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University of San Francisco

Undocumented Asian Immigrants: Securing Higher Education and Cultural Citizenship

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of College and Arts and Science
Migration Studies Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts in Migration Studies

By
Ka Kui Lee
May 2020

Undocumented Asian Immigrants: Securing Higher Education and Cultural Citizenship

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

In

MIGRATION STUDIES

By

Ka Kui Lee

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Abstract

This research investigates how undocumented Asian immigrants navigate the obstacles of higher education. It inquires how undocumented Asian immigrant students navigated the higher education process and how institutional actors influenced their college experience, revealing the intimate interactions between undocumented students and the institutional actors. The political economy of their college application process is understood through the frameworks of liminal legality, narratives, cultural citizenship, borders and boundaries, and governmentality of migration, all of which frame the process of the data analysis.

Through the interviews of college-graduated undocumented Asian immigrants and ethnography at a local high school in the San Francisco Bay Area, this research finds that institutional actors perform a critical role in the context of their higher education process, inviting inclusionary and exclusionary spaces of belonging. Although many recent studies have illustrated the role of cultural citizenship manifest in the civic engagement of undocumented immigrants, few have seriously considered the intimate and structured terms of higher education access and process as a claim to cultural citizenship. The participants' personal experiences with higher education is constructed in a political-social economy different from one person to another, producing versatile narratives of experiences of inclusion and exclusion in US society. By advocating for themselves, undocumented Asian students are claiming their rights to citizenship in the higher education process.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the problem

The achievement of undocumented students is uplifted in the pro-immigrant narrative of the US immigration discourse. In her 8 hour speech, Nancy Pelosi spoke on behalf of Dreamers and Deferred Action Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients' life successes and challenges and advocated for immigration relief through comprehensive immigration reform (Dyke, 2018). Josefina was one of these Dreamers she included in her speech, and Pelosi highlighted the immigrant body and class (the educated class) that deserve to be recognized and accepted, "Although she [Josefina] became aware of her immigration status in her early age, her status had never defined her. She had transformed uncertainty to determination." Although undocumented students are recognized in the political discourse, people with liminal status discover bureaucratic barriers as they apply for college and universities. The educational and social processes of exclusion are less verbalized and recorded as they get lost in political rhetoric.

Undocumented students more than ever face a tremendous struggle for higher education in the United States as they pursue their goals and dreams. Currently, over 90,000 undocumented students graduate from high school every year (Zong and Batalova, 2019), and undocumented students are likely to face deportation and work under-the-table because of the decision by the Trump administration to rescind the DACA program in September 2017 (Bradley, 2017). Today, pending in the Supreme Court, hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants may lose their work authorization and protection from deportation. With no prospect for legal employment for future undocumented students, undocumented high school students now face challenges as they apply for higher education, reverberating the experiences of undocumented students applying to higher education before the initiation of DACA in 2012.

Prior to DACA, undocumented students had faced economic exclusion because of their undocumented status. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 made it illegal for employers to hire or recruit undocumented immigrants knowingly without proof of identity. It bars undocumented immigrants from participating in the mainstream economy in an *employee* labor status, driving undocumented immigrants towards the underground economy (working under the table) for survival. Although undocumented immigrants have workplace rights under the National Labor Relations Act, their undocumented status, their low levels of education, language barriers, and lack of familiarity with the US legal systems have made them exploitable, particularly in the agriculture, restaurants, construction, and domestic work (Gleeson, 2012). For undocumented students without work authorization, their undocumented status is the inevitable conclusion of exclusion as they realize the limits of inclusion and economic mobility after secondary and higher education (Gonzales, 2016).

Moreover, undocumented students must also worry about deportation as they work and survive. Over the decades, the United States has installed and financed border security as a deterrent to the clandestine border crossing at the US-Mexico border. And its budget and infrastructure have since increased dramatically in the post-September 11th period (Department of Homeland Security, FY 2020 Budget in Brief, 2020). Through deterrence and assertive removal of undocumented immigrants, federal institutions and agencies have responded aggressively to unauthorized migration and settlement (Fassin, 2011). Indeed, immigration policies and labor laws intersect paradoxically and affect intimately on the lives of undocumented immigrant students.

Undocumented status, or illegality, has also prevented undocumented students from accessing crucial economic capital to fund their education. American students tap into the

institutional, family, and individual economic capital to fund their higher education, which includes scholarships, federal, state, and school grants, government and private loans, family assistance, work-study, part-time, and full-time jobs (Watson, 2018). The majority of the economic capital listed here is not available for undocumented immigrants because of their undocumented status. Federal grants and loans, as well as private loans, are the most common ways college students finance their education, but these financial products require at least legal permanent resident status (CollegeBoard, n.d.).

These requirements also include federally funded educational programs accessed by students across the country called the Federal TRIO programs, which are designed to target and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities (US Department of Education). Because these programs are federally funded, program administrators and service providers can only assist individuals who are legal permanent residents or United States citizens. Due to these constraints, applying for higher education and attending college or university is a huge financial risk. For those who do proceed towards high education, their family's economic status has a tremendous impact on how many resources and risks they can invest during college and how much debt they accrue (Zhou and Wodtke, 2019). Applying to college is a conscious and careful decision undocumented students are taking because their decision to obtain higher education also puts their family's economic situation at risk. Altogether, legal exclusion and the threat of deportation situate undocumented students in a marginalized position of society as they struggle for higher education in the United States.

Recognizing their struggles and stories, states have increased immigrant rights and services as a result of advocacy for undocumented immigrant students by undocumented youth, immigration activists, policymakers, and politicians (Abrego and Gonzales, 2010; Munoz, 2015;

Nichols, 2013; Zimmerman, 2011). Throughout the country, many state policies enacted since 2001 have encouraged and supported higher education enrollment for undocumented immigrant students through in-state tuition rates, state financial aid, and state-funded educational outreach programs. However, these institutional support are different by state (Zong and Batalova, 2019). In May 2020, at least 20 states and the District of Columbia have laws or policies allowing undocumented immigrant to pay in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020a) and at least 13 states now offer state financial aid to undocumented students (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020a).

Advocacy also opened a new American immigration policy for undocumented youth called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA), granting undocumented immigrants who came as children with prosecutorial discretion and work authorization. Not only did DACA defer them from deportation, it also opened employment opportunities and career paths, creating economic and social inclusion of these undocumented students who otherwise would have been excluded. DACA recipients have acquired some normality through employment opportunities (therefore financial security), but they live under restricted time as they must renew their work authorization and deferred action every two years.

Despite the alleviating changes through state aid and the federal program like DACA, institutional and legal barriers still continue to dominate the lives of undocumented immigrant students, especially access to financial services and aid. State financial aid and in-state tuition status depends on state residency requirements and sometimes to students with DACA only (Presidents' Alliance on High Education and Immigration, 2020a), creating exclusion to undocumented students as a result of state policies.

Undocumented students without DACA and the assistance of the state and federal government rely on their personal income, family assistance, school grants, and private scholarship to pay for tuition in a community college, four-year university, graduate school, or professional/trade school (Immigrant Rising, n.d.). The financial barriers undocumented students face in pursuing higher education and the extent to which they are able to complete their education are very challenging, and they are well documented by Latino scholars (Abrego, 2006; Abrego and Gonzales, 2010; Gonzales, Heredia, and Negron-Gonzales, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Lopez and Lopez, 2009). Yet, undocumented students have many reasons for pursuing higher education despite their inherent legal barriers.

Undocumented students who apply for colleges and universities often arrive in the country when they are young and wish to stay in the United States as their home. By getting a college degree, they meet the education eligibility for the American Dream and Promise Act of 2019, a variation of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) (Immigration Legal Resource Center, 2019) and therefore potentially gain legal status through their educational attainment. In addition, by acquiring higher education degrees, they could expand their economic opportunity for higher-income jobs and improve their financial security, leading to economic mobility (Zong and Batalova, 2019). However, they face barriers during the process of applying for college, from how to move forward from the social security question, to the tax information, to the college admission paper. And every inquiry questioning their identification, the more frustrated and hopelessness they feel in what they do not possess—a legal status.

In *Lives in Limbo* (2015), undocumented Hispanic students learn and struggle with these issues internally, creating intense pressure to succeed and survive in an impossible situation of

social and legal marginalization (Gonzalez, 2015). Succeeding in the face of significant obstacles is understated. 90,000 Undocumented high school students graduate each year (Ibarra and Ross, 2012), and most undocumented students pursuing postsecondary education in the United States do not have DACA.

Currently, more than 454,000 or approximately 2 percent of all students in higher education in the United States are undocumented students. Students with DACA or who are eligible for DACA (DACA eligible) constitute a subset of approximately 216,000 students or 1 percent of all students in higher education (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020b). Many undocumented students are enrolled in public higher institutions rather than private institutions, and approximately 90 percent are in undergraduate schools and 10 percent are in graduate schools of the total 454,000 undocumented students. Undocumented students are a heterogeneous population in higher education. Hispanic students account for approximately 46 percent of all undocumented students; Asian students account for approximately 25 percent; Black students account close to 15 percent; White students account about 12 percent; and others, including biracial and multiracial students, account for about 2 percent (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020b, p. 5).

While the experience of undocumented Latinx in higher education has been told by many scholars (Gonzalez, 2015), undocumented Asian students' experience in the higher education process is opaque. In light of this, the research addresses how undocumented Asian students navigate obstacles in the higher education process and in what ways institutional actors influence their college experience. The experiences, perceptions, and frustrations of undocumented Asians reveal these otherwise-occluded dimensions of illegality during the college application process.

Seemingly small sites like the counselor's office, admission office, and financial aid office reverberate with larger issues, as the undocumented Asian students in this study encounter a higher education process teeming with issues: undocumented students are left feeling isolated as they pursue higher education rife with institutional barriers. Institutional barriers are a pattern across the states where state policies create lucid othering. My participant's narratives reveal their experiences as undocumented immigrant students are not only understood as isolating, but also as a failure of education policy at the state level. This thesis will look at two states, California and Maryland, as part of my analysis in explaining state policy relative to when and where my participants went for higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine how college-graduated undocumented Asian students navigated obstacles they encountered in the higher education process. Through their experience, the context of higher education for undocumented Asian immigrants is revealed. The study will provide its recommendation for education and legal reform in the higher education process. Moreover, the research will result in a set of recommendations for institutional actors, such as high school counselors, nonprofit service providers, and institutional advocates, who are looking to build programming infrastructure on how to assist undocumented students during the process of higher education.

Research Question

This research addresses two questions: how do undocumented Asian student navigate the higher education process, and in what ways do institutional actors influence their college experience?

Theoretical Frameworks

The study of undocumented students' higher education experience process is analyzed through the frameworks of narratives, liminal legality, cultural citizenship, borders and boundaries, and governmentality of migration, all of which frame the process of my data analysis. The literature review will provide further details of their processes and functions in this study.

Methodology

Because this research investigates how undocumented immigrants navigate the obstacles of higher education, I gathered my data in two ways: interviews and ethnography. November is a critical period as college admission applications are due for public and private universities, such as the California State University application, University of California application, and Common Core application. I conducted my ethnographic observation as a college admission writing tutor during November 2019 at a local high school in the Bay Area. I conducted ethnography at this high school to understand how high school students were applying to higher education in order to understand the current college application process for Californian high school students. Although it was a privilege to assist students in their admission essays, I did not interview the high school students.

From February 2020 to March 2020, I interviewed 7 individuals in total, and I included pseudonyms for all participants. Two participants are nonprofit service providers who work closely with high school students. The other 5 participants are college-graduated undocumented Asian students from various nationalities. Among the 5 college-graduated students, 2 are from Hong Kong (Keith and Michael), 1 from South Korea (Katie), 1 from Taiwan (Lily), 1 from Singapore (Elizabeth). I selected these participants based on convenience-sampling.

The interviews with the participants were allotted 60 minutes. The interviews with the nonprofit service providers averaged 50 minutes. The interviews with the 5 college-graduated undocumented students averaged 55 minutes. All the interviews were conducted through semi-structured interviews to give flexibility at switching interview questions. The interview location was conducted at an agreed physical space, and only two interviews were conducted through Zoom.

As part of the consent form, I inquired the 5 undocumented student participants for permission to receive a copy of their college admission essay in addition to the oral interview. However, due to the passage of time, all 5 participants lost their college admission paper. Instead of content analysis of the college admission paper, this research will collect narrative data and perform narrative analysis of the oral reproduction of the college admission essay, the college application process, and the higher education process. This research, therefore, excludes any content and analysis of college admission essays.

I uploaded the interview recording files and ethnography notes in Google Drive, and I followed Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (2011) instruction on data analysis through open-coding, close-coding, and memoing for my transcript. Using this method, I found three themes essential to the understanding of the higher education process for undocumented Asian students. The findings of the study will be organized and discussed in chapter III.

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to 7 participants due to capacity constraints. My participants graduated from college as undocumented Asian students. Although they now hold various statuses after many years since graduation, this study does not focus on documentation. Indeed, this study also does not focus on DACA. Instead, it focuses on the implication of higher

education without DACA in the future. Although DACA can provide access to undocumented students, states can still exclude them as this research will show in chapter IV. Lastly, this study excludes undocumented immigrants who did not get into higher education because this study attempts to show the experience of applying for higher education for undocumented Asian students who applied as high schoolers.

Significance of the Study

Undocumented students are minors within the education system and invisible to those who wish to help them, which makes measuring the undocumented students' experience of applying for higher education nearly impossible. The practices of private and public institutions serving students have increasingly become integral navigators for undocumented students. Institutional actors, such as counselors, teachers, principals, nonprofit service providers, and institutional advocates, look for measurable qualitative and quantitative results to determine where their money and energy will be of most significant use to assist undocumented students. This research will provide institutional actors with data to validate the best practices of higher education assistance for undocumented students while also looking for areas of growth to build programming infrastructure.

Evaluating the narratives of the higher education process from past college-graduated undocumented Asian students will allow alumni to help shape and steer the best practices for undocumented students. The interviews created opportunities for college-graduated undocumented students to share their personal stories and reflect on how applying for higher education affected them personally and how it has influenced the way they think education as a demonstration for inclusion. Amplifying the voices of undocumented students is critical in ensuring valuable and practicable programming can be distributed, tested, and funded.

Definition of Terms

Borders and boundaries – Borders are general viewed as territorial lines defining political entities and subjects, whereas boundaries are social constructs creating social categorization of people and therefore their differences in society (Fassin, 2011). Borders and boundaries together are related in a process in which immigrants are racialized and ethnic minorities are reminded of their foreign origin as immigrants discover social boundaries through the differential treatment they receive as they enter and exit the destination country's borders and experience new social norms and categorization (Fassin, 2011).

Cultural citizenship - The demand for disadvantaged subjects for full citizenship in spite of their cultural differences from mainstream society (Gonzales, 1994).

DACA – DACA stands for deferred action for childhood arrival. This is an American immigration policy that gave work authorization and deferred action to undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children. Advocated by undocumented immigrants and institutionalized by the Obama administration in 2012, it was rescinded by the Trump administration in 2017 and currently being challenged in the Supreme Court by immigration rights groups.

Governmentality of migration - How individuals are governed or managed through organized practices of the government, specifically ideologies, knowledge, and power technologies (Fassin, 2011). In other words, how the system control social groups using specific rhetoric and state action.

Illegality – A social construction and perception of someone and something breaking the law. In the immigration context, it is indicative to unauthorized migration or unauthorized migrants. Migrant “illegality” draws from an epistemological, methodological, and political problem, and together influence the theory and social imagination of what is deemed illegal and therefore deportable (Genova, 2002).

Liberalism and liberal rights – The rights of all people to hold individual and freedom from government tyranny. Liberalism gave form to civil rights (the rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality) and human rights (the universal liberties of human beings).

Liminal status – The condition of transitioning one's social and political position to another. In the immigration discourse, it is refer as being “stuck” in the transitional period without being able to move one's status to another.

Liminal legality - How undocumented status affects people's ability to live in the United States. Although undocumented immigrants can be assimilated, their legal status prevents them from

being incorporated into society economically, civically, culturally, and legally. Often, people call it as stuck in a “limbo.” (Menjivar, 2006)

Political economy – The system of politics or economics in a space, revealing the relationships, values, practices, and norms of a society.

Narrative – The personal story of the individual.

Undocumented/illegal/unauthorized immigrant – Immigrants without legal status or have expired legal status in the country they visit, work, or settle.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Narrative, Liminal Legality, Cultural Citizenship, and Borders and Boundaries, and Governmentality of Migration

Undocumented immigrants who have established their lives in the United States feel the enormous struggle of their undocumented status, and scholars have coined this phenomenon in their study as liminal legality (Cebulko, 2014; Dao, 2017; Lachica Buenavista, 2018; Menjivar, 2006) from the narratives that they hear. Moreover, undocumented immigrants operate on the peripheral of social and legal structures of the state. They are people who stayed beyond the legal migration policy of a nation-state and have been called with multiple labels: undocumented, unauthorized, and illegal immigrants. Although their motivation for migration varies from one person to another, their legal rights are determined by the nation-state's laws and legal system. They are excluded from formal and substantial status and rights because of how they cross borders of the nation-state and experience social and cultural boundaries.

Undocumented immigrants feel different impacts of boundaries as they move within and between local and state structures despite a class-based exclusion from the federal government. The federal, state, and local governments take their own positionality in immigrant rights, resources, language access, services, surveillance and control. The institutional positionality of each level of government towards undocumented immigrants vis-à-vis policies, ordinances, laws, and political culture dominates the attitude towards immigrants. Under these contexts, undocumented students growing up and living in the United States experience differential borders and boundaries. These frameworks help conceptualize how undocumented students navigate their lives.

Narrative and Liminal Legality

Narratives, in the immigration context, are used by subjects to tell stories about why they migrate, how they migrate, and why they want to stay. Subjects use their narratives to apply for immigration statuses while the immigration bureaucracy process and verify their request. The immigration process for refugees and asylum seekers relies on written and oral testimonies to make a claim to their case. In hopes of understanding the experience of asylees and refugees seekers, migration scholars have used narrative analysis as a methodological framework in the study of refugee experience (Bek-Pedersen and Montgomery, 2006; Bruner, 1986; Eastmond, 2007). Similarly, narratives are also the way in which students write their college admission essays. Undocumented immigrant students use narrative to inform others about their life, drawing from their experience, social relations, and cultural repertoires to structure their narrative and to a particular audience (Good, 1994).

Narrative analysis is grounded in the assumption that “meaning is ascribed to phenomena through being experience and, furthermore, that we can only know something about other people’s experiences from the expressions they give them” (Eastmond, 2007, p. 3). People’s experience creates and structures narratives, yet the experience is also organized and given meaning when told. Analytically, narrative analysis is divided into three segmentation: life as lived, life as experienced, and life as told (Eastmond, 2007). Life as lived is the flow of events that touch on a person’s life; life as experienced is how the person perceives and give meaning to phenomena, drawing on previous experience and cultural repertoires as frameworks; and life as told is how experience is framed and articulated to an audience (Eastmond, 2007, p. 3). Narrative analysis, therefore, can tell us something about how subjects make sense of their world and

thereby making experience inter-subjective and cultural to the core with regards to their personal stories (Good, 1994, p. 139).

In regards to undocumented immigrants, scholars have found personal narratives an important piece to the process of political activism for undocumented immigrants (Abrego, 2006; Abrego and Gonzales, 2010; Beech, 2011; Dao, 2017; Gonzales, Heredia, and Negron-Gonzales, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Lopez and Lopez, 2009; Nakano, 2011). Nakano describes undocumented immigrants' advocacy as "framing liminality." Framing processes are the combined, collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that facilitate between opportunity and action (Nakano, 2011).

Liminal narratives assist undocumented immigrants in framing their marginalized position in strategic storytelling to engage and influence politics. Their marginalized position is often understood through the concept of liminal legality which inquires how undocumented status (no legal status) affects people's ability to live in the United States and how they live in a "limbo" (Cebulko, 2014; Dao, 2017; Lachica Buenavista, 2018; Menjivar, 2006). Liminal legality affects undocumented immigrants in all aspects of life, and their lack of status forces a condition for survival regardless of any cultural citizenship or milestone one obtained through education, language, and awards in the American society (Gonzales, 2015). Although undocumented status, or "master class" status as Gonzalez coins it, creates social barriers to the incorporation of a society, political advocacy has helped create an opportunity for cultural citizenship and identity reconstruction (Beech, 2011).

Scholars (Dao, 2017; Negron-Gonzales, 2015) who study political activism of undocumented immigrants have found advocacy as a significant medium that influences their civic participation in society. Moreover, advocacy provides an opportunity to meet other fellow

undocumented immigrants for social, political, and legal determination—creating a political economy that undocumented immigrants can turn to feel the affirmation of their mental and life struggles as a person without legal status. By organizing political action through talking, speaking, and chanting to critique draconian immigration policies and rhetoric, advocacy has created two phenomena: a political body striving for legal determination, and a space of belonging and relief in which derives the conditions of cultural citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

The participants' narratives in this study will show how their liminal legality is revealed in the institutional barriers of the higher education process. Moreover, their narratives will also show how individual action for self-determination for their higher education is taken despite their undocumented status.

Cultural Citizenship

Narrative and liminal legality help readers see how undocumented immigrants living in the marginalized periphery of society without traditional rights of citizenship and protection are able to find agency. In order to understand how undocumented immigrants portray and advocate for themselves in the higher education process, I use the framework of cultural citizenship to help inform the research.

Cultural citizenship offers new ideas about citizenship based on the experiences of people historically excluded from either formal or substantive first-class status. Ong (1999) defines cultural citizenship as a dual process: the current cultural practices and beliefs of an individual and community versus the state's criteria of belonging. In other words, belonging is contested between the people and the state. Rosaldo (1994) views cultural citizenship as demand for disadvantaged subjects for full citizenship in spite of their cultural differences from mainstream

society. Drawing on Rosaldo's definition, I look at the higher education process as demands for disadvantaged undocumented students for full citizenship despite their legal marginalization from mainstream society.

Other scholars who have written about cultural citizenship for Asian immigrants and Asian Americans explore the advocacy of Asians in media activism against stereotypical portrayals (such as the model minority stereotype) as a fight for cultural citizenship and belonging in the United States (Lopez, 2016). The intersectionality of cultural stereotypes and legal exclusion is embodied by the body of the undocumented Asian immigrant. The reality of educational stereotypes of Asians as the model minority creates additional barriers of marginalization for undocumented Asian immigrant students as they navigate social spaces and institutions.

Regardless of state categorizations such as citizenship and immigration status, different racial groups will have to interact with society and people's social norms and the institution's formal biases through laws and policies as they craft lives and selves. This thesis contributes to the growing literature of the different ways cultural citizenship is fought for Asians and Asian Americans.

Borders and Boundaries and Governmentality of Migration

Narratives may be different among different immigrant groups because of how they experience borders and boundaries. Contextually, it is hard to weave narratives together into a systematic and specific understanding of the undocumented experience for racial groups because the political structure of the United States creates different spaces and criteria of belonging. The political economy that influences undocumented people and the government law and policies in which they operate are different in each state, county, and city.

The different spaces undocumented immigrants traverse can be understood as crossing borders and the way they are treated and received in the space as boundaries (how they are treated by the existing population, institutions, and governments). Borders are generally viewed as territorial lines defining political entities and subjects, whereas boundaries are social constructs creating social categorization of people and therefore their differences in society (Fassin, 2011, p. 2). Borders and boundaries together are related in a process in which immigrants are reminded of their foreign origin (Fassin, 2011, p. 3).

Undocumented immigrants embody the epitome of borders and boundaries because of where they come from and how they are treated by the host society. Although Fassin (2011) discusses the national borders as the territorial spaces, I further dissect state and local governments as borders within borders and boundaries within boundaries. The ideologies and technologies at work in policing borders and the production of boundaries (Fassin, 2011) affect how undocumented immigrants are received in the nation-state. Governments protect their identity and sovereignty by managing people through law and policies, particularly in the economy, police, and humanitarianism (Fassin, 2011). I argue that schools and higher institutions are also itself a governing entity replicating the functions of a state.

As they enter and exit local governments and county jurisdiction, state borders, and higher institutions, undocumented immigrants are reminded of their exclusion as they discover social and legal boundaries through the differential treatment they receive. Their experiences at different levels of the government and higher institutions depend on where they are and how the local government, counties, state government, and higher institution include undocumented immigrants into their spaces. For undocumented immigrant students, inclusion technologies have

been manifested as in-state tuition policies, state financial aid, and school grants. These state laws and policies are informed by the ideologies and technologies that produced them.

Similarly, the federal government has also performed inclusionary ideology and technology by using its power and rhetoric to grant DACA to undocumented immigrants who came as children. However, we have also seen how exclusionary ideologies and technologies have informed the United States immigration law and policies because of class, religion, and politics. For example, the federal government controls the movement of people for immigrants through economic status (e.g., being poor prevents you from migrating or visiting the US), religious affiliation (e.g., the travel ban against predominantly Muslim countries), and political views (e.g., being previously affiliated with a communist party may prevent you from naturalizing).

Furthermore, we have also seen how exclusionary ideologies and technologies have informed border security through migration deterrence. For instance, nativism as an ideology has invited exclusionary technology in the federal government against migrants through the construction of detention centers for unauthorized immigrants, the walls on the US-Mexico border, the surveillance and increased Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE) action in immigrant communities, and the increased funding of these machineries to the Department of Homeland Security (Fassin, 2011). Surveillance, incarceration, and removal have affected the Hispanic immigrant communities due to how the exclusionary ideologies and technologies are targeted. Indeed, these exclusionary technologies are disproportionate when other determinants such as race are put into the equation.

In the United States, Mexicans became a token of illegality due to the racialized discourse of immigration in the US-Mexico migration context. Consequently, Mexican

immigrants learn how boundaries are created against them in the United States because of the racism they experienced in US society (Villa, 2000). The legacy of anti-Latino sentiment for societal problems since early-mid 20th century and their practical presence and population as well as coupled by technologies in the state policy level to conspicuously include (via labor) and exclude (via deportation) Mexicans in the labor market and society have created a racialization of Latino as the quintessential illegal immigrant in the United States (Ngai, 2006). As such, the label of illegal immigrants and illegal labor in the American imagination has made the focus of US immigration debates and academic inquiry on Latino and Central Americans instead of other transnational migrants from the Asian-Pacific, Europe, and Africa. Despite the racial undertone of immigration, Asian immigrants are also affected by borders and boundaries.

The conceptualization of Asian immigrants in the United States is dominated by the social token called model minority—the idea that a minority group in the United States can persevere, work hard, and obtain success (i.e., The American Dream). This is due to the observation that Asian immigrants are graduating high school and universities and earning gross wages at a rate comparable to the natives, specifically white Americans (American Council on Education, 2019). The comparison logic, however, is limited as it specifically draws its data from East Asians (China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan) and Indians. Therefore, the social application of the model minority often designates and imagines people coming from these nation-states.

The model minority stereotype miscommunicates the advances of social mobility of people coming from Asia. The social consequence of generalizing success for Asian immigrants is best summarized by Dao:

While the racialization of Asian Americans has historically been conceptualized as . . . [the] model minority immigrant who thrives by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps without government assistance, political debates on immigrant policy for immigrant rights are dominated by the concerns of the Latinx threat (Dao, 2017, p. 5).

As a result of the uneven racialization of immigrants, the ideologies and technologies in the United States provide a subtle context of how (when one investigates it carefully) the relationship between liminality and visibility is unequal among different racial groups. The degree of how one's social identity was targeted and harassed may influence undocumented immigrants' narrative. This thesis recognizes differences and experiences of immigration due to one's social identity and how they are perceived by others. This thesis will look at how boundaries and borders are produced in the higher education process and how that informs us of the racial experience for undocumented Asian immigrants in the higher education process.

CHAPTER III RESULTS

Chapter III will review the methodology, data collection, analysis, and the results of the study. The purpose of this study was to determine how college-graduated undocumented Asian students responded to obstacles while applying for higher education. The interviews were structured to draw out their experience with the higher education process and as well as identify in what ways institutional actors influence their college experience.

Setting of Study

The study was conducted in November 2019 to March 2020 in the Bay Area. The ethnography was conducted at a local high school in November 2019, and the interviews were conducted from February 2020 to March 2020 at an agreed location or through Zoom.

Participants

Participants graduated from college as undocumented Asian students. Although they now hold various statuses after many years since graduation, this study does not focus on documentation. Indeed, this study also does not focus on DACA. Instead, it focuses on the implication without DACA in the future by examining past undocumented students. Although DACA can provide access to undocumented students, states can still exclude them as this research will show in chapter IV. In addition to college-graduated students, I also interviewed 2 nonprofit service providers. The nonprofit service providers were interviewed to understand how their organizations provided services to undocumented high school students in their respective spaces. The organizations included a federally funded Upward Bound program housed at a nonprofit organization and the Boys and Girls Club.

Due to capacity constraints, I decided to cap the participants at 10 to allow adequate interview time. A total of 7 individuals participated in the study: 5 college-graduated undocumented Asian students and two nonprofit service providers. The 5 college-graduated participants identified their country of origin as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Their pseudonyms are Keith (Hong Kong), Michael (Hong Kong), Elizabeth (Singapore), Katie (South Korea), and Lily (Taiwan).

Data Collection

Data were collected through two primary methods: ethnography and individual interviews. I engaged in participant observation by assisting the college application process as a college essay writing tutor at the local high school. I used convenience sampling to collect individual interviews from college-graduated undocumented students.

Ethnography

The data collection began on November 5, 2019, in the college career center of the high school. The purpose of the ethnography was to understand how the current college application process looked like for Californian high school students. I understood the process by assisting students as a college essay writing tutor and advising students on how to write their essays. I assisted students with their essays only if they wanted help. The ethnography objectives were:

1. Learn how the college career center assists students with the college application process.
2. Understand the current requirements for the college admission paper and the college application process for UC applications, CSU applications, and Common Core applications.
3. Observe how the college career counselors assist students with their college admission essay.

4. Assist prospective college students with their college admission essays as a college essay writing tutor and learn the relationship and dynamics of the writer and the tutor.
5. Observe any other community members that assist with this process or have a relationship with the college career center or the school.

Although it was an excellent opportunity to learn how the political economy of the college application process looked like for current high school students, high school students were not interviewed in this study as it is outside the scope of this project. The ethnography only supplements this research, and the data collected will be discussed in chapter 4 conclusion.

Interviews

Interviews were completed in private rooms at an agreed location or through Zoom. Each interview was allotted 60 minutes, though the average interview spanned 55 minutes. Interviews were recorded on both the iPhone application and my laptop. Interview questions and consent forms are detailed in Appendix A.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed by a third party professional transcription service called Otter.ai. I followed Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's instruction on data analysis through open-coding, close-coding, and memoing for my transcripts. I developed codes based on notes I took during the transcription, as well as my notes from my observation as a college essay writing tutor. Using this method, the three major themes to emerge critical to the understanding of the higher education process for undocumented students were: assessing their own illegality, problem-solving institutional barriers, and finding mental wellness.

Results

This section details the results of the interviews and the ethnography. This project aims to assess how undocumented college-graduated Asian students responded to obstacles while applying for higher education and being a college student. The results were compiled to answer two research questions: how did undocumented Asian students navigate the higher education process, and in what ways do institutional actors influence their college experience?

Chapter 4, my analysis, in addition, will answer this following question: what does their reflection of their experiences with higher education tell us about how they claimed education in the context of citizenship?

Assessing their Illegality

The dominant theme throughout my analysis has been assessing the boundaries of their illegality (undocumented status). Boundaries in this context refer to discovering or educating themselves about what they can do and cannot do in relation to their undocumented status. Every person interviewed referred to the boundaries of their undocumented status as they pursued their way towards higher education. Although their personal experiences with undocumented status were unique from one another, the barriers to education were not—the stories of Elizabeth, Michael, Katie, and Lily highlight this theme.

When she was a high school student in Maryland, Elizabeth had the opportunity to get college credits by taking college courses while in high school. She found out she was unable to continue her extracurricular class at a community college because of her undocumented status. She recalled her experience:

So I brought this thing [application form] home. You know, I told my dad I need to get this SSN number situation and he's like, okay, I'm gonna go ask my boss, he came back the next day and he said, you know, we can't really have you enroll in this program [college course], you know, I don't have the ability to help you get into this program or

something like that. And then I think that was kind of when I learned that something was off, you know. And so for a long time, I think after that, that door was the first door that got closed on me because of immigration status, even though I didn't really know what was going on (Elizabeth, February, 20, 2020)

Elizabeth and her family recognized the seriousness of this problem and went to get legal help from an immigration attorney. Elizabeth found limited solutions to her precarious situation, stating “they [immigration attorney] were telling my mom, you can you either have a child here, wait 21 years, or you can wait for your children to get married, get naturalized, and wait for them to adjust your status and apply for you. I was 15 when this conversation happened.” (Elizabeth). Although solutions were not available for Elizabeth, she learned the complexity and the tedious process of being an immigrant in the United States. Another participant, Michael, who lived in California, echoed Elizabeth’s situation with his endeavor to search for a solution for his undocumented status, stating:

I first approached my JROTC instructor and asked, him if joining the army would be an option for me to get status. And so he said, okay, let's go to a recruiter, but I want to make sure that I'm there when we talk to the recruiter. I don't want you to go by yourself. So let's do that and scheduled some time and we'll go together. And we went to the recruiter. And while we were there, the recruiter basically said that there was no option for me to get status through joining the army. That's just not a thing (Michael, March 1st. 2020)

Undocumented students learn the hard truth of being out-of-status in a stringent immigration system: it is incredibly hard to adjust their status. The cold truth simultaneously closes doors for them and makes them hyperaware of their exclusion in society.

When they understand their limitations as an undocumented student and what future that might hold, the realization that it might not be possible for them to go to college and find employment hit them hard. According to Katie:

I think when I found out [about my undocumented status] that even if I work really hard, I may not be able to go to any college because they won't accept me even if I had good grade . . . because of my immigration status, all of the hard work, it's not going to really matter. I think that was something that hits me, kind of like a struggle between like, is this even worth it like to continue like studying really hard? And then on the other hand, it's like, I still need to still need to do it just in case it works out. I don't know it's like a very uncertain situation and you just, you just have to kind of, like swallow it and just kind of do the best I can. That was like the only thing I could do at the time. I felt there's nothing else I can do (Katie, March 7th, 2020)

Like Elizabeth and Michael, all my participants first learned the restrictive and the complex role of immigration law and policies play in their lives as they prepare for college. Soon after, the questions about eligibility to go to college followed, like in Katie's experience. But my participants did not understand what "undocumented means" in the context of applying to higher education until they researched it themselves.

The intersectional consequences that immigration has on education and the limitation that it entails was a personal journey of discovery (i.e., they figure it out themselves). Several participants noticed the intersectional relationship of immigration policy on education as early as 10th grade or as late as when they applied for college. From her experience, Lily states:

I started to ask school counselors and trusted teachers about resources. And I think it's really throughout the process that even though I knew what undocumented student from my online researching, I didn't really know what it meant, right in terms of like, what are the limitations? What are the things are available, what are out of our reach, etc. . . . So that's pretty much how I framed sort of like, the last two years of my high school is figuring out what exactly did undocumented being undocumented mean, you know, as a high school student who's graduating, and because of that, I learned a whole lot about California policies, like AB 540. And like the GED requirements, and what can you do with it (Lily, March 2nd, 2020)

Discovering their immigration status as a barrier to educational mobility and assessing their limitation as an undocumented student was ingrained in each participant's story. In assessing the limitation of their illegality, participants hinted at the role of institutional barriers in the process

of their higher education. These obstacles included financial barriers, administrative barriers, and institutional actors. The paragraphs below explain the theme of problem-solving those barriers as an undocumented student.

Problem-solving Institutional Barriers

Assessing the limitation of their illegality gave way to another theme that emerged: problem-solving as a skill to navigate institutional barriers. Institutional barriers are issues related to the institutional actors my participants encountered; and institutional actors in this context refer to schools, education, school policy, bureaucracy, and people like high school counselors, nonprofit service providers, and administrators. In inquiring about their experience with the higher education process, participants highlighted the absence of institutional actors in guiding them towards higher education.

Notably, they witnessed institutional actors, such as school counselors and administrators, were not trained in their professional career to guide undocumented students. Indeed, even though Elizabeth was a high-performing student in her school and tried to get assistance from the school counselor to navigate her predicament, she found out the role of the counselor was never prepared for a student in her situation.

I needed like my guidance counselor to help me navigate but she couldn't because she didn't know how either. There was no in-state tuition for Maryland students who are undocumented. There were no resources that were available. I tried literally googling undocumented student aid. Obviously nothing came out (Elizabeth, February 20, 2020)

Michael's experience echoed this as well. Michael was worried about applying for college undocumented and tried to get help from the school district, only to be told by the district official, "I don't know how you continued through the system this way but this isn't right. So, here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna pretend that this meeting did not happen and you should go home." (Michael, March 1st, 2020).

Reference to these institutional challenges was highlighted among all my participants and revealed structural cracks in educational services. Despite finding limited assistance from their counselors and administrators, Elizabeth, Michael, and Lily researched solutions and found ways to navigate the higher education process that was never built to include undocumented students. Michael found out that he was eligible for an in-state tuition rate in California because of AB 540, while Elizabeth was able to receive an in-state full-ride scholarship from the debate team and go to college in Maryland and New York. Others, like Lily, created solutions for herself and became involved in her campus organizing during her second year of community college. When she became part of the student council, she advocated with other student organizers at the administrative level for undocumented students. According to Lily, it was to bring greater recognition and resources for undocumented community college students.

I think one quarter of us [student council] were undocumented students. These are all elected people. Some of us ran on very deliberate campaign that were undocumented. Some, like me talked about being undocumented during campaign so not quite explicit. And then some who have just come out of a deportation and campaigned for themselves. So we, you know, we had that particular representation. And we use that as a way to advocate for undocumented student center on campus. Because it was really part of a recognition that like, well, there are a lot of people here and community college being by the symbol of affordable college education, right, we need to actually do more, right, which is to provide resource centers right, in all areas are needed within our student population and undocumented being is one of them. And so, we definitely made that into a priority in our year of tenure there as a student body representative (Lily, March 2nd, 2020)

Although Elizabeth, Michael, and Lily were able to attend college and receive higher education, immigrants like them who are excluded because of their immigration status never found full inclusion in higher education spaces as they had to problem-solve their way towards higher education.

Indeed, Elizabeth had to pay out-of-state tuition even though she was a resident of Maryland. This meant that her scholarship only covered half of her tuition. Placed in a situation where family and community could not help her, Elizabeth had to advocate for herself to find resources.

This was when I learned to talk to the crowd [administrators]. I've had to do so much advocacy for myself, like with talking to the financial aid office. And I now understand a little bit more how these institutions work, you know? There is the academic arm and then there's administrative arm. And you really want to be talking to like the right department and the right decision makers, you know, to, to get in and stuff (Elizabeth, February 20, 2020)

Lily also echoed Elizabeth's experience as she had to deal with cold bureaucracy and administrators. Lily went to inquire for more financial aid at a prestigious private university in California as she wanted to see if California AB 130 could provide her with more funds but felt excluded as she "literally got shoved out the door" (Lily, March 2nd, 2020) because of her undocumented status. Instead of a detailed breakdown of her financial aid package, the financial aid office administrators told her they did not have any more resources for students like her. Lily later went to UCLA and graduated from her Bachelor's degree from there.

Problem-solving institutional barriers does not always mean being able to find the perfect solution as my participants show. In inquiring about their experience with the higher education process, participants showed the absence of institutional actors in guiding them towards higher education. Moreover, assessing the limitation of their illegality gave way to problem-solving as a critical skill to navigate institutional barriers. Yet my participants also alluded to mental deterioration with the higher education process because of their undocumented status. The paragraphs below highlight the theme of wellness in the process of encountering exclusion and privilege as an undocumented student.

Finding Mental Wellness

When asked about their college application process and college experience, wellness was mentioned among all my participants. Although all my participants were able to obtain their Bachelor's degree and graduate from college or university, the path towards this milestone was not easy. Their undocumented status had made them hypersensitive to privilege as a marker of exclusion.

Privilege in forms of rights for noncitizens is relative to their status in a country, which is dictated by the laws of the host country. This form of privilege—immigration status—affects all immigrant communities, and undocumented students learn the differences between them and their peers quickly. Often, they feel excluded by understanding the cultural markers they cannot obtain. For instance, Katie described her experience in high school isolating because of the privilege disconnection she found with her friends due to her undocumented status.

I think it [being undocumented in high school] was kind of hard because I hadn't told any of my friends about it [being undocumented]. There were a lot of situations where . . . you have to deal your peer pressure when you're in high school and stuff, and there's a lot of like, how come you don't do this? How come you don't do that? How come you don't have a driver's license? There's a lot of things . . . So I always having to make up excuses, like, oh, I'm just too lazy. I don't want to drive and also like, how come you never visit your family? It's like, just to say like, oh, I'm too busy. I can't go back to Korea to visit them. And there was a time when my grandmother got sick in South Korea and it was really devastating for our family here not being able to visit her. You know when you go through some difficult times you want to have a way to kind of deal with the stress and share with people around you right. But I couldn't even do that (Katie, March 7th, 2020)

Not only did undocumented status create cultural disconnection, but she also found isolating because her friends did not know about her situation. Without friends to rely on, Katie could only depend on her family and sister, her closest social contacts, for solidarity in the face of privilege as a cultural disconnection.

Katie was not alone in her feelings of exclusion. Elizabeth also encountered rejection from society through institutional barriers. Elizabeth's strengths, grades, and performance were not acknowledged when she graduated at her high school in 2007 in Maryland. There was no recognition of undocumented students at the state level and higher education at the time. In other words, there was no advocate for undocumented students like Elizabeth.

It was it was rough. I think you [researcher] use the word lonely to describe it. I think that is a very astute way of describing what it felt like. I think on the level of fear, I definitely felt afraid to tell anybody about my situation [undocumented status]. On the level of feeling kind of bitter, I definitely felt bitter because I was slated to be the valedictorian for my high school. I was elected to be the youth Commissioner on the citywide school board. And I was a star competitive debater on the high school debate team . . . so I just want to say like, you know . . . I did sort of get a chance to reflect on some of like my attitude and be reminded of like some of the ways that I was thinking [back then] because I worked really hard. My family went through severe hardship, and I am a contributing member of society. You know, that was like very much the mindset. And these structures are in place to like really suppress my ability to thrive as an individual. As a part of my debate research, I was also learning about social justice. I was reading like, you know, Noam Chomsky, like really trying to understand a lot of these systems, transnational global contacts, understand American exceptionalism trying to understand this wacko immigration system that we have. But all of that knowledge did not help me at all, because I needed an advocate (Elizabeth, February 20, 2020)

Undocumented status, once acquired, placed them in a situation of awareness of the injustices of the system and society that they live. However, undocumented student's experience with cultural and institutional barriers depended on where, when, and whom they live. Keith provides a good example.

Keith could not rely on his aunt and friends during the college application process for assistance, stating, "My aunt couldn't assist me because she has a language barrier. I couldn't really rely on my friends either because my friends didn't know my undocumented status." (Keith, February 15, 2020). Without friends or family to turn to, Keith decided to inquire the school counselor for assistance and trust his instincts. Because Keith lived in the Bay Area and

was graduating high school in 2014, he was introduced to the school's college and career counselor and other nonprofit service providers where he quickly learned about AB 540, AB 130, AB 131 and received critical assistance from the college career counselor to navigate the college application process and the college admission essay. Michael, Lily, and Katie also lived in California and were also eligible for California state financial aid and in-state tuition because they were college students during or after 2012. Their experience of exclusion was mitigated by state inclusion of undocumented students through financial aid and out-of-state tuition waiver, which contrasted with Elizabeth's experience in Maryland. Although state aid facilitated a more accessible pathway for Keith, Michael, Lily, and Katie to enter college and receive their degree, their feelings of isolation and hypersensitivity with privilege were mutual with Elizabeth.

Undocumented Asian students find themselves with several layers of exclusion: institutional barriers during higher education and milestone barriers during the coming-of-age (e.g., getting a driver's license, visiting family outside the country, etc.), which consequently made them aware of their illegality. In addition, with no employment prospects because of their undocumented status, Michael described his future as "no light at the end of the tunnel." (Michael, March 1st, 2020). Altogether, class, employment, and institutional exclusion created conditions of stress for Elizabeth, Katie, Keith, Lily, and Michael. Those conditions sprouted mental health issues, such as anxiety and, in some cases, even depression.

Michael fell into a state of depression and tried to cope by playing video games, and "[I] got very addicted to video games." (Michael, March 1st, 2020). Michael recalls suffering from anxiety and unable to focus in class, especially reflective assignments. In fact, he had severe challenges writing about himself in his college admission essays. Articulating their own

experience was often hard because they do not want to disclose themselves and their status. Katie express this issue during her process of writing a graduate admission essay, stating:

It was hard to talk about myself and I think it is [hard] especially always being in that mode where you're trying to hide some parts of yourself, right? It's also because you're asking for my difficulties, like me overcoming my issues, and I am putting it out there as like my strength, right? Like my resilience and luck. Like, I gone through this and I was like able to be strong and I've learned something from it right? While that's like good, I personally felt like it was so difficult because I'm being vulnerable, because I feel like I have to be vulnerable. I think that was kind of difficult for me. And I realized that throughout the process, I don't feel very comfortable talking about my vulnerability because I'm always I've always had that mindset where I don't want to disclose to people, right. And because that has to be disclosed in order for me to make the point that I'm coming [qualified], right (Katie, March 7th, 2020).

Without the practice of expressing themselves, especially sharing their vulnerability, it became a tedious situation to be in when the path towards higher education required them to “tell them about themselves” through a personal statement. The college admission essay itself can trigger mental anxiety and exclusion in the process of higher education.

Once they were admitted and established residency in their college or university, they were no longer in the space of their family, one of their closest social support group. They soon found similar barriers of isolation and exclusion, like in high school. For instance, Elizabeth felt disconnected from her peers and her situation of being undocumented during college. With no resources and assistance to process her feelings, Elizabeth had to persevere through.

It was so disconnecting for me and I also didn't felt like I was ready or prepare[ed] for college. I remember in my freshman year, falling into a very, very deep state of depression. And I didn't know that I was struggling with like a legit diagnosable mental health condition. I had no access to health care, I did not have any resources. And I was like, really scared of like getting found out you know. I remember we would go to like debate tournaments because in order to participate in on the debate team competitively to get and keep the scholarship, you have to perform [well] academically, and then you also have to like compete. Debate tournaments happen on the weekends, so I spent all my weekends and did these debate tournaments and some of them were like not in state and I

had to fly. And as you also remember, during that period of time, Bush, Jr. term 2.0. He instituted workplace raids and really amped up enforcement. And so I was like, really scared to like fly. And I was like, really banking on these like, white faculty members, who were our chaperones to like, protect me. And there was a lot of pressure to like, perform well in debate. To secure my scholarship (Elizabeth, February 20, 2020)

Their experience shows how isolating being undocumented can be during the process of applying for higher education and being a college student. For undocumented Asians without social support, without a bedrock and a support group to rely on, they faced intense pressure to succeed and survive in an impossible situation of legal marginalization.

Although Keith was lucky to go to a prestigious UC school with resources and support group for undocumented students, the lack of social space and support for those who look like him made him feel excluded. Keith went to one of the UC in California in 2014, and he felt “at times alone because I didn’t know other undocumented Asians at my university. Even though there were an undocumented student center and a lot of undocumented Latinos at my university, I felt weird going in there, you know?” (Keith, February 15, 2020). Keith’s experience of isolation resonates with most of my participants: the experience of being undocumented and Asian. Keith did not find other undocumented Asians until he heard of a support group called ASPIRE located in the Bay Area.

All my participants eventually found support groups for undocumented Asians. Advocacy by immigrant rights, nonprofit organizations have created spaces for undocumented Asian students like Elizabeth, Katie, Keith, Lily, and Michael. On the west coast, Asian Law Caucus created an undocumented Asian youth group called ASPIRE in California. These spaces involving undocumented Asian youth and young adults provided some sense of inclusion—allowing them to process their experience, share stories, and solidarity with one another.

Michael's involvement with ASPIRE has helped him with his anxiety and depression, and he was able to move past his gaming addiction as a coping mechanism.

I think part of how I got out of that hole was friends. Part of how I got out of that hole was Christina Peralta [from] ALC reaching out to me at the end of that first semester where I tanked my grades and saying, hey, there's this support group that we're trying to start at ALC, would you like to come and participate? And that became ASPIRE and so part of it if ASPIRE wasn't there, then I probably would not have had another coping, adaptation mechanism (Michael, March 1st, 2020)

The effects of social inclusion can be life-changing. On the other side of the coast, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund created RAISE in New York. They are a pan-Asian undocumented group on the east coast. Here, Elizabeth found a new home for herself within RAISE and a new purpose: commitment to social justice. It is within these productions of spaces that Elizabeth, Katie, Keith, Lily, and Michael found mental wellness. These spaces allowed them to process and articulate their experience being undocumented and Asian.

Summary

As their narratives have shown, their experience of being undocumented creates a complicated experience of being an undocumented Asian student. Although they assessed the limits of their illegality and problem solved institutional barriers as they made their way towards higher education, they always found themselves in stressful situations produced by cultural markers of exclusion, legal marginalization, employment barriers, and threats of deportation. No matter the circumstances that brought them to the United States, each person felt the boundaries of illegality as a barrier to their life as the government's rhetoric and action on immigrants had created many forms of exclusion and inclusion. Their experiences were marked by borders and boundaries, liminal legality, and cultural citizenship. The analysis of my themes and theoretical frameworks will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The study of narrative is critical. Undocumented students discover borders and boundaries as they apply for higher education and interact with institutional actors. My participants' experience of the higher education process has shown being an undocumented Asian student required them to assess their situation of being undocumented, problem-solve issues during the process of higher education, and to persevere, often alone, through legal marginalization, cultural disconnection, and mental health issues.

The obstacles in their higher education process show that these students are marked by borders and boundaries, liminal legality, governmentality of migration, and cultural citizenship. This chapter focuses on the 2 primary research questions that guided this study: (1) how do undocumented students navigate the higher education process; (2) in what ways do institutional actors influence undocumented student's college experience?

How do undocumented student navigate the higher education process?

First, in assessing their illegality, undocumented students learn the boundaries of their undocumented status. They search for ways to legalize their status, but they learn the truth of what being out-of-status in a stringent immigration system entails: it is incredibly hard to adjust their immigration status. The cold truth simultaneously closes opportunity for them and makes them hyperaware of their exclusion in society. They experience first-hand the boundaries of illegality in the context of higher education as they learn that institutional support, such as in-state tuition and state financial aid, are closed on them.

The theme of assessing the boundaries of their illegality awaken undocumented students to their anxiety over the uncertainty of their future as higher education and legal employment are

no longer a pathway to which they can obtain economic mobility. Because undocumented status entails no stability of their future, illegality excludes privilege from their lives, produces cultural disconnection with their peers, and situate them in a hyper invisible and visible state.

Undocumented students are hyper-visible and invisible as they are neither fully included nor excluded in the process of higher education. Invisibility and visibility rest on the social context of the situation, often related to the action of the undocumented subject. They become visible when institutional actors, such as counselors and teachers, are invited to their personal boundaries to help them apply for higher education. Yet, they are invisible when undocumented students exclude and restrict the knowledge of illegality from others.

Although undocumented immigrants rest on the peripheral of society, they are people with agency. As the narratives of Elizabeth, Katie, Lily, and Michael have shown, the conditions of illegality forces undocumented students to survive and assess their illegality. Undocumented students rely on themselves to problem-solve institutional barriers as they commit their pathway towards higher education. Institutional barriers are issues related to the institutional actors my participants encountered, and institutional actors in this context refer to schools, states, bureaucracy, and people like high school counselors and administrators. My participants' experiences show that the higher education process was never built to include undocumented students.

Some of my participants witnessed traditional educational service provider's confusion on how to support undocumented students, as shown in Elizabeth and Michael's experience in dealing with counselors and administrators. Despite finding limited assistance from these educational spaces, my participants problem-solved their issues by finding solution to navigate the higher education process. Michael found out that he was eligible for an in-state tuition rate in

California because of AB 540, while Elizabeth was able to receive an in-state full-ride scholarship from the debate team and go to college in Maryland and New York. Others, like Lily, created solutions for herself and became involved in her campus organizing during her second year of college.

Although problem-solving became a critical skill set they developed, it only sensitized them of their illegality as their undocumented status made them hypersensitive to privilege as a marker of exclusion. Those conditions sprouted mental health issues, such as anxiety and, in some cases, even depression. Once they had been admitted and established residency in their college or university, they were longer in the space of their family, one of their closest social support group. They soon found similar barriers of isolation and exclusion, like in high school. Their experience shows how isolating being undocumented can be during the process of applying for higher education and being a college student. For undocumented Asians without social support, without a bedrock and a support group to rely on, they face intense pressure to succeed and survive in a situation of legal marginalization. Although Keith was lucky to go to a prestigious UC school with resources and support group for undocumented students, the lack of social space and support for those who look like him made him feel excluded.

All my participants eventually found support groups for undocumented Asians. Advocacy by immigrant rights, nonprofit organizations created spaces for undocumented Asian students like Elizabeth, Katie, Keith, Lily, and Michael. The effects of social inclusion can be life-changing as Elizabeth found a new home for herself within RAISE and a commitment to social justice. It is within these productions of spaces that Elizabeth, Katie, Keith, Lily, and Michael found mental wellness. These spaces allowed them to process and articulate their experience (Nakano, 2011) being undocumented and Asian (Dao, 2017). It is within these close-

knit spaces and the higher education process that they constructed belonging in a wider structure where the state had contested their claims to citizenship (Ong, 1999). Because disadvantaged people can make their own claim to citizenship (Rosaldo, 1994), undocumented Asian students have articulated what they desired—inclusion in the United States—by creating their own boundaries, sharing their experience, and obtaining higher education. Narrative analysis of people's undocumented experience reveals these intimate and affective themes as they navigate the structures and mentality of institutional actors, society, and bureaucracy (Cebulko, 2014; Eastmond, 2007; Fassin, 2011; Lachica Buenavista, 2018; Menjivar, 2006).

In what ways do institutional actor influence their college experience?

As my participants have shown, applying for higher education and being a college student is stressful for their mental health. They encounter rejection from society through institutional barriers, and they feel excluded by understanding the cultural markers they cannot obtain. Undocumented status, once known, places them in a situation of awareness of the injustices of the system that they live. However, undocumented student's experience with cultural and institutional barriers depends on when and where they live. Their experience of exclusion can be mitigated by state inclusion of undocumented students through financial aid and exemption of out-of-state tuition. In addition, their exclusion can be mitigated by the creation of their own boundary and social group, establishing spaces to share experiences, creating cultural repertoire and solidarity within a close-knitted space.

Indeed, undocumented students face the challenge of institutional barriers in the process of applying to higher education because of their liminal legality. They live in a society without traditional rights and citizenship, and they are excluded in the margins of society because of their lack of status. Each of my participants crossed borders and experienced boundaries by

overstaying their visas. However, they also felt different impacts of boundaries despite a class-based exclusion from the federal government.

Immigration status as a class plays a considerable part in undocumented student's exclusion. However, their experience with illegality (undocumented status) is relative to where they reside (school, local, and state boundary), the social space they occupy, and the inclusionary and exclusionary law and policies of the local and state government create towards undocumented immigrants. Undocumented students learn the complexity of state and federal law when governments take their own positionality in immigrant rights services. The institutional positionality of each level of government towards undocumented immigrants is manifested vis-à-vis policies, ordinances, laws, and political culture. Through these manifestations, the federal and state government's mentality and treatment towards immigrants are revealed. What they point out to is differential immigrant rights and services throughout the nation. As a result, undocumented immigrants experience inclusion and exclusion differently relative to how the state treats them in the space they occupy.

In this study of undocumented Asian students, state government's mentality toward students is revealed through their educational policy in their respective states in the form of institutional aid for undocumented students. The narratives of the participants in chapter 3 showcase the attitude and mentality of two states: California and Maryland. Their narratives show how these states, as institutional actors, produce inclusion and exclusion in the process of higher education.

California and Maryland: Institutional Aid

Katie, Keith, Lily, and Michael attended high school and went to college in California. Some of them enrolled as early as 2009 and as late as 2014. At the time of 2009, undocumented

students in California were eligible for in-state tuition through AB 540, which was enacted in 2001. In order to receive an exemption from nonresident tuition in California, the law required the student to have attended California high school for 3 or more years, graduate from a California high school or receive the equivalent, such as GED, and submit an affidavit to the California public college or university they wish to attend (UC Berkeley, Undocumented Student Program, n.d.). Only when undocumented students fulfilled all these requirements did they become eligible for in-state tuition, and my participants in California were eligible for in-state tuition rates because they have met these requirements.

California's AB 540 in-state tuition residency requirement reflects a broader trend across the nation at the state level where state residency has become indicative of inclusion and exclusion of undocumented students. Currently, 20 states and the District of Columbia have implemented in-state tuition educational policy for undocumented students regardless if they have DACA (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020, p. 2). In 12 additional states, undocumented students—or only DACA students depending on which state they reside—who meet residency requirements have access to in-state tuition at the state or institutional level (e.g., Arkansas passed in-state tuition bill in 2019 for only DACA recipients). As a result, almost all non-resident undocumented students are excluded from state institutional aid residing outside their "home" state. In regards to California in 2012, non-resident undocumented students who did not attend high school for at least three years in California would not be eligible for in-state tuition. The juxtaposition of AB 540 in 2012 shows how, on the one hand, educational state policy had created an inclusionary boundary for undocumented Californians who have been part of the education system since they were young, and, on the other hand,

excluded those who have temporarily lived in the state and deterred those not living within the jurisdiction of the state.

Although California loosened the restriction on AB 540 through the passage of SB 68 in 2017, which helped expand AB 540 to enable students to count community college and adult school towards AB 540 eligibility (University of California Berkeley, n.d.), many other states still follow California old's mentality: excluding undocumented students belonging outside the state's community because the length of which they resided in their state's education system. While many states have promised inclusion through institutional aid in higher education, other states have adopted strict educational policies in order to keep undocumented students out, such as Georgia and Alabama. Thus, state borders and boundaries within national borders have created a different experience of higher education across the country for undocumented students.

In my participants' narratives, Katie, Keith, Lily, and Michael showed in-state financial aid as another way that states have included undocumented students through educational policy. Recognizing the failure of Congress to pass the Dream Act in 2011, California introduced AB 130 and AB 131, which allowed AB 540 eligible students to apply for non-state funded scholarships (AB 130) and state-funded financial aid (AB 131). This meant that institutional aid for AB 540 eligible students had expanded with many forms of financial aid moreover to the exemption from nonresident tuition. Passed in 2011 and implemented in 2012, the 2012-2013 school year was the first time Californian AB 540 eligible students were eligible to receive Cal Grants (California state grants), UC grants and scholarships, and private scholarships. These two legislations were critical to Katie, Keith, Lily, and Michael's educational inclusion within higher education spaces.

Thanks to AB 130 and AB 131, Katie and Lily finished their last two years of their baccalaureate degree with institutional aid at their respective UC universities without needing to save up money to pay for tuition. Their experiences resonate with many undocumented students because leaving school and saving up money entails a longer time for undocumented students to finish school. Moreover, it is crucial to indicate that Cal Grant, university grants and scholarship, and private scholarship are merit-based. This is where an undocumented student's scholastic achievements, extracurricular activities, titles, and other factors are taken into consideration in their financial aid package and admission.

Indeed, Keith's valedictorian title, 4.1 GPA, and cross country star status helped him stand out as a competitive student in his college application. As a result, he was offered admission to three prestigious UC campuses. Keith's UC application also helped him in another way because of the higher institution policy. The University of California admission guarantees the top 9 percent of students who apply a secured spot at a UC campus (UC admission, n.d.). Due to this policy, Keith's admission was guaranteed in at least one of the UC campuses he applied. Keith's completion of his baccalaureate degree within *four years* would not have been possible without institutional aid such as AB 540, AB 130, and AB 131. His success was facilitated through the pro-immigrant mentality and treatment of the State of California towards undocumented immigrants, which has included students like him.

Although the top 9 percent admission policy was based on scholastic achievement alone, this shows that higher education institutions as institutional actors can produce policies to make undocumented students feel included in higher education spaces in addition to state actors. Indeed, higher education institutions play a critical role in higher education access (Green, 2019),

and the University of California public university system has demonstrated how they have led the effort in advocating for undocumented students.

The University of California's education system has created three critical infrastructure and services for undocumented students. They established Dream Centers for undocumented immigrants that serve both as a support group and a student academic success center. They have created programs to train staff and faculty regarding undocumented students and how they can be allies. They also provided free-of-charge legal services for undocumented UC students.

Perhaps the most attention they have received on the national sphere is their advocacy on behalf of undocumented students in national discourse by challenging the legality of the Trump administration to end DACA (Green, 2019; So and Canedo, 2015; Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco C., and Suarez-Orozco M., 2014). Although these are non-monetary support and services, institutional support from higher institutions has been important for undocumented students in achieving certifications and degrees.

Yet, the timing of legislation and education policies like AB 540, AB 130, and AB 131 are important and uncontrollable for students. Keith's AB 540 status in 2014 qualified him for many forms of financial aid through AB 130 and AB 131. Keith stated he felt lucky to have gone to one of the prestigious UC University with "a full-ride" because he would not have been able to pay for college and receive his baccalaureate degree within four years had he graduated high school in 2010—when AB 130 and AB 131 were not available yet. Indeed, the difference between the Californian participants and Elizabeth (from Maryland) is the time they went to college and when institutional aid for undocumented students was available. Although Elizabeth graduated high school in 2007 and was a resident of Maryland, the state had no in-state tuition support for undocumented students at the time (they would not be available until 2012).

Undocumented students like Elizabeth residing in states without institutional aid (in-state tuition policy and/or state financial aid) find themselves with a different experience of illegality in the process of higher education. Moreover, they would also find themselves with a different experience of higher education if they speak with undocumented students residing in states with better treatment and attitude towards undocumented immigrants, such as California.

Although state exclusion of undocumented students still exists today, the mentality and attitude towards undocumented students have changed significantly since 2001. States across the nation are more accepting undocumented students in their educational spaces germane to where undocumented students live. Institutional aid in the form of in-state tuition and/or state financial aid legislation has risen from 1 in 2001 to 32 states as of May 2020 (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020). The decision to incorporate undocumented students in higher education spaces has involved undocumented students in many active spaces, creating advocacy for undocumented students in the political discourse, state economy, and social life.

However, the social inclusion of undocumented students in educational spaces is still ephemeral because institutional aid only mitigates the effects of illegality. Through state institutional aid in the higher education process, the state has mitigated to some degree the cultural disconnection of in society by facilitating and investing in the education of undocumented students with the projection that they will become invaluable and integral members of society. Through their immigrant right services and policies, state governments and higher institutional have invited cultural retention in the experience of being a college student, providing some sense of normality for undocumented students.

Moreover, state and higher education institution's efforts to include undocumented students are only a financial improvement of their situation as an undocumented college student.

Without work authorization after graduation, many undocumented students will go back feeling the full extent of their exclusion because of their undocumented status. Being in spaces of higher education is only a temporary relief of their illegality. Without comprehensive immigration reform, undocumented students will never find full inclusion in society as a result of their undocumented status.

Challenging Institutional Actors through Legislation

Action in Congress towards immigration reform has stalled for the last 19 years since the introduction DREAM Act in 2001. States have attempted to fill the gap by providing more immigrant rights, resources, language access, and services in their states (Gleeson, 2012). The federal government has also tried to fill the gap by introducing DACA. These first-aid attempts to the inclusion of immigrants cannot fix the more significant issue of migration, and they set up conditions where state law and federal law collide, creating litigation at the Supreme Court and resulting in higher tension between the immigrant communities, locals, and law enforcement.

For instance, by adjudicating the validity of education access for undocumented minors through *Plyer v. Doe* (1983), undocumented immigrants are able to receive K-12 public education in the United States. This ruling had created a dilemma for undocumented students: while undocumented students had the right to education, the ruling did not extend to the right of higher education. The consequences of the ruling created a dysfunctional condition of inclusion. As undocumented students become acculturated with American social values and norms through the American education system, they soon find exclusion as they depart from K-12 spaces when they consider higher education or employment. As a result, many undocumented students, like my participants, had to rely on themselves to survive without institutional guidance. *Plyer v. Doe* (1983) legitimized education for all by giving undocumented students temporary inclusion in K-

12 spaces, but the ruling also unintentionally created a population of Americans without full rights to citizenship, people known as Dreamers in the political discourse.

In an attempt to address where the federal government has failed, states gradually intervened in the higher education process and provided undocumented students institutional aid. Their policy of immigrant inclusion conflicts with the federal government's orientation of deterrence and removal of undocumented immigrants, creating tension between states and the federal government. Some local governments with pro-immigrant mentality conflict with anti-immigrant states, bringing political advocacy across all political arenas.

The complexity of the consequences of this ruling is a reason why first-aid attempts like *Plyers v. Doe* (1983) are impossible to balance immigrant rights and law and order. Although immigration legislation is supposed to be the domain of Congress, the paralyzed legislature had shifted social actors in counting on the implementation of immigration policies through the Executive Branch and the adjudication of laws through the US judicial system to promote or devalue noncitizen rights. Although individuals within those apparatus can make impactful decisions that lead to systemic changes, like the Supreme Court and the Executive branch, long-term social integration, civil rights, and migration policy should be decided by the legislative branch.

This study is a way to show what the higher education process will look like in the absence of DACA and how far institutional aid for undocumented students has come along since 2001. While small battles are won for noncitizen rights such as the right to K-12 education, the US judicial system cannot fix and address the more significant systemic issue of migration and the rights of noncitizens. The judicial system relies on laws passed by Congress, the Constitution, previous case rulings, and their own interpretation of the law in relation to the issue

at hand to determine the final verdict. Where they draw their analysis comes from laws passed by Congress, and the solution to immigration and noncitizen rights must come from Congress.

Litigating cases, such as DACA, creates an incredible amount of stress for DACA recipients who are already part of the American community. If their rights to employment and deferred action are suspended, many undocumented immigrants with DACA will find themselves again excluded and deportable. Institutional actors and social actors who have not participated in the political discourse must use their rights and power as first-class citizens to vote on issues they want to fix. It is only people and institutions with privilege and rights that can fix the most pressing and sensitive topics of today.

In this final paper, I have engaged with theoretical concepts of borders and boundaries, governmentality of migration, and narratives, as well as liminal legality and cultural citizenship, to understand how undocumented Asian students navigate the higher education process and how institutional actors influence their college experience. Undocumented students discover borders and boundaries as they apply for higher education. Through their narratives of the higher education process, the resources for undocumented immigrants, the attitudes of institutional actors towards undocumented students, the infrastructure of the educational policies in states are revealed. By focusing on the concept of borders and boundaries and narrative and governmentality of migration—informed by identity experience and liminal status—as key terms how undocumented Asian immigrants in United States craft lives and selves, I foreground the affective and intimate dimensions of the higher education process for undocumented Asian immigrants.

Conclusion

The study of narratives of the higher education process is critical. As my participants' narratives have shown, their experience of being undocumented creates a complicated experience of being an undocumented Asian student. Although they assessed the limits of their illegality and problem solved institutional barriers as they made their way towards higher education, they always found themselves in stressful situations produced by cultural markers of exclusion, legal marginalization, and threats of deportation. No matter the circumstances that brought them to the United States, each person felt the boundaries of illegality as a barrier to their inclusion as the government's rhetoric and action on immigrants had created many forms of exclusion and inclusion. The policy and infrastructure of educational institutions and states expose the mentality of social and legal structures in which undocumented immigrants reside as they cross borders and boundaries.

Undocumented student's immigration status may not fully manifest in their awareness until they reach high school and apply for education. My participants' experience with the higher education process in California and in Maryland shows that spaces—with or without institutional aid—create a substantial difference in the college experience. Although many recent studies have illustrated the role cultural citizenship manifest in the civic engagement of undocumented immigrants, few have seriously considered the intimate and structured terms of higher education access and process as a claim to cultural citizenship. This research is one way to understand how undocumented Asian students navigate the higher education process and how institutional actors influence their college experience.

Recommendations

In the last few years, more and more states have introduced institutional aid to undocumented students. Some state governments like California have introduced state-funded educational programs to assist undocumented students in their college application process by providing state grants to nonprofit service providers to guide undocumented students. The Japanese Community Youth Council (JCYC) of San Francisco, a nonprofit organization, is one institutional actor using state funds to provide services to undocumented high school students. It is important to remember that state institutional aid and increased immigrant rights and services would not be possible without the advocacy by undocumented students, politicians, community organizations, higher education institutions, nonprofits, and other stakeholders. Researchers and educational actors should continue to follow carefully on local and state politics and educational policies to understand the higher education process for undocumented students.

Future Research

This study has focused on ways that institutional actors influenced undocumented student's college experience. However, it is hard to generalize my analysis to the bigger population of undocumented Asian students in the United States because my data collection is limited to my capacity, the number of participants I am able to gather, and the geographical restriction of Northern California. Given more time and capacity, I would have attempted to interview more college-graduated undocumented Asian students for this study.

Moreover, there are several areas that my method and research did not address. First, the admission process and perspective of the admission officer can complement this area of research. I would inquire about how they analyze college admission essays and how they view undocumented students. Second, research of current undocumented college students can provide

more information on the higher education process of their state. Current college students can reveal how they wrote their college admission essays and how they navigated the college application process as it is still “fresh” in their minds.

Third, longer ethnographic work following undocumented high school students may reveal the profound impact of collaboration and the relationship of public schools, nonprofits, and businesses in the higher education process. In my ethnography, I found institutional aid from corporate, nonprofit, and public school collaboration are important variables that influence the college application process, including assistance with the college admission essay for high school students. I observed that private companies and industries are influencing, albeit indirectly, the college application process by collaborating with school districts through the investment of infrastructures (e.g., computers for schools) and grant funding.

Specifically, in the Bay Area, for instance, Salesforce invested \$80 million dollars to local school districts in the Bay Area through its Education & Workforce Development Initiatives and Grants (Salesforce.org, n.g.). Although this paper does not focus on measuring the impact of these monetary investments, they are discretionary funds ultimately tied to the agenda of the corporation, serving multiple purposes including, but not limited to, positive public relations with school administrators and politicians and tax breaks under the IRS rules.

Other ways of involvement include corporate, nonprofit, and school partnerships. In San Francisco, many corporate companies have partnered with a nonprofit organization called the San Francisco Education Fund. SF Ed Fund engages local companies to adopt San Francisco public schools through the Circle the Schools Program and is divided into three foci: elementary, middle school, and high school. For high school partnerships, the goal is to provide each public school with their own corporate partner that can help the school reach its unique goal on college

and career readiness (see sfedfund.org). The program is a partnership between the San Francisco Education Fund, sf.citi, and San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). [Sf.citi](http://sf.citi) recruits corporate partners; SFUSD identifies schools to receive a partner; and SF Ed Fund train and support company volunteers and provide logistical support for partnership events. Salesforce is one of the participating high school circle partners through its Salesforce Employee Volunteering & Giving and Pro Bono Program (see salesforce.org/philanthropic-programs/). Because the school where I was conducting ethnography participated in the Sf Ed Fund, Salesforce volunteers and activities became part of my ethnography.

Although this corporate, nonprofit, and school collaborative-complex have benefited the school and students, the impact of direct involvement of corporate volunteers at the local high school to promote college and career readiness is less clear. According to the college and career director at the local high school where I was assisting students, Salesforce volunteers are invited only when there are available school projects. This included a personal statement workshop the school hosted earlier in November 2019. More research on this ecosystem in San Francisco can benefit how local institutional actors, like businesses, nonprofits, and the school district, influence the higher education process for high school students. Direct collaboration through volunteer involvement and indirect collaboration through monetary investment from corporate, nonprofit, and school are important variables in influencing the college application process for students. They are institutional aid and collaboration often left out in the discourse of higher education access.

In addition, researching the production of college admission essays in these school spaces show how schools are intimate settings in which the higher education access and process are portrayed. In the space where higher education access is performed, the relationship and the

negotiation of power dynamics occur between the writer and the inspector—challenging the authenticity and agency of the paper critical to the idea of authorship. Although the impact of volunteer services cannot be measured quantitatively in my ethnography, the relationship between the inspector (e.g., writing tutor) and the writer is more defined and explicit. From my ethnographic observation, the relationship and the power dynamics between the writer and the inspector influence the student's college application process and the voice and agency of their admission paper. Researchers can look into this intimate relationship as another determinant to understand the higher education process for undocumented students.

Finally, the narrative of my participants shows that the experience of illegality and the expression of narrative in college admission essays are different individually. However, they follow the theme and cultural attitude of the American Dream. This expression of the American Dream is institutionalized through the college application process when one investigates carefully. Future work analyzing the theme of the college admission essay will advance the work of understanding the higher education process for undocumented students.

Recommendations for Educational Practices and Policy for Institutional Actors

Teachers, college career counselors, nonprofit service providers are often trusted community members to high school students, and students may inquire for their advice during the higher education process, such as the college admission essay. Outlined below are some recommendations on how to be an effective college admission essay writing tutor for high school students applying for higher education.

According to the college career counselors I interacted with, the writing services should only offer suggestions, and the goal is to ensure student's essays answer the prompt, meet the word limit, and flow well. These writing goals is to respect the agency of the student. However,

the agency of the paper during the interaction between the writer and the inspector is blurred during the writing process. Writing tutors may inadvertently tilt the power dynamic when they directly interfere with the voice of the paper through structural re-organization and style. This leads to invalidating the writer's agency and creating tension between the writer and the inspector. However, often inquiring if the students like the change and give them the power to deliberate mitigate the effects of tension. Moreover, establishing a consistent relationship with the student can help relax the power dynamics of the writer and the inspector relationship. Indeed, it is through trust that they then negotiate the voice and agency of the admission paper.

In addition, if institutional actors wish to assist undocumented students during the higher education process, they should educate themselves in the state's education policy towards undocumented immigrants in higher education. By learning what institutional aid exists, they help transfer critical information to undocumented students, allowing undocumented students to problem-solve higher education issues easier. For instance, Immigrant Rising, a community based organization, offers a variety of resources, such as a listserv of financial aid and instruction on independent contracting. Institutional actors can also look into the Dream Summer Fellowship, an internship program for undocumented students, to see if it is available in their city or county as it provides paid internship opportunities for undocumented immigrants. Lastly, institutional actors can refer undocumented students considering undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools to websites like My Undocumented Life and PreHealth Dreamers for advice.

Lastly, institutional actors should know that local and state institutional aid cannot protect undocumented students from federal enforcement action. Despite the upward trend towards immigrant right services in higher education, the limits of local and state advocacy in higher

education still exist, especially the rights of noncitizens. Local and state actors can only mitigate the effects of illegality by facilitating the higher education process for undocumented students and making it easier for undocumented students to access state and other forms of institutional aid. Without work authorization and deferred action from removal, undocumented students still live in marginalized peripheral of society in the United States.

What institutional actors can do to be problem-solvers is to become civically involved in the immigration discourse. The federal government, specifically Congress and the Executive branch, have the power to dictate the rights of immigrants, including whether they can stay in the United States as community members. By letting your voice heard through advocacy, by calling your representative, by practicing voting, by listening to the stories of undocumented immigrants, you can make meaningful changes to the direction of the immigration reform.

Institutional and social actors must work together to avoid creating undocumented immigrants. Deterrence and removal policies have only mitigated the effects of unauthorized migration and visa over-stayers in the United States. By looking for ways to include them in every sense, acknowledging their constitutional rights, and give them avenues to adjust their status, the United States has performed their exceptionalism.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Questions for college-graduated undocumented students

Personal History

1. How does your migration journey look like?
2. How did you learn about your undocumented status?
3. How did you learn to adapt to your situation as an undocumented person?

College Application Process and Reflection on College Admission Essay(s)

4. How was your experience like applying for college? Did anyone help you?
5. What factors did you consider when applying to college? In what ways were these considerations influenced by your undocumented status?
6. How many colleges did you apply to? How many essays did you have to write?
7. How did you write your personal statement or essays?
8. What was important for you that made you focus your narrative that way?
9. Did you have anyone to help you with your essays? E.g. college career counselor, writing tutor, teachers, friends, family, etc.
10. Thank you for your time. Is there anything else you want to share or ask before we end the interview?

Questions for the Nonprofit Service Provider

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about the organization that you worked for. What do they do?
3. What is your role?
4. What's the itinerary like for you in each school semester?
5. What kind of support do you provide to graduating seniors? And juniors?
6. How is it like providing support for students who are graduating seniors?
7. How do you navigate the writing support around a student's college admission essay? Did you have any training when you were on-boarded?
8. For undocumented students, this is probably the scariest time for them as they get ready to apply. Have you encountered undocumented students at your school? How do you assist them?
9. From my experience as a student who graduated from SFUSD, my school was gung-ho about academic success and college career readiness. Even though I couldn't get support from JCYC b/c of the federal TRIO program, I knew that they are a great program for students because they support students from the day you write the college admission essay to your offer letter from the schools. I think they even help with scholarship essays. I'm not too familiar with JCYC policy now. Has JCYC policy changed in recent

years with regards to college career counseling for noncitizens who are not permanent residents? If so, what was the reason?

10. Do you know any other nonprofits, like JCYC, who focus on college career counseling or writing support for college admission essays?
11. Thank you very much! Do you have anything you wish to add?

Questions for Boys and Girls Club Service Provider

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about the organization that you worked for. What do they do?
3. What is your role?
4. What kind of support do you provide to students?
5. How is it like providing support for students?
6. Have you ever encountered undocumented students at your school? How do you assist them?
7. Do you know if the Boys and Girls club have a policy on how to address undocumented students?
8. Do you know any other community based nonprofits like the Boys and Girls Club in San Francisco?
9. If students need writing assistance with college admission essays and college counseling support, where do they usually get help?
10. What do you think schools and nonprofits can do to better assist immigrants and undocumented immigrants?
11. Thank you very much! Do you have anything you wish to add?

APPENDIX B

Consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by “**Kenny**” **Ka Kui Lee**, a graduate student of the Migration Studies Program at the University of San Francisco. The faculty supervisor for this study is **Dr. Melissa Canlas**, an assistant professor in the Critical Diversity Studies at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

There are two parts to this research study: an interview and a copy of your college admission essay(s). First, you are asked for an interview to describe your experience with the college application process and your experience with the admission essay(s). The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed for the purpose of this research as evidence of your participation in this study. Second, I will also ask for your consent to receive a copy of your college admission essay(s) in physical or digital form. By signing this consent form, you agree to be interviewed and give permission for the researcher to get a copy of your college admission essay(s).

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

By signing this consent form, you agree to be interviewed and give permission for the researcher to get a copy of your college admission essay(s).

Before signing the document, I will state your rights to delete the recording session before, during, and after the interview if you feel, with or without reasons, uncomfortable with the interview or recording. You also have the right to withdraw your college admission essay(s), with or without reason, before, during, or after the interview. In addition, I will state the estimated time of the interview, which will be a 1-hour maximum. The recording of the session will be uploaded to my Google Drive folder called “MIMS Master’s Research.” Your interview recording will not be shared to anyone.

Lastly, you may provide me a physical or digital copy of your college admission essays before or after the interview. If you provide me a physical form, I will scan and upload the college admission essay(s) to my Google drive in a folder called “MIMS Master’s Research”; I will then shred your physical copy. If you provide me a digital form, I will make a copy of your college admission essay(s) and upload them to my Google Drive in the “MIMS Master’s Research” folder. Your college admission essays will not be shared to anyone.

This “MIMS Master’s Research” folder is password protected through my USFCA g-suite account. It has additional security protection through an application called Lastpass with 2nd authentication activated. The “MIMS Master’s Research” folder will not be shared with anyone.

I recognize that college admission essay(s) may have been lost during the passage of time and therefore understand that you may not be able to provide a copy of your college admission essay(s). If this situation applies to you, I will only ask you to complete a consent form for this research study and fulfill the interview session only. You will receive your full \$30 benefit for participating in this study without penalty.

After you sign the consent form, we will begin the interview. You may give me your copy of the college admission essays(s) before or after the interview.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve an hour maximum interview. This interview intends to be only one session. The study will take place at Chinese for Affirmative Action located in San Francisco or an agreed location.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

If you feel discomfort during the interview due to the interview questions, you have the right to choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty to your benefit. If you are a student and feel discomfort during or after the interview, I will direct you to your university’s student health center or any equivalent health center in your area.

In addition, if you feel discomfort about sharing your college admission essay(s) after signing the consent form, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty to your benefit. I will then shred your college admission paper or delete the digital copy permanently.

BENEFITS:

You will get a \$30 gift card or a \$30 cash honorarium from “**Kenny**” **Ka Kui Lee** for your participation in this study.

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any information you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report we publish, we will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. You will be assigned a pseudonym or you can choose your own. Specifically, we will keep your information secure in a google drive folder called “MIMS Master’s Research.” I, as the researcher of this study, will be the only person who can access the information you provided in this study. Your interviews, transcripts, and essays I collected will be accessible to myself only. No other individuals will have access to my research

data unless required by law. The recordings, transcripts, and your college admission essay(s) in the MIMS Master's research will be archived for five years. Your consent forms will be scanned and uploaded to the MIMS Master's Research and will be archived for five years. The physical copies of your consent form will be kept for three years before being shredded. These physical copies will be kept in my room at home, in a blue box where there will be a black binder containing your consent form.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:

As stated in the benefits, you will receive a \$30 gift card or \$30 cash honorarium from “**Kenny**” **Ka Kui Lee** for your participation in this study. Furthermore, your college application experience will help contribute to the gaps of knowledge regarding the experiences of undocumented immigrants applying to universities and colleges in the United States.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: **Dr. Melissa Canlas at mlcanlas@usfca.edu**. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu. You will receive a consent form for your copy.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

DATE