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**THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SUFFERING: VULNERABILITY BY
UNACCOMPANIED MINORS**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

SOCIOLOGY

with an emphasis in LATIN AMERICAN & LATINO STUDIES

by

Katherine (Kati) V. Barahona-López

June 2020

The Dissertation of Katherine (Kati) V. Barahona-López is approved:

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2020

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Abstract

The Institutionalization of Suffering: Vulnerability by Unaccompanied Minors

Katherine (Kati) V. Barahona-López

This dissertation focuses on the way immigration legal, social service, and charitable institutions use narratives of trauma, suffering and vulnerability to determine who is worthy of economic, social, and emotional resources. My research employs a mixed methods approach, combining participant observation with twelve participants, focus groups with nineteen participants, and secondary data (N=503) of unaccompanied minors.

First, this study illustrates that the narration of suffering is a discursive practice habitualized among unaccompanied minors. Institutions require unaccompanied minors to disclose this information in order to categorize them as unaccompanied minors and provide them access to resources. As a result, unaccompanied minors harm relive trauma and exhibit somatic-emotional signs of harm. This includes physical manifestations such as biting, picking, and crying, and affective/emotional effects, such as expressing feeling distress, hopelessness, regret, depression, and anger. Over time, their engagement with a myriad of institutions and experiences of coerced self-disclosure on a continual basis shape unaccompanied minor's subjectivity and in turn their identity, resulting in unaccompanied minors identifying as traumatized and vulnerable.

Dedication

This dissertation would not have been possible without the young folks that participated in this study. Thank you for trusting me with your experience, for allowing me to be part of your life, and for the kindness and generosity you all showed to me. It was my deepest honor to work with you all as your case manager. I am also enormously grateful to CARECEN San Francisco for allowing me to work alongside their staff. I am particularly indebted to the staff of the Family Wellness and Health Promotions Programs: Vanessa Bhom; Silvia Ramos; Tomasa Bulux; and Lezly Martinez, along with the administrative staff: Lariza Dugan-Cuadra; Ronald Muñoz; and Nancy Castro.

I am thankful to my dissertation committee, Dana Takagi, Herman Gray, and Pat Zavella, who read multiple drafts of this work, and who continue to believe in my potential. I am grateful for the preparation you gave me to weather the many gauntlets that academia has and will throw my way. Dana, you taught me to have a daily writing practice. Herman, you encouraged me to read deeply and curiously. Pat, you showed me how to truly observe the world I sought to study. I could not have written this work, or any of the other pieces of academic writing, without these lessons. I appreciate your support, your comments, your feedback, and your generosity.

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throughout these past few years. I turned to you for advice, support, and encouragement. You kept it real, but always empathetic.

In many ways this dissertation comes from my love of the city in which I grew up, conducted this field work, birthed my child, and wrote this dissertation. San Francisco is so many things to so many people. It is my home, but it's also a place that lives in my memory.

To my mother and father who worked so hard throughout their lives to survive. Gracias por enseñarme como sobrevivir sin lujos materiales pero como echarle ganas para tener una abundancia de amor. To my family, thank you for your support and putting up with me. What a roller-coaster these last few years have been.

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To my child, Romerito. I'm so lucky to be your mamá. Whenever I look at your face it gives me the strength to keep going. Thank you for providing clarity in a world that is filled with the Bay Area Fog that I love, but can still be overwhelming.

Lastly, to my love, Gustavo. Sin ti, nada de esto sería posible. There aren't enough words in English or in Spanish that can ever express how much your love and support mean to me. You championed my work when I could not and you never lost faith that I'd make it to the finish line. We were just kids when we set out on our lives together. You never let me give up on my dream; you held it and cultivated it alongside me. My success is your success. This one is for us!

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

I examine how institutions, often thought of as neutral actors in assisting migrants, shape Central American unaccompanied minor's decision-making process, their physical and emotional wellbeing, and impact their identity and subjectivity. The study of immigrants' interactions with organizations has primarily focused on how these institutions effect the lives of migrants: the legal protection, social and educational services, and physical and emotional support that migrants do or do not receive (Amuedo-Dorantes, Puttitanun and Martinez-Donate 2013, Block, Bustamante, de la Sierra et al. 2014, Coutin 2003, Cristancho, Garces, Peters et al. 2008, Menjívar 2013), and the impact of receiving the aforementioned (de Graauw and Gleeson 2016, Gleeson 2009, Gonzales, Terriquez and Rusczyk 2014). These studies examine the ways that the laws, policies, or regulations that institutions adhere to shape immigrants' agency (Paret and Gleeson 2016) and subjectivity (Menjívar and Lakhani 2016). Similarly, my data highlights how the U.S. immigration system creates a system where unaccompanied minors must exchange their "story" in order to change their immigration status, receive medical and mental health services, and meet other basic human needs, such as finding food and shelter.

The narratives unaccompanied minors provide are experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability in their country of origin and in the United States; the unaccompanied minors' immigration status determines the resources that institutions, such as the immigration court or state sponsored medical system, can provide to

them. The physical and emotional suffering experienced by unaccompanied minors is best encapsulated by the concept of structural vulnerability, which highlights both the social location of a subject and the way that power produces a nexus, which negatively affects the subject's physical and emotional wellbeing and limits their agency (Castañeda 2013, Holmes 2013, Quesada, Hart and Bourgois 2011:340, Vogt 2013). As unaccompanied minors continue to engage with these institutions, the institutional processes shape their subjectivity. Thus, my theoretical contribution is twofold: First, I demonstrate that immigration law, social service, mental health, and charitable organizations institutionalize suffering in order to provide support to unaccompanied minors. Second, I note that when unaccompanied minors practice performance-based deservingness (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas 2014) it impacts their sense of self and shapes their subjectivity. Since the narratives that unaccompanied must provide to institutions throughout their two or more year-long immigration adjustment case are rooted in experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability in their country of origin, over time unaccompanied minors begin identifying as traumatized individuals, which impacts their identity and subjectivity.

Research Questions

My research questions focus on institutions to better understand their role in managing and disciplining migrants. Furthermore, a focus on institutions demonstrates the extension of the immigration legal system to non-legal aspects of immigrant's lives and day-to-day and long-term choices (Brabeck and Xu 2010, de

Graauw and Gleeson 2016, Dreby 2012, Gonzales et al. 2014, Menjívar and Lakhani 2016). Thus, my dissertation is guided by three primary research questions:

1. What is the impact of immigration policies, as enacted through various legal and institutional systems, on unaccompanied minors who are waiting for the resolution of their immigration case?
2. What role, if any, does the institutionalization of immigration enforcement policies outside of the immigration detention context have on unaccompanied minors?
3. What impact does the sustained contact with institutions and organizations have on unaccompanied minors in the short term and long term?

By focusing on the institution, I was able to observe that the experiences of unaccompanied minors were shaped by re-telling their past trauma history and by the institutions' treatment of that traumatic history. Scholarship in the area of immigrant trauma has overwhelmingly focused on psychological, psychiatric, and behavioral health research, which describes the trauma of immigrants and provides treatment protocols for clinicians (Foster 2001, Goodman, Vesely, Letiecq et al. 2017, Tummala-Narra 2001). Previous scholarship does not identify the way that the traumatic material was not only needed by the institution, but also shaped migrants' subjectivity. While Menjívar and Lakhani (2016) demonstrate that migrants' actions in the short and long term are effected by their immigration status they do not demonstrate that the institution produces trauma; rather, they focus on the way that the institutions shape migrants' agency and subjectivity. I examine the role of institutions

on the lives of unaccompanied minors to demonstrate that institutions exacerbate migrants' pre-existing trauma and in doing so produce new trauma. Trauma is a key component to unaccompanied minors' legal status since it is their experience of trauma, suffering, and/or vulnerability that provides a pathway to changing their immigration status. Given that adjusting immigration status for Central American immigrants is largely contingent on specific legal forms of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability, it is necessary to examine the relationship between institutions and individual's trauma.

Defining Unaccompanied Minors

I use Chavez and Menjivar's (2010) definition of unaccompanied minors for this study: a child under the age of 18 who enters another country alone (and without a legal guardian) and who is undocumented or without proper documentation.

The term, unaccompanied minor, is not a legal term; the legal term for these youth is unaccompanied Alien Child. Legally the U.S Code under Title 6 Statute § 279(g)(2) defines an unaccompanied alien child as:

- 1) Having no lawful immigration status in the U.S
- 2) Under 18 years of age; and
- 3) Having no parent or guardian to care for them

Like most scholars, I use the term unaccompanied minor instead of unaccompanied alien child to humanize youth migrants while continuing to center their immigration legal identity.

This legal category, leads unaccompanied minors to engage with specific institutions. In Chavez and Menjivar's definition of unaccompanied minor, it is

possible that a youth under 18-years-of-age enters the United States and is never apprehended by U.S. Border and Custom Enforcement. Without apprehension, an unaccompanied minor is not legally defined as an “unaccompanied alien child,” since proving that the minor entered the United States without a parent or guardian is an essential component of this legal definition. Further, two unaccompanied minors in this study were separated from their parents during the journey to the U.S. Therefore, upon apprehension by U.S. Border and Custom enforcement they were given this legal designation even though they migrated with a parent and were eventually reunified with their parent.

Unlike minors who enter the United States undetected by U.S. Border and Custom Enforcement, unaccompanied minors who are apprehended are put into deportation proceedings, meaning that they must engage with the immigration legal system and that a branch of that system, either the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Justice, will determine if they will be deported. Until unaccompanied minors are granted a new immigration legal designation, unaccompanied minors are unauthorized migrants. Success in obtaining one of the immigration statuses means that unaccompanied minors’ immigration status goes from being in deportation proceedings to a form of liminal legality such as T-visa recipient or asylee. This immigration status is temporary. However, unlike other forms of temporary immigration status, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS), the immigration adjustment processes that unaccompanied minors follow are pathways to citizenship; after a

designated amount of time under the temporary status, an unaccompanied minor is able to apply for residency and later become a citizen.

Defining Trauma, Suffering, and Vulnerability

I use the words trauma, suffering, and vulnerability frequently throughout this dissertation. Suffering and vulnerability are words connected to migrants' eligibility to change their immigration. Unaccompanied minors are eligible for Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS), T nonimmigrant visa (T-visas), U non-immigrant status (U-Visa), and asylum. The term trauma is used in the instructions for T-nonimmigrant visas. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, a branch of the Department of Homeland Security, administers these cases and uses the term trauma in its policy manual for officers who will interview immigrants. In the Appendix 15-2 Non-Adversarial Interview Techniques, which is part of the Adjudicator's Field Manual-Redacted Public Version, the Department of Homeland Security advises Adjudicators (interviewers) that, "interviewees who are survivors of abuse or other severe trauma may have difficult responding to questions during an interview" (Adjudicator's Field Manual-Redacted Public Version).

The immigration legal systems' use of the words trauma, suffering, and vulnerability were the biggest factors in my use of these words. I also considered the scholarship on structural vulnerability (Quesada et al. 2011), legal violence (Menjívar and Abrego 2012), and theories of cultural trauma (Alexander 2004). In addition to the legal and academic considerations, I also used the words trauma and suffering because they were words that the unaccompanied minors used themselves; "La

trauma” (the trauma) and “sufrir” (to suffer) were words that minors used when explaining their discomfort with talking about specific experiences.

Trauma, Suffering, and Vulnerability in the Immigration Legal System

The unaccompanied minors in this project were processed through an immigration legal system that is dependent on narratives of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability as the pathway to adjust their immigration status. In order for an immigrant to be eligible for one of the aforementioned immigration statuses (or “immigration adjustments,” as they are referred to within the immigration legal system), the immigrant must prove that they meet specific eligibility requirements; among them are: “Abuse, Abandonment, Neglect” (USCIS Policy Manual, Chapter 2: Eligibility) by one or both parents in the case of Special Immigrant Juvenile Status; “severe form of human trafficking” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security) in the case of T-Visas; “substantial physical or mental abuse as a result of having been a victim of criminal activity” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security) in the case of U-Visas; and, finally, “race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion was or will be at least one central reason for [...] persecution or [...] fear [of] persecution” (Instructions For The I-589, 2), in the case of asylum. The eligibility requirements for each of these immigration adjustments necessitate that unaccompanied minors retell and revisit traumatic experiences.¹

¹ Generalizations about why or how an immigrant chose to apply for a specific form of immigration adjustment are difficult to outline because the immigration legal system is contingent on many factors. Immigration legal professionals and scholars argue that sweeping generalizations can be harmful to individual immigrants, as generalizations paint pictures of immigration law and paths to immigration status which are not applicable to specific individual immigrants. In my work with unaccompanied minors and other newly arrived immigrant individuals and families, I have witnessed how generalized

Pathways to Immigration Adjustment

To begin to understand the complexity of the system that unaccompanied minors are navigating, it is important to understand that immigration adjustment processes are governed by congress, which enacts laws, such as the Immigration Nationality Act (INA), that shape much of our current immigration law. Immigration policy is also shaped by the United States Code, which is not the law, but a guide to the law and which the Department of Homeland Security uses to define their eligibility requirements for immigrants who seek to adjust their legal status.

However, immigration attorneys will clarify that for the wording of specific eligibility requirements they must turn to the actual law, like the INA. The purpose of the legal descriptions below is to provide an overview of the immigration adjustment pathway and of the general circumstances under which an unauthorized immigrant may be eligible for a given pathway. However, over the course of writing this dissertation, some of the requirements and rules changed. For example, during the Obama Administration, a youth immigrant had a viable Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) application as long as they met the criteria for SIJS and filed the paperwork

characterizations of the immigration system can result in fear, hope, anxiety, devastation, and uncertainty. In an effort to avoid creating these generalizations, I provide details about the context of each unaccompanied minors' overall situation, while also including details about how each individual's circumstances open up immigration adjustment possibilities which may not have been accessible to other unaccompanied minors. The immigration lawyers I interacted with during my research all agree that the life details of each client are so impactful to a case that it is dangerous and dishonest to apply generalizations from one case to any other immigrant. It would be disingenuous, therefore, to present this dissertation as providing the reader with the information and tools to be able to determine if an unaccompanied minor is able to adjust their immigration status via one of the discussed immigration adjustment processes.

prior to the youths' twenty-first birthday. Given that the U.S. government's processing time was lengthy, the application was preserved at the time that the applicant submitted the application. However, under the Trump Administration, SIJS is only a viable form of immigration adjustment if the youth's application can be reviewed and adjudicated prior to the youth's eighteenth birthday. There is currently a lawsuit and a mandatory injunction that allows for youth to continue to apply and be eligible until their twenty-first birthday. At any time this injunction can be lifted if the court decides that the Trump administration's proposed changes do not violate the law. This is just one of the ways that immigration adjustment processes have changed.

The following is a broad overview of immigration adjustment processes: Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS); T nonimmigrant visa (T-visas); U non-immigrant status (U-Visa); and asylum. The only one of these immigration adjustment processes that is exclusive to unaccompanied minors is SIJS, the other processes are open to any immigrant who meets the criteria.

To qualify for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, youth must demonstrate that they are legally an unaccompanied minor and that they experienced abuse, abandonment, and/or neglect by one or both of their parents. Unaccompanied minors must find an adult willing to serve as a legal guardian and complete the legal guardianship process in the county that the guardian and youth live. If the prospective guardian is unwilling to legally serve as a guardian, then the youth is not eligible for this type of immigration relief. SIJS is processed and approved by the U.S.

Citizenship and Immigration Services, a division of the Department of Homeland Security.²

Youth are eligible to apply for T nonimmigrant status (T-visa) if they are legally considered the victim of “severe” human trafficking. The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act defines a severe form of trafficking as sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Applicants must be physically present in the U.S. and work with law enforcement to assist in the prosecution of human trafficking offenders. Individuals under 18 years of age are not required to assist law enforcement. Finally, youth must demonstrate that they would suffer extreme hardship if they were unable to remain in the United States. Like with the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services processes and approves T-Visas.

For U-nonimmigrant visas, a youth’s eligibility is dependent on being a victim of a qualifying crime that occurred in the U.S. and which violates U.S. laws, such as armed robbery or domestic violence. The youth must have suffered physical or mental abuse as a result of the crime. The youth must also have information about the criminal activity and cooperate with law enforcement to investigate or prosecute the crime. If the youth is under the age of sixteen, a parent or guardian can relay the information for the youth. A youth may also qualify for a U-visa if their parent meets the U-visa criteria and the parent lists the youth as one of the beneficiaries. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services also processes and approves these cases.

² The department or division of government under which application process falls is highly impactful to the experience that unaccompanied minors have, which will be explored in the research.

Asylum is an immigration benefit that a youth may qualify for if they experience or are in fear of experiencing persecution on the basis of five criteria: race; religion; nationality; membership in a particular social group; or political opinion. Individuals who pursue an asylum claim must file their claim with the U.S. Executive Office for Immigration Review, a Branch of the Department of Justice, within a year of entering the United States. There is an exception to this rule, which requires the individual to demonstrate that there was a qualifying reason that prevented them from filing the application. Not knowing that asylum was an option is not considered a qualifying reason. Unaccompanied minors who pursue asylum to adjust their immigration status are eligible to have their asylum claim heard in front of an asylum officer. In the case of unaccompanied minors, if the asylum officer denies their asylum case, their case will be referred to the U.S. Executive Office for Immigration Review and an immigration judge is assigned the asylum case.³ A major difference unaccompanied minors will experience between their interview with the asylum officer and their proceedings before an immigration judge is that the former is an interview, while the latter is a court case. This means that in the latter there is a judge, an attorney representing the government, and an attorney for the youth. However, unlike in U.S. criminal court proceedings, the petitioner (the immigrant in proceedings) is not guaranteed an attorney.

³ If their case is denied by an immigration judge they will subject to deportation. However, unaccompanied minors can appeal their case.

The twelve unaccompanied minors with whom I conducted participant observation were represented by pro-bono attorneys. However, based on my observations working in San Francisco as a case manager, it was clear that there were many youths who did not have legal representation.

Scholarly Approaches to Unaccompanied Minors

A cultural studies approach to immigration in the United States can contribute to our understanding of unaccompanied minors from Central America by moving away from social sciences' focus on immigrants' individual or collective agency and toward a structural analysis, which not only considers the power of institutions in constraining agency, but also the institutions' need for specific materiality, in this case, narratives of trauma, to function.

The study of unaccompanied minors is a small but growing field. Specifically, the study of unaccompanied minors from Central America focuses on the integration and incorporation of unaccompanied minors into the United States (Canizales 2019), the role of the immigration legal system in producing legal identities for unaccompanied minors (Heidbrink 2013), transnational experiences of unaccompanied minors and their families (Heidbrink 2014), and the unaccompanied minors' experience in immigration detention (Canizales 2019, Heidbrink 2013, Heidbrink 2016, Terrio 2015, Zayas, Brabeck, Heffron et al. 2017). In what follows, I address the immigration literature and the three primary subfields: assimilation and incorporation; immigration legal identity; and transnationalism.

The predominant immigration and assimilation scholarship on adult and minor immigrants living in the United States highlights the ways that immigrants experience social, legal, educational, economic, and gendered changes. This literature focuses on immigrants' ability to succeed in adapting to these changes (Chavez 1991, Gleeson 2010, 2012, Gleeson and Gonzales 2012, Menjívar 2006, Menjívar and Abrego 2012, 2013). Immigrants' agency and the barriers that inhibit that agency become its central question (Gans 1992, Portes and Zhou 1993).

Transnationalism scholarship compliments this exploration of agency in that it focuses on immigrants' voluntary transnational practices, such as remittances (Portes 2001, Portes 2003), political participation (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003), communication with family members (Menjívar, Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2016, Zavella 2011), and agentic forms of identity formation (Vertovec 1999, Vertovec 2004, Zavella 2011). Both assimilation and integration scholarship and transnationalism scholarship, then, provide valuable insight on unaccompanied minors' ability to adapt to their new environment in their new country (Coutin 2016, Haller, Portes and Lynch 2011, Kasnitz, Mollenkopf, Waters et al. 2009). This framework, however, masks the power that the institutions tasked with managing, supporting, and/or disappointing migrants have to retraumatize migrants, and, conversely, how those institutions are dependent on migrants' narratives of trauma to function.

Immigration legal identity scholarship assesses institutions' and laws' impacts on migrants' agency. This scholarship falls into three primary fields of research:

deportability (Anderson, Gibney and Paoletti 2011, De Genova 2007, De Genova 2010); the immigration enforcement system (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014, Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013, Golash-Boza 2015a, Golash-Boza 2015b, Heidbrink 2016); and the production of illegality, liminal legality and other immigration statuses/legal categories (Abrego 2011, Gleeson and Gonzales 2012, Menjívar and Abrego 2012, Paret and Gleeson 2016). These scholars demonstrate that an individuals' actions are restricted and impacted by the threat of deportation, the expansion of the immigration enforcement system into the criminal justice system and the workplace, and the production and entrenchment of immigration status outside of the immigration legal context. Furthermore, immigration legal identity scholarship emphasizes the importance of social location in producing the subjectivity of immigrants who have an undocumented or liminal immigration status (Coutin 2011, Gonzales et al. 2014, Menjívar and Abrego 2012, Zavella 2011).

Immigration legal identity scholarship is critical to understanding the legal context of unaccompanied minors in the United States; all unaccompanied minors are in deportation proceedings and immigrants must contend with the aggressive expansion of immigration enforcement into the criminal justice system and workplaces in the last decade, meaning that their immigration status has come to have an ever-greater influence in more areas of their lives This scholarship, furthermore, emphasizes the importance of social location (institutions, legal status, family structure etc.) in producing the subjectivity of immigrants who have an

undocumented or liminal immigration status (Coutin 2011, Gonzales et al. 2014, Menjívar and Abrego 2012, Zavella 2011).

I build upon this scholarship by moving from an exploration of agency and success in assimilation and incorporation, to focus on how unaccompanied minors' legal status and interaction with immigration institutions constructs for them a subjectivity centered on their trauma.

While immigration scholarship does explore the formation of immigrants' subjectivity, it centers on unaccompanied minors' experiences within the U.S. immigration system. I expand on this by focusing on the experiences of unaccompanied minors outside of immigration detention center, navigating immigration legal proceedings, social services, and charitable institutions. I also expand on immigration scholarship by focusing on their traumatic narratives as the cornerstone of their subjectivity. My research builds upon Coutin's (2016) study on 1.5 generation Salvadorans who migrated during the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992). Coutin (2016) argues that trauma is an important site to understand youth identity because trauma and suffering shape youth's understanding of belonging. My study uses this trauma-informed subjectivity lens to argue that the violence experienced in the unaccompanied minors' country of origin, the violence during their journey to the U.S., and the exploitation, discrimination, and re-traumatization they experience in the United States, contribute to their sense of belonging and ability to assimilate.

In my research, it quickly became clear that unaccompanied minors' traumatic narratives were needed and called upon far beyond the court room, and throughout the myriad of institutions that unaccompanied minors must be processed through. I explored why institutions are dependent on unaccompanied minors' narratives of trauma to operate and how confining unaccompanied minors' narratives within institutional parameters produces further trauma.

To help in this analysis, I incorporate institutionalization scholarship. Unaccompanied minors are part of a growing segment of immigrants, including political refugees, asylees, and victims of human trafficking, for whom integration in the United States is based on their perceived suffering and vulnerability. The sociological study of the process of institutionalization has several areas of study that are useful in understanding the subjectivity of unaccompanied minors. These include an economic approach (North 1990, Greif 2006), an examination of the process of infusing norms and values into institutional logic (Powell 1990), and an approach that examines the objectification of shared beliefs (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Campbell 2004, Goldstein and Keohane 1993, Friedland and Alford 1991, Thornton et al. 2012, Strang and Meyer 1993, Tolbert and Zucker 1996). The process of institutionalization as outlined by Berger and Luckmann (1967) is sequential and consists of three phases: 1) habituation; 2) objectification; and 3) sedimentation. The role of emotion in the process of institutionalization is a growing subfield, focusing on using emotions to establish an identity (Creed et al. 2010, Lawrence et al. 2009, Seo and Creed 2002) and mobilizing social actors to change or reform institutions (Voronov

and Vince 2012). My intervention in this literature is to demonstrate that unaccompanied minors habituate telling narratives of suffering because their existing institutional mechanisms that allow them to overcome barriers by telling their story.

In much of the previous literature concerning unaccompanied minors, the role, purpose, and power of the unaccompanied minors' traumatic material in their deportation proceedings is overlooked in favor of their immigration status. Instead, I consider the way that the traumatic material and their immigration court proceedings are co-constituted; the unaccompanied minors' trauma produces the conditions for their court proceedings, which seeks to determine if the unaccompanied minors' trauma meets the legal definition of trauma, continuously revisiting this trauma throughout the legal process, resulting in a subjectivity grounded in trauma that unaccompanied minors develop to engage with the institution.

Methodology

The methodology for this study draws from three types of data: participant observation, focus groups, and secondary quantitative data. The use of ethnographic data, rather than survey data, is required because direct observation is necessary to capture the nuances between unaccompanied minor and the institutions. In this section, I discuss the different types of data, beginning with participant observation, then focus groups, and finally, secondary quantitative data. I end with a discussion of the ethical implications of conducting research on unaccompanied minors, learning to

develop self-reflexivity as a researcher, and learnings from other providers and researchers about the impact of this type of work on the researcher.

I collected data between 2015 and 2018 during the second term of the Obama presidency. There was a total of twelve youth who participated in the participant observation portion of the study. The focus group consisted of all twelve participant observation participants and seven additional participants; therefore, a total of nineteen youth participated in this study. The study consisted of eight young women and eleven young men between the ages of twelve and nineteen. Seven youth were from Guatemala, seven from El Salvador, and five from Honduras.⁴ I also had access to secondary data, collected by CARECEN San Francisco and shared with me. This data consisted of 503 individual responses. Appendix A contains a table of the research subjects.

Ethnographic work is essential for this project for two reasons. First, the study focuses on observable activities between the research participant and institutional actors. Second, Becker and Geer (1957) note that participant observation is most appropriate when a researcher is exploring a set of relationships and dynamics. In this case, I was interested in the dynamics between unaccompanied minors and legal and social service institutions. Third, observations of dynamics and relationships between

⁴ All notes from the participant observation and the focus group were typed in a word document prior to 2016. After 2016 I moved to a cloud-based application. I analyzed notes in Dedoose and uploaded recordings of focus groups on to Dedoose for transcription. In the summer of 2016, I used Dedoose to make an open code of the notes that I'd gathered thus far. After reading the open code notes I created thematic codes. Finally, I used analytical codes based on these thematic codes. In the summer of 2017, I conducted the same process and added additional analytic codes. I went back through my notes from 2015-2016 with the expanded codes. I conducted the same process for the 2017-2018 notes when I finished my fieldwork.

caseworkers and unaccompanied minors requires extensive, longitudinal research, developed over years.

In order to conduct intensive participant observation with unaccompanied minors, I approached the Central American Resource Center San Francisco (CARECEN) in the summer of 2014 and first obtained a research volunteer position. As I learned more about the legal and social processes through my research for the organization, I became interested in how youth were accessing resources typically reserved for immigrants with residency or U.S. citizenship. In 2015, CARECEN approached me to begin working directly with unaccompanied minors as a case manager, giving me a direct role in this question that had piqued my interest.⁵

I met the participants in my research by providing direct social services, such as linking individuals with local, state, or federal economic, social, medical and legal resources. There were a few ways in which I minimized the possibility of participants being coerced into participating in my research. First, as a case manager, I was not allowed to choose my clients and thus could not dictate my research pool. Secondly, in order to minimize a dynamic of coercion, I had an initial intake meeting with each client in which I would discuss goals for case management, but I did not discuss my research. I only mentioned my research until the end of our second meeting at the CARECEN offices. The second onsite meeting might be the next time I met with the

⁵ The duties and responsibilities of a case manager vary widely by organization and clinical approach. CARECEN case managers had three primary duties: 1) developing a case plan; 2) accompanying the client to institutions such as, Medi-Cal, family court, immigration court, food pantries, and homeless shelters; 3) and supporting the client in familiarizing herself/ himself/themselves with the institutions connected to their goal. One of the organization's goals in this work was to prepare the client to navigate these institutions on their own in the future.

client or might be the third or fourth meeting, because we may have previously met at immigration court or another institution. During the last 5-10 minutes of the second onsite meeting I told the client I was in a Ph.D. program and provided a short description of the study. As part of this discussion, I was required to tell the client that services were not connected to participating in the study. Clients had to express interest in participating in the study independently (without me inquiring again) sometime after the second onsite meeting. The majority of my case management clients never brought up wanting to participate in the study after the second onsite meeting, and thus did not participate. Twelve case management clients told me they were interested in participating in the study at the following meeting or during the next few meetings, and thus, they were my participants. The Case Manager Director agreed to sign the consent form for the participants who were under the age of 18. She met with each one without my presence and asked directly if they were voluntarily participating in the study.

Participants' confidentiality was maintained in two ways: 1) ensuring my case management case load did not only include research participants; 2) creating pseudonyms and omitting any tattoos of participants, their families, and guardians. Since many of the clients I worked with were never participants in the study, other CARACEN staff did not know who was or was not a research participant. I did not record any information about participants' tattoos to prevent research being used by law enforcement to identify individuals.

As a case manager, I supported the client to find resources to support his/her/their legal case and meet his/her/their basic human needs. Generally, as I accompanied participants to appointments with various institutions, we discussed their experiences living in the United States. The majority of these interactions took place during one to two-hour interactions. During the study, I saw these youth an average of once a week for two to three hours. Some weeks, I would see a youth for many more hours and other weeks I would not see them at all.

I also observed the interactions between participants and other institutional actors. I listened to minors explain their perceptions and feelings about the interactions between themselves and the institutional actors, and heard unaccompanied minors articulate their hopes, dreams, aspirations, frustrations, barriers, and challenges. After my meetings with participants, I took extensive notes to capture information about the interactions I observed or participated in. Notes included a description of the interaction and explanation of the purpose of the visit to a specific institution, the process of arriving and entering a given institution, a description of the minors' emotive response to being in an institution, and their emotive and physical response when interacting with institutional actors. Whenever possible, I wrote down the specific words or phrases that the youth used. This intensive participant observation allowed me to examine the experiences of youths as they attempt to integrate into the United States, but also the mechanisms institutions use to manage, regulate, punish, and deport these youths.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted three focus groups over the course of the two and a half years. The focus groups were structured so that discussion between participants and interviewer occurred and were focused on my research questions (Morgan 1996; Morgan et al. 2002). I used to understand the dynamics between participants and institutions in three major ways: 1) using focus groups as a replacement for individual interviews; 2) using focus groups to make comparisons between and among focus group participants; 3) highlighting the importance of the “group effect” (Carey 1994, Carey and Smith 1994).

I chose to conduct participant observation instead of interviews because I was interested in examining the dynamics between unaccompanied minors and frontline staff in legal, social service, and charitable institutions. Interviews would have provided me with unaccompanied minors’ reflection on their experiences with the aforementioned institutions but would not have allowed me to observe the actual interactions. In conducting the focus groups, I focused on questions that would result in dialogue among the participants. The participants and I would sit in a circle and I instructed all participants that they could respond to questions in any order they saw fit, or not at all.

Once I had done enough participant observation to build trust with participants, I’d incorporate them into a focus group I’d begin the process to convene one. Participation varied according to availability. Most participants knew at least one other person in the focus group(s) they attended. The dynamics of each particular focus group were unique. My analysis of the focus groups focused on the

participants' answers to the questions. Comparisons were not made between or among focus groups.

Finally, I applied principles of the "group effect" (Carey 1994, Carey and Smith 1994) by asking the participants follow-up questions after a participant made a point that elicited physical response/affirmation from others: nodding, leaning their heads in, smiling, grimacing, or other gestures. At times I asked participants to raise their hands to indicate their agreement, other times I asked open ended questions.

The first of these focus groups was conducted six months after I began participant observation. To recruit more participants for focus groups, participant observation participants were asked to invite friends or acquaintances. I screened all potential participants to make sure they met the criteria of the study. Minors needed to identify as an unaccompanied minor, confirm they were in immigration court proceedings, lived in San Francisco, and identified their nationality as Guatemalan, Honduran, and/or Salvadoran. Additionally, I asked minors the year they entered the United States to determine the approximate length of time they were in immigration court proceedings at the time of the focus group. Each participant was provided with a \$30 cash stipend for their time. Focus groups ranged from 90 minutes to 120 minutes. I assigned participants a pseudonym, facilitated the focus groups, recorded participants' responses, and transcribed and translated the focus groups. I also consulted with participants themselves regarding some of the slang or expressions they used during the focus groups.

I also used secondary data of 503 unaccompanied minors collected by CARECEN and its other collaborators between 2014 and 2015. The data consists of demographics such as age, country of origin, income, household size, and sexual orientation, and does not include personally identifiable information. I used this data to develop a general description of the unaccompanied minor population that CARECEN served from 2014-2015.

Chapter two addresses my first research question by describing the process of institutionalizing unaccompanied minors' suffering into legal, social service, and charitable institutions. I demonstrate that unaccompanied minors' suffering becomes institutionalized as they engaged with institutional actors who use the unaccompanied minors' narrative of suffering to make the minors eligible for different resources. I describe a general pattern of institutionalization: the interaction between the unaccompanied minor and the institutional actor results in the minor being identified as socially vulnerable; the institutional actor's line of questioning focuses on the minors' experience of trauma, violence, or vulnerability; the minor discloses information about their experience of trauma, violence, or vulnerability; the pattern is repeated at another institution. I argue that unaccompanied minors share their narratives repeatedly because of unequal power dynamics between themselves and institutional actors. I label this dynamic as "coerced self-disclosure." The institutionalization of suffering is a result of institutional actors identifying and categorizing suffering in order to provide unaccompanied minors access to relief, support, and resources.

Chapter three addresses my second research question by focusing on the actions of unaccompanied minors' during and after interactions with institutional actors. Acts such as skin picking, pinching, forceful hair twirling, and nail biting—to name a few—were physical demonstrations of the harm they experienced when sharing their narratives of trauma. Similarly, unaccompanied minors' emotional responses, such as boundary crossing, crying, yelling, asking questions repeatedly, oversleeping, cutting class, and overeating—to name a few—are emotional responses to this form of disclosure. Chapter three suggests that these somatic-emotional expressions signal that unaccompanied minors experience significant harm as they are made to repeatedly narrate their stories of suffering in other aspects of their lives.

Chapter four explores my third research question by examining the long-term effects of narrating experiences of suffering on unaccompanied minors. In this chapter I document how the discursive process of sharing narratives of vulnerability forms a subjectivity that shapes unaccompanied minors' understanding of self and possibilities for themselves and their future

The conclusion chapter reflects on the evidence presented, noting that the case of unaccompanied minors, while unique, also demonstrates that institutional contact is increasingly predicated on the narratives of suffering and that changes in the immigration system create new barriers for immigrants while also solidifying a punitive state approach to immigration. Finally, I provide concrete ways that academics, frontline staff (including social workers and attorneys), and folks not connected to immigrant rights work can respond to these findings. My policy and best

practices recommendations call for introspection and engagement instead of a single fix.

Conclusion

The fields of sociology and anthropology are key for understanding the social context of immigrants and social processes of migration. However, the focus on immigrants' individual or collective agency in navigating social structures has created a lacuna in this literature. To fill it, I consider the power of institutions in constraining migrants' agency. Furthermore, I note that the institutions' need for narratives of trauma to function lead them to incorporate unaccompanied minors into institutional arrangements they would otherwise be excluded from. Additionally, I bring in observations about the physical and emotional harm that institutional contact has on unaccompanied minors. In doing so I extended the legal violence literature to incorporate somatic-emotional expressions of harm. Finally, my findings suggest the vulnerability framework scholarship has not considered how age and repeated contact can shape immigrant's identity and subjectivity. Unaccompanied minors' young age and their sustained and repeated contact are paramount in shaping their sense of self and their identity.

In conducting the field work for this dissertation, I wanted to be ever mindful of the youth who came into intense and extensive contact with institutions. This research focuses on just one part of their lives, the moments and days when unaccompanied minors engaged with institutions. My dissertation fieldwork captured very heavy material and content. I attempted to distill the information I heard or

observed into what was most essential. I am grateful to all the unaccompanied minors who participated in this study and who are, hopefully, living their lives beyond the scope of immigration court and the narratives that they relived so many times.

CHAPTER 2: The Institutionalization of Suffering

Introduction

This chapter focuses on understanding the discursive processes of suffering that unaccompanied minors outside of immigration detention draw on to access resources during their court immigration case. My research illustrates that the narration of suffering is a discursive practice habitualized (Berger and Luckmann 1966) among unaccompanied minors because institutions require them to disclose this information in order to categorize them as unaccompanied minors and provide them access to resources. These resources, such as food and shelter, are vital to the wellbeing of unaccompanied minors. However, the unintended consequence of this discursive practice is the harm that it does to unaccompanied minors.

Throughout this chapter, I use the term “suffering” broadly, as encompassing experiences of trauma, vulnerability, harm, difficulty, and violence (Harvey 2012). My use of the term is intentional because “suffering” is recognized in immigration legal procedures, statutes, and regulations (Mayo 2011). Since immigration law makes some experience of suffering more visible, which shapes a collective understanding of trauma, violence, and vulnerability, I consider the perceived collective trauma of unaccompanied minors. In doing so, I am arguing against an individualized perspective of trauma, violence, vulnerability and suffering, and instead turn to structural vulnerability to demonstrate that the collective identity—unaccompanied minor—is a situated positionality that highlights both the social location of a subject and the way that power produces a nexus, negatively affecting a

subjects' physical and emotional wellbeing and limiting their agency (Castañeda, Holmes, Madrigal et al. 2015, Holmes 2013, Quesada et al. 2011). The legal context shapes the social or discursive rhetoric by immigrants and figures into how immigrants narrate their experiences in specific ways. However, legal visibility is not the only reason that immigrants must narrate their experiences of suffering. As I describe later in the chapter, some minors may disclose experiences of suffering to individuals who have no connection or control over their immigration legal cases, but who may be able to support them with resources such as food, health care, or emotional support.

Unaccompanied minors were required to discuss experiences of trauma, violence, harm, and vulnerability to institutional actors both within the immigration legal system (such as an asylum officer or a border patrol agent) as well as to social service institutions (such as Medi-Cal or the Human Services Agency) and charitable institutions (such as a food pantry or a rent deposit programs).⁶ The fact that the minors had to present their experiences of suffering in order to receive benefits, services, and/or resources indicates that their narrative of suffering has become institutionalized. In the proceeding chapter I outline the process for the institutionalization of suffering. While Berger and Luckmann's theory of institutionalization is useful for identifying when institutionalization has occurred, it doesn't help identify the reasons why unaccompanied minor are pushed to habituate

⁶ The Human Services Agency is the physical location where individuals can apply for state social services such as food stamps, cash aid, and fourteen-day hotel vouchers for temporary housing. In San Francisco, this agency also houses Child and Adult Protective Services.

their actions. I demonstrate that unaccompanied minors' actions are habitualized not only as an agentic strategy to overcome barriers, but also because the immigration legal system constantly coerces minors into narrating experiences of suffering, vulnerability, and trauma.

Institutionalization scholarship's ideal subject types—the rational actor and the institutional actor (Tolbert and Zucker 1996) — do not accurately describe neither unaccompanied minors, nor the institutional actors. Rational actors examine discrete social situations for their benefits, risks, and costs (Coleman 1990), while institutional actors naturalize social norms and follow them without question (Wrong 1961). I note institutional actors and unaccompanied minors do not occupy these ideal types, but rather exhibit characteristics of both. Unaccompanied minors often find themselves toggling between the ideal types of the rational and institutional actor. They must assess the personal benefits, risks, and costs of narrating their experience. Over time, unaccompanied minors begin to normalize narrating their experience. Thus, their narrative of suffering becomes an institutionalized action. I center the institutionalization of suffering as a key component of the immigration adjustment process for unaccompanied minors. In chapters three and four, I discuss the consequences of this institutionalization.

Unequal Power Dynamics

The legal designation of unaccompanied minors greatly limits this population's power and autonomy. Because unaccompanied minors enter the United States without parents or guardians who can advocate on their behalf, the law takes

on the role of the parent and, ostensibly, ensures that unaccompanied minors are treated properly and that their rights are not violated. This vulnerable legal status, furthermore, follows unaccompanied minors far outside of the immigration legal domain. I observed that as unaccompanied minors continued to live outside of detention centers and interact with institutional actors, these actors required the minors' narratives of vulnerability in order to provide them access to services that other immigrants are generally excluded from: full scope Medi-Cal benefits; food stamps and cash aid; job training programs; pro-bono attorneys for representation; and other charity based on meritorious situations/circumstances.⁷

Unaccompanied minors describe their experiences of the imbalance in power dynamics between themselves and the institutions. Dani, a transwoman from Guatemala who was 18 years-old when she participated in this research, explained that she lived in a neighborhood where she was harassed regularly because of her gender identity. Dani wore jeans and a hoodie to a focus group that she participated in. While she initially sat by herself, her friend joined her and they began talking animatedly in their indigenous dialect. During the focus group, Dani did not hold back her opinions; she explained the power dynamics she encounters with institutions.

The people at Medi-Cal, they have power [...] they get to decide what happens [with your case....] all I have is myself. I can't say anything to them.

⁷ Medi-Cal benefits, in particular, are only eligible to unaccompanied minors who apply for immigration adjustment as a victim of human trafficking.

Dani states that she was in a disadvantageous position because the institution held all the decision-making power.

Miguel, a man from El Salvador, was 17 years old at the time he participated in a focus group. He was the shortest participant in his focus group and had a slight lisp when speaking in Spanish. He also used the more Spanglish during the focus group than any other participant. Although Dani and Miguel participated in different focus groups, they echoed each other's sentiments. He identified the lack of power that he felt when engaging with institutions.

Miguel: La gente (those people), they really push the limit. I was at [the Human Services Agency]. I'm just trying to get my clipper [public transit] card and they were asking me why I got on the bus without paying. All I'm trying to do is get my paperwork. I don't want to talk about it. But they keep pushing and pushing. Can I complain about them? No. Who would I complain to? I just have to swallow [my complaint].

Kati: I understand; I'd feel super uncomfortable. Why do you feel like you cannot complain?

Miguel: First of all, the language...I can't speak English very well. I don't know if I could make [the complaint]. Also, you know the system. If you make the complaint and they say something to you then you know who to talk to. [My friend] he told me that when they say no to you then you get in there and you find someone [else]. You don't let them say no to you... well if it no its no... but what I'm trying to say is that you don't give up. That's because you know the system.

Miguel stated that the institution had more power than he did. He was bothered by the questions he was asked at the Human Service Agency but felt that he could not complain. When I asked him why he could not complain, he identified language and institutional knowledge as two barriers. Miguel's statement that he doesn't have

institutional knowledge of how to make a complaint shows his awareness of his limited power in relationship to this institution.

Fear of Losing Access to Resource or Services

Unaccompanied minors must weigh their level of comfort with the fact that institutions have the power to determine their future well-being: whether they stay in the country; what kinds of supportive services they receive; and how much material help they receive. The federal immigration legal institutions, including the Department of Homeland Security and the immigration courts, public federal, state, and local service institutions, and private charitable institutions all have power over the lives of unaccompanied minors in that they have resources, opportunities, and relief that they can choose to provide to them. In engaging with institutions, unaccompanied minors learn that their narrative of trauma and identity as a vulnerable person is central to accessing resources.

For example, when Adan, a 17-year-old homeless young man from Honduras, and I called a youth shelter to inquire about the availability of a bed, he chose to provide the shelter with information about his need to work, so that the shelter would alter their curfew policy to allow him to maintain his bed and also work.

Adan asks me, if he should tell them (the shelter) that he has to work because he needs to save up for his immigration case that is ongoing and needs money to feed himself. 'I don't know,' I respond. 'Ok,' he says. He will tell the shelter 'todo, todo hasta que entiendan' (everything, everything, until they understand) and he hopes that they will make an exception.

In our conversation, Adan weighed his options with respect to the shelter. His primary concern was the shelters' strict schedules for entry and exit, and possibly

losing his job because of them. He depended on his job to pay for his food and other expenses. At the same time, he didn't make enough money to rent his own room. Besides being only 17 years old, Adan earned only about \$1,000 monthly, when the average room in the city at the time was about \$1,200 per month. In our conversation, Adan strategized and discussed his options. The first option he identified, telling the shelter that he works in the evening, was more than likely going to fail. So, Adan asked me if he should disclose more information about his immigration status. In the end, he responded that he will tell them "everything" in the hopes that he will be able to secure a place in the shelter without losing his job.

The shelter staff chose to accept him based on the information he provided. Therefore, Adan was rewarded for telling the shelter "everything". This is an example of coerced self-disclosure. Adan's original solution, telling the shelter that he has a job that conflicts with the shelter entry hours, was reasonable and relevant information. But when Adan stated that he would tell the shelter "everything, everything until they understand" he was saying that he would tell the shelter about his immigration status, his current situation, and potentially answer questions about his trauma in his country of origin. Central to Adan's decision to disclose so much was the fear that he would not be able to access this resource. Adan's material conditions create the context for coerced self-disclosure. In this case, it was not an institutional actor who pressured him to disclose his immigration status and narrative

of trauma. Instead, it was the context and the information that he received from me, in my capacity as a case manager.⁸

Janet, a 17-year-old woman from El Salvador, felt compelled to disclose her narrative of trauma by a school counselor.

While the counselor and I are waiting, the counselor tells me that Janet has either missed or been late to her first period for the last 30 days. When Janet arrives, she sits down next to me and apologizes to her counselor for being late. As the meeting takes place, Janet nods respectfully. She often bites her lip and shifts her weight in the chair. The counselor asks Janet if she wants to be in school. 'Yes,' Janet responds. The counselor cuts her off, 'glad to hear, but your actions indicate you aren't interested.' The counselor explains that the only way that Janet can remain enrolled at her current school is to come to school on time and show everyone that she is committed to school. The counselor asks Janet what she thinks about what she (the counselor) has said. Janet starts off by stating that she does want to remain in school, that she is sorry that she was late to the meeting; that she is doing her best. The counselor tells her that she and I are there to help, but that we can't help Janet unless she tells us what's going on. Janet immediately fills the silence and divulges information about her immigration status, her home life, her romantic relationship and her economic situation. We leave with a verbal agreement that Janet will no longer miss class this month and will be on-time to all her classes.

The counselor's strategy of reprimand created the conditions of coercion, albeit well-intentioned. The counselor was genuine in her desire to support Janet and believed that she needed to know "what was going on" in Janet's life. From the perspective of the counselor, more information would allow her to better support Janet. However, this well-intentioned request did not consider the power that the counselor held in

⁸ It's important to note that I told Adan that he might have to wait in long lines to access the shelter, which would conflict with his work schedule. In other words, I am also part of the context that creates this coercion. Had I not provided this information; it is possible that Adan would not have determined that accessing the shelter required sharing "everything". I am also an institutional actor that added to the process of coerced self-disclosure.

over Janet. Janet, on the other hand, was very aware; she had apologized twice for being late, obediently sat and listening to the counselor's extended monologue. The fact that Janet gripped the sides of the chair until her knuckles were white and bit her lips indicated that she was worried and anxious. Janet's physical response to this conversation demonstrated that she knew she was in a vulnerable position.

The counselor had the power to recommend that Janet continue at her high school or receive some disciplinary action that might include expulsion. Thus, when the counselor asked Janet to tell her "what's going on," Janet disclosed all of her vulnerabilities, including her immigration status. Janet's disclosure allowed her to work with the counselor to create a plan for Janet to attend school consistently and on time.

Focus group participants corroborated these experiences, articulating that they feared that they would not be able to access resources unless they shared their immigration statuses and narratives of trauma. Miguel, an 18-year-old man from El Salvador, discussed being unable to access resources because he didn't disclose.

Miguel: The truth, it took me a long time to find [legal representation]. They would bring me to different [legal non-profits] but they would always say they didn't have space. I would tell them that I left El Salvador and about the gangs and the economic situation. But when they asked me questions, I didn't really answer them. I couldn't get anyone to help me.

Kati: So you would tell them what happened to you in El Salvador, everything, everything that happened to you and they still didn't want to take your case?

Miguel: The truth, truth, no I didn't. I wasn't answering their questions. I didn't tell them what happened to me. I think that's why they wouldn't take on my case.

Miguel's experience of going to different legal non-profit agencies and not being able to access legal representation because he didn't share information about his trauma and vulnerabilities was common among the participants in my research. During my time working with unaccompanied minors in San Francisco, a city which provided universal legal representation for undocumented immigrants in deportation hearings, unaccompanied minors often struggled to find representation. The legal non-profits tasked with representing these minors could not handle the number of clients. While the approach to evaluating cases varied for each non-profit, a commonly used tool for evaluation was asking individuals why they left their country of origin. The fact that Miguel didn't exhaustively answer that line of questioning, resulted in his difficulty finding pro-bono legal representation. Miguel was aware that his lack of disclosure resulted in his difficulty finding pro-bono representation. While Miguel was saying this in the focus group, other participants shook their heads, breathed deeply, and looked at each other. These reactions suggest that the other participants did not approve of Miguel's actions. Miguel's example demonstrates the negative effects that not disclosing takes on unaccompanied minors' ability to access resources.

Lucia, on the other hand, explained how disclosing her narrative of trauma allowed her to access resources. Lucia who from El Salvador and has medium length curly hair that she wears up, was 18 years-old at the time of the focus group. She often used colorful scrunchies, and had one on her arm during this focus group. She pulled at it throughout the session.

In my case, I felt embarrassed asking for help and also, I didn't want to tell people what happened to me. So, I waited and waited. Finally, I couldn't take it and I told my teacher that I didn't have any food to eat at home. She asked me some personal questions. After [I answered these questions] she helped me find someone that could help me. Then I got connected to Kati and she was able to get this letter and with the letter I was able to get [food stamps].

Lucia was originally embarrassed to share that she did not have food, and it was only extended hardship that pushed her to disclose that. In this situation, Lucia clearly connected the dots that she must disclose in order to have access to the resources that she needs.

Throughout my fieldwork, I heard unaccompanied minors say to themselves, to me, and to their family members the colloquial Spanish phrase, “el que no canta no come” (those who do not sing don't eat). In Lucia's case, the phrase was literally her situation. Unaccompanied minors were aware that resources were only provided to those whose narratives were worthy enough, determined according to the trauma and vulnerability they disclosed.

As I accompanied youth to different institutions, I noted the way that institutional actors evaluated unaccompanied minors' eligibility for benefits, or resources. I noticed a general pattern: first, unaccompanied minors were subject to a series of questions that asked explicitly about their vulnerability; second, minors were told that their answer would determine if they qualified for the benefit or resource. Unaccompanied minors engaged in this same conversation at each institution they would visit.

Compulsory Interactions between Unaccompanied Minors and Institutions

Unaccompanied minors interacted with immigration legal, social service, and charitable institutions often because they were legally compelled to. I use the term compulsory in accordance with its legal definition: mandatory. I cite the terms under which unaccompanied minors are released to parents or family members as the document which makes these interactions compulsory. In these documents, parents and or family members affirm that they will enroll children into school, provide access to health care, shelter the minor, etc. This is in addition to parents or family members agreeing to ensure that unaccompanied minors report to their immigration court hearings. For this reason, the institutions that unaccompanied minors engage with at a legal compulsory level are not just their immigration court hearings and/or family court hearings but also include the school district, Medi-Cal, and the Human Services Agency.

I examine Jessica (a 17-year-old young woman from Guatemala) and her experience with the San Francisco Superior Court and Family Court Division, and Lucia (a 16-year-old young woman from El Salvador) and her experience when enrolling in the San Francisco School District.

Jessica hoped to apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) as a form of immigration relief available to youth who can demonstrate that one or both of their parents abused, neglected, or abandoned them. Jessica selected her older brother to become her guardian. He, 24 years old, lived with his partner and their young child. As part of Jessica's guardian application, she waived notice of the change in

guardianship to her parents, who had been physically and emotionally abusive towards her. In all of our meetings, Jessica arrived with a black plastic tote bag and a smaller purse which she took to school. She would put the plastic tote bag on the ground while holding on to the smaller bag in her lap. Neither the black plastic tote nor the smaller black bag ever looked full. She brought both bags with her to her guardianship hearing, the court papers visible in her tote bag.

I'm sitting toward the front of the courtroom where Jessica, her attorney, her brother and her brother's partner are sitting. We have to wait for the end of the docket so that the judge can hear the case in private. Jessica sits next to me, moving from side to side, wrapping her hair tie around her index finger and unwrapping it, rubbing her arms and shoulders, and cleaning out her fingernails with the end of a pen. I watch her do this while I silently listen to the hearing. During the breaks we all pull out our phones, get up, stretch, walk around, and go to the restroom. We have been here for over two hours. ...Our time finally comes and the judge asks us all to stand and identify ourselves. We each do. Afterward, the judge asks Jessica if she gives permission for me and Jessica's brother's partner to be in the room. She says, 'Yes.' The judge begins by asking Jessica her name, her address, the name of her brother, their relationship. The judge asks if it is true that Jessica is asking the court to waive notice to her parents. 'Yes,' Jessica says. The judge asks if she is sure about this. 'Yes,' Jessica answers. The judge asks if this is because of physical and emotional abuse. 'Yes,' Jessica answers. The Judge directs his question to Jessica's attorney and begins by reading the description of the physical and emotional abuse that Jessica experienced on the part of her parents. Jessica listens to the translator relay this information. She sways back and forth in her chair but doesn't say anything. I cannot see her face but I realize that she must be crying because suddenly the judge hands a tissue box to the bailiff, who places it next to Jessica on the table.

In Jessica's case, the process of habitualization played out in the courtroom where Jessica was asked a series of questions by the judge and was asked to respond to these questions to prove her suffering; this process was deemed legally necessary so that the judge could consider if there was cause to approve Jessica's petition to waive

notice to her parents. The judge began by asking Jessica basic questions: her name, address, name of proposed guardian, and her relationship to him. The judge then switched over to discussing Jessica's experience of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her parents. The judge narrowed in on that issue and it was clear that he was interested in whether waiving notice was valid. The judge framed his questions such that they elicited a yes or no response. Notably, the judge did not ask follow-up questions that would have prompted Jessica to provide more information or more detail. However, the judge read the record, the information that Jessica and her attorney had provided to the court. As the judge continued, Jessica had to listen to the description as part of the court proceedings. The judge acknowledged that the information that he was reading out loud was indeed painful for Jessica to listen to, by giving her tissues. While Jessica herself did not have to verbalize her narrative in the courtroom, the judge's choice to read her testimony out loud indicated that he wanted the record to reflect the violence that Jessica suffered at the hands of her parents in order to justify waving notice to Jessica's parents.

At a guardianship review a little more than a year later, a different judge asked Jessica a similar question about the abuse she suffered by her parents. During this hearing I noticed that Jessica's small bag had been replaced with a newer looking one. The judge let Jessica and her brother know that the hearing was to confirm that Jessica was not experiencing physical or emotional abuse from her guardian (her brother) or anyone else living in the household.

Jessica sits down with her attorney at the table. ...The judge asks Jessica if it's true that she asked her brother to be her guardian because

she didn't want her parents to be her guardian. Jessica responds in the affirmative. The judge asks if she has had contact with her family in Guatemala, Jessica responds that she has not. The judge asks Jessica if she is getting along with her brother, to which Jessica responds in the affirmative. The judge asks Jessica if there is anything additional that Jessica would like to tell the court. Jessica says that there is not. The judge presses Jessica and asks if Jessica's brother is helping her. Jessica pauses and states that, unlike when she was living at home with her parents, her brother doesn't make her work and she is going to school full time. She says that she's happier and that her brother is nice to her. The judge gives a nod of satisfaction and moves on to the administrative matter.

Jessica's second interaction with a different judge demonstrates how each institutional actor has their own criteria and information they are looking for, even if they are part of the same institution. In this case, the judge's line of questioning centered on the paperwork that allowed Jessica to waive notice to her parents and the potential harm that Jessica may be experiencing. The judge's interrogative line of questioning, which was perhaps well-intentioned to ensure Jessica's safety, centered on Jessica's experiences of abuse. The judge's question about Jessica's contact with her family in Guatemala assessed if the harm that Jessica experienced was great enough to warrant not having any contact with them. Jessica's affirmative response prompted the judge to ask about her current living situation and her relationship with her brother. We see that the judge was trying to make space for Jessica to address any issues or concerns that she may have had. When Jessica responded that she did not have additional information to present to the court the judge continued to interrogate Jessica and reframed their question about her brother's support. Re-confronted with this question, Jessica provided a narrative regarding the differences between the treatments that she received by her parents and by her brother.

In this narrative, she did not directly comment on the emotional and physical abuse that she experienced, and instead used school attendance and work as stand-ins for better treatment. In the following part of their conversation, the judge appeared to be clear that they were evaluating the situation and that Jessica's response aided them in making that evaluation.

The judge is wrapping up all the administrative matters. Jessica's brother looks relieved as he is no longer moving his leg up and down. ...The judge looks up and tells Jessica that the court is pleased to hear that the guardianship is working out. The judge explains that since the court order was issued when Jessica was 15, she was young enough for [the guardianship] to have an impact on her life and that the judge is hopeful that this will have a positive effect on her life. The judge also thanks Jessica for the information that Jessica provided to the court. The information, the judge states, helped the court in evaluating the case.

The judge's statement at the end of the hearing demonstrated that Jessica's narration regarding the treatment she experienced with her parents versus the treatment she was now experiencing with her brother was a central part of the line of questioning. The judge stated that Jessica's age at the time of the petition, 15 years old, made it imperative that the judge carefully evaluate the case. In other words, Jessica's age marked her as a vulnerable subject; for that reason, the judge stated that there was a need to further interrogate the experiences of the individual. Jessica's experience with the court indicates that narrating vulnerability was essential to continue to receive the legal relief Jessica originally petitioned the court for: a change in guardianship. Jessica's case in front of the family court is a case study of the habitualization process: Jessica was subjected to questioning by an institutional actor, this questioning centered

on her vulnerability, her narrative of vulnerability allowed her to access the relief/resource she was requesting, the process is repeated at a different time.

Jesica, furthermore, understood that this process would repeat, as I note in Jesica's own reflection following the court hearing the next day in my office.

I comment that Jesica must feel relief that the guardianship court proceedings are over. Jesica gives me a look, her eyebrows furrow and she has a scowl on her face. 'No,' she responds, 'it's not over because others will need to know the information.' Then she backtracks and states that she has had to provide the information to others. So, she isn't sure if she's done telling her story. But she tells me that she wants to stop telling her story.

Jesica was highly aware that her narrative of trauma was needed by many institutional actors. She was also clear that the end of this petition was not the end of this dynamic, as she anticipated having to continue to narrate her experiences with other institutional actors.

Lucia, a 16-year-old young woman from El Salvador encountered a similar dynamic enrolling in the local school district. Lucia was religiously devout and attended church three times a week. It was common for Lucia to say good-bye to me by stating "que dios la bendiga" (may God bless you). She told me that God had given her strength to deal with all the situations that had come her way. As part of Lucia's condition of release from the detention center, Lucia's mother agreed to enroll Lucia in school. Lucia, her mother, and I visited a school district office to do

just that. This should have be a pretty routine process, since Lucia had her immunization record and her school records from El Salvador.⁹

The enrollment process began well and moved quickly at first, since Lucia and her mother had brought all of the paperwork the school district requires: proof of residency, Lucia's birth certificate, the mother's photo identification card, and a completed application form that I helped Lucia and her mother complete. As the enrollment specialist reviewed Lucia's birth certificate, they began to ask Lucia questions about her biological father who was listed on the birth certificate. This is where the interaction shifted to call upon Lucia's suffering.

The enrollment specialist asks Lucia the name of Lucia's father. Lucia responds. However, it's not the name of the person listed on the birth certificate. The enrollment specialist asks her if she knows the name David. ¹⁰ Lucia responds that that's not her 'papi' (daddy). She looks up, concerned. The she asks if the birth certificate that the enrollment specialist is holding is actually Lucia's. 'Yes,' Lucia responds. The enrollment specialist asks who David is. Lucia responds that it's the name of her 'padre' (father). The enrollment specialist is confused and states this to Lucia. At this point, Lucia responds that she doesn't want to have anything to do with David. She explains that David is on the birth certificate but that her 'papi' is Leo¹¹. 'Ok,' the enrollment specialist responds. Then she asks if Leo is the nickname for Arturo¹². 'No,' Lucia responds. She explains that Arturo is the name of her mother's current husband. The enrollment specialist then repeats the information the Lucia has given. At the end the enrollment specialist asks if the information is accurate. Lucia responds that it isn't. The enrollment specialist, who is speaking Spanish, is using 'papi' and 'padre' interchangeably. Lucia explains again that the 'padre,' David, is a good for nothing who let bad things happen to her.

⁹ While the school records from El Salvador are not necessary to enroll Lucia in school, it is helpful to the staff in determining what grade Lucia completed in El Salvador. Lucia will be required to take a language proficiency exam in Spanish and a math exam to determine her level of reading comprehension and her math level.

¹⁰ I changed the name to a pseudonym.

¹¹ I changed the name to a pseudonym.

¹² I changed the name to a pseudonym.

Immediately, the enrollment specialist states that she is a mandated reporter and that if Lucia is being abused that she can tell her. Lucia and her mother look confused. No Lucia's mother states, there's no abuse. The enrollment specialist begins to talk over Lucia's mother. Which makes Lucia's mother begin to raise her voice. I begin to intervene so that I can support Lucia and her mother. That's when I see Lucia, she is bright red and is speaking very, very quietly. I look at the enrollment specialist and motion toward Lucia. Everyone stops talking and I hear Lucia say that he hurt her. The enrollment specialist begins to ask Lucia questions. 'Who did it?' 'Who was this?' 'Where was this?' At this point, Lucia is answering her questions, which revolve around the physical abuse she experienced with David, the biological father listed on the birth certificate. Lucia further explains that this occurred in El Salvador when she lived with her paternal grandmother and biological father. The enrollment specialist asks who Leo is, Lucia explains that it is her half-sister's father who she lived with after her paternal grandmother passed away. This entire conversation is taking place in a cubical-like setting where there is very little privacy.

I want to be clear that I am not assessing the enrollment specialist's response to information that is potentially reportable to Child Protective Services (CPS). Rather, want to highlight that in this exchange, Lucia's narrative of abuse deescalated a situation between the enrollment specialist, Lucia's mother, and myself. In this case, a narrative of suffering became key to moving the enrollment process forward.

The enrollment specialist's line of questioning did not make sense of the distinctions that Lucia was making between her biological father, her father, and the man that is Lucia's mother's partner. Because the enrollment specialist interpreted Lucia's use of "padre" and "papi" as the same, Lucia's attempt to demonstrate a distinction between "padre" and "papi" became the subject of additional query and led Lucia to divulge information about the abuse that she experienced from the "padre," David (the biological father). The enrollment specialist, who identified herself as a mandated reporter, stated that she would have to report that abuse. The

enrollment specialist's follow-up questions were meant to assist her in making a report. This would have essentially paused the enrollment process. In order to move it along, Lucia provided more information about the abuse, importantly, the fact that it took place in El Salvador. Lucia more than likely did not know that a Child Protection Services report taken about abuse that took place outside of the United States would be unlikely to prompt further investigation. However, she more than likely did apply her experiences from the detention center and immigration court to make her decision to share more information. Lucia's decision to disclose did not end the line of questioning, instead it resulted in follow-up questions, which Lucia answered. All the questions and follow-up questions centered on her abuse.

In the conversation between Lucia and her mother that continued immediately after the interview with the enrollment specialist, Lucia clearly understood that she had to discuss her vulnerability to overcome potential barriers.

The enrollment specialist has stepped away from her desk. Lucia and her mother are sitting next to each other. Lucia is twirling and pulling on small sections of her hair. I watch as some strands of her hair fall on to the floor. Lucia's mother begins to chastise Lucia for providing so much information. Lucia responds that what she said is true. Lucia explains that she understands the system. Lucia states that it isn't her fault that her mom doesn't like what she is hearing. 'This is what I have to do,' Lucia states. Lucia's mother is about to say something but the enrollment specialist comes back and Lucia's mother stops talking.

Here, Lucia stated that she was navigating the system by disclosing more information. While she told her mother that the information that she provided to the enrollment specialist was the truth. Lucia's statements indicate that she understood that narratives of suffering must be exchanged with institutional actors. Moreover, while Lucia's

mother was concerned that Lucia had overshared, Lucia did not share this concern. Instead she told her mother that this was the way the system worked. Importantly, while the enrollment process is usually dictated by the parent, in this case, Lucia, the child, moved the process forward. The enrollment specialist directed her questioning towards Lucia, instead of toward the mother. The process of institutionalization was further exhibited when Lucia stated that she understands the system; she understands what the institutions need from her to make her experiences legible. In the section that follows, the enrollment specialists' statement to Lucia and her mother demonstrate that Lucia's gender was an important factor in determining how to proceed with the enrollment process.

As Lucia and her mother are looking at a map of San Francisco to locate the high school that Lucia has been placed into, it seems like there will be no more mention of Lucia's disclosed abuse. However, after the enrollment specialist has asked Lucia and her mother if they have any questions, the enrollment specialist states that Lucia is a strong young woman and that Lucia shouldn't let bad things define her. Rather, Lucia should go to school to learn English and show the world that she overcame obstacles. Lucia has a blank look and is nodding while her mother is nodding saying yes over and over again and affirming the enrollment specialist's statements. When we get up to leave the enrollment specialist states that Lucia is a 'jovencita que va a salir para adelante' (a young woman who will succeed). Lucia thanks the enrollment specialist and walks away.

To end on a positive note, the enrollment specialist, who meant to empower Lucia through the discourse of strong women, engages in a narrative of meritocracy, which did not attend to Lucia's needs. Attending school, learning English, and overcoming adversity would not change the fact that Lucia was abused and needed resources to heal from those experiences. It would not attend to the fact that Lucia was in

deportation proceedings, and would not provide any material support for Lucia to achieve academic endeavors she may want to pursue. Instead, the enrollment specialist's parting statement soundly places the burden of healing, accessing support, and achieving academic endeavors at Lucia's feet.

Lucia's, experience exemplifies unaccompanied minors' common experience of being questioned when enrolling in school. The enrollment specialist staff always asked minors and or their parents or guardians: who had legal custody; where their parents were located; the name of their parents; who they live with; and whether the youth was listed as a dependent on their parent or guardian's taxes. The guardianship issue was often the one that resulted in more interrogation, as the unaccompanied minors and their guardian would bring immigration paperwork that showed that the adult present was a quasi-guardian to the minor.

Non-Compulsory Interactions between Unaccompanied Minors and Institutions

When unaccompanied minors interacted with institutions for reason that did not relate to their immigration case, I classified these interactions as non-compulsory. To make this determination I asked myself if unaccompanied minors believed that engagement with the institution would strengthen their immigration case or if engaging with the institution was a necessary condition of their release from immigration custody. If either of these were true, I considered the interaction compulsory. For the most part, non-compulsory interactions occurred when unaccompanied minors chose to engage with institutions to meet a basic need, such as

food, housing, physical health, reproductive health, and oral health. In general, unaccompanied minors' engagement with these institutions resulted in detailed disclosure; unaccompanied minors were generally asked for more information about their experiences of suffering, than they were asked during compulsory interactions. And non-compulsory institutional actors made it clear that the unaccompanied minors' narratives were vital to receiving services. Furthermore, many times unaccompanied minors were asked to share their experiences more than once, to several institutional actors, during the same visit.

During a visit to an institution an unaccompanied minor may engage with one or more departments within that institution, or may even be introduced to and have to engage with institutional actors of second or third institutions. Such an example is going to the doctor, disclosing abuse in one's home, and then engaging with Child Protective Services (CPS). One visit could also consume an entire day. This is especially true when unaccompanied minors went to the Human Services Agency, where the whole process for obtaining food stamps, Medi-Cal, and cash aid all occur. Most of that "day", notwithstanding, consisted of sitting in a large room with poor cell phone reception from 9am to 3pm—if one was lucky.

This section considers habitualization that occurred during engagement with non-legal institutions, e.g. social service and charitable institutions.¹³ I examine the

¹³ I do want to note that an unaccompanied minor did engage with Family Court to obtain a child custody agreement and another unaccompanied minor went to the San Francisco Superior Court to obtain information about custodial rights. These examples are important, but I don't consider them in this section as they were atypical experiences.

case of Marti, a 19-year-old man from Guatemala, and Jenifer an 18-year-old woman from Guatemala. In Marti's case, I examine the day he went to a food pantry. In Jenifer's case, I examine the day she terminated a pregnancy. In each experience, the unaccompanied minors were subjected to questioning that focused on their experiences of violence, trauma, and/or vulnerability by institutional actors who had the power to provide them with services and resources. Unlike in situations of compulsory interaction with institutional actors, non-compulsory interaction with institutional actors often times resulted in unaccompanied minors providing more detailed accounts of their experiences of trauma.

This phenomenon can be accounted by non-compulsory institutional actors' limited experience with and understanding of unaccompanied minors. Most of these institutional actors asked for time to consult a particular issue with a senior staff member in order to determine whether resources could be offered to the unaccompanied minor. While the curiosity of the individual institutional actor is a factor in the extent of questioning, I argue that larger institutional forces are present; institutions need to categorize unaccompanied minors in order to attend to their needs and find ways of providing support or resources. The following examples demonstrate the process of habitualization, showing that unaccompanied minors' engagement with institutional actors focused on their suffering and resulted in the unaccompanied minors' disclosure of their narrative of vulnerability, something that became for each unaccompanied minor a repetitive pattern with one and another institutional actor.

One of the first things I noticed about Marti was how short his nails were. They were super short because he worked in a restaurant as a bus boy and told me that if he did not cut his nails short, they would break, which was painful for him. Marti used a filler phrase, “es que” (it’s that), when he spoke to me because Spanish was not his maternal language. Marti identified as indigenous and spoke a dialect of Mam. Using the filler phrase allowed him to collect his thoughts when speaking to me in Spanish. Despite Marti working a full-time job, his rent was highly burdensome; he paid \$1,200 for a room in San Francisco. This was over 50 percent of his take-home pay.¹⁴ Marti, like many San Franciscans, met San Francisco’s definition of excessive rent burden: “a rent-to-income ratio exceeding 30 percent” (San Francisco Tenant Survey 2002). Marti had been sick and unable to work for a week earlier and needed food, but could not afford to buy it. He did not qualify for any federal or state programs. Marti reached out to me to ask for help finding some groceries and I recommended a food pantry close to his home. He asked that I accompany him to the food pantry.

Marti and I are at the food pantry waiting in line. It is a warm day and we are waiting outside of the building; the sun is on our faces and we stand in the slim line of shade that hugs the wall of the building. When I look around, I notice that Marti isn’t the only youth. There are others standing with adults, perhaps a parent or guardian. When it’s our turn to walk up, Marti states that he would like a food bag. The staff person asks him if he’s ever come to the food bank. ‘No,’ he says. The staff member tells him to fill out a form in Spanish that asks him biographic and demographic information. As Marti begins to fill out the paperwork, he stops when he gets to some words he doesn’t understand. He asks me what some words mean and I try my best to explain. An example of this is the word ‘ingreso’ (income), which I explain means

¹⁴ As the note will show Marti interprets the income question to mean, his take home pay.

how much money he makes before taxes get taken out. He says he doesn't know how much he makes before taxes, but he knows how much his check is for. He writes in that number. ... When he's done filling out the paperwork, he goes up to hand it to the staff member. During the exchange, I notice that Marti is looking at the staff member with confusion. He is pointing at the paper; the staff member shakes their head and Marti walks back. Marti says that the staff member was asking him some questions but that he didn't understand the questions and he just decided to walk away. I ask Marti if he still wants the pantry bag. He says that he does.' I tell him that I can walk up with him and I can support him. I tell him it's not a guarantee that he will get the food bag but that I will do my best to help.

Marti went through the formal procedure of trying to obtain the food pantry bag: he waited in line; filled out the paperwork; and returned the paperwork to the staff member. However, he encountered a linguistic barrier when he did not understand the questions that the staff member asked.

However, it became clear rather quickly that language was just one of the barriers that Marti must navigate.

We walk up to the staff member, and I explain that I'm a case manager and that I'm here to support Marti in getting a food bag. The staff member responds that they were trying to determine if Marti qualified. Since Marti is 18, the staff member is wondering if his mother or father can come and request a food bag for him. The staff member says that they give out the food bags to parents or heads of households. Marti is nodding his head, but I can see he hasn't understood the statement, perhaps because he doesn't understand what 'la cabeza de la familia' (head of household) means. I explain what this term means to Marti and he states that that is him. The staff member looks at him and asks if his parents claim him on their taxes. 'No,' he says. The staff member has someone else come up and asks us to sit down. When we sit down Marti asks me what the problem is. I explain that the staff member is trying to determine if he is the head of household or a parent because typically those are the people who can get a pantry bag. 'Ok,' he responds. When the staff member calls up Marti to speak with him, Marti tells her that he's working full time and that he lives alone. The staff member asks him if he is a parent. 'No,' he says. The staff member marks a box and asks him to sit down. When the staff

member comes back she tells Marti that he will have to wait to see if there are bags of food left over. Marti looks confused, he tells her that he has no one and that he really needs the food. The staff member asks him what he means. Marti then explains that he is renting a room for \$1,200 a month and that he was sick and that he doesn't have money for food right now, which is why he came with his case manager here.

The larger barrier to accessing the pantry bag was determining how to fit Marti into a category that gave him access to the food pantry. This was why food bank staff attempted to classify Marti as a dependent, a head of household, or a parent. Once his status as a head of household was determined, Marti was told that he did not qualify for the resources.

Marti reported that his income was around 40 percent of Median income. (See Appendix B) Marti should have been considered low-income, so it was unclear why Marti was told to wait for a left-over pantry bag. As a result of this, Marti began telling a narrative of suffering and needing food

In this case, the process of habitualization is a result of being denied resources. Marti provided information focused on his vulnerability in San Francisco, stating the amount of rent and the fact that he doesn't have food. By disclosing this, Marti attempted to demonstrate his need for the pantry bag and overcome a barrier.

As the section below demonstrates, Marti discloses more information as he is repeatedly denied resources.

The staff member tells him to wait a moment. They return with another staff member who introduces them self as the program director. The director asks Marti if he lives with parents. 'No,' Marti responds. The director asks him if he is a recent arrival. 'Sort of,' Marti responds. Marti proceeds to tell the director and staff member that he is an unaccompanied minor and that he is living alone. They ask him additional details about his work situation. Marti describes long

workdays, no sick leave, no breaks, and lots of overtime that isn't paid. They ask about his living situation. He responds with the cost of rent and the number of people he lives with; they ask if he has access to other resources, he responds that he has Medi-Cal. After asking these questions, the director states that Marti can have a food bag. The director tells their staff that in the future, unaccompanied minors can have food bags.

Marti's interaction with the staff member and the director shows that the pattern of habitualization occurred as they attempted to determine both eligibility and level of vulnerability. After first requesting food from the front-line staff member, Marti then had to disclose parts of his narrative of vulnerability with a second staff person, and then a third, the director of the food bank. The director's first question, did Marti live with his parents, was a variation of the question that the frontline staff had already asked to determine Marti's eligibility. The following question, whether Marti was a recent arrival, prompted Marti to identify himself as an unaccompanied minor. This, in turn, prompted more questions, which Marti answered. Marti overcame a barrier and secured food by disclosing. Conversely, by disclosing, the director was able to categorize Marti as vulnerable and, therefore, eligible for resources.¹⁵

While disclosure often was a tool to overcome institutional barriers, unaccompanied minors sometimes disclosed simply because they felt a desire to. Such was the case with Jenifer, an 18-year-old woman from Guatemala. Once out of detention, Jenifer sought to terminate a pregnancy that resulted from sexual assault.¹⁶

¹⁵ Perhaps this was always the policy of the organization, but perhaps the director's interaction with Marti prompted the director to implement this policy

¹⁶ Due to the sensitive nature of this note I did discuss with Jenifer if she wanted this experience to be included into my notes. I reminded Jenifer that, as a case manager, my support was not dependent on her participation in the study. Jenifer agreed to have the experience recorded but asked to read the note.

In my first meeting with Jenifer, she explained that abortion was illegal and punishable by incarceration in Guatemala and she came to the United States in order to end her pregnancy, which she was able to do. Two days after Jenifer's abortion, I called her and we spoke on the phone.

I decide to call Jenifer to let her know that I'm thinking of her. When she answers the phone, she sounds groggy and I tell her that I'll call her back. 'No,' she responds. I let her know that I hope she has a speedy recovery and that I'm thinking of her. She thanks me, and I tell her that I will call her in a couple of days to check in. She responds by asking me if everything is ok. I tell her that yes, everything is ok. She explains that the doctor asked her a question. She can't remember the question but she started telling the doctor what had happened. Jenifer says it felt good to tell the doctor, but she didn't think that the doctor was going to ask her about filing a police report and she didn't know what to say so she told her to call me, which the doctor did. Jenifer apologizes to me and I stop her by telling her that it was ok for the doctor to call me...Jenifer says that the doctor said the police could come and take the report, but Jenifer told the doctor that she wanted to focus on what was happening. I tell her that we can file a report if she would like. 'No,' she states. Jenifer says she'd just like to put it all behind her and focus on her life.

Jenifer's account of the events that happened the day of her abortion procedure demonstrate that not all instances of habitualization are the result of information that the institutional actor needs in order to provide services. In Jenifer's case, she wanted to discuss a trauma that happened to her with an institutional actor. It is this information that prompts the habitualization process. After having heard Jenifer's account, the doctor wanted to fit her experiences into the processes and procedures that the medical staff follow when a patient tells them that they have been sexually

I translated the note into Spanish and allowed her to read it. Jenifer asked that I omit some information from the note. The note above has been further redacted for clarity.

assaulted. As part of trying to fit Jenifer into the typical arrangements, the doctor asked Jenifer if she wanted to make a police report. Jenifer did not say that the doctor was pushing her into making a report. Rather, she described being surprised that the doctor would suggest making the report. Jenifer told the doctor to speak to me about the police report and that she wanted to focus on the medical procedure as an attempt to navigate the unintended consequences of disclosing information.

Turning to the day of Jenifer's abortion, it becomes clear that the doctor was trying to fit Jenifer's experience into the context of the hospital's procedures and protocols.

Jenifer and I are sitting in the waiting room of San Francisco General Hospital. It's the old part of the hospital; the halls have a distinct musk; the elevators jolt when they ascend and descend; the linoleum tile is chipped. Jenifer is here to end a pregnancy. As we sit in the waiting room for the medical professional to call Jenifer's name, we make small talk. I notice that it is time for the appointment, and I tell Jenifer that we have to walk to the door, since no one has come out to get her. We walk down the hall to a metal door. It is locked and has an intercom and video cameras on both sides. I press the button and the intercom turns on. The voice on the intercom asks us, in English, to state our purpose. I state that Jenifer has an appointment. The intercom voice asks for clarification, I say the clients' name and explain that she is a monolingual Spanish speaker. The voice tells me that I am not allowed to come through the doors, just Jenifer. I say ok and interpret the statement for Jenifer. She begins to bite her nails and nods. The doors open and a medical staff is standing at the door. Jenifer takes my arm as a sign to walk in with her. I explain again that I can't go in. The medical staff person speaks in broken Spanish and asks Jenifer who I am by pointing at me and using the word 'quien' (who); Jenifer responds that I am her social worker. I interpret for Jenifer. The medical staff person looks down at some paperwork and tells Jenifer that I cannot enter with her. 'You, sí' [they points at Jenifer and makes a motion toward the interior of the hospital wing], 'her, no' [they points at me and shakes their finger]. I tell Jenifer that I'll be in the waiting room.

As I settled in the waiting room for what I expected would be a three to four-hour wait, I pulled out my laptop and started doing some work. After about 20 minutes, I received a phone call from an unknown number. The person identified them self as Jenifer's doctor. The doctor was wondering if the police had been called or if a police report had been done. The doctor explains that Jenifer has asked the doctor to call me. The doctor explains that Jenifer has explained that she was looking to terminate the pregnancy because it was a result of rape in her country of origin. The doctor's voice cracks while speaking.

Jenifer's experience with the medical staff highlights that part of the habitualization process involves the institutional actors trying to determine how, if at all, unaccompanied minors fit into the processes and procedures they have established. In Jenifer's case, there were two aspects of the pre-treatment process where the medical staff tried to fit Jenifer into established procedures. The first was the language barrier, the second, the process around police reporting. The language barrier was an issue that all individuals who do not speak English face. In this case, the person who received us at the door used very limited Spanish to communicate to Jenifer, complying with procedures that only allow the patient and medical staff into that unit of the hospital. However, the language barrier made it impossible for the patient to understand the policy that kept others out of this hospital unit, which existed to protect the safety of patients, medical staff, and the procedures that occur there. This policy, however, set the stage for the confusion that occurred several minutes later and the phone call from the doctor that I received.

When Jenifer's doctor called me, she was trying to determine how to follow protocol, given that Jenifer's experience was atypical, since her sexual assault occurred in Guatemala. In this case, filing, or attempting to file, a police report would

give Jenifer access to medical services. However, the report would not have been taken, since the police have no jurisdiction in the place of the assault. The doctor attempted to categorize Jenifer to make her eligible for resources. Their emotive response at the end, their voice cracking, demonstrates the difficulty they had in that moment to determine how to best include Jenifer into their institution's policies and procedures.

Jenifer's case demonstrates that the process of habitualization is experienced by both the individual seeking out resources *and* the institutional actor who has the power to provide this resource.

In this section I have discussed youth's interaction with non-compulsory institutions. Marti and Jenifer's experiences demonstrate that the process of habitualization and typification occur outside of the immigration legal system, and that both the unaccompanied minor and the institutional actor are evaluating the experiences of suffering. The unaccompanied minor is describing their experience of suffering per the questions or statements of the institutional actor. The institutional actor is distilling the unaccompanied minor's experience of suffering and attempting to fit those experiences into the institutional arrangements already set out. Habitualization happens when the unaccompanied minor repeats the information to a second institutional actor, as in the case of Marti, or when the institutional actor relays this information to another institutional actor to make sense of the process of the narrative of suffering, as is the case of Jenifer's doctor calling me.

Marti's case demonstrates the way that unaccompanied minors advocate for themselves, using their narratives of suffering to fit into institutional arrangements. Jenifer's case demonstrates how unaccompanied minors may willingly describe experiences of suffering without realizing that these experiences will trigger an institutional procedure.

Conclusion

This chapter documented unaccompanied minors' interactions with institutions resulting in them disclosing narratives of suffering, which institutionalized those narratives and made disclosure of them the common action for unaccompanied minors, wherever and with whomever they interacted.

It can be assumed from other scholarship that unaccompanied minors learn that their experiences of suffering are a necessary and vital component of their immigration case, as well as the condition of their release, in their initial interactions with immigration officials, while they are in detention. That experience sets the stage for the unaccompanied minors' expectations about engaging with institutional actors when they leave detention as unaccompanied minors..

The second part of this chapter focused on the process of habitualization and typification. I describe a three-part process which begins with unaccompanied minors' engagement with institutional actors who ask questions to screen the minor for potential relief, benefits, and resources. Unaccompanied minors are then subjected to interrogation of varying degrees so that institutional actors can categorize the unaccompanied minors' experience. And ultimately, unaccompanied minors repeat

their narrative of suffering at different institutions or with a different institutional actor within the same institutions.

Demonstrating that narratives of suffering have been institutionalized, it is important to move away from perceiving narratives of trauma, violence, vulnerability, and suffering as pathological and/or the result of poor mental health. Instead, the institutionalization of suffering is a key component of living through the immigration adjustment process. In chapters three and four I discuss the consequences of this institutionalization.

CHAPTER 3: Somatic-Emotional Evidence of Harm

Introduction

In the last chapter, my research showed how suffering and vulnerability of immigrants is a key condition for charitable, local government, state, and federal to provide them resources. In this chapter, I examine somatic-emotional expressions of harm, including physical manifestations such as biting, picking, and crying, and affective/emotional effects, and expressing feeling distress, hopelessness, regret, depression, and anger. This data indicates that by institutionalizing vulnerability, the harm experienced by unaccompanied minors extends beyond the original trauma.

The term somatic-emotional harm draws on the behavioral health definition of somatization, which recognizes that an individual can communicate “psychological distress in the form of physical symptoms” (Lipowski 1988). The term also draws from the fact that unaccompanied minors’ talked often about their feelings, using words such as “anxious,” “depressed,” “down,” and “hopeless.”¹⁷ While the study of somatics is typically relegated to the field of behavioral health, social scientists have been interested in the collective experience of specific somatizations, such as cutting (Hodgson 2004) and other forms of self-harm (Adler and Adler 2007). Building upon sociological work that demonstrates that self-injury is connected to larger social and demographic characteristics, such as age, cultural background, emotional labor, and

¹⁷ A useful article which bridges the literature in the behavioral health field with that of the physical health field is Somatic Symptoms of Distress (Simon, Gregory, Richard Gater, Steven Kisely and Marco Piccinelli. 1996. "Somatic Symptoms of Distress: An International Primary Care Study." *Psychosomatic medicine* 58(5):481-88.. The authors’ note that the words patients use to describe their emotional state are as important as the observations that physician makes.

gender (Chandler, Myers and Platt 2011, Chandler 2012), I argue that somatic-emotional harm presents as self-injury or self-identified negative emotional states that result from engagement with institutions. Menjivar and Abrego's (2012) important work on legal violence, which established that the criminalization of immigrants at the federal, state and local levels has resulted in violence and inequality and has prevented migrants from integrating into US society, greatly informs my research; I theorize how the legal and institutional category of unaccompanied minors creates an experience of physiological and emotional harm for immigrant youth, which then has further negative consequences for them. A somatics lens helps us see the physical and emotional expressions associated with the engagement with these institutions.

This chapter discusses the somatic-emotional harm unaccompanied minors exhibit when engaging with legal, social service, and charitable institutions. Somatic-emotional harm is produced by forces specific to each institution. Unaccompanied minors overwhelmingly displayed somatic-emotional harm during the legal declaration writing process for their immigration court case, when engaging with immigration law institutional actors such as their attorney, judge, asylum officer, etc., when accessing resources, and when engaging with institutional actors who struggled to fit them into institutional logic. Unaccompanied minors also experienced somatic expressions of harm with charitable institutions when they were forced to tell their story in order to secure basic human needs.

Research on the trauma and/or re-traumatization of immigrants who are in court proceedings focuses on the law's injurious nature (Berg and Millbank 2009,

Bögner et al. 2007, Bögner, Brewin and Herlihy 2010, Hinton, Chhean, Pich et al. 2006, Schock, Rosner and Knaevelsrud 2015). Drawing from Menjívar and Abrego (2012) and Jackman (2002), I argue that the injuries identified by scholars in legal proceedings extend to other institutions. It is precisely their immigration designation as unaccompanied minors, and their immigration status initially as deportees, but later as quasi-documented individuals, that produces patterned emotional and self-inflicted injuries. I begin with discussing unaccompanied minors' practices of disclosure within United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, the branch of the Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for administering the cases of unaccompanied minors.

I then branch out to discuss unaccompanied minors' practices of sharing their narratives of trauma at social service institutions, such as the Human Services Agency, the Department of Public Health, and the Housing Authority. Lastly, I discuss how charitable institutions, (non-profit organizations, churches, and foundations) create their own systems that unaccompanied minors navigate through by disclosing the same narratives of trauma.

Immigration Legal Institutions

Unaccompanied minors interact with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service sporadically, yet these interactions are occasions of intense stress, because youth understand that their future in the United States may well rest on their interactions with officers of this agency. Field offices have a criminal justice infrastructure: there are security officers who check paperwork and identification at

the entrance; Department of Homeland Security officers are armed with firearms and dogs who watch people as they enter and exit the building. All individuals must pass through metal detectors in order to enter the building. Immigrants' interactions with United States Citizenship and Immigration Service is governed by immigration laws, rules, and regulations, which allow field officers to ask migrants personal questions, verify the conditions of their release from the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and even verify information regarding their physical and mental health.¹⁸ These dynamics at United States Citizenship and Immigration Service offices increase unaccompanied minors stress and results in somatic-emotional harm.

Miguel, who in chapter two discussed his difficulty obtaining an immigration attorney in a focus group, was 18 years old when he was scheduled for his biometric appointment at United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. When we spoke about his appointment, while most of the youth would use the Spanish word "huellas" (fingerprints), Miguel used the word "biometrics," which he pronounced "beo-meh-trik". Miguel often integrated English words into our conversations, which were in Spanish. I noticed that he attempted more words in English when he was relaxed. So, I knew that he was not relaxed when he called me and did not use any English words.

¹⁸ In this section I will not discuss physical harm, as none of the unaccompanied minors who participated in the study experienced physical harm during their interactions with United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. However, entering a United States Citizenship and Immigration Service office could result in possible physical harm in two ways. In order to enter the office, individuals had to go through a metal detector and were subjected to a search. In one instance, I witness a security guard search an individual's hair. She replied that she was in pain because the security guard was pulling her hair. In another instance, I witnessed a young women state that the pat-downs she was receiving were too forceful and were hurting her. Secondly, a field officer mentioned to an unaccompanied minor that if he did not adhere to the rules of his release it was possible for a field officer to arrest the minor. On one occasion I witnessed an arrest at a field office, which resulted in the arrested immigrant being physically restrained by two officers.

Its Monday morning; Miguel and I have scheduled an appointment for Thursday to get his biometrics (fingerprints) completed at a United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) field office. Normally, it wouldn't be a big deal. It's a routine part of the process; his application was accepted by the USCIS field office and is being reviewed. However, nothing will be routine about this experience because Miguel has a black eye. He asks me if it's a big deal. I tell him that he needs to talk to his attorney so that she can advise him, because I don't know if it is or isn't.

Miguel's admission that he had a black eye came from his knowledge that a black eye may identify him as a danger to others and that it may negatively impact his visit to United States Citizenship and Immigration Service, which has jurisdiction over his case. This was the impetus for his call.

As my interaction with Miguel continued, the power dynamics and the conditions that the immigration legal system had created to coerce self-disclosure began to appear.

Twenty minutes later I get a phone call from the attorney and she sounds stressed: she is speaking quickly; cuts me off; begins a question and then states, 'never mind,' or answers it herself. She asks me to accompany Miguel to the biometrics appointment and tells me that Miguel has spoken with her and explained everything. The attorney says that going to the biometrics appointment with a black eye shouldn't be a big deal, but it not an ideal situation. She says this statement, 'not ideal,' three or four times. I ask if the appointment for the biometrics can be rescheduled. No, she explains, it's too close to his court date and she wants to present the biometrics results as proof that the case is moving forward. She asks me to coordinate with him so that I can accompany him.

I call Miguel back and tell him we are still on for the appointment on Thursday. He asks me what I think he should say in the appointment if they ask him about the black eye. I tell him I don't know what he should say to the officer. I tell him, again, to speak with his attorney about that.

Miguel needed to disclose information so that the attorney could provide him with the appropriate legal advice. However, Miguel checked in with me before disclosing to his attorney, ultimately disclosing to multiple institutional actors, to test the impact of his disclosures. I point this out to demonstrate the pattern of repeated, coercive self-disclosure that Miguel encountered in all institutions related to his immigration case.

It's Thursday morning, Miguel and I meet at the Montgomery BART [train] station and walk the 15 minutes to the building on Broadway. I immediately notice the black eye; Miguel has brown skin but the bruising is visible. I also notice that his hands are scuffed up and that he has scabs on his hands. We're running short on time and we are both dressed up, I'm wearing the dress I wear to court and he is wearing slacks, tennis shoes, a polo and a jacket. It's a normal foggy San Francisco day, but by the time we get there we both have some sweat on our brows. We get in line; the security officer will review his paperwork and will admit him and I into the building.

Since Miguel and I have walked over briskly I take off my jacket and so does he. That's when I see it; he has really visible scabs on his forearm. The scabs take up the majority of his forearm. I'm not the only person that notices. The families in front of and behind us look more closely. Miguel looks at me and I smile but I begin to put on my jacket, silently indicating to him that he should do the same. He puts on his jacket and looks straight at the ground. I try small talk but his answers are monosyllabic and after a few attempts, I stop and silently drink my coffee.

Miguel was clearly aware of both his vulnerability and the perceptions that others had of him because of the black eye. The combination of the black eye and the visible scars on his forearms made Miguel an object of curiosity as the people in front of and behind him began to look more closely at his body. It is important to note that my own silent cue that he put on his jacket made me contribute to the environment that read his scars as a concern. The unequal power dynamics in this situation meant that Miguel obediently followed my social cues to determine how he should act and what

parts of his bruised body offended others' sensibilities. Within this situation, Miguel then began to self-disclose and exhibit somatic-emotional harm.

When it's our turn, I walk up to the security guard with Miguel and he hands the security guard his paperwork. The security guard looks at him and asks in English what happened to him. Miguel stares forward, blankly. The security guard points at his eye and Miguel tells him that he got hurt. The security guard asks me to translate. 'He got hurt,' I say. The security guard then lets us in. He gives us a clipboard with paperwork and asks us to take a seat and fill it out. We walk over to some chairs and sit down. Miguel has the paperwork in his hand and begins to fill it out, asking me what specific fields are. I help Miguel finish up the paperwork. Then we just wait. Miguel asks if I brought a book. 'No not today, I forgot it,' I tell him. We are waiting for a long time. During our wait, I notice that Miguel is shifting in his seat. He's rubbing his knuckles and I notice that one of his nails is cracked. I notice that Miguel is picking at some of the small scars on his hand. I notice that Miguel keeps clearing his throat. He tries to do it quietly, but the waiting room is very quiet and every time he does, the folks around us look directly at him. Miguel has a pretty affable and agreeable personality, but today he is very quiet and he hasn't smiled at all.

Miguel's decision to disclose to the security guard came after attempting to avoid the question. Because Miguel's ability to communicate in English is limited, his strategy of avoidance could have worked. However, the security guard persisted in trying to obtain information about Miguel's black eye. The security guard had the power to let or prevent Miguel from entering the building. Fearful that he would not be able to follow the steps for his immigration adjustment process, Miguel disclosed a little more information, just enough to appease the security guard. This admission provided us with entry into the building.

Miguel's picking at his scabs was the most blatant sign of a somatic-emotional harm. It indicates that he was experiencing emotional discomfort; Miguel also

exhibited anxiety and made attempts to self-regulate his emotions, shifting back and forth in his chair and repeatedly clearing his throat. The last instance of somatic-emotional harm was his outward affect; someone who would normally be affable in this situation was unable to make small talk or smile.

The situation in general could have made anyone anxious. However, Miguel's stress was also coming from the unique position he finds himself in: having a black eye at his fingerprinting appointment. It was a situation ripe for anxiety.

Miguel's name gets called and he looks at me. He has the clip board in his hand, and I smile at him. "I'll be here," I say to him, and he walks away. Some 10 minutes later the security guard walks up to me. He asks me if I came in with the kid with the black eye. 'Yes,' I say. 'They want to talk to you,' he says. I walk to a counter and a woman greets me. She tells me that Miguel has stated that I am his case manager. I confirm that I am. She tells me that she's given him some bandages for his arm, and that he's in the bathroom cleaning himself up. He'll be out in a minute. 'So sad what happened to him,' she says. I smile, nod, and ask if I should wait at the counter or in the waiting area. He's fine, she responds, she just wanted to make sure that he wasn't alone

Miguel walks out and says goodbye to the woman at the counter and to the security guard. Miguel doesn't say much on our way out, but I can see that there is a bandage on his knuckles and his scab is bleeding. I ask him about his weekend plans, but he tells me that he's not sure what he's doing. We walk by a Walgreens and he tells me that he needs to go in. I ask him if he wants me to wait for him. No, he says. We say our goodbyes and I leave.

The biometrics technician's comment that "it's so sad what happened to him" indicated that Miguel must have self-disclosed some information regarding the black eye that made the technician sympathetic.¹⁹ Furthermore, there was a link between

¹⁹I accompanied seven other youth to biometrics appointments, and, except for this one, I was never acknowledged by the staff. My routine was to sit and wait in the waiting room until the youth returned

Miguel's scab-picking and disclosing. Although I was not physically present for the interaction between Miguel and the biometrics technician, the biometrics technician's comments to me, "gave him some bandages" and "he's in the bathroom cleaning himself up," indicated that Miguel had been picking his scabs again and that he began bleeding. In this case, it appears that the act of disclosing to the biometrics technician produced somatic-emotional harm. Miguel's engagement with this immigration legal institution demonstrates that minors used disclosure to navigate institutions (acting within the dynamic of coerced self-disclosure) and that this disclosure, in turn, produced somatic-emotional harm.

The next day, Miguel continued to display somatic-emotional harm.

Miguel calls me and leaves me a message on my phone at 6 am. So, when I get into the office I call him back. He wants to know if everything is ok with the fingerprints. I tell him it will take a while to know anything about the biometrics. He asks me when the information will be released. I say I don't know and that it can depend on a number of factors. I ask him if he wants to come in to the office for an appointment. He tells me that he's around the corner and can come in now.

Miguel was clearly in an anxious emotional state. He called me, his case manager, at 6 am, three hours prior to when CARECEN opens. His voice message on my cell phone said the following, "Hi Kati. It's Miguel. I want to know if everything is ok. Can you return my call?" His voice was at a higher register than normal and he emphasized the words "can you return my call" as if he was pleading with me. For

from being fingerprinted and then leave with the youth. This was the first and only time any staff or security guard addressed me or spoke with me about the youth.

this reason, I called him back as soon as I got into the office.²⁰ Miguel's statement that he was around the corner, despite the fact that he lived a 45-minute bus ride away and that he worked on that (Friday) morning, also demonstrated that he was in a heightened emotional state. Furthermore, during our phone call, Miguel asked the same question twice, a strategy that some youth used when they felt anxious about the answer. He arrived at my office shortly after we got off the phone.

When Miguel walks in, I can see that his black eye is still very visible. We go into the family room and Miguel sits down. I ask him how he's doing. 'Not good,' he says. I ask him what's going on. He tells me that he couldn't sleep, that he hasn't been sleeping. I nod and I tell him I'm sorry to hear that. He tells me that he's worried about the finger printing appointment. I tell him that the finger prints are to see if he's ever been arrested or in criminal custody. 'Ok,' he says. I tell him that he doesn't have to be worried if he hasn't had an incident with the police. He nods. I wait for a verbal response.

Finally, Miguel says, that I won't believe him, but that his black eye was the result of being mugged. Some men took his wallet and beat him up. He says he recognized them as gang members because of their tattoos and he's worried that his problems with gang members are going to be 'like the problems I had in El Salvador.' I tell him that I understand. He then tells me that he didn't want to say anything to anyone, but he told his attorney and he also told the person that was finger printing him. He says that he felt like he had to give her an explanation because when he was getting finger printed he rolled up his sleeves and she saw the scars on his arm and she got scared. So, he told her. Now he feels worried because his attorney told him not to say anything. He doesn't know if the attorney believes him, or if I will believe him.

Miguel's self-disclosure to me a day after his finger printing appointment indicated that his stress, discomfort, and anxiety had not subsided since the previous day.

²⁰ Over the course of my field work, boundary crossing—calling many times consecutively and calling outside of business hours—was a common way that unaccompanied minor exhibited their anxiety.

Miguel's own admission that he was not able to sleep and had not been sleeping indicated that he was in a heightened state that he could come down from. The information that I provided Miguel was meant to comfort and reduce his anxiety. However, I also prompted him to disclose any information about criminal history. In my capacity as his case manager and a person that had power over resources, I created the conditions of coercive self-disclosing.

Miguel was aware of the power dynamics and institutional actors that he was navigating between: me; his attorney; and the biometrics technician. Miguel stated that I may not believe him, highlighting the institutional actor's (myself) important role of validating vulnerable subject's narratives of trauma. Miguel began to provide me with further information, identifying the robbers as gang members and stating that this incident made him think about the incidents that occurred in El Salvador with gang members. Miguel's worry about going against his attorney's advice demonstrates that coerced self-disclosure creates situations where he must negotiate conflicting interests of different institutional actors and that his narrative has the power to both create and break those relationships of trust.

Furthermore, Miguel said that he would have rather kept this information to himself. He was inwardly struggling to decide whether or not to maintain his privacy. Ultimately, he chose to give up his privacy in three interactions—with his attorney, with the biometrics technician, and with me, his case manager. During all this, he became increasingly anxiety ridden and exhibited somatic-emotional harm: not sleeping, boundary crossing, and asking the same question repeatedly.

Miguel is close to tears, he keeps looking down and his eyes look watery, but he hasn't shed tears. I can't assuage his concerns but I tell him that I believe him. That makes him cry.

Miguel began to cry from the accumulation of events: obtaining the black eye; not following his attorney's directions to not disclose²¹ by disclosing to the biometrics technician; and then disclosing to me. His tearful look and then crying were displays of somatic-emotional harm. His emotional release was triggered by my believing him. The tears were not solely a cathartic release of emotions, but also a sign of all the harm that Miguel endured throughout this process.

Miguel's experience with Citizenship and Immigration Service highlights the way that unaccompanied minors' legal identity and the legal adjustment process is dependent on their disclosure of trauma, even in unusual ways. It also demonstrates that even under unexpected circumstances, disclosure was part of interactions with institutional actors. In the example outlined above, an event outside of Miguel's control resulted in additional disclosure. While some may argue that Miguel's situation merited disclosure, I would argue that Miguel's situation is merely another example that the events of his life are not his own to private. Instead, the content of his life is subject to coercive self-disclosure whenever he comes into contact with the institutions that constitute his identity as an unaccompanied minor. Furthermore, whenever Miguel interacted with an institutional actor, he disclosed again; it was his only option for all situations. As a result of this dynamic, unaccompanied minors

²¹ Since I am not in the meetings with the participant and the attorney, I cannot definitively say whether his attorney gave direct legal advice that Miguel not disclose, or if Miguel interpreted his attorney's advice to mean that

begin to exhibit somatic-emotional harm. In Miguel's case, he picked at scabs, cleared his throat, shifted in his seat, experienced insomnia, crossed boundaries, asked the same question over and over again, and cried.

These visual, emotional, and relational actions indicate unaccompanied minors' experience within the immigration legal system produces harm for them. The probative actions of institutional actors that examine the specific life events or situations of unaccompanied minors, normalizes the creation harm that unaccompanied minors experience within the immigration legal system and at the hands of the institutional actors who attempt to navigate the system with and for them.

I now turn to what may be considered a more routine example of engaging with the immigration legal system to demonstrate that the dynamics described above are consistently at play. Unlike Miguel, Janet's experience with United States Citizenship and Immigration Service was more typical. She was an unaccompanied minor who had entered the United States without inspection when she was 17. She had been in San Francisco since she was released from an Office of Refugee Resettlement youth shelter. I began working with Janet shortly before her asylum interview. In this interview she would have to describe to an asylum office events that happened to her in El Salvador. The officer would then determine if Janet met the criteria for asylum.

Janet had been waiting for over two years for this interview. In the week leading up to it, she visited her attorney's office three or four times to prepare. I

accompanied Janet and her attorney to the interview, to support her. I did not have any official role nor did I participate in or observe the interview; instead, I was there solely to provide support to Janet. Janet wore a white tank top, jeans, and a sweater, all of which had been ironed meticulously. Her black winged eyeliner had been carefully drawn on to her eyes.

Janet and I are at her asylum interview. A question that Janet may have to answer is about her current living situation. Unknown to the attorney, Janet has moved. Her uncle kicked her out last week and she's been moving from house to house. I encourage her to tell her attorney. After telling the attorney this information, in the hallway as we are waiting to go through security to enter the asylum area, the attorney quickly tells Janet to state that she has moved and explain the situation. Janet looks over to me and looks at the other people and the room and looks up at the ceiling until she's called in. Janet and her attorney walk to the asylum interview where an asylum officer will hear her case.²²

Janet keeping the information regarding her housing private could have harmed her case, as the asylum officer may have discovered that Janet was hiding information or being dishonest. Each institutional actor (myself, her attorney, and, ostensibly, the asylum officer) wanted or actively pushed Janet to disclose. The needs of the immigration legal case took precedent over Janet's own desire or need to keep this information private. This interaction between Janet, the attorney, and the case manager (myself), highlights the fact that disclosure is a necessary part of a successful case. The logic of immigration law constrains Janet's agency, compelling

²² Each asylum case engages one or a combination of grounds of merit for asylum. Important to note is that asylum law is subject to the immigration judge, or in this case the asylum officer's discretion. This allows them the ability to give different weight to the presented facts in order to determine whether the experiences of the individual rise to the level of persecution. In the interview, her attorney may have highlighted Janet's unaccompanied status in order to show her vulnerability. In the interview, her attorney, the asylum officer, and Janet discussed, probed, minimized, and/or highlighted specific characteristics of vulnerability to see if she met the criteria to be offered asylum.

her to always disclose, be forthcoming and honest. However, after Janet's hearing, the pain of her self-disclosure resulted in self-harm

I wait about forty-five minutes. During an intermission she comes out to go to the restroom and her makeup is smudged from crying. Our interaction is brief and we don't get into any specifics. Once her interview is over we all go outside. Outside, her attorney takes her to the side and talks to her. I stand close to the bus stop awning to stay out of the hot sun. I can see Janet has her head down as her attorney is speaking to her. I see her say a few words but she is mostly quiet. Janet has a scab on her fore arm and I watch as she picks at it. She continues to pick until I see her place her hand on the scar and press down. I assume Janet has drawn blood.

Janet seemed to have experienced emotional pain during her interview, to the point of crying.²³ Furthermore, Janet and her attorney's discussion afterwards resulted in further injury, as Janet was reprimanded for not disclosing sooner. Janet responds to that reprimand with another expression of somatic-emotional harm, picking at her scab until it bleeds,

These instances of somatic-emotional harm are produced by the immigration legal system, more than are by her lawyer or the immigration officer. Janet's skin picking is a physical manifestation of the pain she feels and the harm that the immigration legal system has had on her. Janet's experience at her asylum interview demonstrates that legal violence exists within legal proceedings, far removed from immigration custody or deportation proceedings.

After about twenty minutes Janet walks back to me and explains that the immigration officer needed to know what she experienced in her uncle's house. She was subjected to a quasi-physical exam of her arms

²³ In a focus group Janet participated in, she said, "the worst is when you cry and you're crying a lot and you're with immigration...because you don't know how [the immigration office] will react." For Janet, crying in an institutional settings creates additional uncertainty, stress, and worry.

by the asylum officer. She also had to point to the parts of her body that were mistreated. She says that her attorney was angry that Janet had not previously told her about the living situation. She tells me that she thought the asylum declaration meeting where she recounted the details of her trauma would be the hardest part, but she can't escape the trauma. I ride the bus with her to her school. I can tell she's upset because Janet, who is usually quite gregarious, is quiet and monosyllabic. As we part ways, she stands in front of me, looking down and states that she can't wait until the process is over so she doesn't have to worry about the little things anymore. She tells me she just wants to be done with the process so she can go back to feeling normal.

Janet's statement as we parted ways was indicative of symbolic violence; she normalized the injuries that she had endured within the legal process. She suggested that once she had adjusted her status and no longer had to engage with immigration proceedings, she would be able to move on, demonstrating her naturalization of immigration law as injurious. While she doesn't self-deprecate, it is clear that Janet experiences immigration law and proceedings as barriers to her identity and sense of self.

As a branch of the Department of Homeland Security, United States Citizenship and Immigration Service's role in immigration enforcement is to ensure that administrative processes move forward. Miguel and Janet's experiences in these administrative processes produced increased anxiety, fear, and left them uncertain about how to proceed. They exhibited somatic-emotional harm, which was in fact produced by their experiences with United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. Furthermore, these instances of somatic-emotional harm are directly related to the pattern of coerced self-disclosure. Interacting with the immigration legal system causes harm because it constrains unaccompanied minors' agency and

normalizes coerced self-disclosure and somatic-emotional harm. In the following sections, I demonstrate that this legal violence extends to social service and charitable institutions that unaccompanied minors must engage with.

The Reach of the Federal Immigration System into Social Service Institutions

My observations reveal an important, but not previously well-understood dynamic of social service institutions that work with unaccompanied minors and their immigration court case. Unlike undocumented immigrants who are unknown to the Department of Homeland Security, unaccompanied minors must engage with some social service institutions in order to adjust their immigration status.

For unaccompanied minors' attorneys, one set of institutions of particular importance are hospitals and health care facilities. At multiple points in the immigration court process, United States Citizenship and Immigration Service asks questions about minors' physical health. Furthermore, under the Affordable Care Act, mental health services have been expanded to give minors access to individual therapy. Access to therapeutic services allows attorneys to include mental health evaluations as another piece of evidence to support an immigration adjustment case.

The mental health evaluations are particularly useful in asylum and trafficking cases.^{24,25}

²⁴ As Menjívar (2006) has shown, immigration status has a profound effect on the way immigrants do or do not engage with institutions. Furthermore, Menjívar's (2011) study of immigrants in Arizona demonstrates that immigrants overwhelmingly choose to not access resources because of their immigration status. Despite being in deportation proceedings, unaccompanied minors are encouraged to access resources, particularly those that will support their immigration case.

²⁵ Engaging with institutions such as Medi-Cal, Cal-Fresh, or Cal-Works can be met with resistance among unaccompanied minors' family members, who may have a strategic practice of avoiding contact with institutions.

Unaccompanied minors who live outside of detention centers face a daunting task of understanding and navigating the immigration legal system and the social service system. Furthermore, unaccompanied minors have to understand the nuances of both systems to determine if one will negatively impact the other, while also sifting through misinformation within the immigrant community with respect to the impact of particular social service resources on immigration status and immigration court proceedings.

Diego, a 14-year-old young man from Guatemala, was short, slim, and always complained of being cold. He used a huge jacket which was too large for his body. He looked like he was wearing a sleeping bag, but defended his choice of clothing, saying that San Francisco was too cold for him. Diego was in middle school and was looking forward to entering high school in the fall.

Diego's experience applying for Medi-Cal illustrates the importance of understanding the panoply of institutions immigrants encounter. When Diego and I met, he had been successfully linked with an immigration attorney who took his case pro-bono. He was living with his aunt, Rosa, an undocumented middle-aged woman whose children were in Guatemala. Diego identified Rosa as a family member who could serve as his sponsor in the United States when he had still been in an Office of Refugee Resettlement shelter.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement process required that Rosa prove her blood relationship to Diego. This was done by submitting birth certificates that established a family tree. Rosa also submitted employment records, rental

agreements, governmental identification, and fingerprints. Once the paperwork was submitted and completed, a social worker would inspect the potential sponsor's home to ensure that the youth has a proper home to live in. Only then could the Office of Refugee Resettlement authorize the release of the unaccompanied minor.

It is easy to understand, then, why Diego felt frustrated with his aunt, who was reluctant to engage with Medi-Cal. It may seem contradictory that Rosa was willing to engage with the immigration legal system to help her nephew leave immigration custody, but was hesitant to access social service resources. This resulted in Diego mediating, cajoling, and explaining the system to his aunt to allay her fears. All the while, Diego understood that he needed to engage with social service institutions in order to present the best case to his immigration court.

Diego, Rosa (his aunt), and I are at the Human Service Agency (HSA) to apply for state medical insurance²⁶. Diego greets me with a weak smile and then looks down at his phone, puts on his head phones, and slowly walks into the building. The night before, I called Rosa to confirm the appointment. Over the phone, she tells me she is nervous because she is undocumented. She asks me what type of questions the case worker will ask her. I explain that the case worker's questions will focus on her income, address, and relationship to the minor. She explains she'd rather not go but Anna, Diego's immigration attorney, has stated it's necessary for his immigration case²⁷.

When I met Diego and Rosa that morning it was clear that Rosa was having a difficult time. Her questions the night before indicated that she felt unprepared, uninformed, and weary of going to the Human Services Agency offices to apply for Medi-Cal.

Diego's weak smile and his use of the cellphone was likely a coping mechanism for

²⁶ Rosa is a pseudonym.

²⁷ Anna is a pseudonym.

Rosa's hesitancy and anxiety. His slow walk into the building also indicated that he was nervous about what awaited him inside.

Diego's attorney's well-meaning request for Diego to access medical services, in order to help his immigration case, had caused a strain between Diego and his guardian. Although Diego was the minor, he was caring for his aunt by allowing his aunt's anxiety to take up the emotional space at this appointment.

As we walk into HSA a security guard stops us to ask, in English, how she can help us. I explain that we are there to sign up Diego for health insurance. Diego looks away as he leans against the wall. The security guard asks if Rosa is the mother, I say no, Rosa is his guardian. She gives us a ticket and we sit down to wait for the automatic teleprompter to call our number. The teleprompter will call our number in Spanish. As the other numbers are called I notice Rosa is fidgeting in her seat. Diego is on his phone. He looks up at his aunt briefly, gives her a weak smile, and quickly returns to his phone. Our number is called and we approach a case worker who asks Diego his age and then gives him a Medi-Cal application.

While typically the legal client would be the one to have to make decisions about following the legal directive and, thus, feel the pressure of the constraints of immigration law, in this case, the Medi-Cal process necessitated Rosa's presence and she became subject to the logic and constraints of immigration law and case strategy. Thus, Rosa's anxiety was an important factor in how Diego navigated this engagement as an unaccompanied minor.

Diego was aware of the important position that he had placed his aunt in and of her weariness. This is why he checked in with his aunt by giving her a quick smile.

After filling out the application out we sit back down. We are called to an intake interview about one hour later. I walk behind Diego and Rosa. When I approach the cubical I state that I am a case manager. The case worker reviews the application and stops under the

parent/guardian section. He addresses Rosa and asks if she is his mother. She says that she is his aunt and has taken over his care. He asks her if she has the proper paperwork for guardianship, such as a legal notice, or a birth certificate. She responds that she does not and before she can continue the case worker puts down the paperwork and explains that Diego cannot access Medi-Cal without his parent. Rosa looks back at me and begins to get out of the chair, when Diego lets out a huge sigh. He quietly but quickly tells the caseworker that he came to the United States without his parents and that immigration placed him with his aunt. He moves his hands up and down his short hair as he makes this statement and doesn't look up at the caseworker's face. Rosa sits back down. The case worker begins asking Diego more questions about his parents. 'Where do they live?' 'Are they alive?' 'What are their names?' Diego answers each one as he twirls his phone in his hands. The case worker asks if he has a social security number. Diego answers that he doesn't. Finally, the case worker certifies the paperwork. We all leave.

Diego's loud sigh changed the course of the interaction. Prior to his sigh, the case worker had determined that they would be unable to proceed with the Medi-Cal enrollment; his aunt had visibly given up by getting out of her chair. The sigh also proceeded Diego's disclosure of part of his narrative of vulnerability, a somatic sign that he was going to change the direction of the interaction. Notably, his aunt did not provide information about Diego's immigration status and his connection to her. Instead, it became Diego's responsibility to disclose this information. In this situation, his vulnerability as an unaccompanied minor put him in a situation where he must narrate his vulnerability. This was not an immigration legal situation, showing that Diego had learned that he must narrate his experience of vulnerability outside of the legal setting. Equally notable is that he knew that this narrative must come from him. Diego's sigh stopped his aunt from leaving and served as a non-verbal cue that he would take care of the situation.

Diego also engaged in actions that demonstrated his discomfort. Moving his hands through his hair his lack of eye-contact between himself and the case worker, twirling his cellphone as the case worker ask him more questions, were signs of nervousness and discomfort, and coping/soothing techniques. The accumulation of Diego's physical actions indicated that he was negatively impacted by this experience. His overuse of his phone cannot solely be read as an overreliance on technology for entertainment, but rather as a coping strategy to deal with the combination of emotions he must have been feeling. Diego had little control in this situation. He had little control over the emotions of his aunt; he did not know what would happen to his Medi-Cal application; he felt that he did not have any choice but to follow the directive of his attorney. In this context, the control he does have is his ability to remain calm and to share his narrative of vulnerability.

Examining Diego's experiences from a legal violence lens highlights how immigration law created the structure that impedes Diego's and Rosa's agency. As Diego's guardian, Rosa needed to be present at Human Services Agency to fill out the paperwork and provide her signature. Yet, she was reluctant to attend and anxious during the appointment. She attended the appointment because the attorney had stated that it was necessary for their case, particularly to access mental health resources. Neither Rosa nor David, however, questioned the immigration attorney. They followed through on the attorney's request to obtain medical insurance for Diego as soon as possible. Diego and Rosa had normalized their constricted agency as a part of immigration law and procedures.

Unaccompanied minors were aware of the hurdles that their family members living in the United States had to overcome in order for them to exit immigration custody. Once out of immigration custody, unaccompanied minors often felt reluctant to leave their guardian's home, even when the living situation was untenable. Furthermore, unaccompanied minors were well-aware that they could not legally work and that living with their guardian, who often was a distant family member with whom they were not well acquainted, was required by law. Their immigration status tethered them to their guardians, sometimes creating suffering and harm. This was the case for Adan, a 17-year-old man from Honduras who in chapter two was trying to navigate the San Francisco Housing Shelter System. His living situation was full of conflict.

Adan's living situation is precarious; his uncle threatens to kick him out, doesn't provide food, and regularly locks him out of his house. Two nights ago, Adan was forced to sleep at a friend's house. He tells me he's had to sleep at other people's houses with more frequency. We are at Human Services Agency (HSA) to apply for benefits he is eligible for as a victim of human trafficking. It's 8 in the morning when I pick up Adan from what I think is his uncle's house. When we enter HSA we pick up a number, an application, and wait to have our number called. Adan turned 18 the week before, so he is eligible to receive services without a guardian present. When we are called, we head over to the desk where a case worker begins reviewing his application. She asks for his social security number. He tells her he doesn't have one. She tells him he can't receive services if he doesn't have a social security number. Adan pulls out a letter from his lawyer. The letter states he is eligible for services under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.²⁸

²⁸ The Trafficking Victims Protection Act allows trafficking victims to receive both federal, and, in California, state services such as the 14-day hotel voucher for homeless individuals, full scope Medi-Cal, and cash aid through the Cal-Works program.

The case worker tells him there isn't anything she can do to help him, that he should go talk to his lawyer. He tells her in a low voice that he is a victim of human trafficking and eligible for the resources. She tells him she doesn't know what that means and that he should go talk to a lawyer.

At this point I intervene and introduce myself as his case manager. I tell her that the letter indicates that he is eligible for services. Vicky, a supervisor, comes over and takes over the case.

Adan and I are asked to sit again to wait for our number to be called. When our number is called a case worker is waiting for us at the door that leads into the cubical offices. We sit down and the case worker directs his questioning to Adan. At first the questions are general: name, birthdate, address, etc. But the case worker's questions become more intrusive: 'when did he arrive in the United States?' 'How long was he in the detention center?' And, most intrusive of all, 'what does it mean that he, Adan, is a victim of human trafficking?' Before I am able to state that Adan doesn't have to answer this question, Adan launches into a brief explanation of his migration story. He doesn't reveal any specific details and so the case worker asks more. Instead of answering his question, Adan begins to describe his housing situation, and his lack of food this week. The case worker immediately responds and checks off the boxes that indicate Adan is homeless and food insecure. It's 3pm when we leave HSA. As I drive Adan to a friend's house, I ask him if he was upset about the line of questioning. He says no. After a moment, he tells me that he has to say something otherwise they [institutional actors] keep asking questions. He feels weird about having to describe his current situation, but that it's just something that he has to do.

Unlike Diego, Adan was not directed to social services by his lawyer. He sought out these services to meet his basic human needs, such as toiletries, food, and clothing.

Adan engaged with the social service system knowing that his immigration status as an identified victim of human trafficking would allow him to gain access, even though he is still under removal proceedings and has not adjusted his immigration status. Human Services Agency made him not only identify himself as a trafficking victim, but also tell his narrative of vulnerability, in order to access services. Adan

chooses to lower his voice when disclosing his identity as a trafficked victim, likely because of embarrassment or shame.

The case worker's questions about Adan's trafficked status demonstrates an expectation that Adan would disclose traumatic information. This expectation is another form of violence, the expectation of disclosing information instead of respecting his privacy. Adan's only viable strategy of engagement with institutions is disclosure, so instead of sharing more about his experienced being trafficked, he chooses to disclose about a less sensitive vulnerability, that of being homeless and food insecure. In the car ride back home, Adan expressed that he had normalized this expectation of him to disclose, as how the system works; his disclosure of vulnerability is a required part of interacting with institutions and receiving services.

Whether the decision to access social services comes from immigration attorneys or the immigrant them self, the undocumented and quasi-documented statuses of immigrants compels them to disclose narratives of vulnerability in order to overcome structural barriers that prevent individuals from receiving these services. The rules and regulations of the immigration legal system are applied to the social service sector, constraining immigrants' when accessing these services. Furthermore, migrants normalize the constraints on their agency as the way things work, normalizing their discomfort, stigmatization, and frustration when engaged with these institutions.

The Reach of Federal Policy in Charitable Institutions

While it is expected that institutions connected to the government (such as attorney offices) integrate immigration law into their practices, charitable institutions (including non-profit organizations, churches, and foundations) also integrate immigration law logic into their practices of supporting unaccompanied minors. Thus, unaccompanied minors are compelled to tell their narratives of vulnerability in order to receive support even from organizations that have nothing do with their immigration case. Indeed, most charitable institutions my clients engaged with used legal categories to determine the degree to which they would support the unaccompanied minor. As a result, minors experienced the effect of immigration law as they accessed charitable and non-profit services.

In order to present a compelling immigration court case, attorneys suggested that unaccompanied minors attend therapy and obtain a psychological evaluation. Most therapy for Spanish speaking youth was available through non-profit organizations, such as Clinica Sol and Roseville Home, that that had waiting of 6 months or more.²⁹ This meant that minors often scrambled to find mental health service providers who could provide an evaluation shortly before their attorney needed it. On the other hand, mental health service providers, overwhelmed with the number of clients on their waitlists, used immigration law criteria to prioritize clients. In this scenario, disclosure became a tool to advance their priority on the wait lists.

²⁹ These are pseudonyms.

Unaccompanied minors sought mental health services out of a combination of structural pressure (their immigration attorney needing to provide evidence of trauma, vulnerability and suffering) and personal reasons (their current need of mental health support to process the events, situations, or individuals that caused their suffering). In order to gain entry to mental health service provision, unaccompanied minors would have to narrate again their experiences of trauma, vulnerability, or suffering. Then, once they were receiving therapy, they would explore more deeply those narratives, which sometimes created unexpected complications.

Raquel, a 15-year-old young woman from Honduras, had crooked front teeth and she reported having pain in her left leg, so at times she had a slight limp. Raquel painted her toe nails in pastel colors, visible when she wore sandals. Raquel was desperate to meet with a mental health profession for two reasons: one, she had been told that it would greatly help her immigration case, and, two, she was having a particularly difficult time at home and was looking for support. Raquel's guardian, her older sister, recently found out that Raquel was sexually assaulted, and since then had become aggressively over-protective.

As her case manager, I advocated for Raquel to get priority for mental health services, using the information about her immigration case that she was willing to disclose to help her get close to the top of the wait list. While I use Raquel's story to advocate for her placement, I do not have to experience the stigma that Raquel experiences from telling her story nor the "bad" feelings she experiences afterwards. The mental health provider, conversely, has come to use narratives

After Raquel began meeting with a therapist, her and I had a conversation to check in about any additional support that Raquel needed. She expressed her stress over disclosing too much information to her therapist.

Raquel tells me over and over again how much she likes speaking with Lisa, her therapist. Raquel and I are facing each other and I notice that she is biting her nails. As she speaks she places one finger into her mouth and then the other. Sometimes I cannot understand her. I mention this to her and she takes her fingers out of her mouth and begins to move her legs. I ask her if she is nervous and she responds that she's not. Finally, she tells me after sighing very loudly that it's stressful for her to talk with Lisa because she doesn't know what to say and what not to say. Raquel also tells me that she can't really talk to me because I could tell the authorities (Child Protective Services) about what happened. She tells me that she knows Lisa might also tell. Then Raquel puts both hands over her face and digs her nails into the skin of her face and pulls down hard. I notice the pressure that her nails make on her brown skin. I ask her if she'd like to take a deep breath with me. She says no and that she has to leave soon to make the next bus.

Raquel's interaction with her therapist was against the backdrop of her immigration case and the need to present the best case possible. Like Diego, who sought out medical insurance, Raquel's decision to engage with the institution is the result of her desire to present a strong immigration case. However, Raquel expressed stress that the institution she needed for her immigration case could also harm her, by calling Child Protective Services. As mandated reporters both Lisa (Raquel's therapist) and I must report suspected or stated child abuse. Raquel's statement that she could not talk about "it" indicated she was aware that the intuitions had power over how her narrative would be used outside of the immigration court system. Prior to this statement, Raquel was already exhibiting signs of stress, biting her nails and shaking her legs. When she dug her nails into her face, it became apparent that the internal

conflict she felt about her engagement with the institution and the stress caused by the power it had over her was severe. Raquel continued to exhibit signs of stress via bodily mutilation several weeks later

Raquel and I wait in the reception area of the lobby for the letter from her therapist. Raquel's attorney needs it the following day, so I will take the letter to the attorney. While we wait Raquel tells me that she is so nervous that she hasn't eaten all day. When I ask why she is nervous, she explains that she hopes the letter is good enough for her case. 'I'm sure it's fine,' I respond. But when she looks at me I can see that she is picking her skin at the top of her forehead where her hairline begins. 'Do you want to take a walk?' I ask as I see a small bead of blood begin forming. I don't get an answer, because the receptionist calls us over and hands us the letter.

Raquel's somatic-emotional harm, picking at her skin to cause bleeding, was the result of an accumulation of stress from the experiences of trauma in the past, the worry regarding the content of the material she discussed in therapy, the anxiety she felt over her immigration case, and the worry she had about obtaining a "good enough" letter. This was evident by her statement that she was nervous, she had not eaten, and that she hoped the letter is good enough. In that moment, the experiences of the past, feelings of the present, and hopes for the future were all wrapped up in the letter we were waiting to receive. Unable to communicate the weight of this letter, Raquel picked at her skin. During a focus group, Raquel addressed the feelings she experienced when engaging with institutional actors,

What else can I do except tell people what I have endured? This is the only thing that moves their hearts. I don't like it, but I don't have any choice. Every time I tell others what has happened to me I feel bad. [Long pause]. But I don't have a choice.

Raquel's statement rings true, given her experience at Clinica Sol. A few weeks after we obtained her letter, I received a phone call from Iris, Clinica Sol's intake coordinator, who asked me about Raquel's situation. Why did the intake coordinator, as opposed to the therapist, check-in with me about Raquel? Because as Clinica Sol's intake coordinator, I had presented Iris with Raquel's narrative of vulnerability, and she had used it to determine Raquel's eligibility and priority for receiving services.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that when unaccompanied minors are outside of detention centers they still behave under the rules and logic of the immigration legal system, which has them constantly disclose their narratives of vulnerability. This phenomenon, furthermore, produces harm, as expressed, somatic-emotionally. None of the unaccompanied minors in my study were deeply knowledgeable of the array of the laws and institutions that shaped their lives and that they had to engage with. They needed, though, to know what to say and do whenever they encountered officials, caseworkers, lawyers, and judges. The script and strategy they developed was disclosing their narrative of vulnerability. In doing so, they often encountered new levels of pain and anguish, on top of their original trauma. When faced afresh with a new institutional actor who would pass judgment on eligibility for benefits or resources, there was a heightened anxiety about the stakes and about again needing to disclose old traumas. New harm was constantly born. And this harm was not just produced by immigration officers, but rather continued to be produced through the same dynamics with other institutions.

The legal violence that unaccompanied minors experienced becomes visible by using an affective lens to observe them. The physical toll that disclosure had on the unaccompanied minors came in the form of self-harm—biting and picking. Similarly, self-disclosure resulted in emotional harm—feelings of despair, anxiety, self-loathing, self-sabotage, and hopelessness.

Now, having a better understanding of the harm that the disclosure of narratives of vulnerability have on unaccompanied minors, I move in the next chapter to discuss how the cumulative effects of engaging with legal, social service and charitable institutions impacts unaccompanied minors' sense of self, identity, and subjectivity.

CHAPTER 4: Subjectivity, Identity and Unaccompanied Minors

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the effect that narrating trauma has on the identity and subjectivity of unaccompanied minors. I observe the power dynamics that result in unaccompanied minors' decision to disclose their experiences of suffering, trauma, and vulnerability and I reveal how disclosing this information produces physical and emotional harm. My observations regarding the impact that narrating this experience has on the subjectivity and identity of unaccompanied minors comes from their descriptions of how they felt.

Jesica, an 18-year-old, from Guatemala, alludes to the impact sharing narratives of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability had on her life.

It's my last meeting with Jesica; it's cold in the family room where we are and I turn on the heater. As we reflect on the past two-and-a-half years of working together, Jesica and I are reminded of the first time we met. 'I thought that it would be over quickly,' she tells me. 'Yes,' I respond, 'it has taken much longer than we both anticipated. But, it's almost over now.' I remind her that her immigration case is nearly over. She looks at me, smiles, but I see water rim her eyes. I'm trying to put a positive spin on a situation that Jesica and I both know is uncertain. Her immigration case may be strong, but it is not a guarantee that she will be granted asylum. Jesica tells me that what she's learned is that there are some parts of her life that she would like to forget, but won't be allowed to. I remind her that there are so many qualities that she has that aren't related to the events that led her to make the decision to migrate to the United States. She nods her head in agreement, but tells me that those events are part of her life and that it doesn't help that she has had to continue to retell them. In a particularly difficult part of the conversation, Jesica asks me if I think she is deserving of everything that has happened to her. '¿Cree usted que yo merezco todo lo que me ha pasado?' I begin by responding that she is an important person and that she deserves positive things to happen to her. She stops me and says that she knows that, but she

doesn't feel that way. Sometimes she feels like she is defined by her trauma. I ask her what her plans are for the future. She lists off going to school, getting a job, and moving in with her girlfriend. I tell her these are all good steps.

In Jessica's and I's last meeting, Jessica confided in me that her experiences of trauma, vulnerability and suffering, while not being the only thing to shape her sense of self, had deeply impacted her identity formation. Jessica's rhetorical question, if I believed she deserved everything that has happened to her, allowed Jessica to admit feeling defined by her trauma. These reflections, in the midst of a discussion about the end of her immigration case and her life in the United States, suggested that she was making a connection between her immigration case, the process of navigating institutions, and how she felt about herself. She made it clear that she felt that her trauma defined. Jessica's statement about how her trauma presents an opportunity to examine the way that the process of narrating experiences of vulnerability have effects on the identity and subjectivity of unaccompanied minors.

Scholarship that discusses the production of immigrants' identity in the United States has analyzed statements like Jessica's as part of immigrants' struggles to assimilate (Alba and Nee 2009, Jiménez and Fitzgerald 2007, Portes and Zhou 1993, Waters, Tran, Kasinitz et al. 2010). However, in our conversation, Jessica was not talking about assimilating or integrating into mainstream U.S. culture or society. Instead, she described embodying the vulnerable immigrant identity, feeling that she was defined by her experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability.

Deservingness framework, scholars have noted that there are particular immigrant bodies whose social identity—such as youth, women, children—make

them a more sympathetic face of the immigration rights movements (Huber 2015, Marrow 2012, Yukich 2013) and that those immigrants make agentic decisions to identify as vulnerable and practice performance-based deservingness (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014), which does not necessarily translate to immigrants' own identity formation (Cvajner 2012, Gleeson 2015). However, as Jessica shared with me that narrating vulnerability did impact her sense of self and her identity.

This finding is in line with scholarship that has uses life course theory to demonstrate that being an undocumented or quasi-documented youth negatively impacts one's identity formation (Gonzales, Chavez, Boehm et al. 2012, Gonzales, Terriquez and Ruszczyk 2014, Negrón-Gonzales, Abrego and Coll 2015, Terriquez 2015) and, subsequently, negatively impacts their physical and mental health (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes and Milburn 2009, Yoshikawa, Suárez-Orozco and Gonzales 2017).

While I do not suggest that unaccompanied minors' subjectivity is only shaped by narrating the experiences of trauma, suffering, or vulnerability, I do argue that it becomes one of the cornerstones of unaccompanied minors' subjectivity. To understand this, it is helpful to look at scholarship that has emphasized the importance of social location in producing undocumented immigrants' subjectivity (Coutin 2011, Gonzales et al. 2014, Menjívar and Abrego 2012, Zavella 2011). Scholars have demonstrated that immigration status has a powerful impact on migrants' subjectivity, shaping their short-term and long-term plans, including fighting for equitable pay, family planning, and educational persistence (Gleeson 2010, Gleeson and Gonzales 2012, Gonzales 2011, Menjívar and Lakhani 2016). This indicates that

unaccompanied minors' narratives of trauma and identity as vulnerable subjects do not only serve an instrumental purpose in navigating legal, social service, and charitable institutions, but that they also produce somatic-emotional harm and shape their subjectivity.

Subjectivity and identity and their relationship to one another in the case of unaccompanied minors is rooted in idea that performance-based deservingness is mainly a strategic tool that the agentic immigrant can use for their own benefit. I note that unaccompanied minors are aware that using a deservingness framework will confer benefit that they would otherwise be unable to access. But, this is complicated by unaccompanied minors' social location as youth in removal proceedings, which highly limits any other options and choices to self-advocate. Since unaccompanied minors are in their teens, furthermore, their brains are still developing while they engage with a myriad of institutions and experience coerced self-disclosure on a continual basis. Over time, the forces that shape unaccompanied minor's subjectivity begin shaping their identity, resulting in unaccompanied minors identifying as traumatized and vulnerable.

Sense of Self and Identity

Youth who identified themselves as vulnerable described being different to their peers. In a focus group, Jesica explained this.

I can never be normal. What I mean is how they see me, the people who know about what has happened to me, they cannot see me as normal. I also cannot see myself as normal. I am different.

Jesica states that she is different. This isn't a celebratory or emancipatory statement. Instead, Jesica's reference to "what happened to me" is a reference to her experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability. Throughout our over two years of work together, Jesica discussed that her decision to leave Guatemala was partially motivated by the threats of sexual violence she received by gang members. Once in the United States, Jesica experienced economic inequality and social isolation. She was required to explain these events to her attorney, case manager, school social worker, therapist, doctor, teacher, an immigration judge, etc. Providing this information to other people came at a cost, as Jesica explains. She did not see herself as a normal person.

During the focus groups I attempted to get clarity on how and why unaccompanied minors felt "not normal" or "different". When participants stated that they felt different, I asked follow up questions. Their responses suggest that they were unable to verbally communicate the reason or way they felt different. When I asked Jesica to expand on this concept of not being normal during a focus group, she used her hands, arms, and body to evoke the feeling of being different/not normal, which prompted Carlos, an 18-year-old unaccompanied minor, to also respond.

Kati: Can I ask, you don't have to tell me, but what makes you feel not normal in the situation?

Jesica: I don't know. [She moves her arms towards the middle of the floor and then pulls them towards herself. She does this motion 2-3 times.]. It's that one [she points to herself] is here, but they ask about the one over there. [She makes an arc with her finger and arms from herself to the middle of the room. She sighs and raises her shoulders and shrugs. I notice she has tears in her eyes. She stops talking. And Carlos immediately jumps in.]

Carlos: I don't know. I don't know. She is right. But I don't know why they want to know. They aren't trying to make us feel bad. [He looks down at the phone he is holding.] But they do. [Carlos looks at Jessica and then looks away.]

Jesica: [Gets up to grab water and food.]

Kati: It's like, like you understand why they do it, but it still bothers you?

Jesica: Yes, it is bothersome. [Jessica nods a lot.]

Carlos: [Nods and looks away from me and toward some unknown point in the center of the room.]

The exchange between Jesica, Carlos, and myself highlights the way that youth were often unable to articulate the difference they felt. Jesica motioned to her body and then outside of it. The explanation that Jesica provided via her arms, hands, and body is unclear. However, to Carlos it was evocative of some emotion which he also was unable to describe. The physical gestures were more helpful for her than word to express her thoughts and feelings. Her emotive response demonstrates that this feeling of being different was painful. Carlos' statement that the people (presumably institutional actors) were not trying to make him feel bad, also indicates that the process of narrating his experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability effected his sense of self. Jesica and Carlos's responses to what made them feel not normal suggests that they were still determining the full effect of their interactions with institutions.

Youth also identified their displeasure of feeling vulnerable, as opposed to merely their displeasure of disclosing their narratives of vulnerability and trauma.

Melani, a 12-year-old woman from Guatemala, for example, expressed that she was unable to stop thinking of herself as traumatized. This had a profound effect on Melani's sense of self

Melani asks me today if I see her as a normal girl. Before I can respond she says no and begins to make her way off the bus.

Melani had internalized a feeling that she was not normal. Her question indicates that she was still processing her identity. She also answered her own question, which demonstrates that she thought that the outside world saw her as she was seeing herself. This is understandable, given the fact that Melani was put in situations where she had to constantly discuss traumatic material. Her young age, 12 years old, meant that her narratives of vulnerability came to shape her subjectivity profoundly and at a very young age.

Similarly, Monica, a 17-year-old self-identified woman from El Salvador, explained how sustained narration of her vulnerability had affected her sense of self and her plans for the future:

Monica: When I was little I wanted to be a mom, I wanted to go to school. I wanted to be with my family. I didn't think I'd have to talk about such horrible things. And that I'd keep getting asked about them. And that people would want to know so much about them.

Kati: So do you still think about being a mom, going to school, being with your family?

Monica: I don't know. I don't really think about it.

For Monica, talking about "horrible things" constantly had affected her dreams.

While she could remember what she previously hoped for, continuously narrating her

vulnerability had changed her feelings about what she could or could not do. Monica had dreams of what her future would contain, and while she could still articulate them, she now found herself ambivalent about them. Monica had come to live in a painful unknown defined by her past that casted an uncertain future.

Unaccompanied minors' reflections demonstrate that using the deservingness framework can be harmful, particularly as these youth are in the early stages of developing their identity. Minors felt that they were forced to engage with memories and experiences that they would rather not remember. Furthermore, they themselves suggested that repeated contact with these memories and experiences was harmful to their sense of self and their confidence in their future. Even when they didn't have the words, through hand movements and somatic-emotional behaviors they all expressed that their immigration court process and its spillover in their lives negatively affected their ability to engage with their aspirations.

Longitudinal Impact

In this section, I demonstrate how unaccompanied minors' subjectivity is transformed over time. I show that that sustained contact with institutions that require unaccompanied minors to narrate their experiences of trauma, vulnerability and suffering, shapes their subjectivity. In the beginning of my interactions with unaccompanied minors, I noticed that they verbally contested narrating their experiences of trauma, vulnerability, or suffering to institutional actors. However, over time, they became less likely to contest narrating their experiences. Such was the case for Samuel, a young man from Guatemala, who I met when he was 16 years old,

and, ever since our first meeting, always had a cough. Samuel did not like providing information to institutional actors about the events that occurred in Guatemala that resulted in his migration to the United States. Nor did he want to discuss his living situation in San Francisco, which included couch surfing, working at a restaurant after school often until 1 am, and a lack of emotional and financial support from the relatives with whom he was living. During the first month of working together, Samuel was taken off the waiting list for mental health counseling. He clearly understood that he was meeting with the therapist because it was the directive of his attorney, but he was reluctant to do so. He would only attend the sessions that were required to complete the evaluation for his immigration case. During the meeting where we discussed the logistical details of his appointment with the therapist who would see him, I realized that Samuel didn't have his medical card, which he needed to present at the first meeting to qualify for the service. I suggested we go to the Medi-Cal offices to obtain a temporary card and Samuel and I made an appointment to go the office. However, during our conversation it was clear that Samuel did not want to go.

Samuel looks pissed when I tell him that we have to go to the Medi-Cal office to get the temporary card. He keeps running his hands through his hair and sighing as I go over the dates and times we can meet. He also gives me short replies. I assume that his reaction is connected to the last time he went to the Medi-Cal office.

The last time, in order to avoid the hassle of going in person, I had helped Samuel and his cousin, who is his legal guardian, fill out the application online. Unfortunately, since the cousin isn't Samuel's parent, that application couldn't be processed online and we had to go in person.

Prior to that first appointment at the Medi-Cal office, Samuel told me that there are some things about his life that he'd rather not have to discuss in front of his cousin. He asked me what type of information he would need to provide. I explained that the information should be limited to demographic and biographic information. I told him that if the Medi-Cal staff asks him a question he is uncomfortable answering he could just not answer it.

When we go to Medi-Cal the first time, unfortunately, the Medi-Cal staff asks Samuel where his mother is located. He responds that he doesn't know, which results in a series of questions about the whereabouts of his mother and leads Samuel having to disclose that his mother was kidnaped by gang members in Guatemala and he doesn't know about her whereabouts or if she is even alive. After the interview, his cousin asks him why Samuel has never told her that his mom was kidnaped. Samuel becomes defensive and tells her he assumed she knew, because that's why he is here in the United States.

After that, as I walk with Samuel back to the bus stop, he tells me that he didn't want to have to tell anyone anything about his mom, that it's not his information to tell, and that he's upset that people (institutional actors) can ask him these questions. He asks me why I didn't say anything to stop the Medi-Cal staff from asking him about his mom. 'I didn't know about your mom,' I tell him. He responds by asking me if he needs to tell me his whole story for me to do my job and make sure that staff don't ask invasive questions. Samuel is mad. He isn't yelling at me, but his voice is clipped and he looks at me but quickly looks away. Also, Samuel isn't referring to me as 'usted' (you), the way that children typically refer to adults and people in positions of power. I try to explain that the questions aren't meant to be invasive but that I understand that they can be, and that he can provide short responses. I tell him that he can say that he doesn't want to provide specific information and ask if the question is necessary for the process. Samuel ends by telling me that he is so tired of talking about private information and rhetorically asks me why private information can't be kept private.

Like deservingness framework scholarship suggests, Samuel was aware that there was information about his experience of trauma, vulnerability, and suffering that he must disclose in order to get services. He was so aware of this that, prior to walking

into his first Medi-Cal interview, Samuel asked me what type of information he should expect to disclose. When confronted with an institutional actor who asked him questions about his mother, he disclosed this information, presumably because he thought it was necessary to move the Medi-Cal approval process along. However, afterward he made it clear that he hadn't wanted to provide the information about his mother to anyone. He also made it clear that I should be a buffer between institutional actors and himself, in order to protect his privacy.

This interaction highlights that Samuel was aware that in order to receive service he had to provide information that either directly narrated or alluded to trauma, suffering, or vulnerability. Samuel's anger and his reproach afterward further indicates that he was not resigned to inhabit the identity of a vulnerable immigrant. He demanded that I support him in limiting the amount of information that he provided. It is important to note that the attorney who referred Samuel to case management support advised me that Samuel was having difficulty receiving resources and support because he was not opening up enough and was defensive and aloof with service providers. I make note of this to demonstrate that Samuel's resistance to narrate his experience of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability, was consistent with interactions he had had with previous institutional actors and, importantly, at least one actor had identified that resistance as being a barrier to him receiving services.

However, a year-and-a-half later, Samuel's approach to narrating his experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability had shifted quite considerably.

Samuel and I meet at his school and make our way on the bus to his appointment with a staff member of California's food stamp program (Cal-Fresh). There is confusion about his food benefits and his living situation. As we walk over to a building that he hasn't been to before, Samuel and I are discussing his day. He has made some new friends in the community and has recently been living with one of them. He has left his cousin's home and is currently living on different people's couches. But he tells me that he's grateful because at least he isn't sleeping on the streets. I ask about his new friends and we make small talk as we make our way into the building and wait in line to check in with the receptionist.

Once we are called into the meeting, we sit down and Samuel introduces me as his case manager. The person assigned to Samuel's case, the caseworker, explains that he just needs to better understand Samuel's case. Samuel begins by explaining that he doesn't live with his cousin; he's 18-years-old, and doesn't have any specific place to stay. He explains that he moves around a lot. The caseworker nods and asks him if Samuel's cousin can still claim him on his taxes; Samuel responds he doesn't know. The caseworker asks if he can confirm that his cousin won't claim him on his taxes so that his Cal-Fresh case is separate, because currently he is still on his cousin's application.

Samuel is sitting on his hands and is swaying forward and back on the chair. He lifts his hand to his lips and begins to pick at some dry skin. Samuel explains that he doesn't have contact with his cousin since her boyfriend kicked him out of the house after he turned 18. As he tells the case worker this, I notice that he is picking at his dried lips more and more, and at times it makes it difficult to understand what he is saying. The case worker has to ask him to repeat himself several times.

When we leave the office, Samuel thanks me for coming with him. He tells me that his situation isn't that bad, that I shouldn't worry about him. I tell him that it's ok for people to worry about him. He responds with a 'sí, sí, sí' (yes, yes, yes). I ask him if he's headed to work and if he wants to walk to the bus stop together. He shakes his head and explains that after these interactions he doesn't feel good. He needs some time to just be by himself and not feel so bad about himself. I nod and we say goodbye.

A year and a half after our first Medi-Cal interview, Samuel's interaction with institutional actors has become much different; this time, he was forward with

providing the information that he felt they needed to know. Samuel's interaction also demonstrates his knowledge of the bureaucratic system. He provided a linear narrative that gave the case worker the information that he needed to make a determination in his case. However, his ease with detailing these experiences is a façade. His somatic-emotional expressions of harm, sitting on his hands, rocking back and forth, and picking at his dry lips, indicate that he providing this information caused him harm. Most notably, Samuel's own admission that these interactions made him feel bad about himself indicate self-awareness of their power to impact harm him harmfully.

In this case, my telling him that it was ok for people to worry confirmed to him that I perceived him as vulnerable. Samuel's statement that he was ok and that his situation "wasn't that bad" not only assuaged my worry about his living situation, but also pushed back against my categorization of him as vulnerable.

The contrast in Samuel's actions between the Medi-Cal office and California Food Stamp Program, shows that Samuel had incorporated the vulnerability framework into his way of seeing himself in the world, and, furthermore, that it was impacting his sense of self and the way that he understood his positionality in the world. In an effort to work through these feeling, Samuel chose to take some time to himself.

Over time, Samuel began making statements that indicate that he saw his vulnerability as part of his identity. In one of our last meetings, two and a half years after he first agreed to participant in my research, Samuel and I were back in the

family room where we first met; he still had his persistent cough, which had remained throughout the time that we worked together despite his going to the doctor several times. Now, I was pregnant, and transitioning out of my working relationships with all my clients. Samuel, meanwhile, had come to our last meeting with his new child and partner.

Samuel and his family walk back to the family room. He opens the door for me as I waddle behind him, my pregnant belly slowing me down. We are ending our work together, so that I can go on maternity leave. His case is being closed since he has Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and his immigration case is dormant until it's time to apply for legal permanent residency. Now that Samuel's child has been born, he doesn't need my help anymore. It's a good time to close the case. Our last meeting is really to say goodbye. I have some pamphlet resources to give him, but the meeting is procedural. We chat about parenthood, sleep, and challenges with finding child care. Samuel thanks me every few minutes for my help in one area and another. I tell him I'm so glad that things are going well and that he has a wonderful, beautiful family.

As we are walking out, he hangs back and tells me that he hopes that he will be a good father but that he is worried because he has been through so many things that make him feel like he won't be. He explains that he has had too many problems. He's not normal, he says. I try to reassure Samuel and tell him that this is a common worry; that I'm worried about it. He tells me that I don't understand because I will be a good mom because I was born in the U.S. and I haven't been through what he has. He says that the things that he's been through have been difficult and it doesn't help that he hasn't been allowed to forget them.

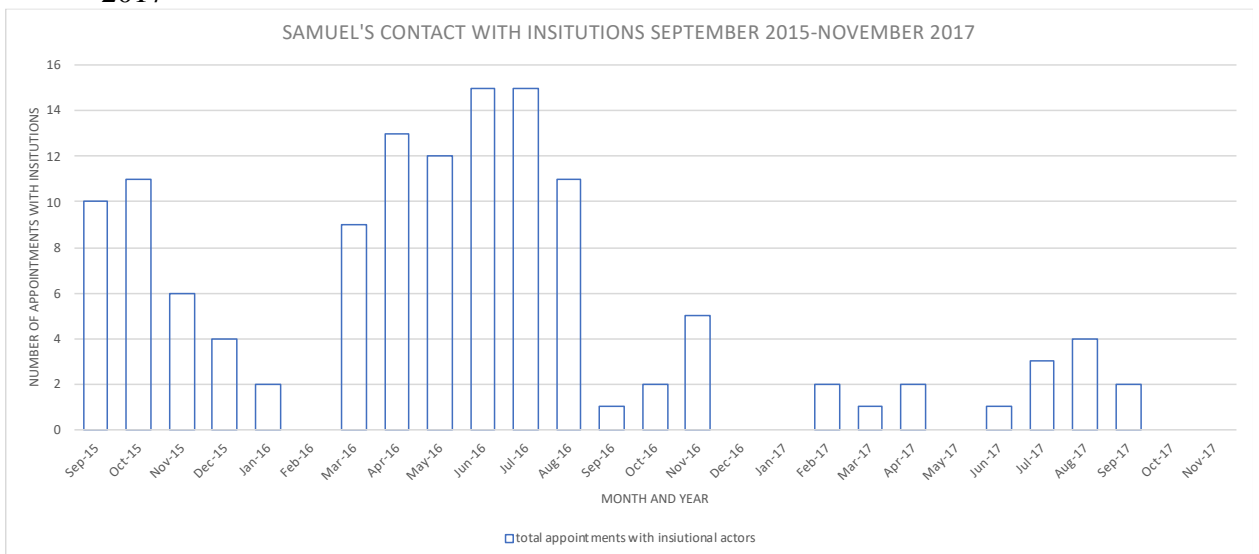
In our exchange, Samuel referenced his experiences of trauma and vulnerability to identify himself as abnormal and defective. Notably, Samuel said that he hasn't been allowed to forget the traumatic things that have happened to him.

According to the literature on immigration status and subjectivity, Samuel's successful Special Immigrant Juvenile Status would continue to impact his day to day

activities. Samuel received an intermediary status, which provided him with work authorization, but didn't give him the same rights as a legal permanent resident or a citizen. In fact, shortly after Samuel's child was born, he told me that his girlfriend wanted to get married, but that he couldn't because of his immigration status, which prevented him from getting married until after he turns 21. Thus, his liminal legality shaped his decisions. The habitualized disclosure of narratives of vulnerability, furthermore, was the aspect of this that had most impacted the construction of his identity.

This would make sense, given the high number of contacts Samuel had with institutional actors over the two and a half years that I worked with him. The chart below—Figure 1—records the number of contacts that Samuel told me about during this period.

Figure 1: Samuel's Contact with Institutions September 2015—November 2017



Samuels' contact with institutions rose and fell, with the largest peak between March 2016 and August 2016, while he was working with his attorney on the paperwork for his Special Immigrant Juvenile Status application. On average, during this two year period Samuel had five meetings per month with institutions; since I accompanied Samuel to most of these meeting or checked-in with him after these appointments, I saw or heard again and again that during the meetings he discussed some experience of trauma, vulnerability, and suffering. This data supports Samuel's own admission that he felt that he was not allowed to forget his experiences of trauma, suffering or vulnerability. By the time we met for our final session with his partner and baby, Samuel had a total of 131 individual contacts with institutional actors, 131 times that he narrated some aspect of his trauma, suffering, or vulnerability in two and a half years.

Samuel's experience indicated that he was an active knowledge participant as he engaged with institutional actors. While in the beginning it was highly uncomfortable for him to narrate experiences of trauma, vulnerability, or suffering, his discomfort did not preclude him from engaging in performance-based deservingness (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014).

Samuel was keenly aware that he must provide these narratives to overcome institutional barriers. However, he also struggled with not wanting others to see him as a vulnerable subject. His attempt at privacy from his cousin/guardian at the Medical office and his anger towards me for not shielding him from having to tell his story demonstrate that he straddled the line between narrating his vulnerability and refusing

to identify as a vulnerable subject. Our experience a year and a half later, when Samuel and I went to meet with a California Food Stamps representative, indicates that straddling this line had taken a toll on him, as narrating these experiences left him feeling bad about himself afterwards and needing time alone to process his feelings. It isn't until our last meeting, where Samuel reflected and assessed his ability to be a parent, that it became clear to him that his interactions with institutions have had a negative effect on his sense of self and his identity formation. In other words, the interactions between Samuel and the institutional actors was the discursive practice that produced his identity as an unaccompanied minors. And although he was now legally an adult, had his own family, and had a legal status in the United States, he would never be normal, because he hadn't been allowed to let go of the past.

Conclusion

In the preceding sections, I have laid out the effect that narrating experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability have on unaccompanied minors' subjectivity and their long-term identity. While other scholarship has indicated that frameworks of deservingness are not necessarily transferred over to the day-to day experiences of immigrants beyond immigration court, I argue that the sustained contact that unaccompanied minors have with institutions and the constant disclosure of their narratives of vulnerability shape their general lived experience and their ability to make choices. As a result, these unaccompanied minors begin to identify as vulnerable, even while they wish they did not feel this way. Given that many of these youth have immigration cases that have spanned more than two years and may

continue for years to come, it is likely that they will continue to narrate their experiences of trauma and vulnerable, and thereby produce the identity that they feel trapped by.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Most mornings I walk outside of the office and grab a coffee at the shop next door. Today it's a super sunny, warm August morning. The San Francisco Mission District feels so alive with the activity of pedestrians rushing to the 24th Street Bart Station, the long line of cars waiting to make the right hand turn at the end of the corner, and children and their parents strolling to the childcare centers that flank the right and left side of the block. It is both familiar and "familiar" (family-like). I listen to the cadences of the Central American women speaking as they walk up to a Mexican and Salvadoran restaurant. I smile and nod to the *senora* who makes the pupusas that I eat at least once a week. I hear families walk up to the doors that house the CARECEN programs, Family Wellness and Health Promotion. I think about my own parents making their way to CARECEN in the late 1980's. The building they went to was different and their purpose different. Today was my last day working for the Family Wellness Program. And I'm about to walk in to see my last client, Jenifer. She sees me in the coffee shop and walks over to me and gives me a hug. During our meeting, she tells me that she's grateful for all my help. I respond that it was my job. She tells me that I made lots of mistakes when I started working with her. I was too shy, too quiet, I didn't get enough information about her. That she should have told me more about her life for my school work. I shake my head. 'I know enough about you. And I know what's most important,' I tell her. 'What is that?' Jenifer responds. 'That you live your life. You keep living. That's all that matters'. She smiles and begins talking about her plans to move to a new apartment in Daly City.

Jenifer's statement during our last meeting, that I didn't ask enough and she didn't tell me enough surprised me. I worked with Jenifer (who's experience terminating her pregnancy was discussed in chapter two) for over two years. I listened to her tell caseworkers, attorney, judges, members of religious organizations, other unaccompanied minors during our focus groups, and countless other people her experiences of violence, hunger, homelessness, economic difficulties, emotional challenges, physical impairments, loss, and harm.

I assumed that Jenifer's expectation when we first met was that I would sit her down, take out my notebook and pen, and ask her to tell her story. I did not do that, not only because it wasn't necessary, but because as I worked with the immigrant population it became clear that if I were to sit in on their interactions with institutional actors I would know enough, perhaps not all the details, but enough. The fact that I knew so much about the experiences of unaccompanied minors' experience of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability without directly asking questions about their experiences, demonstrates that the immigration legal, social service, and charitable institutions required unaccompanied minors to exchange these narratives in enough detail and enough times, that they were intimately revealed to me.

Throughout the over two and a half years that I conducted field work in San Francisco with unaccompanied minors, the national conversation about immigrant rights centered on unaccompanied minors. Cast as hyper-worthy immigrants who were in need of support and resources. There had been large scale legal intervention in the form of lawsuits to protect their rights while in immigration custody and outside of it, and unaccompanied minors became one of the most visible faces of the immigration rights and reform movement. The campaign to abolish Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) consistently presented examples of unaccompanied minors who had experienced physical violence, sexual assault, and infringements of their constitutional rights. There was, however, little information about the lives of unaccompanied minors outside of detention centers. Most importantly, there was little scrutiny about how the experience of being an unaccompanied minor, while receiving

resources, services, and support, came at a cost: narrating experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability. This cost was not a small one; in the short-term unaccompanied minors experienced coercion and exhibited somatic-emotional signs of harm. In the long term they began to believe that their trauma defined who they were: their ability to be parents and pursue their long-term plans.

Generalizability

Given that unaccompanied minors represent a small proportion of the immigrants population in immigration deportation proceedings, their experiences are not generalizable to all immigrant groups. The specificity of being a Central American unaccompanied minor outside of immigrant custody and living in San Francisco, a sanctuary city with deep historical connections to the Central American community, cannot be understated. Nor can the fact that the unaccompanied minors in this study are a unique group because they all had access to attorneys who took charge of their immigration case.³⁰ Furthermore, not only were there specific case workers, like myself, who were assigned to work and support unaccompanied minors, but, also, the phrase unaccompanied minors has become part of public discourse and was immediately recognizable to most institutional actors.

³⁰ At the time this study ended there was a long list of unaccompanied minors without legal representation in San Francisco. The agency that compiled this list stated that many of the youth would have a difficult time finding pro-bono representation and that unaccompanied minors would have to advocate for themselves to secure pro-bono representation. This meant that unaccompanied minors would have to tell their stories of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability, with the hope that they said something that connected to some legal biases for adjusting their immigration status.

And it is precisely in this welcoming, resource-rich, sanctuary city that unaccompanied minors experienced the harm and effects of being coerced into narrating their experiences of suffering (often in order to meet basic human needs such as housing and/or food). This indicates a larger societal preoccupation with narratives of suffering that has become core to immigrant, social service, and charitable institutions

Due to their status as unaccompanied minors, they have access to federal and state social safety nets. However, accessing these services and resources came at an unexpected cost, which was normalized much like the normalization that Menjivar and Abergo (2012) discuss Latinos families experience when they are unable to access essential service or resources. This indicates that the process for immigrants to access these social safety nets requires further examination and attention. My dissertation also demonstrates, I hope, that it is vital to extend vulnerability framework scholarship to consider age and repeated contact with institutions in shaping immigrant's identity and subjectivity.

Examining the role of institutions on the lives of unaccompanied minors revealed that institutions exacerbate migrants' pre-existing trauma. Due to the difference in power between themselves and the institutional actors they engaged with, unaccompanied minors were coerced into disclosing information about their trauma, suffering, or vulnerability that they may have otherwise not discussed. After disclosing this information, unaccompanied minors exhibited signs of physical and emotion distress, such as cutting, biting, and picking and poor mental health such as

stress, discomfort, and anxiety. Over the course of time, unaccompanied minors began believing that their experiences of trauma, their suffering and vulnerability, defined them. Casting oneself as deserving because one is vulnerable shaped both their identity and subjectivity. In the next section I turn to policy recommendations that can be helpful to those working with unaccompanied minors.

Recommendations

The institutional actors who engage with unaccompanied minors are caring, well-meaning individuals who have a modicum of awareness that unaccompanied minors hold experiences of trauma, suffering, and vulnerability. However, they are beholden to institutional systems that require these narratives in order to provide unaccompanied minors resources. It is important to shift the ethos that drives service provision: services such as food, water, clothing, housing, health care, transportation, and other essential services should be available to people who need them, no questions asked. Otherwise, service recipients, such as unaccompanied minors, will continue to be forced to perform and reproduce their trauma and vulnerability in the effort to qualify as “vulnerable,” “poor,” “persecuted,” etc.

In California, there is precedence for universal access to essential services. The public defender system, reproductive services, and mental health resources are examples of institutions with low bars to access. However, they are not low enough, as participants must meet minimum requirements. In setting minimum requirements, our society continues to uphold the ideal that to receive support, the individual must

prove they really need it. Instead, institutional systems should be set up so that all individuals can access them as a right.

In the absence of such a shift, institutional actors should practice soliciting information from unaccompanied minors by explaining why the information is necessary. Instead of being curious about the circumstances that lead an unaccompanied minor to engage with your institution, take the perspective of how you can help protect their privacy. While open ended questions are perceived as the gold standard of a client centered approach, a more supportive approach is to provide a potential client with information about the criteria and then ask specific questions that evaluate if the potential participant meets the criteria.

Conclusion

This chapter began with my last meeting with Jenifer, who asked me what I really knew about her. I responded that I knew that she was living her life and that she would keep living her life. In that moment, I cautiously celebrated Jenifer's tenacity, being aware that she was resilient and strong despite all the institutional barriers that she had faced. In the preceding chapters, I have outlined the gauntlet that unaccompanied minors have to navigate in order to receive the support, services, and resources they need. Even now, the gauntlet has new obstacles added to it that unaccompanied minors arriving to the U.S. must navigate. Continuing to carefully examine these obstacles provides scholars with vital information about the changing nature of immigrant experiences and vital information about institutional changes and

patterns. On the other hand, some barriers remain as entrenched systems that shape immigration policy.

This case study sits at this juncture. Unaccompanied minors immigrants are not new, yet our present-day preoccupation with their well-being is and the laws and rules that mediate their integration into society are ever evolving. Finally, it is vital to extend the vulnerability framework scholarship to consider age and repeated contact with institutions in shaping immigrant's identity and subjectivity. This provides information on the changing variables that effect immigrants subjectivity as the barriers and challenges evolve over time.

The immigration legal system labeled these youth unaccompanied minors, and this vulnerable identity shapes unaccompanied minors experiences with legal, social service, and charitable institutions. The discourse and logic of this legal category, unaccompanied minor, seeps into the youths' interactions with immigration legal, social service, and charitable institutions, with harmful results. It makes unaccompanied minors sympathetic subjects and forces them to align their identity with this discourse and logic. As unaccompanied minors engage with this legal category and label, they learn how to narrate their lives as vulnerable and traumatized subjects. Those narratives come to define them. For the unaccompanied minors who were able to adjust their immigration status, this becomes a permanent fixture of their identity that they would rather forget as they become adults, parents, partners, and friends, but struggle to do so.

I am inspired and moved by the strength and courage of my former clients to challenge this identity, appreciative that so many have succeeded in adjusting their legal status, and hopeful to see them step beyond being an unaccompanied minor.

APPENDIX A:

Table 1: List of Research Subjects

Participant Observation and Focus Group Participants: 12					
	Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Self-Identified Gender Identity	Length of Time in the United States	Age(s)
1	Jesica	Guatemala	Woman	2 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	16, 17, 18
2	Adan	Honduras	Man	2.5 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	17, 18
3	Alex	Honduras	Man	2.5 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	15, 16
4	Marti	Guatemala	Man	2.5 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	17, 18, 19
5	Janet	El Salvador	Woman	2 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	17, 18
6	Jenifer	Guatemala	Woman	2 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	18, 19
7	Miguel	El Salvador	Man	2 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	17,18
8	Samuel	Guatemala	Man	2.5 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	17, 18, 19

9	Lucia	El Salvador	Woman	2.5 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	16, 17, 18
10	Melani	Guatemala	Woman	2.5 years by the end of the participant observation part of the study	12, 13
11	Diego	Guatemala	Man	1 year by the end of the participant observation part of the study	14
12	Raquel	Honduras	Woman	1 year by the end of the participant observation part of the study	15
Focus Group Only Participants : 7					
1	Luis	El Salvador	Man	1 year at the time of the focus group	16
2	Mateo	El Salvador	Man	3 years at the time of focus group	17
3	Carlos	El Salvador	Man	Less than a year at the time of the focus group	18
4	Joel	Honduras	Man	2 years at the time of the focus group	17
5	Monica	El Salvador	Woman	1.5 year at the time of the focus group	17
6	Dani	Guatemala	Transwoman	1 year at the time of the focus group	18
7	Angel	Honduras	Man* (trans)	1 year at the time of the focus group	18

Table 2: Participant's Counties of Origin

Name of the Country	Total Participants
Guatemala	7
El Salvador	7
Honduras	5

Table 3: Gender of Participants

Gender	Total Participants
Women	8
Men	11

APPENDIX B:

San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development 2015
Maximum Income by Household Size

2015
MAXIMUM INCOME BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE
derived from the
Unadjusted Area Median Income (AMI)
for HUD Metro Fair Market Rent Area (HMFA) that contains San Francisco

Income Definition	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 Person	5 Person	6 Person	7 Person	8 Person	9 Person
20% OF MEDIAN	\$14,250	\$16,300	\$18,350	\$20,400	\$22,000	\$23,650	\$25,250	\$26,900	\$27,700
25% OF MEDIAN	\$17,850	\$20,400	\$22,950	\$25,500	\$27,500	\$29,550	\$31,600	\$33,650	\$34,650
30% OF MEDIAN	\$21,400	\$24,450	\$27,500	\$30,550	\$33,000	\$35,450	\$37,900	\$40,350	\$41,600
40% OF MEDIAN	\$28,550	\$32,600	\$36,700	\$40,750	\$44,000	\$47,300	\$50,550	\$53,800	\$55,450
50% OF MEDIAN	\$35,700	\$40,750	\$45,850	\$50,950	\$55,050	\$59,100	\$63,200	\$67,250	\$69,300
55% OF MEDIAN	\$39,250	\$44,850	\$50,450	\$56,050	\$60,550	\$65,000	\$69,500	\$74,000	\$76,250
60% OF MEDIAN	\$42,800	\$48,900	\$55,000	\$61,150	\$66,050	\$70,900	\$75,800	\$80,700	\$83,150
70% OF MEDIAN	\$49,950	\$57,050	\$64,200	\$71,350	\$77,050	\$82,750	\$88,450	\$94,150	\$97,000
72% OF MEDIAN	\$51,350	\$58,700	\$66,000	\$73,350	\$79,250	\$85,100	\$90,950	\$96,850	\$99,800
75% OF MEDIAN	\$53,500	\$61,150	\$68,800	\$76,450	\$82,550	\$88,650	\$94,750	\$100,900	\$103,950
80% OF MEDIAN	\$57,100	\$65,200	\$73,350	\$81,500	\$88,050	\$94,550	\$101,100	\$107,600	\$110,900
90% OF MEDIAN	\$64,200	\$73,350	\$82,550	\$91,700	\$99,050	\$106,400	\$113,700	\$121,050	\$124,750
100% OF MEDIAN	\$71,350	\$81,500	\$91,700	\$101,900	\$110,050	\$118,200	\$126,350	\$134,500	\$138,600
110% OF MEDIAN	\$78,500	\$89,650	\$100,850	\$112,100	\$121,050	\$130,000	\$139,000	\$147,950	\$152,450
120% OF MEDIAN	\$85,600	\$97,800	\$110,050	\$122,300	\$132,050	\$141,850	\$151,600	\$161,400	\$166,300
135% OF MEDIAN	\$96,300	\$110,050	\$123,800	\$137,550	\$148,550	\$159,550	\$170,550	\$181,600	\$187,100
140% OF MEDIAN	\$99,900	\$114,100	\$128,400	\$142,650	\$154,050	\$165,500	\$176,900	\$188,300	\$194,050
150% OF MEDIAN	\$107,050	\$122,250	\$137,550	\$152,850	\$165,100	\$177,300	\$189,550	\$201,750	\$207,900
200% OF MEDIAN	\$142,700	\$163,000	\$183,400	\$203,800	\$220,100	\$236,400	\$252,700	\$269,000	\$277,200

San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development

Notes:

1. Source: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, published March 6, 2015.
2. Figures derived by SF MOH from HUD's 2015 Median Family Income for a 4 person Household for San Francisco ('HMFA'), unadjusted for high housing costs, and are rounded to the nearest \$50.
3. Additional information on HUD's defined income limits can be found at: <http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il.html>

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