

Undocumented Students' Educational Experiences and their Socioemotional Health



Dra. Aurora Chang

**What do you know and what
would you like to know about
undocumented students?**

...

Write for five minutes.
Then, turn and talk to the person next to you.

**Undocumented to
Hyperdocumented**

...

Sueños Muertos

Dead Dreams

Undocumented Students

- *Demographics

- *Educational experiences/Socioemotional challenges (based on my participatory action research)

- *Reflection

- *Strategies

National (U.S.) Demographics Estimates - Undocumented Immigrants

-11.9 million undocumented people in the U.S.

-65,000 undocumented students graduate high school annually
(Passel & Cohn, 2008)

-One of every eight American is an immigrant (38.5 million of
307 million total)

-of these, 16.8 million are naturalized U.S. citizens

State (IL) Demographics - Immigrants

-One of every seven Illinois residents is an immigrant (1.74 million out of 12.9 million).

-of these, 783,000 are naturalized citizens

-91.4% of Illinois immigrants (1.59 million) live in the seven-county Chicago metropolitan area (Cook, Lake, McHenry, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, and Will)

-Chicago is home to 588,000 immigrants, 33.8% of the state's total

Research Question

How do undocumented college students make sense of the American Dream and how do their identities, educational trajectories and sense of agency manifest, develop and intersect in coming to that understanding?

(Today's focus: experiences going to college, being in college and the socioemotional impact)

Participatory Action Research

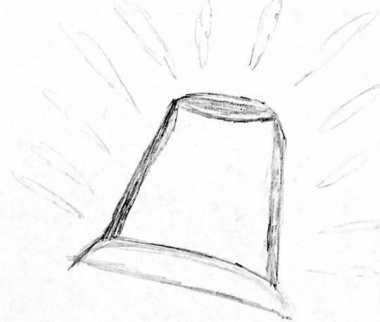
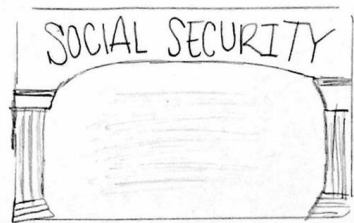
Tenets

a collective commitment to investigate this issue

a desire to engage in self and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation

a joint decision to engage in individual or collective action that leads to a useful solution that benefits the people involved

the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation and dissemination of the research process



And so I didn't get this was important because people, they don't know how important it is. They don't know what they have. Because they don't know what it means for us not to have it. And so, a picture of that like saying, "Hey, we don't have it." The second one is, I don't know how to say it in English. Is it searens? Sirens. Because we have to be always alert in everything that is going on. And I just feel really alert all the time. And this one is a person in the clock because we cannot miss opportunities. So I feel that other people can do the different thing and they lose and opportunity and they're like, "OK, another opportunity can come." But for us, its more limited, so we have to take every opportunity that we can take. And this one is a person jumping because it is not an obstacle because sometimes obstacles for us seem like, really small now because we have to go through a lot of things, that obstacles are not a big thing now. They're just things that we have to go through and keep going. So I think we just jump and keep going. And this one is the sea. And i did this one because the undocumented population is like the sea. It's like a lot of people, right. And the waves because the waves are the only people that succeed. I'm like, I'm here. And I was looking at the way the waves form, and they have to be hit by the air like really hard so they can come up. So, to come up, we have to be a wave. We have to be hit. And people do not know that, like they don't know how hard it was to get there.

What keeps undocumented students from coming out?

So like, so I have been seeing, even though we have the support of teachers and staff, and we have the school, people still like, I don't know stepping back because they don't want to come out, or at least they don't want to say "oh I'm undocumented". Maybe get more into it because at one point they will need the support, when they transfers, so I'm like in high school it was like we didn't have all that support, it all started when I was in senior year, I was almost finishing high school, then we started to say oh we need to start a group and start getting support, and now I say, if I just had a lot of support there, but now I am here, we have the support and still people have the support and they still just don't want to do it.

What keeps undocumented students from coming out?

I would say that lack of conversations, or the lack of, there are students that are undocumented, um so like even here at there are students, there are people that don't know what undocumented students is, cuz you know they have never been exposed to like, or don't know that another student doesn't have citizenship or residence in the united states and what situation that puts them, so like they don't know and so they well basically they don't know and if we keep like having this type of environments or atmosphere where this is not talked about, of course people are going to ignore it then because it's not talked about, so it's kinda like, because there's a lack of conversation, or a lack of understanding of this type of situation that undocumented students are in, so because there's a lack that probably that's also a reason, you know students don't feel as confident or like coming out.

Tell me about your college application process

Well in high school I was the student that I didn't want to get stuck, I didn't want to go to a school everyone else went to like UIT or like Dixon (laughter) I don't know I wanted something better for myself, and like I mean that's what I worked for all those four years, because I wanted to go to a university, I guess Pratt wasn't my top choice, it was like UIT, I got accepted into the schools but I it's like still couldn't do it you know, it wasn't because I didn't have what it took I just didn't have the money for it, so like I guess that was my goal, I wanted to prove to myself that it's not like I don't have the money but I did have the skill, that I had to get into the schools, I guess I was like, I mean it's sad I can't go to them, but it's like I would have been able to if I had the chance.

What made you persist to college even when others didn't?

Yeah because I was thinking on my senior year, I saw how many undocumented students couldn't make it to college. And I got a scholarship and they couldn't do it. So I felt really bad at one point because they also worked as hard for them and they just, I guess it didn't work, so it made me feel bad. So like there are not enough opportunities so some of us make it and others do not. I think a lot of undocumented students, they don't really, they know they are not going to have opportunities so they give up in high school. So I had some friends who were undocumented but if they would have been documented I think they would've worked hard and went to pursue higher education. But because they were undocumented they thought, not that's it, not I can't, there's no upside there's no anything for me. Why should I work hard for nothing. I think that's when they like, I think that one of the, some of the majority of the population, they just give up.

What makes you resilient?

For me it was GOD, there's a verse in the bible that says "you can do everything because GOD is by you" and that is always with me and like he could move everything, he could open doors. I always put my family, and I'm like I can do it. Even my mom said you won't make to college. I am sad for you, I am mad for you, because even though I know you work hard, I know that at one point you will fall because you are not going to be able to do it. And I was always the one that said, I will do it, I will get a scholarship, I'm not worried about that, I'm worried about the present. They already have this idea that you won't make it, so I won't work hard anymore, and so I wouldn't be here. So I think I would need to get something that makes you keep going so you won't give up.

What should our research focus on?

So you know how this is like a focus group, or a group where we are trying to like, do the research. Are we going to focus on undocumented students or just like, undocumented populations? Because one of the things I found interesting is, I guess like us we were students and we had to face those barriers. You know, so. But at the same time, I saw something about this, how undocumented students are able to share out their experience. We are able to find groups, or you know, do something about it. But what about the parents that might be immigrants too, they're undocumented. What about them? They are still providing for their children. And in a way, how I see it, this might not be necessarily true to everyone, but it's kind of like, achieving the success through their children. So, their children are doing that, but what about their own success. No one is asking them. I mean, some parents might, like my dad he wants to own his own business. So that's his own personal success. But it's just kind of like, from my perspective, how like my parents.

Educational Experiences & Socioemotional Challenges

- Disclosure (“coming out” as undocumented) & Activism
- Fear & Courage
- Disappointments & Little Victories
- Insecurity & Determination
- High Stakes & Appreciation of the Everyday
- Hopelessness & Resilience
- Perfectionism & Defeatism
- Survivor’s Guilt & Ambitious Zeal
- Cautious & Bold
- Observant & Agentic
- Stressed/Anxious & Resourceful

Strategies

- Listen mindfully, don't make assumptions
- Utilize visible markers of welcome on publications, websites, emails
- Ensure that there is a clear, easy to find link for undocumented student resources on your institutional homepage
- Work on collaborating with other campus offices/departments/schools so there is a consistent message
- Support an undocumented student group/organization
- Create opportunities that don't require legal status such as internships
- Develop an undocumented training for students, staff and faculty
- Host a teach-in about undocumented student issues
- Don't give legal advice; do familiarize yourself with community resources
- Develop a [scholarship](#) specifically for undocumented students
- Invest in a DREAMer Resource [Center](#)

Reflection

What have you learned about undocumented students today?

What information can you take back to share with your institution?

What is one action you can take to increase your knowledge about and advocacy for undocumented students?

Gracias!

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