wealth. Through this study, I hope to highlight how participants articulate notions of selfhood, state their perceived academic journeys and trajectories, and speak of their persistence in the face of adversity (Perez, 2012; Perez et al., 2009; Perez et al., 2010; Muñoz, 2008; Nanz, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Context of Research Site

The geographic context of this study is Greater Los Angeles, California. I focus on Dreamers' perceptions of their lived experiences in higher education as undocumented students who entered the United States as minors. The major moves in politics and and law to

integrate this segment of the American population have been comprehensive legalization that allows a path to American citizenship and in-state tuition benefits along with greater access to financial aid. Activists like José Antonio Vargas, Lulú Martínez, Lizbeth Mateo and Marco Saavedra have been successful in drawing attention to Dreamers and engaging discussions about them in the United States. The California legislature responded to calls for reform by granting lower tuition benefits in 2001 and financial aid in 2012 to offer relief in the absence of a major immigration overhaul. My interest lies is how these students encounter post-secondary education, and in ther their *iteratio*—in the sense of repetition, performance and rehearsal— of their identities, and their participation in American culture, as vocalized through their utterances and voices. I am interested in tracing the arc of those beliefs as set against the experience of cultural, legal and identity liminality (Anzaldúa, 1999; Iqbal, 2005; O'Keefe, 1994; Parra Cardona, Busby, & Wampler, 2004; Worthan, Allard, & Mortimer, 2006).

Exclusionary practices in higher education have met stark opposition from progressive politicians and community organizers. Dreamers themselves have sought to access a university education through federal immigration relief or favorable state legislation that classifies them as residents and grants them financial assistance. They justify their right to a life and a univresit education in the US because they (1) arrived to the U.S. in childhood or early adolescence, (2) have developed strong bonds of friendship, family, and (3) have become deeply invested in their communities. As adults, Dreamers see themselves as part of the social fabric of the United States. However, proposed changes in legislation to grant immigration relief to this otherwise law-abiding population meet with intense opposition from law and order conservatives. Mass deportation of Dreamers is unethical and impracticable.

Transcription

Transcription of 'encontextualizing speech' is one of main tools of ethnographic studies. Mishler stresses the importance of systematic transcription practices (1986, 48-50) and recommends that transcription practices serve the theoretical assumptions of the researcher. The apparent simplicity of the task led early analyses in the first half of the 20th century to transcribe field interviews within a gamut of lesser complexity. Mishler remarks that scholars even thought that it was sufficient to produce summaries and general impressions as primary records of data gathered. Wider use of this practice was initially premised on the idea that there was but little difference between the written and spoken word. The centrality of transcription to qualitative studies is examined by interpreting the degree of fit between the representation of speech as a written object and the process of interpretation exacted from such texts to arrive at the emergent meanings of these texts.

Scholars held this belief for a few decades into the early 1900s. That type of transcription gradually fell into disfavor as a central and reliable tool in ethnographic studies. In great part, this change may be ascribed to a diversity of concurring and intersecting developments: the foundational work done in historical linguistics, the insights from works in structural and post-structural analyses of language, the work of generative and sociocognitive linguistics, and the seminal work in anthropology directed by trailblazing figures like Geertz (1983). Later, the intention to record speech in greater detail led to highly complex renderings of actual conversation commonly found now in sociolinguistics or conversational analysis (CA). The impetus towards greater detail may well have been due to a shared trend across the disciplines that saw issues of linguistic complexity as a central concern (Mishler, 260).

Not every qualitative researcher, however, agrees that these new practices necessarily imply an elegant solution to the problems of representing field data. Mishler points to a number of critiques arising from a postmodern understanding of speech representations and the attendant qualities of emergent and elusive speech (Woods, 1999). Among the arguments brought forth for approaching transcription practices cautiously are the use, representation, meaning, and relationship of different styles of transcription and their theoretical basis. To counter, scholars like Bell (2011) have critiqued the application of Conversational Analysis in the non-linguistic social sciences, without explicitly mentioning education textual representation is best used when it is put to the service of the theoretical assumptions of the transcriber, and these have been made evident.

Sample transcription

The following section illustrates my transcription practice, based on Mishler's (1991) recommendations that transcription parallel the goals of the research questions. Following Mishler (1991), my transcription practices aimed to adapt the representations of interview speech to the breadth, depth, and focus of the research questions in this study.

Felipe: *So, I wonder, how you see yourself in ten years, what's your, your heart's desire for yourself, uhm, in the future? Uhm, what will Diego be doing in ten years? And how that might connect to, to your present experience, or.....?*

Diego: *(Laughs)*

Felipe: *Or maybe not, I don't know. What do you, what do you see, how would you see yourself, who would you like to be?*

Diego: *Uhm, I have a pretty concrete plan actually, but obviously, plans don't always work the way that we want them to be, but if I can have, you know, the, my, I guess, plan, uhm, I, see, I should graduate from university, 'cause I hope to also, do a double major…*(Diego, Interview, February 7, 2013)

To avoid interrupting the flow of ideas in my participants' turn-at-talk, I inserted between brackets my own comments (Rusu, 2013). I include my translation next to the transcription in Spanish.

Approval of Transcripts

Once I completed the first draft of transcripts, I listened to the transcriptions another time and checked for completeness and accuracy. Once corrected, I sent copies of transcripts to participants. I asked participants to suggest additions, edit, or omit segments as they deemed necessary. I then obtained participants' approval of their transcripts and made the changes they requested.

Background and Role of Researcher

As a member of the Hispanic community in California, I knew of many family, friends, and acquaintances who arrived in the US as minors. My own residence in Greater Los Angeles has implications for the degree of access to participants, their levels of disclosure in interviews, and the interpretive process I engaged in to understand participants' and my own lived experiences. My age, gender, sexual orientation, and class identification also influenced how participants and I co-constructed interviews and my interpretations of those exchanges. My geographic location outside the United States at the time of the interviews shapes the type of questions I formulated, the responses I received, and the interpretations I reached from these three Dreamers' dialogues.

Recruitment

I contacted by phone and email a number of community serving organizations in the greater Los Angeles area that advocate for the civil rights of immigrants and which I knew might

be active with DREAM-Act eligible students. I came across many of these organizations through my readings about the DREAM-Act movement, immigrant rights activism, and Internet searches. The first attempts to reach participants were not entirely successful given the staffing practices of some of the organizations, the busy schedules of activists and of students themselves who often juggle multiple educational, co-curricular activities, internships or paid employment. I persisted, however. I met Diego, a student at a major research-intensive university, when I canvassed for participants with activist organizations in greater Los Angeles.

I have known Xavier and Jesús for many years, and with them I have strong bonds of friendship. I often speak to them about my post-graduate studies. In early February of 2012 I asked Xavier and Jesús on one of our telephone conversations if they would like to participate in my study, and they agreed. I later sent a request via email and obtained their signature of consent to take part in this study.

Jesús and Xavier initiated their lives in the United States at the age of 14. Diego was 9 or 10 when he first saw the United States on a holiday and returned two years later to settle in Los Angeles permanently. The experiences in the United States of these three Dreamers are divergent in many aspects. They have important intersections in their value of diversity, a shared belief in the institutions of their adopted country, and their projections towards a future that embraces their identity as immigrants and Americans. They arrived at their undocumented status under the guidance that loved ones, usually parents or guardians, held over the course of their lives when they entered the United States as accompanied minors.

Gaining Access and Data Collection Process

I found the recruitment process challenging because funding constraints made it impracticable to canvas for participants and conduct interviews in person. My decision therefore was to conduct and record interviews over the telephone. I disseminated a call for participants via the Internet to community organizers and followed up with phone calls. My first impression was that there were few Dreamers willing to speak about aspects of their lives fraught with deep emotion. I was honored and delighted that three Dreamers agreed to volunteer for interviews. In view of the limited availability of participants and aimed for depth in conversation.

Table 2

Data Collection Process

Dates	Activity
January/February 2012	Call for participants
February 2012	First set of interviews with Diego, Xavier, and Jesús
June 2012	Second set of interviews with Diego, Xavier, and Jesús.

I conducted conversations by telephone and recorded interviews from the Faculty of Education at McGill University in Montréal, Québec, Canada. This was a quiet environment that filtered out extraneous noise and provided an ideal space for this type of exchange. I connected a phone adaptor to an Olympus VN-5000 voice recorder to keep a record of conversations. In the first part of the first set of interviews, I asked sociobiographic questions and dates of arrival

in the United States and understandings of American culture. In the second part of the interviews, I asked questions about participants' educational trajectories and experiences of education in their country of birth and the United States, how they encountered university studies (choice of university, choice of program, role models, choice of location of university), and how they exercised their own agency since the moment they learned they were undocumented until they succeeded in gaining university admission or completed post-secondary studies. In our interviews, I attempted to delve into how participants looked for financial support or scholarships, the effect of public policy upon their educational and employment prospects, and how they viewed their participation in academe and in broader society.

Participants

The list of participants in Table 3 reflects the order of the first set of interviews. Table 3 includes information on participants' age of arrival to the United States, their country of birth and the disciplinary area of studies.

Table 3

Participants identifying data and age of U.S. arrival

Name	Gender	Age	Citizenship	Discipline
Diego	Male	9	Philippines	Humanities
Xavier	Male	14	Mexico	Humanities
Jesús	Male	14	Mexico	Humanities

All participants reside in the greater Los Angeles area. I focus this study on Dreamers living in the greater Los Angeles area. I have chosen to change some socio-biographic data of participants. Dreamers' names in this thesis are pseudonyms, their fields of study are broad disciplinary areas that reflect their interests, and their present ages are omitted to protect their identities. Participants were all over 18 years of age.

Diego

Diego comes across as an energetic young man. When I contacted community organizers with a call for participants, Diego graciously volunteered his time and generous help for my study. I shared with him the written call for participants and the description of the study. His kind willingness to be interviewed and rapid response to my request were very moving. Diego accepted to participate in my research despite never having met me. On the telephone he comes across as a confident, optimistic, highly driven young man who can see rich possibility and races to grab opportunity with deep conviction and sense of direction. My perception of him relies on my understandings of the tones and pitch of his voice, its rapid tempo, and the eloquent modulation apparent in the content and form of the arguments he shared as he described feelings and experiences.

Diego was around 8-9 years-old when he came to the United States for the first time on a short vacation, but has hardly any recollection of that event. Two years later, as a 10-year-old, he returned to live in the Southern California area permanently. He is audibly undistinguishable from other native speakers of English in Southern California. He makes use of a rich vocabulary and is subtly aware of the nuances of the personal and private discourses at play in his social position as a highly gifted university student and a Dreamer. He is also fluent in Spanish and can

read and write Tagalog, his mother tongue, although he laments his writing skills are not on a par with his abilities in English.

He became aware that completing a university education might be a challenge during his senior year in high school, aged 17, around the time when he started inquiring about submitting university applications and filling out financial aid forms. The magnitude of perceived odds, however, made no dent in his determination. Knowing that a few highly selective private institutions awarded full scholarships to Dreamers, Diego applied to six of those and to several highly ranked research-intensive universities in California. He speaks of receiving an acceptance letter from his current university and of his wish to attend a highly ranked university in the San Francisco and Palo Alto area of California. The cost of attendance, however, was the deciding factor Diego used to choose among his admissions offers. I show this exchange how Diego phrases his final decision to attend university near home.

> *Felipe: Did being a Dreamer change the options that you had (to attend the university of your choice)?*
>
> *Diego:I originally wanted to go to UC Berkeley…Berkeley is like one of the best colleges in the country. So, like, I wanna go to Berkeley. But then, obviously, I can't move there because I don't have the financial means to do that. So, I ended up at my current university because, uhm, I live very close by, and there's, uhm, it's in a place where I can commute and go to campus without having to spend extra money.* (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

Diego is very active in advocating for the rights of undocumented students individually and through a network of other likewise passionate activists who are well organized, committed, and have been successful in obtaining different forms of change in academe and raising positive awareness in teach-ins and other types of public forums. Diego has participated in many teach-ins, and is quite knowledgeable on the interview process and how to respond

convincingly and eloquently to questions in this open interview. His answers flowed easily and honestly, and at no time did he seem to be distant or guarded, too cautious or afraid to describe his experience.

My interview with Diego transformed my thinking about many aspects of how I would write this thesis, and was for me a learning experience. I had originally approached my research project with the reluctant intent of documenting the lives of undocumented youth and register the struggles and hardships they have encountered. Diego's radiating optimism and confidence on pursuing his dreams, their concreteness, and his steely conviction that they would be achieved helped me refocus my study and revisit the reason behind carrying out this project and what I hoped to achieve. From Diego's outlook and the generous gift of sharing with me his self-conception as a Dreamer, I learned that the experience of undocumented youth strengthens the social fabric of society. Dreamers are an example of resilience, persistence in personal ambitions, and nurturing in their survival of their most cherished hopes. Diego is midway through successful completion of his degree (Stratton, 2009).

Xavier

I met Xavier when he lived in Greater Los Angeles. We have kept in contact through telephone and personal correspondence. Xavier has an engaging and lively style of speech, rapid-fire and richly inflected. He uses English and Spanish expertly to refer to the bicultural worlds he has inhabited since early adolescence. His demeanor is dignified and elegant and is likewise articulate in speech, managing deftly the description of experience by situating himself at the time those experiences occurred.

Xavier lived in Central Mexico from birth until at 14 years of age he was brought to the United States. His experience in education both in Mexico and the United States was very positive. As a teenager and later as a young adult, he cultivated excellent working relationships with teachers and professors, history and art teachers especially, who served as role models during the formative years of high school and the at community college. Xavier's life since early adolescence and in adulthood has been shaped by tightly knit family ties. His notion of family extends beyond the nuclear family to include the first and second generation of his relatives who settled in the United States. Xavier's stature and the high regard in which he is held by his family are exceptional. He has helped choose the names of two of his nephews, has tutored most of his nieces and nephews, served as a role model to his sister's children who raised her as a single parent, and has been asked to assume legal guardianship of three of his siblings' children if emergency arises. He is a pillar of the extended family in that he has maintained close connections to his siblings who all live within close driving distance of one another, and has acted as mediator with the world outside the family by attending child-parent conferences, taking his sibling's children to doctor's visits, and highlighting the value of education through many and varied interactions, among them home tutoring and constant encouragement to attend university.

Xavier tells me that having lost his father as a child prompted his mother and siblings to develop very tight bonds of love and solidarity. When he arrived in the U.S. at age 14, he understood that his visit was to be only for the summer and that he would be returning to Mexico. However, at the suggestion of his U.S.-born nephews who were around his age, he was enrolled in summer courses at the local high school and found that experience delightful. Xavier

was the youngest in a family of 12. At 14, he and his mother inhabited an largely empty nest in the outskirts of a medium-sized city in Central Mexico. Xavier's siblings and extended families encouraged him to stay in the United States permanently. As his experience in summer classes had been so inspiring and rewarding, he initially agreed to stay. Xavier would live with his sister while his mother came back to Mexico and returned to see them during the summer and Christmas holidays.

Xavier, at the threshold between childhood and adulthood, cherished his life in a beautiful colonial city in Central Mexico, rich in reminders of ancient cultures and in dynamic, lively exchanges with friends, neighbors and acquaintances known since childhood. Moving to another country signified leaving behind his cherished plans of completing high school in Mexico and attending university there. He had projected himself into a future in that community, dreamed of finishing his education in Spanish and becoming socialized into a professional occupation. The move to the United States was for him somewhat abrupt in that the idea had literally never crossed his mind as a teenager. The sudden change in locales profoundly upset him after a few months, taxing both his coping strategies in a new country and the strength he derived from a close relationship with his mother who had to return to Mexico.

Xavier speaks of becoming aware of inequalities when he began to apply to universities and requesting financial aid. He saw that even though he had been a stellar student, obtaining very high marks, having a well-rounded profile in volunteering and a diversity of interests, the amount of financial support granted him by universities and privately funded scholarships was markedly small in comparison to equally qualified peers. He remembers being shocked at this

fact and speaking to his high school counsellor about the differentials in support and being told that his significantly smaller award was because he had no valid social security number:

> *Felipe:* *But, at what point did you realize that your immigration status might influence your access to education? So, um, was it during 10th grade? Was it in…?*
> *Xavier:* *It was during my senior year, in the 12th grade. See, it was in my last year when we began to apply for, for all of those things, and they gave more money to students who had papers. If you didn't have a social security number, they gave you some money, but not as much.* (Xavier, Interview, Feb. 8, 2012)

There is in this recollection both a protest at the creation of sites of inequality beyond his control, but also a history of hope in that the effort would be rewarded, or at least that it was a fundamental question of equality denied. In spite of the setback, he enrolled at a four-year university the next fall. With help from his siblings, part-time work, and in-state tuition he was able to finish two semesters at university as a social studies major.

In 1995 he had to abandon his studies. He enrolled in community colleges soon thereafter. Tuition in those schools was significantly lower, and Xavier was able to complete a degree there. The prospect of a bachelor's degree remained distant, however, as he could no longer afford it, if in-state tuition was again available to him. The responsibilities of adulthood and the limitations in employment opportunities faced by the undocumented now distance him from that plan. At present, he is saving to come back to finish his bachelor's degree in the humanities.

Jesús

I met Jesús when we both attended school and lived greater Los Angeles. Jesús is quite reserved and seems to consider answers carefully. Jesús came to the United States as a teenager from Central Mexico. That first trip to the United States was to him the opportunity to

learn another language, become educated, and have a better life in that country. He attended a public high school in a majority Latino neighborhood in Greater Los Angeles and was keenly aware of his social position as a newcomer to American society, a feeling that did not leave him during his high school years. He knew since his first year of high school that accessing university studies would not be easy if he did not have a legal status. Not knowing if he might or might not achieve that status before graduation, he took college preparatory courses by the second year after arriving in the United States, obtained high marks and graduated with honors. In high school, he mastered English and began to learn German.

Rationale for Methods

Universities and community colleges accomplish the central function of helping immigrant origin students, including Dreamers, to transcend family histories often fraught by extreme financial and emotional hardship and acute exclusion. I believe conversational spaces should become available where Dreamers' utter in their own voices their motivations and aspirations. There is a need to document the personal trajectories of the adult education of current, or potential, university non-status students. As completion of university studies has been a predictor of greater civic participation among adult populations, it is important to understand how Dreamers see themselves in relation to their histories outside the United States and how they have to come to engage with their realities in their new country.

Summary

In this chapter I provided a theoretical basis for my choices in ethnographic tools, the interview process and my transcription practices. I introduced my research questions and situated them in relation to the lived experience and the participants' broad personal

trajectories of participants. I also discussed the evolution of my identity construction as an interviewer and an apprenticed researcher, and how that role intersects with the relationships I have with some of the participants. I aimed for systematic and attentive transcription that served to answer my research questions, introduced portraits of participants, and provided examples of their speech styles and my understandings of the communicative personae conveyed in our dialogues. I looked at my double role as a researcher and as someone who lived through similar experiences when university-aged. In chapter four, I identify clustered themes that center around the emergent metaphors of belonging, being, and becoming. I see in these three elements a number of opposing and converging personal understandings of self: a refashioning of identity that emerges from personal histories and a reformulation of individual intentions.

Chapter 4: Merging Borderlines - Data and Data Analysis

Felipe: And if you situate yourself geographically, where would you see yourself in ten years?
Diego: I would say that I would still be here in LA?
Felipe: So, you see yourself in LA.
Diego: Yeah, because if the Dream Act doesn't pass in the next ten years, I wanna be part of the movement here
Felipe: Mmhmm
Diego: And I want to continue helping undocumented students
Felipe: Mmhmm
Diego: Like myself. (Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012)

Introduction

I begin this chapter with an excerpt from an interview that addresses beliefs about identity and higher education. I explore what three participants believe about access to higher education for Dreamers, and ask them to envision their aspirational futures. These three Dreamers address how they self-identiy, recognize themselves, and what they think their righttful place should be in society in the United States. I introduce five salient themes from my data analysis: (1) Origin and destinations, (2) Being, belonging and becoming, (3) Showing pride, (4) Fighting for their dream, and (5) Claiming their dream. I attempt to delve into the life worlds of these Dreamer participants and discuss how they perceive that they have woven their identities within and into the communities in which they locate themselves in the United States. I counducted interviews with Dreamers in English and Spanish, with languages alternating depending on the speaker's choice and my role as interlocutor. I provide English translations beside the original transcription in Spanish when needed.

The central theme in identity is how a Dreamer understands his own experiences and articulates self-knowledge. From my interviews, I see that Dreamers seem to locate themselves

within a set of cultural borderlands where they are cultural brokers for the cultures of their parents' country and the ways and mores they have met in the United States.

I reflect on equity and social justice in tertiary education in tandem with these three Dreamers' constructions of their experiences and their creations of counternarratives that permit them to claim they belong in the U.S. and are as American as the native-born. I interpret my understandings of Dreamers' social and intellectual evolutions as a dialogic exchange they adopt with the social positions they occupy as undocumented immigrants and with their aspirations to become full members of society. These interplays involve an unravelling of visions of identity, belonging and equality. Participants build narratives of contestation through a chronological awareness of identity evolution. Participants engage with the emergence to a drive towards the conciliatory power of context embedded in socially grounded aspirations.

Invoking an Identity

Identity is a psychological and emotional state lived as a set of contested oppositions. In this chapter, I approach the concept of Dreamers' identities in higher education, as emergent in our interviews, and develop my analysis of our reflections in dialogue. I did not explicitly state I wanted to hear about how students constructed their identity at the onset I. I set out to describe my motivation for carrying out this research briefly and honestly. I shared my goal here is to document how Dreamers speak about their own identities in their intersections with American culture and Dreamers' struggles to participate more fully in society through engagement with higher education, its stakeholders and gatekeepers. For example, the next excerpt illustrates how I began interviews:

Felipe: The idea for the research is to find out how DREAM Act students feel about their presence in higher education, the challenges that they meet, or how they navigate the experience of higher education. That of course would maybe start a little bit earlier with, ehm, with, ehm, students contemplating the idea of perhaps continuing their studies during high school. There is like a lot that happens at that time. (Felipe, Interview with Diego, February 7, 2012)

I set the stage to establish rapport to reduce the tensions that might emerge from speaking about the delicate subjects of identity construction, life projects, dreams, and aspirations. I made sure that participants knew they could modulate their answers and feel at ease. I also promised to edit out any information they feel might identify them. I approached this relationship with great reverence and respect for their courage, thanking them for their generous gift of time and for sharing their ideas with me and with a wider audience. In the following sections I outline the five themes I encountered in my data. I hope to describe the arc of participants' lived experiences in the United States in their voyage to and through university studies.

Emerging themes

Through "-etic" and "-emic" coding of data, I noticed that certain themes and forms of language recurred in interviews. I arrived at the themes below through careful reading of the transcripts of partipants' interviews. I examined the data over several weeks and highlighted sections that seemed especially meaningful or which contained valuable insights or expressions of participants' subjectivities. I guided my choices by using the notion of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and its articulation of *aspirational capital*. In abridged form, aspirational

capital is understood by Yosso as “the ability to dream of possibilities beyond… present circumstances, often without the objectives to attain those goals (78).” More specifically, to deploy aspirational capital involves persisting in achieving despite adversity and vexing obstacles. Thus, I engaged with those moments in which participants faced especially poignant situations and chose to persevere rather than renounce their choices. As a construct, community cultural wealth highlights the rich possibilities and agentic choices set in motion by individual from communities of color. In framing my analysis, I was aided by the overarching concept of metaphor. One of the ways in which human being structure their thinking is analogy, and metaphor, as one such process, helps articulate human experience. The metaphor of a trajectory or ‘journey’ was a recurrent metaphor I encountered in the language of participants (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). As the larger themes I encountered referenced origins and transformations, I teased out the elements of relevant data into identity trajectories, temporal progressions, with agency viewed through the lense of community cultural wealth and through aspirational capital. The themes therefore exemplify an arc of agency and proactive choices. Participants imbue their pasts, presents and futures with meanings that allow them to remain resilient as they expand their realm of action around conceptions of their socially situated selves.

Theme 1: Origins and Destinations

Xavier

Xavier has lived in Southern California since at age 14 he came to the United States accompanied by one of his minor siblings. His family originates in a mid-sized city in Guanajuato State, in central Mexico. His family had known a prior history of migration from a small village in

that state and had moved to that larger city when Xavier was nearing 8 or 9. By the time he arrived in the United States, his mother was approaching her 60s, her delicate health strained by raising two teenaged children. Most of Xavier's older siblings, who were then long-time, legal US residents, suggested that Xavier and his brother, the only ones remaining under their mother's care in Mexico, could come for an extended visit. The family would reunite in the United States during the summer recess. That period would mark both the end of their academic year and their graduation from middle school.

Xavier was happy he would learn English during the two or three months of his stay in Los Angeles. The prospect of meeting their nephews and reuniting with his sibling was exciting. Xavier, however, longed to stay in Mexico and continue his studies there. His family, however, preferred Xavier settle permanently in Southern California.

> *Felipe: But, can I also ask, what was the context behind the move to the States? Este*
> *Xavier: Vengo de una familia de doce miembros*
> *[Felipe: Mhm]. En el cual, yo soy el más pequeño de los doce. Y pues mi papa, el ya había muerto. 'Eda. Pues ya, cuando yo tenía nueve años. [Felipe: Mhm]. Entonces ya todos mis hermanos ya básicamente estaban aquí. Ya únicamente estábamos yo y mi madre, y mi…, y nomas. Y mi familia quería que nos moviéramos ya para acá, porque de esa forma ellos me podían ayudar con los estudios. Yo en verdad quería seguir estudiando en Guadalajara. Ya tenía planes de terminar mi secundaria.*
>
> *Felipe: But, can I also ask, what was the context behind the move to the States?*
> *Xavier: I come from a family of twelve children. And well, my father had died when I was nine years old. [Felipe: Mhm]. And so, I am the youngest of the twelve. By that time, all my siblings were here. Only my brother, my mom and I had stayed in Mexico. The family wanted us to move here because my older siblings could then help me with my studies. But I actually wanted to study in Guadalajara. I had made plans to complete high school there.*
> (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Xavier explains that he would have preferred to remain in Mexico to study there to university level. This career goal was partly inspired by his interest in the humanities, but also by a devoted teacher who served as a role model. Xavier's memories of learning about the history of Guadalajara, Mexico as a country, classroom activities, and field trips to historical sites sparked his desire to know more and share intellectual curiosity in a classroom context.

> *Felipe: Este, can you maybe continue telling me….? eh, how you wanted to become a teacher y todo esto.*
> *Xavier: Si, pues, tenia un buen maestro de historia, y él nos llevaba a los museos. Y él fue mi punto de inspiración, ese maestro. Me encantaba. Que yo creo que a lo mejor él era homosexual, era gay. Porque tenía así unas manías medias, así, retorcidas, y estaba bien guapote. Tenía un bigotote, y bien machote se me hacía. Pero en veces como que se le entraba agua a la canoa, al maestro. Pero a mí me llamaba mucho la atención el. O sea, me fascinaba escucharlo hablar. Y me gustaba muncho la historia, como él la contaba y todo. Y él nos llevaba a los museos, y lugares así importantes de Guadalajara. Y desde allí yo empecé a decir, yo quiero ser como él. Yo quiero ser alguien así. Que enseñe y que aprenda. Y a ser una persona sabia e inteligente, y todo.*
>
> *Felipe: Can you tell me about, how you wanted to become a teacher?*
> *Xavier: Well, I had a great history teacher. And he took us to museums, and he was my point of inspiration, that teacher. I liked him. I even think he may have been homosexual, gay. He had these mannerisms, sort of, elegant, and he was very handsome. He had this big old moustache, and looked quite masculine. But sometimes, that pretense of masculinity didn't hold up. But I really found him attractive. I mean, I loved hearing him talk. So I really liked history, how he talked about it. He took us to museums, important places in Guadalajara. And since then I began to say, I would like to be like him. I want to be someone who teaches and learns. Be a person who's wise and intelligent, and all that that means.* (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Since an early age, Xavier found that his future career would incorporate intellectual curiosity and service in the form of teaching. He learned English but encountered difficulties in accessing higher education. Many of these hardships in the U.S. stemmed from lack of access to financial assistance from federal, state, or institutional sources. When asked about his high

school experience, and his career plans after finishing high school in the US, Xavier is cautiously optimistic. After moving to the United States, Xavier was enrolled in summer school in Los Angeles County. Among the enrichment programs Xavier participated in were English-as-a-second language classes. Xavier interacted with students from many different neighborhoods from the Los Angeles area. They represented a rich group of ethnic groups and national origins.

Xavier interacted with newcomers to the U.S. in that summer program for immigrant children who, like him, would start their very first year of schooling in the fall. Xavier had been told he would spend only the summer in California, but his family began to prepare him to settle in Los Angeles.

> *Xavier: Entonces, este, cuando vinimos yo y mi mama, vinimos únicamente de vacaciones. Y una vez estando aquí, ya en junio, pues aquí este, aquí mis sobrinos, ya los más grandes, los de mi edad, eran los hijos de mis hermanos los más grandes, ya nacidos aquí ellos. Deste, ellos estaban yendo a escuela de verano…[Felipe: Mhm] Summer school que le llamaban. Y ándale que a, a uno de mis hermanos le dicen, 'Por qué no llevamos a Luisito? o sea a mi' y dice, eh, 'a que tome clases de summer school. A ver si le gustan.' [Felipe: Mhm] Pues, me llevaron. Y me fascino a mí el sistema. Me gusto muncho como enseñaban. Y aparte me gustó mucho la diversidad cultural que encontré.*
> *[Felipe: Mhm] Me gusto muncho que había neg.., gente, eh, puedo decir negros o no? [Felipe: Ay, eh, di lo que….] ¿Sí? [Felipe: Of course, claro que sí] Me gusto como había estudiantes negros, estudiantes filipinos, estudiantes güeros, incluso*
>
> *Xavier: So, ehm, when my mother and I came here, we came just for a holiday. But once here, in June, well, eh, my nephews, who by then were older and about my age, who had been born here, uhm, they were in summer school. [Felipe: Mhm] And so, they told one of my brothers, "Why don't we take Luisito, meaning me, to enroll in summer school. Maybe he'll like it. [Felipe: Mhm] And so they took me there. I loved the program. I liked the way they taught, the cultural diversity I encountered. [Felipe: Mhm] I like that there were some bl… people, eh… can I say black people or no?" [Felipe: Yes, say what you…] I liked it that there were black students, White students, Russians even. Because at that time they bussed Armenian-origin students from Hollywood. And they took them there for summer school.* (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

había gente rusa. Porque en ese entonces transportaban en el bus acá de Hollywood, y llevaban unos Russians Armenians. Y los traían acá a la Jefferson para summer school.

Xavier's summer school experience of school in the U.S. was also quite positive, so much so that it even changed his mind about remaining in the United States. That feeling would be tempered when as he encountered bullying scenarios common in high school. Xavier spoke, in our interviews, about the multilayered origin of his ambitions, which have remained largely unchanged.

These three Dreamers' parents or guardians decided what was best under their circumstances. Although many Dreamers are portrayed in the media as bearing no responsibility in their migration from their countries of origin to the United States, Dreamers like Xavier did not truly wish to leave their countries. Xavier tells me he did not consent to settle permanently in the United States and would have come back to Mexico if given the chance, after spending his initial summer in Los Angeles. Xavier eventually embraced his new American context, despite his initial reluctance, find mentors in caring teachers, and through like-minded classmates engaged with the dream of higher education in his junior and senior year. However, his family's inability to secure a lawful status for Xavier would have detrimental consequences for how he planned out his future, and for how he mapped out and claim his original aspirations.

Diego

Diego first visited the United States on a family holiday when he was around 9 or 10. He was a college sophomore when I interviewed him. His family originates in the Philippines. The

family's first trip to the United States had been for leisure. Diego's family had visited local landmarks in Southern California and enjoyed their visit very much. During their first visit to the United States, Diego's family had no intention of staying in the United States and then returned to the Philippines. Diego's family settled in the United States approximately two years after that initial trip. Diego, like Xavier, was told that his family would only be staying in the United States for a short period and soon return to their country. That stay, however, extended beyond a short visit. Diego would be enrolled first in middle and later in high school.

Diego's parents enrolled him in junior high school in Southern California, later in high school. He developed close relationships with teachers, administrators, and classmates. A child of keen intellectual curiosity, Diego had been enrolled in advanced placement courses that allowed him to take examinations for university-level credit upon high school graduation. As his experience with education had been very enjoyable in high school and his family encouraged him to excel academically, Diego was among his high school's top students. He knew he was university bound from an early age and dreamt of attending a top-tier research university in California or New England. His dream was to complete a baccalaureate degree in the humanities and become employed liaising and working community organizations in the Los Angeles area.

Felipe: *Did lacking a lawful status affect the choices that you made regarding which universities to apply to or attend? Did that affect your first choice…Did you have your heart set in one specific school as opposed to another one when you were going to high school. I mean, did you also consider going, ehm, to a university outside California?*

Diego*: Definitely, when I was in 12th grade, uhm, because, I had pretty good grades and uh, I had a pretty strong chance. I always wanted to go to Harvard, you know, the East Coast, yeah, Ivy Leagues, and stuff like that because first of all, private schools offered a lot of financial aid. Harvard, specifically offered funding to undocumented students. And I thought I wanted to go to those schools out of*

> *state, but obviously, because it was I guess the most viable option for me.* (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

Diego was aware that lacking legal status in the United States shut him out from receiving most state, federal, and institutional awards in those universities he wanted to attend. Despite that apparent setback, Diego worked tirelessly during high school to obtain high marks in his courses and was involved in co-curricular activities like public speaking which, he knew, would help him to develop as a person and improve his chances of admission at highly selective universities. Diego was offered admissions to some of the finest universities in the world for his program of study in California. His current struggle is to fulfil his career goals outside academe and transform his professional ambitions into a reality.

Jesús

Jesús' family comes from the central Mexican state of Guanajuato. He was 13 when he arrived in the United States. His family had a history of migrations, twice to Mexico City, a return migration to Guanajuato, and later migrations to the United States. When Jesús joined his siblings became older, they began making the trek north and settled in the U.S. This pattern of migration allowed the family to establish a foothold in the United States and prepare for the arrival of the rest of the family. Jesús and his parents moved to the U.S. in the mid-1980s. When asked about his origins, or for an abbreviated statement of identity, Jesús responds that his family comes from Mexico and later explains he must nuance that statement. He arrived in the United States still a child and therefore considers himself American. To Jesús, to be an American is predicated on his lived experience and on his knowledge of culture in the United States. To Jesús, being American has meant being able to communicate with the majority of Americans in English and participating in the labor force and education.

Felipe: If I asked you where you are from, what would you respond?
Jesús: Ah, well, my family comes from Mexico. I mean, the place where I was born is a state called Guanajuato. Our family has been coming and going between the United States and Mexico… for a long time. So, that means my father, he came to the States to work in agriculture. He was a farm worker in Illinois. The family moved to the Los Angeles area later.
Felipe: Would you consider yourself Mexican only?
Jesús: I am, but not only. I think I share many experiences and knowledge about the U.S. with Americans who are native-born, with people who have become naturalized. So, yes, I am American, and yes, this is my country too. (Jesús, Interview, Feb 28, 2012)

Although Jesús settled in the LA since aged 13, he struggled to integrate fully into a society in which he claims membership. Jesús believed he should access education and employment and education opportunities like other Americans.

The lack of a lawful status proved elusive for participants. The absence of positive legislation to benefit immigrants was quite complex, due largely to an upsurge in anti-immigrant feelings during the 1990s and political inaction in the 2000s.

Theme 2: Being, Belonging and Becoming

I approach identity from a number of angles by drawing on my interviews of these Dreamers, their personal histories, linguistic proficiencies, and cultural affiliations. Each theme serves as a marker of identity. I have named this section *Being, Belonging and Becoming* because these overarching concepts support the visions of identity that participants used during the interviews to speak about who they were, who they are, with whom they interact and confirm group memberships, and who they hope to become. For these Dreamers, identity is a fluid, complex set of actions including personal histories, multilayered memories, and engagements and aspirations with a life plan that includes or included participation in higher education. Through their construction of identity, they strive towards full membership in

American society. They see themselves as invested in their individual goals to incorporate their educational trajectories into the process of widening participation in higher education. These Dreamers' example of resilience is inspiring, modelling a clarity of purpose and directedness of will.

Dreamers have found ways to oppose the dominant majority's discourse that asserts that Americans are only those who are native to the United States or hold lawful residence. These three Dreamers' statements work to subvert the conventional ideology that edits them and their histories from cultural debates in the United States: social strife in the labor market, levels of educational attainment among U.S. minorities, and participation in higher education in particular (Perry, 2004, 2006a, 2006b). Facing educational and occupational marginalization, they make a claim to Americans identities. A central issue for these Dreamers is the dilemma of responding effectively to marginalization and acute inequality. Rather than dwelling in past visions of the resentments of a dream deferred, these three Dreamers forge ahead towards the future by engaging with the struggles of the next generation of immigrant-origin students aiming to participate in academe.

Xavier

Xavier, when asked about he recognizes himself, answers that he sees himself as a Mexican-American. He then proceeds to explain what the quality of being an American means to him. He evokes the images of the more salient forms of multiculturalism he has encountered in the United States. The tone of his response is infused with the feeling of participation in the cultures that surround him. Xavier draws forth a sense of reverence for his view of United States and what individual Americans represent to him. To Xavier, the essence of his American

identity lies in incorporating cultural knowledge about the practices of the wider population of Southern California. For Xavier, to speak about identity is to distil from his iterative encounter with America a personal ethos celebratory of sociocultural differences.

> *Felipe: How you see yourself, uhm, racially or ethnically, if you see yourself in those terms? Do you see yourself as a person of color, do you feel you belong to a particular group rather than another?*
>
> *Xavier: Well, ethnicity, I see myself as a, a, Mexican person. Although in Mexico, it's a mixture of all cultures, you know. I mean, you can find all kinds of hues and colors. Light-skinned, dark-skinned. I'm a very light-skinned person. I'm Mexican, but culturally, I consider myself American. Like I said, I've been living here, for more than half of my life in the United States, and I do celebrate, most all we celebrate in America, you know. Multiculturalism, you know. I like to celebrate, eh, Hanukah. I like to celebrate Christmas. I like to celebrate the New Chinese Year, you know. You just ask. I mean, I like to celebrate everything. I see myself as a multicultural person. Not necessarily as one particular culture only. But ethnicity, yes, I am Mexican. My ethnicity is Mexican.* (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

When Xavier references markers of race or ethnic identification, he needs to explain more clearly how he came to think of himself as culturally Mexican, but also as an American. He sees his personal history steeped in the ancient roots his family had in Mexico. He asserts, however, that he is culturally American, basing his claim on the time he has spent, nearly all his life, in the United States, and his knowledge of the traditions of the different communities composing the American cultural mosaic. In Xavier's answer there is a rather strong claim that to be American means to live in harmony with those who have cultural practices that were not known to him before arriving in the United States. Xavier states that he has learned to be an American by sensing cultural difference, celebrating cultures, and engaging with those cultures as a sympathetic observer.

Xavier speaks fondly of being in a summer ESL program with students from many countries shortly after initially arriving in the United States. He found that socialization experience was very meaningful.

> *Xavier: Y los train aquí a la Greenville para summer school. Mmm, entonces con toda esa gente yo conviví. Y eran estudiantes como yo que venían de otros países, y, y todos hablábamos así, pues, yo prácticamente no hablaba inglés. [Felipe: Mhm] Entonces yo estaba tomando clases de ESL. También había unos armenios que estaban tomando clases de ESL. Estábamos en la misma clase. This was during the summer, y me encantó muchísimo.*
>
> *Xavier: And they bussed them here to Greenville High. Mmm, so I socialized with all of these people. They were students from other countries, and, and we all spoke very…. Well, I practically did not speak English. [Felipe: Mhm] So I was taking ESL classes as well. There were also Armenians taking ESL classes. We were in the same class. This was during summer, and I really like it all.* (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012*)*

Xavier's utterance conveys that he considers Spanish the language he most closely associates with the different identities he has developed through life. He speaks of using *mi propio idioma*, his own language, when describing interaction with other Latino students during his first educational experience in the United States.

> *Xavier: Oh, pero, sabes qué? Lo que me impacto, lo que me gustó mucho, fue convivir con la gente de Centroamérica Porque hablaban mi propio idioma, mm, pero eran diferentes. Eran muy interesantes el acento, y es algo a lo que yo nunca había estado expuesto. Entonces, cuando los escuche yo hablarlos así. Hablaba acentos de Guatemala, de Perú, de Argentina, de diferentes así. Y me encantaba eso. Y aprendí un montón de modismos.*
>
> *Xavier: Oh, but you know what really impacted me, what I liked a lot, was to socialize with people from Central America… because they spoke my own language. So, I loved hearing them speak. They spoke with accents form Guatemala, Peru, Argentina. They were all different. And I just loved that. I learned so many idioms* (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Xavier considered that the ESL summer program very significant. That schooling experience allowed him to socialize with other Spanish-speakers from Latin America. He enriched his linguistic repertoire and gained literacy in other varieties of Spanish. Xavier started developing a richly inflected identity as an American beginning with that summer program. To Xavier, being American meant being difference and living in harmony with people originating in different latitudes, whose languages and cultural practices are to him a source of beauty, knowledge and wonder. In the practice of his own brand of American culture and in portraying himself to others, Xavier adopts an optimistic view that works toward cultural harmony and integration in an urban, and multilingual environment.

Jesús

Jesús speaks warmly of embracing his family history in Mexico. In his answers, Jesús states that his life in Mexico is an episode of memory with lingering implications. For Jesús, the American part of his identity is the one that he considers more relevant to his presence in the United States. In speaking about himself, he declares that his family and the context where he grew up were both highly important and determinant in how he formed his identity. Jesús, like Xavier and Diego, thinks of identity as a concept infused with the history of his family as well as the historical and sociocultural contexts that surrounded him during his childhood in Mexico.

> *Felipe: So, could you tell me where you are from?*
> *Jesús: Well, this is a difficult question, ehm, to answer because it, it is very ambiguous. Ah, well, my family comes from Central Mexico. Which is, this is, I mean, the place where I'm originally from is central Mexico.* (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

Jesús speaks about his identity via description of geographies that served to foreground his memory of the journey he made to become the person he is now. In this invocation of who

he is, Jesús names family and the immediate surroundings of the town where he lived before moving to the United States. There is a sense nostalgia in Jesús' account of his past, and he seems inspired. The legacy of colonialism emerges early on through the mention that his native town used to have an exploitative model of agriculture.

> *Jesús: So, I mean my family comes from rural Mexico, from a small town in Guanajuato. Our town used to be a settlement that was built around a Spanish* hacienda *or plantation. This is the plantation model that maybe the U.S. had during the Civil War, perhaps during, after reconstruction. My father tells me the plantation owner used to own vast tracts of land, and had tenant farmers, who sort of worked at the hacienda, right? So, this was the situation, I think, for some time.* (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

To Jesús, the details of local history are crucial in describing his environment in Mexico and is crucial to an explanation of the identity into which he has entered. Jesús had excelled in education in Mexico and in the United States. At this time, the idea of having or not having a status was not yet relevant.

Jesús' village was small by any standards, even for a rural context, and was far from the nearest city. The town's only school was elementary.

> *Felipe: What was the town you're from like? What do you think was significant about it?*
>
> *Jesús: Mm, let me think. For starters, the road to the place where I was born was a little bit higher than say, town's square was. The town, xxxx, was then and remains a very tiny town. A point of reference might be that we did not have a hospital, and there wasn't until very recently a high school. So that anybody who wanted to study, eh, for, to become a doctor, or to go to high school, things like that, had to leave the town to a city that was perhaps about 30 kilometres, 35, minutes. Say 15 in today's roads. And maybe 25 minutes a little bit before that. I mean that was the context, so you get an idea, I mean the context, of the place, in the 40s or 50s. I mean, people at that time would go, by, maybe on horseback to the nearest town.* (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

Jesús sees his relation to an American identity, or a vision of himself in American society, grounded in family reunification and intellectual achievement. A gifted learner, Jesús speaks of his journey to the United States as a plan and a strategy that originated in his parents and in forces that lay outside the control of everyone involved in that decision. He speaks of family unity as central to the process of uprooting himself from a context where he was well adapted in school and in his more proximate social sites:

> *Felipe: So did your parents tell you why you were moving to the States?*
>
> *Jesús: The ostensible reason was that I needed to be here. So, I came to the States for family reunification because I had been away from my parents, who were in the United States already. I always had very good grades, so I'd been told I'd be going to the States to continue my studies. I was really excited about that. I wanted to learn English and become very well educated.*
> *Felipe: How then did you become an American?*
>
> *Jesús: I came to the United States when I was still a child, I grew up here. I mean, I've learned English and other languages, worked here, gone to school and university in the LA area. My mother and my father are U.S. citizens. I am invested in this country, so it is my country. I don't have papers yet because of a huge backlog with applications for people born in Mexico. I've been waiting so long for a resolution to my application, as have many others.* (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

Jesús maintains that his contributions to the United States make him an American like others in the U.S. I asked Jesús if he has achieved success, and he responds with reluctant optimism.

> *Felipe: Do you think you have made it in the US? How does the dream you had in Mexico measure up to the reality you are living now?*
> *Jesús: Well, I think I still have a ways to go. I have graduated from college, and have an advanced degree. Not having papers has held me back some. I think I would like to complete a PhD. Becoming an expert on the humanities still appeals to me. Grad school will have to wait though, until I have access to more scholarships or loans.* (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

Although Jesús has been able to achieve some professional success as an educator, he is still working on expanding his professional identity. In his view, not having an American passport yet is, quite simply, a matter of administrative backlogs. He has become an American through time in the U.S. and a commitment to the future of the communities where his experiences unfold.

Diego

Diego is has matured in his politics and social activism. His political consciousness helps him formulate his conception of himself as a Filipino and an American. To him, his identity is connected to his activism in the Dreamer movement.

In the excerpt I quote, Diego represents his own identity through an answer given by José Antonio Vargas, a well known Dreamer journalist and activist. Mr. Vargas has spoken about his identity as a psychological and emotional state, rather than a result of birth within the physical geographies of the United States. Diego creates a realm for citizenship, like José Antonio Vargas, that contests conventional discourses regarding the concept of citizenship as a right claimed by birth within a territory or through parents originating in a nation state. This declaration serves the dual purpose of deflecting attacks that alienate immigrant-origin youth and other U.S. newcomers.

> *Felipe: If someone asked what your nationality is, what would you answer?*
> *Diego: Uhm… nationality.. of.. uhm. It's recently that has become more of a complicated question for me. I don't know if you know José Antonio Vargas. Have you ever heard of him? He was a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist in the United States and, and he came out as undocumented after all these years of writing for the Wall Street Journal. And he always says that, you know, that I'm, I am an American I just don't have papers, kind of like thing, mmhmm, and I can definitely identify, you know, with that sort of sentiment, uhm, but then you know, uhm, at the same time I would also respond that I am a Filipino, so, mmm, you know, Filipino-*

American, yes, I guess I would say. Yeah, I agree that nationality, these are very complicated questions. (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

When I asked Diego to reflect on how his understanding of what it means to be an American, of how that idea has shaped his interaction with non-Dreamers, he responds firmly that he sees his primary role as one of persuasion and advocacy. He sees himself as an activist on behalf of Dreamers in his personal interactions at university public forums and in personal exchanges.

Felipe: How do you feel that you participate in the democratic process, I mean, of course, this is a question of citizenship that goes beyond holding a piece of paper, righ..[Diego: right, right…] But how, how do you think you stand in relationship to, for example, you know, the discussions around elections, or how sometimes… voters decide? What role do you assume when you hear stuff like that?

Diego: Uhm, what I try to do is I try to explain my opinions to people who do vote, and hopefully, the fact that I have, uhm, some sort of intellectual discussion with another person who is able to vote can, influence them to, to, in turn, influence their manner of voting and practicing, you know, their ability, to, uhm, democracy. (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

Instead of assuming a stance of powerlessness in response to lack of political action on comprehensive legalization, Diego declares a strong sense of advocacy. In his view, political influence is not restricted to the old citizen/non-citizen divide. In the lived realities of these three Dreamers, speaking about their personal stories and persuading a nation has meant utilizing their authentic voices. Dreamers' as a class have used social media and the Internet to create and foster a sense of community and show the power that lies in individual agency. The Dreamers I interviewed develop a practice of empowerment for themselves that closely parallelled their expression of their own identity and of their professional and academic journeys.

For Diego, a great deal of the discourse of contestation of dominant narratives regarding the undocumented population of the United States in general, and of Dreamers in particular, has involved participation and creation of self-empowering communities that provide support to Dreamers and act as agents for political and societal change in attitudes towards Dreamers. One example is his participation in a campus-based organization at his university that offers peer mentoring and a safe space for Dreamers. Diego became an activist to help students placed at high risk to complete their studies now and in future.

Diego identifies himself as Filipino American, and speaks about his notion of citizenship as participation in school and civic engagement. He believes that when undocumented students have lived as responsible, enterprising, upstanding citizens, they should be granted access to lawful status:

> *Felipe: We were talking earlier about what arguments might be best to persuade voters or the American public at large about granting financial aid or immigration benefits to Dreamers. Opponents to the DREAM Act, uhm, might be hesitating to offer their support to students. What do you think is the best argument or arguments to help these Americans evolve in their thinking?*
> *Diego: Yea. For the most part, I feel that the arguments that I would use is that… uhm, a lot of people, they feel that America is a place where you work hard and when you work hard, you should get what you work for, earn what you've worked hard for. And you should be worthy of that… earning what you achieve. As for immigrants like me who are undocumented, and maybe the students, we've worked so hard in high school, in our college we try our best to get the best grades, to be the best in our community, and the fact that we are not able to receive what we've earned, is pretty… in my opinion, is pretty much a, a distortion I guess, of the values that the United States stands for…*(Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

Diego sees a fundamental contradiction between what a country should ideally grant to its immigrant-origin populations and the actuated marginalizations of immigrant populations through unequal allotment of rights and freedoms. I see in that reflection a protest against the

failures of society postsecondary institutions to integrate these at risk students. Dreamers face the extreme hardship of legal expulsion from the United States in addition to the stresses of life at high school and university for working class minority students.

Diego reflects here about the foundational ethos of the United States or the belief in equality under the law, the idea of due process. I interpret Diego's words to mean that the 'distortion' constituted by denying Dreamers a legitimate membership in academe and in society at large, is at odds with the spirit behind the laws and the aspirational ethos of the United States.

Diego senses incongruence in how international graduate students can achieve legalization sooner than Dreamers. He expresses Dreamers need urgently to be granted legal citizenship because they have grown up in the U.S. and become American through learning the multiple codes of American interactions. Diego insists that Dreamers' lawful status should be addressed fairly and as soon as possible.

> *Diego: And, in terms of, uhm, I guess legalization, I feel that the United States opened its doors to so many immigrants, uhm, 'cause I go to this university, and there is a lot of people here who just go here, uhm, for college, to do their higher education, and for them it is a lot easier, to get legalized, and how come undocumented immigrants, who also include undocumented students, who came here at a much younger age, and had no choice in that, uhm, are not able to be legalized at a quicker rate? I mean they chose to come to the United States because that is what they wanted to do. As far as undocumented students, as children, we did not have that option.*
>
> Felipe: Mhm
>
> *Diego: And instead of becoming legalized we are stuck in this limbo that we did not decide...* (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

Diego focuses on his medium-term goals like completing a double-major program at university. When asked how he projects himself into the far future, he harnesses the chance to

speak about his here and now at his research-intensive university, with modest confidence expressed as lingering hesitation.

> *Felipe: So, I wonder, how you see yourself in ten years, what's your, your heart's desire for yourself, uhm, in the future? Uhm, what will Diego be doing in ten years? And how that might connect to, to your present experience, or, ?*
> *Diego: (Laughs)*
> *Felipe: Or maybe not, I don't know. What do you, what do you see, how would you see yourself, who would you like to be?*
> *Diego: Uhm, I have a pretty concrete plan actually, but obviously, plans don't always work the way that we want them to be, but if I can have, you know, the, my, I guess, plan, uhm, I, see, I should graduate from university, 'cause I hope to also, do a double major…* (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2013)

Despite living through diminished access to university studies, Diego speaks with confidence and optimism about his academic project and activism.

Theme 3: Fighting for a Dream

I title this section with a metaphor of a struggle wherein opposite intentions vie with one another. I intend this metaphor of agonism to conjure the combative fervor that leads these three participants to peaceful and earnest engagement with each other and, respectfully, with those discourses that oppose Dreamers. The combat I see in the participants' responses is a struggle towards defining their own identity and holding on to their aspirations for the future despite obstacles they face. I invoke a defense, a struggle that aims only to retain the visions of who they are and their right to remain physically present in the communities where they have deepest links.

Dreamers' strong desire is to transform themselves into a powerful agents for the good of their families and their communities. Dreamers have directed their agency towards retaining their constructions of who they are and their visions of themselves as anchored in the

geographies of their past but are committed to the social sites of their present lives. Through that process of becoming and stating who they are, these Dreamers contest the narratives that would portray their presence in the United States as a deficit. They have directed their actions to transform immigration law and university policies so that other students do not encounter the diminished educational opportunities in higher education. Students have gained social capital through engagement with their communities, supportive faculty and university staff, and especially with one another.

Xavier

Xavier attempted to attend university in the 1990s and early 2000. Between 16 and 26 years of age, Xavier discovered the promise and challenge of higher education and has met his struggle by deploying his intellectual and social agency. He was able to find help in caring educators that helped him face the challenge of marginalization and exclusion he encountered. Xavier's fight for his dream in the United States took place in a context of personal and political turmoil in Southern California. For Xavier, fighting for his dream meant discovering his ambitions gradually and, secondly, how to transform his dream of an education into the lived reality. Xavier still read avidly in the humanities, but became fascinated by nature and wished to become a plant scientist.

> *Felipe: Dime, how, what was it like when you were getting ready to, maybe, uhmm, move on after high school? What were you thinking about? Were you thinking of university…?*
> *Xavier: Oh, that was great, that was the best time of my life. Because, let me tell you. Yo quería estudiar para ser un ingeniero agrónomo. Me fascinaban las plantas, las flores, los árboles, todo lo*
>
> *Felipe: Tell me, how, what was it like when you were getting ready to, maybe, uhmm, move on after high school? What were you thinking about? Were you thinking of university…?*
> *Xavier: Oh, that was great, that was the best time of my life. Because, let me tell you. I wanted to study to become a plant scientist. I loved plants, flowers, trees, and everything that came out of the*

que tendría que ver con la tierra. Y incluso yo iba a irme a una universidad que se llamaba xxxx.

earth. I had even decided I would enroll at this university xxxx. (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Xavier's visit to that university was a powerful encounter with the environment that could constitute his project for higher education. He speaks in admiration of the university that he had singled out for attendance as a dream vision. Xavier was full of idealism and optimism as he contemplated a career tending plants and learning about the environment. Xavier found joy in entering a professional identity through a field of study. A Russian-origin teacher helped Xavier in that process by becoming a mentor and offering emotional support and professional expertise.

Xavier: Tenía una buena maestra, que me ayudaba a investigar cosas así, incluso ella me llevo a xxxx. Y me enamore de esa universidad. Porque yo mire, campos así, de cultivo, deste como se llaman, milpas. Y tenían animales también. Algo que me encantaba a mí. Porque recuerdo que mis abuelos, ellos tenían su rancho. [Felipe: So who was this teacher who helped you research a career in agriculture?] Ella era una maestra rusa. Es que… yo he tenido la suerte de tener buenas maestras.

Xavier: I had a caring teacher who helped me research career options. She even took me to university xxxx. And I just fell in love with that university because I saw these vast tracts of land. There were animals, something I really loved because it reminded me of my grandparents' farm…[Felipe: So who was this teacher who helped you research a career in plant science?] This teacher was of Russian origin. Well, I have been lucky in that I have had very good teachers. (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Xavier's enthusiasm for plant science waned, however. After sustained reflection, he decided to pursue a degree in the humanities. Xavier started researching financial aid opportunities during his junior year in high school. He was disappointed that he would get very few scholarships and financial aid. Faced with that dilemma, he sought help from counsellors

who offered cautious encouragement, but could not change the social or political climate in early 1990s California. Xavier was disappointed that he would not be supported sufficiently.

> *Xavier: No te daban tanto dinero. Entonces, ya, jue cuando yo ya empecé a desilusionarme en el sistema. Si yo tengo buenos grados también. Nomás por un simple papel que no me van a ayudar.*
>
> *Xavier: I wouldn't be receiving as much aid. That is when I became truly discouraged. I also have good grades and should not be treated differently. Is it because of a simple piece of paper (green card) that I will not receive as much help.* (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Xavier benefited from California law that allowed undocumented students educated in California to pay resident tuition at state universities. In-state tuition was expensive but still affordable and he enrolled at a local university. However, he was enrolled only one year because the language of the law changed. Xavier tells me that undocumented students must pay around $13,000 in non-resident tuition to remain enrolled. Xavier could not afford this new amount and dropped out.

> *Xavier: Cuando ya finalmente me gradué, y me fui a esa universidad. Y pues el primer año fue bien, y todo. Me dieron ayuda financiera y todo. Pero el segundo año, ya no podían darnos. Nos dijeron, pueden seguir estudiando aquí, pero ya no van a recibir ayuda financiera. [Felipe: So, you were getting financial aid?] Aha, y allí ya se acabó todo. Entonces, pues yo me salí, ¿quién podía pagar esa cantidad?*
>
> *Xavier: When I graduated from high school, I enrolled at university, and the first year was okay. I received financial aid then, but the second year we were told our financial aid would stop. We could continue our studies, but we wouldn't be helped financially. [Felipe>So, you were getting financial aid?] Yeah, but that was the end of that. I had to drop out. Who could pay that amount?* (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Xavier's interest in education was intense. Although the gates to academe seemed then unreachable, he began working to resume university studies. He transformed that struggle with the help of a supportive high school teacher whose words of encouragement always echoed in

his mind. Mr. Percy, one of his high school teachers in the US, had reassured Xavier that completing his university studies would one day help him attain legal status.

Xavier: Le eche ganas, porque yo siempre tenía en mente lo que me había dicho el Mr. Percy, un maestro de ESL. Me decía, Xavier. No te preocupes de tus papeles. Cuando tú ya termines tu educación, tu diploma, tú vas a poder arreglar papeles por medio de tu educación. [Felipe: Mmmm] Y le eche ganas, y todo, y ándale que nos llega la carta de que íbamos a pagar como out-of-state. [Felipe:¿Era muchísimo, verdad?] Xavier: Uuuf, mijita, como trece mil dólares.

Xavier: I really worked very, very hard. I always remembered what Mr. Percy, one of my teachers had told me once, "Xavier, don't worry about your papers. When you complete your degree, you'll get your papers because of your education." [Felipe: Mmmm] And I worked hard, but then we got a letter assessing out-of-state tuition. [Felipe: It was a lot, right?] Yes, darling, like $13,000 dollars. (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Xavier resolved not surrender in the face of this disquieting news. Although his studies interrupted his dream of higher education, he would not give up. Xavier sought the help of an arts teacher who helped him change the course of his life.

Xavier: Entonces ahí, fue… Empezo mi tormento. Y empece a renegar y a renegar, pero no me rendi Y dije, no me voy a rendir. Y rápido, inmediatamente, que le hablo a una maestra de arte que yo tenia. Y ya le dije, Ms. Lemi, le digo, ya oístes las noticias?.... Y ella me dijo, 'necesito que vengas rápido, pues el lunes que voy. Me dice, te voy a llevar a, con unos amigos aquí del junior college xxx.' Dice, 'Ellos te van a ayudar a meterte al colegio.' Digo, 'Pero no tengo papeles. Ya mirates las noticias que no nos van a admitir.' Dice, 'No, aquí es más barato. Aquí es más barato, y aquí si puedes pagar.'

Xavier: And that was when, when my suffering began. I began to complain constantly, but I did not give up. I said to myself, 'I am not going to give up. I immediately called a former art teacher from high school. And I told her…"Ms. Lemi, have you heard the news?..."And she told me, "Come here right now. I'll be leaving on Monday. I will put you in touch with my friends at xxxx junior college". She said, "They are gonna help you enrol in college". I said, "But I don't have papers". And she said, "It's cheaper here. Here you can pay." (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

Xavier eventually completed his Associate of Arts degree. This diploma qualified him to transfer to a four-year university and obtain employment. Although Xavier has achieved some success, he still wishes to complete a baccalaureate and a master's degree in California. Xavier's talent is well used now, but would be a great advantage to the pluralistic society that California hopes to create. He will not give up, even in the face of acute exclusion.

Xavier has shaped his American cultural practices on his sense of individual agency deployed in his many communities. He has tutored nephews and nieces, volunteered helping students at risk at neighbourhood religious organizations. He has done pro bono work in translation for Hispanic-serving organizations and spoken about his experience as a Dreamer to fellow Dreamers he met through his network of friends and family in Southern California. Thus he has guided the aspirations of the children and Dreamers in his extended family and in his neighborhood. Xavier has encouraged children in his family to complete secondary studies successfully, complete their university degrees. Anti-immigrant legislation could not stop him from making an impact on the other Americans around him. Xavier still awaits legislation, however, that enables him to display the full potential of his talents to the benefit of wider American society.

Diego

Diego sees his struggle to advance his career goal rooted in community and advocacy. During our interview, he expressed that the presence of Dreamers in higher education makes sense because they have earned their place in academe. To Diego, it is a matter of fundamental justice to permit and to help deserving students enroll and receive all types of support they need to complete their degrees. Diego offers a rationale founded on human rights, equality, and the respect for the hard work ethic and resilience that Dreamers have shown in their journey *to and through* higher education.

For Diego, belonging in American society—as well as in the communities in which his life unfolds, is not a passive act. To Diego, belonging implies constructing a narrative of merit. Diego maintains that Dreamers deserve a fair opportunity to succeed in post-secondary education as much as other Americans. The foundation for this belief is a strong feeling that every effort deserves a reward, especially when this effort has been inspired by a drive to improve oneself and society. I asked Diego about how or if he participated in the political process to understand his conceptualizations about democracy.

> *Felipe: What would you say might be some of the, of the stronger arguments, or the strongest argument that you can think of for people who may be, like, a little bit neutral, you know, neutral in terms of, helping, supporting undocu-, undocumented students to get access to education? Or get access to having citizenship?*
>
> *Diego: For the most part, I feel that the arguments that I would use is that… uhm, a lot of people they feel that America is a place where you work hard and when you work hard, you should get what you work for, earn what you've worked hard for. And you should be worthy of that, earning….. what you achieve.* (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

In Diego's view, the fact that an immigrant, in this case a Dreamer, lacks lawful status, should not be an obstacle to advancement in society or in academe. In Diego's vision of the ethcis of labour within the American ethos, those who work must receive the just wages for their work.

> *Diego: As for immigrants like me who are undocumented, and maybe the students, we've worked so hard in high school, in our college we try our best to get the best grades, to be the best in our community, and the fact that we are not able to receive what we've earned, is pretty… in my opinion, is pretty much a, a distortion I guess, of the values that the United States stands for. And also, it's, you know, a lot of, Americans, they believe in capitalism, and obviously, the capitalism, is more, like, you know, like paying for what you need, and getting for what you give, and you know. If that is the case, then, I feel that undocumented immigrants should just get what they have worked for because that's what the country stands for, and it is kind of hypocritical for it not to give undocumented immigrants their work's worth.* (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

Diego's vivid and powerful statement conveys that inequality and marginalization should have no place in a democracy like the United States. Diego's belief is that upstanding citizenship should be rewarded with further opportunities to excel academically and to be more helpful to his fellow Americans.

To contest the dominant narratives surrounding Dreamers, Diego counters that childhood arrivals like him bear no real blame in their unlawful presence in the United States. He adds that Dreamers and international students deserve equal opportunities to achieve lawful status. The implicit logic of his argument is that both groups are alike in deserving a fair opportunity to become legalized, to participate as full members of American society.

Diego contests the rationale of immigration law by directing a challenge at a system that privileges those with greater resources whilst it marginalizes the vulnerable, especially Dreamers. strong declaration that there is a fundamental injustice in immigration law. That the

current immigration system does not sense the merit of individuals or their law-abiding character, but rather actuates to perpetuate a set of injustices created by a body politic oblivious to the difficulties faced by immigrants and Dreamers.

Diego engaged with his dream by completing a degree in the social sicences. The journey from a reluctant discovery of career choices in late adolescence met the discovery of how legal status could pose a hindrance to his academic and professional development. Diego learned that completing a university education might be a challenge during his senior year in high school when, aged 17, he began inquiring about submitting university applications and filling out financial aid forms. The magnitude of perceived odds, however, made no dent in his determination.

Diego is very active in advocating for the rights of undocumented students individually and through a network of other passionate activists who are well organized, active, and have been successful in obtaining different forms of change in academe and raising positive awareness in teach-ins and at public forums. The question of solidarity, of who supports Dreamers, lies at the center of the identity development process in Diego's experience of higher education. I asked Diego how or from whom he received support. The network of help that emerges is one that is most directly concerned with bringing Dreamers' stories to the wider campus communities within the university's walls. Community organizations, for instance, have been one source of external awards and scholarships for Leticia A. students and Dreamers. In our interview, Diego highlighted the assistance of professors of diverse ethnic origins who work in different discliplinary areas and especially within the humanities. Diego has witnessed in university a rich the network of solidarity develop which includes admissions

officers, fellow Dreamers, and a student organization funded by the university itself and endowed with a building within the premises to serve as a focal point for activism and peer mentoring.

Felipe: I was wondering, where or how you are getting support from at school?
Diego: Here at my university I feel a good amount of support. I mean, even though it's not 100 percent, all the way, I would say that it's pretty, arguably and comparably to others a very great support that we get from my university. For example, we are able to fundraise with the help of professors here from my university, uhm, and particularly, there is a lot of internships that become open to undocumented students in my university, and some of them are paid, some of them are not, but nonetheless it allows us to have that work experience that we need in the fields that we'll work in.
Felipe: *You mentioned that you get support from, ah, professors. Are these normally within a certain faculty, or is it from a cross-campus, or what is itlike, what's the, the, affiliation like for professors.*
Diego: Uhm, a lot of them come from different fields. From the sciences, social sciences, you know, they're always… I would say that, all around, it's always, although most of them I would say, most of them, do come from the social sciences.
(Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012)

Diego has reflected on how he responds to political discourse surrounding the presence of Dreamers in higher education. If asked to describe his participation and activist stance in regards to contesting deficit narratives about immigrants and immigrant-origin students, he asserts that his role has been to address these concerns through his own practice of democracy. That practice has included writing for his school newspaper. In my interpretation, Diego has raised awareness and contributed to building community, established himself as a voice for Dreamers, and modelled how to engage with one effective form of student advocacy.

Felipe: I was wondering, do you think there are also other activities that you maybe have engaged in, that would work towards, you know, influencing people to, uhm, be perhaps more sympathetic to, to that, or anything like that. I mean are there other activities that you can think of, off the top of your head.
Diego: Being more sympathetic towards undocumented students?
Felipe: Mhm.

> *Diego: I used to write for the student paper in my university. I was one of the, uhm, opinion section in the student paper. So, I was in one of the appointed columns. And I wrote, like, articles about, like, undocumented students and stuff like that, so I think, in that sense, I did make some sort of, uhm, you know, argument for them, And also at the same time, I participate in, uhm, I also participate in…, panels. Uhm, here at school we do like, a lot of student panels about undocumented students and recently I did one, uhm, in my department in school, uhm, 'cause they have…, and I wrote like articles on undocumented students and stuff like that.* (Diego, Interview, February 7, 2012)

Diego has become an experienced activist and developed rich networks of allies within the university community through his engagement in activism inside and outside academe. He has advanced his goals of a career in the humanities. Diego has invested himself wholly in achieving his dream and has become a mentor to newly enrolled Dreamers at his univeristy. He has created his own practice of democracy based on direct activism and supporting Dreamers. Diego is fighting to achieve his own dreams and contributing significantly to widening participation in higher education for at risk Dreamer students.

Jesús

When Jesús attempted to access university studies, he encountered exclusionary policies in law and academe. The laws that made it difficult for Jesús to access university were higher non-resident tuition and the lack of access to financial aid. Jesús lived in the greater Los Angeles area, and the university or community organizations had mobilized tepidly around this issue. There weren't many scholarships and therefore Xavier's attendance at university depended mostly on his savings and help from relatives. To Jesús, his dream meant becoming a humanities major at a nearby teaching-focused university instead of a research-intensive college. He speaks of university studies as a site where could create transformative action:

Jesús: Bueno, yo creo que para comenzar yo creo que siempre tuve un gran amor por el conocimiento, por mejorar.

Jesús: Well, I think that to begin with, I believe that I've always had a great love of knowledge, for bettering myself (Jesús, February 28, 2012)

Jesús describes he worried that universities would deny him admissions because he was undocumented:

Jesús: Entonces, a mi si me acongojaba mucho el no tener papeles, O sea, cuál va a ser mi futuro? Entonces, yo, aunque no entendía muchas cosas de lo que iba a pasar en la universidad, pues lo que yo decía, es que, si yo no tengo papeles como me van a admitir, no?

Jesús: Well, I was quite dismayed that I didn't have papers. I mean, what would my future be like? Then, though I didn't understand many things about what would happen at university, well, I thought… I mean… If I don't have papers how will I be admitted? (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

Jesús was in fact admitted to several state universities in California, but opted to attend a less community college:

Felipe: ¿Cómo fue que solicitaste admisión en las universidades en tu high school? What was the experience like?
Jesús: Yo fui admitido en casi todas las universidades publicas de California.

Felipe: How was the process of applying for university when you were in high school? What was the experience like?
Jesús: I was admitted to all the public universities I applied to in California.
(Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

He cultivated a mentoring relationship with a high school counsellor and with a volunteer from a Mexican American non-profit organization who helped him research the possibilities to attend university. Jesús made applications to more selective universities with the help of this network.

Felipe: ¿Quién te ayudó a ver qué recursos estaban disponibles, a qué universidades pedir admisión?
Jesús: Un high school counsellor, que yo la quería mucho, y la quiero todavía.

Felipe: Who helped you find resources, on which universities to apply to?
Jesús: A high school counsellor I really appreciate a lot, and appreciate still. Ehm, many teachers helped me, you

Este, muchos profesores que me ayudaron, que, you know, they encouraged me. Y luego tambien, esta muchacha de xxxxx que hizo las investigaciones de ciertas universidades, y luego también I asked for admission at a private university in, at The Westmount Colleges

know, they encouraged me. And also, there was a lady from organization xxxx who helped me research on universities, and then also. I also asked for admission at The Westmount Colleges. (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

When he visited universities during his junior year, Jesús encountered negative attitudes about undocumented immigrants in higher education when he was advised to consider carefully whether he wished to apply to private universities. If a private college funded his studies, alumni and donors might be unhappy if their contributions supported 'illegal immigrants':

Jesús: Y pues hubo un consejero latino que él se había graduado de un Private College. Y el más o menos me dijo, 'pues, no se. No se si aquí te vayan a admitir. Es que él ya sabía el rollo, ya ves. Los colegios privados son siempre muy delicados con el dinero. Porque, porque el dinero viene de los alumni, y muchas veces los alumni, si se enteran que el dinero esta yendo a este tipo de estudiantes, este, este, no les gusta el asunto, ves.

Jesús: Well, there was this Latino counselor who'd graduated from a Private College. He told me, "Well, I'm not sure, I'm not sure if you'll be admitted here. You probably know how it is here. Private universities look at money as a very delicate matter. Because their funds come from alumni's donations, and if alumni find out that their money is being routed to this type of students, they won't like that, you see. (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

Jesús had to defer his dream while he saved money to go back to school, or wait for a change in the law.

The first in his family to go to college, Jesús tells me he has served as mentor to children in his extended family to demystify the experience of university studies and graduate school. Jesús has lent his moral support to friends he met in high school who had to interrupt their

studies. Jesús has given moral support by talking to others spontaneously about his experience and encouraged others in pursuing their dreams in higher education as part of their life project in the United States:

> Jesús: *Yes, I've talked to my nephews and nieces about college and grad school. They're U.S. citizens, so they won't face the same issues. My nephew Ishmael, for instance, did a BA degree in anthropology. He's very hesitant to go after a PhD, but I'm encouraging him. I've sort of helped him think about grad school. So yea, in a sense I feel I've come full circle where I am giving advice, not just getting it. I know many kids who had no papers in my high school gave up along the way. I've kept in touch with Anna, who like me had to drop out of school when we had to pay higher tuition.* (Jesús, Interview, June 21, 2012).

Jesús has transcended an earlier sense of lessened power and become involved in his immediate circle. Jesús has not participated in the larger Dreamer movement. He makes contributions, at a personal level, to the community where his life unfolds. Jesús retains his ultimate goal of completing an advanced degree in the humanities, but he knows that ambition may have to wait. Jesús has not given up on that career goals of becoming an expert in his field. He has persevered in the face of great distress. I assume then that in time he will achieve his goal.

Theme 4: Showing Pride

I believe that these Dreamers have succeeded because they adopted many and varied resilience strategies. Dreamers adopt a pattern of behavior grounded in cycles of action and reflection. Dreamers have built resilience thus and engaged with journeys from reluctance/hesitation to empowering pride. This emotional and psychological journey, in turn, helped participants to formulate thoughts and actions to access and complete goals higher education.

There was no direct route that I could trace between the sense of fear they experienced in their journey from diminished self-awareness to greater self-knowledge and action on behalf of themselves and other Dreamers. They evolved from their reluctance about disclosing their undocumented status to a state of awareness that allowed them to overcome educational challenges. These three Dreamer participants learned to situate themselves historically, geographically, and socially as powerful agents in their own lives and their own futures.

They weave discourses of empowerment around their discovery of their undocumented status during early adolescence. Dreamers developed language to manage self-recognitions and to direct focused action that would achieve specific goals in their journeys to and through higher education. These three Dreamers believe that these achievements will in turn lead them to fulfilling their aspirations for self-development, inclusion, and for building a lasting contribution to American society through multilayered engagements in their communities. For instance, Jesús travelled from debilitating fear to success by deferring his dream for several months: he dropped out of school but came back to his studies and graduated. Jesús obtained employment in a field related to his professional training. Diego, at 19 the youngest participant, came of age in the media-rich decade between 2000-2010, has availed himself of dense social networks and produced interactive media to show pride and channel his individual agency.

The future journeys of Dreamers, until permanent legalization is achieved, lies in the support they receive from their most proximate communities. They speak of how they asserted their pride in who they were and demanded to be treated with dignity.

Xavier

Xavier began asserting his pride early after he found out that he would not be granted as much financial aid as native-born or permanent resident peers to continue on with his studies at university. Xavier asked a counsellor why that was the case, insisting that he was no less worthy than other students and therefore should not be treated differently. Xavier was making a claim about the injustice inherent in discriminating against undocumented students. In that sense, he foresaw that financial aid decisions were a challenge to his rights as a human being and a devaluation of his academic accomplishments.

I interpret Xavier's comments to signify a contestation of his diminished access to university studies. If he enrolled in college, Xavier knew he would be at a great risk of dropping out than students whose lawful citizenship status was clearly defined.

> *Xavier: Esto todo paso cuando comencé a aplicar para las becas en high school. Entonces, yo le pregunte a Ms. Kirk, se llamaba. Era una vieja que se encargaba ahí del college. Dije, 'Por qué me van a dar tan poquito, por qué me van a dar tan poquito si yo tengo buenos grados, Miss Kirk? Y dice, mijo, es porque no tienes un seguro bueno. [Felipe: Hmmm] Uh-huh, y le digo, pero, yo no lo entendia. Oh sea, no entendia por que. Yo le decía, 'Pero, que eso no lo hacen basado en tus, en tus calificaciones?', 'En tus actividades, porque yo era muy activa.' Estaba en varios clubs, y participaba los fines de semana en la escuela.*
>
> *Xavier: This all happened when I started applying for scholarships in high school. I asked Ms. Kirk, a college counsellor, 'Why will I be getting very little money if I have good grades, Ms. Kirk?' And she said, 'Darling, it's because you don't have a valid social security number.' [Felipe: Hmmm] Uh-huh, and then I said, but, I don't understand. I mean, why? I told her… But don't they base their decisions on academic achievement, on civic engagement? You see, I was very active. I was in many clubs, and volunteered during the weekend to clean the school*. (Xavier, Interview, February 8, 2012)

There is in this recollection both a protest at the creation of sites of inequality beyond his control and also a history of hope in that the effort would be rewarded, or at least that it

was a fundamental question of equality denied. Xavier enrolled at a four-year university the next fall after high school graduation. With help from his siblings, part-time work, and in-state tuition, he was able to finish two semesters at university as a social studies major. He abandoned his studies, however, unable to pay for a $13,000.00 increase when he was classified as a non-resident.

Jesús

Looking back, Jesús finds pride in his accomplishments as a 15-year old immigrant. He feels he achieved much in spite of belonging to a disadvantaged ethnic and linguistic minority in early 1990s California.

He points out that a specific outreach officer from a community organization helped him to secure admission to UC Berkeley:

> *Jesús: Me informé con una consejera que se había graduado de una universidad de prestigio. Bueno, yo te puedo decir que ella era muy competente*
>
> *Jesús: I inquired from a counsellor who'd graduated from a prestigious university. She was very competent.* (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

Jesús describes how this counsellor helped him navigate the application process because there was then no special admissions form for undocumented students who were submitting applications to university. An informal network of supporters of non-status youth had by then formed, and information was travelling to students through community service organizations more often than through high school counsellors. Information of this type had not yet been disseminated widely. That counsellor's advice played a crucial role in his college application process.

Jesús: Esa consejera en particular hablo a UC Berkeley, and she said, 'yes, I talked to these people, and yes, they are facing this situation. In fact, they would recommend that you do not answer these questions, You just leave I blank or mark N/A, and then they will call you, and that's how I was admitted.

Jesús: That counsellor spoke with people at UC Berkeley, and she told me, 'Yes, I've spoken to these people, and yes, they are facing this situation. In fact, they would recommend that you do not answer these questions, no. Just leave blank or mark N/A, and then they will call you, and that's how I was admitted. (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2102)

Diego

Diego is happy to speak about his own story as an undocumented student and how he has overcome the challenges he encountered. His radiating optimism and tireless work are inspiring, especially as his journey from fear to pride is quite moving. Having learned he would have fewer options for university during high school, he was initially afraid of speaking publically or frankly to strangers about being a Dreamer:

Diego: Originally, actually I was very afraid to speak up, and you know, just become part of the movement. But luckily, the largest Dreamer activist group here at the University of xxxx has a very strong membership core, and they really allowed the membership to get a sense of community amongst themselves, and also to just become part of, uhm, like, this kind of, uhm, and there is strength of this leadership within, and so, the group was very good with that, and as for me, I

originally started on my first, during my first year in college. (Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012)

Diego's engagement with the Dreamer movement happened organically. It emerged through his increasing involvement in activism. At a school teach-in, the organizers needed a speaker and he was subtly eased into the role of an activist. Since that initiation, Diego has found meaning, fellowship, and peer support to navigate the dual challenge of being undocumented and the higher likelihood Dreamers face of abandoning their studies.

Felipe: So how did you, or what made you, reach out to, to the world ? If you go back to the moment when you either picked up the phone or walked into an office to ask for, you know, ah, to be involved and something, if you go back to that first experience.
Diego: It was very spontaneous.
Felipe: Oh, really?
Diego: I was helping at a counsellors' conference about undocumented students, and I was like one of the quiet persons, you know, like setting up chairs, eh, bringing food.
Felipe: Uh-huh.
Diego: Yeah, helping with the registration, and stuff. That's what I had in mind, but they did not have anybody to speak. So, it was like, we kind of need someone to help out, would you be interested? And I was like, okay. I was like, I know what I am getting myself into, so it wasn't so much a choice that I made consciously. It was more like oh, they needed someone, and I stepped up, not knowing what I was getting myself into. (Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012).

Diego has a strong commitment to the Dreamer movement in Los Angeles and has participated in forums and written for the university's newspaper:

Diego: We had a screening of a movie here in our department that was about undocumented students, and I participated in the panel. (Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012)

Diego sees an especially meaningful, transformative effect in his presence at the university campus. Diego's university experience and the Dreamer movement have

transformed him profoundly. He speaks with deeply felt admiration for the activist work he encountered and embraced:

> *Felipe: Would you ever transfer to a higher ranked university to finish your BA degree there?*
> *Diego: Right now, I'm extremely happy here at the University of xxxx. When I first came to this university, and learned about UniDreamers and the amazing work that they do, I would say… that this is the only university in the whole world that has that sort of people who have passion for this movement, and if I had gone anywhere else, I feel I wouldn't have grown as much as an activist, in things like immigration. I wouldn't have grown as much as a person. So, I might have been stagnant.* (Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012)

He has developed a passion and a wide network of activist friends who now constitute his support network:

> *Diego: And even though this university was not my first choice before. Now, it's… will always be my first choice in schools because of that experience with activism. So, uhm, being here at the University of Xxxx, the center of it all. I am in a perfect place in terms both of the Dream movement as well as in the field of study that I want to work in.*
> *Felipe: Wow, that's so wonderful!*
> *Diego: Yeah, so, it works both ways. I can't complain actually. (Laughs).* (Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012)

Theme 5: Claiming their dream

I show in this section how these three Dreamers have been claiming their dream and fashioning their lives in relation to higher education and their recognitions of themselves as full citizens of the United States. They have expressed a desire to participate in higher education. They cherish the transformative role of that experience in their lives when they contemplated the dawn of adulthood. Xavier and Jesús, part now of the elder Dreamer generation, seized all opportunities available but these two Dreamers settled for social and occupational site that are not their initial understandings of their aspirations. Their life projects, and the role of a

university education in it, have clearly changed and been reformulated. A comprehensive legalization or greater access to financial support could transform the lives of these three Dreamers and those whose lives they encounter in their journeys.

Claiming their dream has individual meanings to each participant. For each Dreamer, being optimistic, resilient, and holding on to hope has meant keeping on dreaming and opposing every obstacle vigorously. They have been claiming their dream by

- declaring or asserting who they are,
- expanding the notions of what it means to be a citizen,
- engaging in personal activisms or political action to widen participation in higher education,
- building networks of support with other Dreamers,
- soliciting help from community and allies to change minds and hearts through persuasive discourse.

Diego

I excerpt here Diego's affirmation of commitment to his individual agency in the Dreamer movement. Diego's words need no gloss, they hold such power.

> *Felipe: And if you situate yourself geographically, where would you see yourself in ten years?*
> *Diego: I would say that I would still be here in LA.*
> *Felipe: So, you see yourself in LA.*
> *Diego: Yeah, especially because, you know, because of the industry that I hope to partake in, and also partly because if the DREAM Act doesn't pass in the next ten years, I wanna be part of the movement here.*
> *Felipe: Mhm.*
> *Diego: And I want to continue helping undocumented students*
> *Felipe: Mhm.*
> *Diego: Like myself.* (Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012)

Diego sees a clear path to follow in his struggle to gain the right to be educated and share the benefits of citizenship with more Dreamers who feel American like himself. His passion is rooted in a deep sense of commitment, belonging, and attachment to the Dreamer community and to this presence in academe:

> *Felipe: So, I wonder, how you see yourself in ten years, what's your, your heart's desire for yourself, uhm, in the future?*
> *Diego: Uhm, I have a pretty concrete plan, but obviously, plans don't always work the way that we want them to be, but if I can have, you know, the, my, I guess, plan, uhm, I, see, I should graduate from UCLA, 'cause I hope to also, do a double major in Philosophy, then…*
> *Felipe: Oh, wow!*
> *Diego: Then, after that… and I hope to graduate school and kind of harness some, my film making passion for. So I would go to a graduate program for directing, or just, you know, film making in general, and hopefully I want to make movies of social significance.* (Diego, Interview, June 11, 2012)

Diego's activism is very inspiring. Diego's sense of social justice and how he can help affect change is deeply moving. His commitment is a testimony of the quality of activist he has become in the Dreamer movement. For Diego there is a special ray of hope. In 2012, Barack Obama issued an executive order granting temporary work permits and stays of deportation orders to law-abiding Dreamers under 29 years of age for a non-renewable period of two years. Dreamers' expectation is that immigration relief is enacted in 2014 for all immigrants.

Xavier

Xavier's dream in his educational future is to complete his baccalaureate degree in the humanities. He would like to channel his long-life love for teaching and learning into a profession. He yearns to contribute more to his communities through the full use of his talents in a society that embraces him and his gifts.

Felipe: ¿Todavía quieres estudiar? *Felipe: Do you still want to continue your*

Xavier: Sí, mi BA en las humanidades. In social studies, para enseñar a los niños. [Felipe: Seria maravilloso] Me gusta mucho trabajar con ellos. Les tengo mucha paciencia.

studies?
Xavier: Yes, a BA in the humanities. In social studies, and teach children. [Felipe: That would be wonderful] I love working with children. I am so patient with them. (Xavier, Interview, June 5, 2012)

Xavier's plans might include graduate school and a doctorate. I asked Xavier how his life would be different if he had had the chance to pursue his education in his 20s. He answers he could very easily be educated to doctoral level by now.

Felipe: So… if you más o menos hubieras tenido la, el acceso a la universidad, tú ya
Xavier:….Aja, ya, ya fuera un doctor, o algo así. [Felipe: You can do it. You can do it. O sea…] I am, I am, gonna do it. No pierdo las esperanzas. [Felipe: No, no, no le quites el dedo del renglón.]

Felipe: So… if you had had better access to university studies, you would by now
Xavier: ….Uh-huh, I'd have a PhD by now or something like that.
[Felipe: You can do it. You can do it. O sea…] I am, I am, gonna do it. I am not giving up hope. [Felipe: No, no, don't ever quit.] (Xavier, Interview, June 5, 2012)

It is encouraging to see that Xavier is hopefull about completing his university studies. He remains optimistic and firmly convinced that his future career plans are still congruent and attainable.

Jesús

Jesús, like Xavier, still dreams of returning to university studies. However, graduate school is a major investment, and he is saving and planning for a time when there might be more financial assistance available to Dreamers:

> *Jesús: Becoming an expert on the humanities still appeals to me. Grad school will have to wait though, until I have access to more scholarships or loans. I just couldn't pay for a research degree now.* (Jesús, Interview, February 28, 2012)

Epilogue: Reaching our Futures Together

I identify two elements in my data that help me interpret the overall arc of participants' beliefs regarding their presence in the United States and in higher education: (a) Interviewees develop a sense of self awareness that was expressed as *pride* in their identities and accomplishments as Dreamers, and (b) Interviewees maintain an overall *positive attitude* towards education and their own individual presence in American society. They believe that they can make a difference and shape a more just society for themselves and other Dreamers.

These three Dreamers speak with pride of being American and how they maintain positive attitudes towards their social sites in American society despite opposing discourses. They ascribe a great deal of their perceived success to pride in being undocumented, their aspiration to legal American citizenship, a university education, and maintaining positive attitudes in the face of personal challenges and sour immigration debates. They express their confidence in their own capacities, which they believe help them to achieve greater success.

These Dreamers utilized these two conceptual constructs to negotiate the conflicting discourses regarding their presence in higher education. They share a sense of self, of personal history, of self-confidence that seeks harmony with other Americans. These Dreamers negotiate the complex events that led to their presence on American soil to face political debates that oppose their continuing presence in the United States.

They make journeys of self-discovery that take them from a sense of fear to a sense of self-empowerment and pride in their visions of their own identities. Through that journey of discovery, these Dreamers make a calculus about how they will integrate their American identity into their pursuit of higher education and the social sites they wish to inhabit within

U.S. society. They eschew the politics of resentment and instead embrace a positive view of themselves and of the perfectibility of a society and of a body politic that will eventually open to Dreamers its sets of legal frameworks. They speak of their identity as conceptual constructs arising from a deep wish to partake in American society as full citizens. Their wish has been to support their families and their communities morally and foster integration into the social fabric of the United States. These Dreamers would like to reach their dream together in harmony with other Americans.

These Dreamers express their desire to participate and remain in the United States by deploying a series of goals that incorporate the educational offers of institutions of higher learning and by envisioning personal educational ambitions that make important social contributions to the well-being of their communities. These Dreamers wish to inhabit the social sites available to other Americans because they are deeply committed to mapping out their life projects in the United States. In their wish to accede to and inhabit academe, these three Dreamers aim to transform the societies and the communities they inhabit. Diego excels at university, engages in activism in public forums and through his writing. Xavier and Jesús exercise their own brand transformation in the more localized personal contexts within the networks constituted by family, friends, and acquaintances. Their thoughtful answers here convey their commitments to widening access to higher education for underserved populations like Dreamers and other marginalized immigrants in greater Los Angeles.

Summary

In this chapter I presented five emergent themes in my analysis of interview data. I discussed the ways in which these three non-status students construct their identities in their

journeys to and through university studies. I situated these Dreamers' self-recognitions within the nested contexts where their conceptualizations of personhood arise. I considered the power of self-awareness and pride in the journey to fighting for and claiming a set of aspirations that is born from these three Dreamers' conceptions of their agency within the bounded geographic imaginaries of their personhood as Americans.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this chapter, I reflect on how three Dreamers conceptualize their identities and presence in higher education, and propose future research directions. I explore what actions stakeholders could take to widen access to academe for youth who are asylum-seeking or undocumented. I consider the implications for policy makers and scholars who study youth's efforts to join mainstream American society and explore the implications of this case study for educators and guidance personnel.

A question of social justice

Non-status youth and non-status adults inhabit in higher education. They have co-constructed notions of identity and focused action that have helped them to navigate life in the nested contexts where their lives unfold. Dreamers often belong to families of U.S. citizens and permanent residents. That situation is especially true for Dreamers of Mexican descent who often wait over two decades for lawful family reunification. Dreamers' prospects for educational attainment and professional advancement remain diminished. Many politicians still oppose making any changes to immigration law in a context of public approval for granting citizenship to undocumented youth. Although changes have been made to broader immigration law in the past, applications for legal status languish at immigration and at visa granting centers for decades, testing the resolve of applicants and Dreamers like Xavier, Jesús and Diego, in their quests to have a more positive role in American society through a set of expanded rights and responsibilities.

Undocumented students themselves have mobilized independently or collectively. They have told their stories and demanded inclusion in higher education and immigration relief.

Dreamers of all ages have mobilized during congressional debates. Youth activists have lobbied policymakers by speaking to members of congress, conducting marches and sit-ins, coordinating letter-writing campaigns, and placing themselves at great personal risk. Dreamers have exited the country and established precedents for humanitarian parole that did not exist before for this population in the language of the law. In that sense, many Dreamers have been trailblazers in contesting immigration law that severely disadvantages them.

This process of creating an American identity fashioned from political engagements and community bonds is increasingly heard in discourses about education and political involvement. The major triumph of the fight for the civil rights of Dreamers is fostering conversations possible about their struggles and their futures. The efforts of youth, in fact, are often complementary campaigns to broaden access to underserved populations, and their patterns of civic engagement energize student commitment to success at university, and beyond, through a steely resolve to succeed as a class would, together.

The education of at risk students

Non-status immigrants who are currently enrolled, or potential students, experience sites of belonging and marginalization rather poignantly (Hess, 2005). Their undefined immigration status transforms them into quasi stateless individuals (Romero, 2005). That is, their countries of origin are sometimes less well known to these Dreamer immigrants than is the U.S., but immigration laws in the United States prevent them from fulfilling their life projects successfully. Immigrant youth originating outside the United States should not be penalized for living in a country they did not initially choose to inhabit. After 13 years of inaction on the DREAM Act, the question remains whether Dreamers will be forever strangers

in their own country or become American citizens before the law, as they are in every other respect.

The key understandings of this study may have consequences for university stakeholders and legislators who examine the human impact of university recruitment and the retention of at risk Dreamer students. It might contribute to the study of how cultural practices like language and civic engagement mediate the perceptions of immigrant-origin students' identities, their views on access to higher education, and their moves to access or promote access to higher education for themselves and other immigrant-origin minorities. The Dreamers I interviewed have constructed a support system that has allowed them to persist in their goals and achieve some measure of success in contexts that offer them very limited possibilities. Their fight to extend networks of support can help universities establish on-campus programs that cater to the specific areas Dreamers most need.

Implications for policy makers

Immigrant youth's access to or exclusion from classrooms, including those in higher education, should be definitely settled to ease the human pain and loss of human potential. Scholars like Pérez *et al.* (2010) and Ortega (2011) note that state and federal legislatures should act to widen participation in higher education for Dreamers. Universities, politicians, and other stakeholders have an ethical responsibility to address marginalization of this large and important number of potential students. Regrettably, no federal remedy to the immigration status of Dreamers is in sight as other pressing policy concerns have taken centre stage in federal and state legislatures. At this point, a patchwork of state laws and institutional policies

make it difficult for educators to assist students. Dreamers, often first in their families to attend college, encounter yet another level of complexity in their academic and life journey.

Implications for university administrators

Admissions Offices at universities could increase outreach to high school students to encourage non-status youth to enroll at university (Herrera, 2007). Programs exist already at some California universities that can serve as working models. Research could further document the efficacy of such programs and why they seem to work. Dreamers have seized the opportunity to outreach successfully in California, where the more activist campuses in the University of California System have created volunteer arms of on-campus student life organizations to reach out to students still in high schools (Ortega, 2011).

Implications for educators and guidance counsellors

Guidance counsellors could create awareness, as well as concrete policy, to increase emotional and academic support for Dreamers (Gonzalez, 2009; Gonzalez, Plata, Torres, & Urrieta, 2003). Institutions could foster retention to help students navigate higher education and create spaces where students encourage one another to keep focused on achieving their goals, maintain their optimism and develop their resilience (Nuñez, 2009). Long-running programs exist that help students from underserved ethnic minority communities across the United States. A fine example is the College Assistance Migrant Program or CAMP (CAMPAA, 2003; Araujo, 2011; Suarez, 2010), established to aid the children of migrant farm workers in enrolling at four-year universities and completing their degrees. Programs of this kind provide assistance in demystifying the university experience for Dreamers who may be among the first in their families to attend university (Rodriguez, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2007; Tatum et al., 2000).

Ideally, implementing support programs like CAMP will help students navigate the emotional and academic challenge presented by accessing and attaining a higher education. The mentoring opportunities afforded by these programs (Anaya & Cole, 2003), along with the social networks developed among peers sharing similar life circumstances, have proven effective in creating the type of relationships that are determinant to completion of university studies. Reyes (2009) found that a combination of meetings, orientations, and a lounge area have facilitated students' sense of confidence and engagement. Other factors notwithstanding, Avalos & Pavel (1993) have stated that students receiving financial aid earn more semester units.

Students at CAMP have appreciated the help they received during high school in managing the process of application for admission to four-year universities, which can often be confusing and require a type of literacy first-generation immigrant children and their parents do not possess. CAMP shows how help for students during their junior or sophomore year in high school can alleviate the distress students feel when confronted with the college application process. A program of this type would include meetings and gatherings to create bonds that in turn translate into social capital that can help student manage the admission process and their advancement to graduation.

Further Research

Further research is needed that investigates the transformative role of universities in supporting efforts that widen access to higher education for Dreamers. Research could focus on Dreamers' own declarations of their most urgent needs for these acknowledgements: their presence on campus, respect for their individual at risk situations, and provision of the

instruments through which they can deploy their individual agencies towards maintaining resilience and achieving success. Research can interrogate the ways that silence from universities and stakeholders in higher education reproduces and exacerbate students' acute plights (Badger, 2009; Beamon, 2012; Parsons, 1997). Research is also needed into how institutions of higher education can help students in precarious immigration situations, asylum seeking or undocumented, to navigate admission, remain matriculated, and be supported until graduation (Erisman & Looney, 2007). Researchers and educators could investigate how a bridge can be established between researchers in the social sciences/humanities and stakeholders to document and support Dreamers that can't escape lives of diminished educational opportunity.

The ethical dimension of activism or research on youth experience raises key questions for researchers and scholars: What roles might researchers and scholars play in supporting, promoting, and initiating efforts of transformation that help Dreamers? It is estimated that the number of undocumented students graduating each year numbers around 65,000 in the United States, a large and important contingent indeed. Close examinations of lessons about effective activism learned from the Dreamer movement could change the lives of non-status children, perhaps now adults, living inside and outside of U.S. contexts. Future research could address the concrete ways in which the modern university as an institution can demystify the presence of youth in precarious immigration situations and promote their integration into lawful presence in the host country and entering the professions. A sustained and close analysis of the constructions of Dreamers constitutes an urgent direction for future research to interrogate media depictions of Dreamers.

Participatory Action Research

I now examine a series of activities that could raise the profile of individual Dreamers and promote awareness among stakeholders. I phrase these suggestions as participatory action research, a methodology embracing social justice and working towards transformation of individuals and their contexts. This set of possibilities could highlight students' contestation of narratives that view them as foreign or less worthy of participating fully in U.S. society. Activist students and scholar could engage with this innovative methodology to facilitates youth's engagement with scholarship about their lives and create transformative spaces, especially through the use of social and other widely accessible media.

Produce media texts regarding Dreamers' experience. To dignify the experience of Dreamers and the legal enactment of the individual and collective rights of non-status immigrants, coalitions of scholars and stakeholders could work with those communities to incorporate Dreamers and other non-status immigrants' varied lived experiences into a body of scholarly literature useful for education that could inform policy development and legislation.

Creating spaces for the voices of individual realities and lived experiences of Dreamers. Scholars and stakeholders could spearhead initiatives in which Dreamers map and document their lived experiences, allowing Dreamers to manipulate cultural artifacts to represent their own lived experiences. Youth and adults in precarious migration situations, long silenced, can teach us about their worlds they inhabit; possibly, through a co-creation in film or other multimedia projects, of platforms that document their life histories. Digital media projects could afford youth the use of cameras and other media equipment to help illustrate how scholars and stakeholders can document the experience of the undocumented.

Focus on how youth resist dominant ways of knowing and persistent social and cultural forces. Resistance of social forces is the main starting point to analyze lived experiences in a post-capitalist politics of contexts (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Undocumented or asylum seeking immigrants have resisted dominant discourses about their participation in academe through richly layered examples of how to combat endemic structures of oppression and initiate change. Activists' and Dreamers' iterations of their identities and their voices are in themselves accounts of lives of transgression, frequently placed at great personal risk—as activists' and Dreamers' have quested to promote access to higher education and the full set of possibilities emanating from citizenship. Dreamers' individual and collective ways of resisting dominant discourses constitute a mapping of lived encounters with a world they wish to transform, singularly unimpeded by overzealous concern for personal interest, but rather aiming for the greatest good of the greatest number, the heart and core of striving towards social justice.

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