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Identity, Social Activism, and the Pursuit of Higher Education: The Journey Stories of Undocumented and Unafraid Community Activists by Susana M. Muñoz

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Author

Peumsang, Pavitee

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Understanding how undocumented students make meaning of the intersection between their immigration status and their social identities as community activists in the face of xenophobia is imperative for higher education practitioners, institutions, and policymakers invested in equitable college access, diversity, and success. *Identity, Social Activism, and the Pursuit of Higher Education* provides the journey stories of 13 undocumented students that are navigating different types of educational institutions (e.g. community college, public and private universities, and one nonaccredited institution of higher learning for undocumented students) across the United States. Susana M. Muñoz offers a scholarly yet accessible text that resonates with a range of audiences, including community organizers, undergraduate and graduate students, higher education practitioners and policymakers. Muñoz provides critical higher education research while simultaneously transgressing a traditional scholarly writing style as she interweaves personal reflections of her own journey story about arriving to the U.S., and her experiences as a researcher and educator who works closely with the undocumented immigrant community.

The first chapter of the book offers an overview of policy contexts, concepts of resistance, and theoretical explanations that help explicate the sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic context of undocumented students in the U.S. Engaging identity development, resistance, and theoretical perspectives, Muñoz highlights the need for conceptual and theoretical frameworks to describe the experiences of undocumented students. She closes the chapter by providing the book's organizational layout that reveals her intentional approach to the research and her decision to write with vulnerability.

The second chapter introduces thirteen Latina/o undocumented students from the study. It details the participants' stories of arrival to the U.S., their formal schooling experiences in the U.S., and how these experiences influenced their access to college. Given that participants arrived in different regions of the U.S. and attended different types of institutions across the nation, stories from the lived experiences of undocumented students reveal how policies are unique to each state and institution. For example, Arizona's proposition 300 does not allow undocumented students to receive state financial aid or qualify for in-state tuition benefits. On the other hand, New Mexico allows students who graduate from a New Mexico high school to enroll in college despite their immigration status. This helps her transition to the next chapter, which explains how undocumented students' college access process is complex and unique.

The narratives of undocumented students are revitalized in chapter three where their expressions of gratitude, accompanied by frustration, become evident as they embark on their college journeys. Muñoz describes the critical role high school teachers and counselors played in the college access process for participants in this study. She explains how undocumented students receive

invaluable guidance and support from some institutional agents, yet face extreme frustration from being excluded from federal and state financial aid. This creates an added layer of barriers for undocumented students given the limited availability of funding that does not adequately cover the cost of college attendance and living expenses. Ultimately, some participants express how higher education institutions seek to actively recruit undocumented students, yet they do not provide adequate financial and institutional resources and support. Financial circumstances affect undocumented undergraduate and graduate students differently because graduate students typically rely on fellowships or loans, which undocumented students are excluded from.

In chapter four, Muñoz shares how the process by which undocumented students in this study decide to disclose their legal status is complex, fluid, and unique to the individual. Currently, there is no theoretical framework that specifically describes this process for undocumented students. Therefore, the best fitting framework to illustrate the legal status “coming out” process is borrowed from lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity scholarship, and helps demonstrate the fluidity of undocumented immigrant identities. Utilizing this framework helps readers understand how the coming out process is a strategic political act as a form of resistance to fight for recognition and visibility (Muñoz, 2015).

Chapter five provides theoretical explanations from five different social movements that help better explain the involvement of undocumented students in community activism. Muñoz disrupts traditional discourse by problematizing the perfect DREAMer paradigm in order to expose intersecting inhumane injustices across race, class, gender, immigration status, and sexual orientation. Undocumented students from the study acknowledge how identifying as “undocumented and unafraid” is a privilege and can be utilized as an educational and political tool to challenge unjust policies and practices.

In chapter six, Muñoz introduces the concepts of *legal violence* and *legal consciousness*, and how they influence participants’ understanding of their undocumented identity. Legal violence is described as structural violence that perpetuates systemic inequities that lead to an oppressed groups’ understanding of their position in society. From that, undocumented students make meaning of their identities through a legal consciousness that empowers them to interrogate systemic injustices. However, findings reveal that there is no one concrete definition of what it means to be undocumented and unafraid due to undocumented immigrants’ intersecting identities.

Chapter seven supplies an analysis of the benefits and drawbacks of the temporary immigration policy, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). This reveals how undocumented students transition from struggling to make sense of being excluded from all basic rights, to having some opportunity to access work permits, driver’s licenses in some states, and temporary relief from

deportation. In closing, chapter eight provides recommendations for K-20 policies and practices that will advance from the benefits of DACA, and state and institutional policies to provide a federal pathway to U.S. citizenship.

Muñoz raises an important critique of the ways in which Latina/o community activists like Dolores Huerta do not necessary prioritize or centralize the needs of undocumented immigrant communities, thus perpetuating the systemic status quo. Believing that undocumented immigrant rights can wait only reproduces the idea that undocumented immigrants are “others” and second class human beings. This book emphasizes the need for solidarity across race, class, and gender as a means of mobilizing towards a just and humane society. Moreover, participants’ various references to social security numbers calls for a deeper examination of how undocumented students perceive the political and social constructs of the nine-digit number. Overall, this book reveals how future research should explore whether undocumented Asian and Pacific Islander students and/or undocumented students who are ineligible for DACA make sense of their identity differently than participants from this study.