The Humanitarian Borderlands: Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth and Systems of Aid in the United States

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THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillments of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018

Chicago, Illinois.

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ACKNOWLEGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Every year, tens of thousands of immigrant youth arrive to the United States unaccompanied by parents or legal guardians. They enter into a borderland space that includes not just securitization forces, but also a humanitarian system that is designed to protect youth. In this dissertation, I analyze this humanitarian space to demonstrate that despite the intentions of individual workers, the humanitarian regime is often complicit in shaping and enforcing a neoliberal global order that relies on victim subjectivities, cultural hierarchies, the control of immigrant bodies, and the logics of personal responsibility. In order to explore these tensions, I rely on interviews with 53 professionals who work with youth, *testimonios* with fifteen youth, and an auto-ethnography of myself as a child advocate. I map the professional humanitarians into three primary fields that work to integrate youth into American institutions: the field of family reunification works to integrate youth into the family; the field of legal relief works to integrate youth into the state; and the field of immigrant student outreach works to integrate youth into the education system. Within these fields, I uncover how beliefs about youth dependency and their relationship to parents and other adults creates inadequate humanitarian interventions. I identify the paradoxes that are present as humanitarians help youth to create stories, or borderland legends, about their lives that will gain legal relief. I argue that the education system serves as a stage for youth to perform acceptable adolescence, although the gateway to schools is often blocked. Finally, I look to the ways that both humanitarians and youth attempt to utilize the system to their advantage, despite its failures, to seek the best interest of the youth. Throughout, I emphasize the importance of youth's own actions and agency in this process. Ultimately, I argue that humanitarian interventions fail to escape from the larger logics of neoliberalism and border securitization.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"To live in the Borderlands means
the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off
> *your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart*
> *pound you pinch you roll you out*
> *smelling like white bread but dead;"*

(Anzaldúa 1999, p. 217)

The U.S-Mexico border has been a contentious space since its modern conception. To supporters, the border establishes the country's boundaries, maintains national sovereignty and protects citizens from unknown invaders. However, to its critics, the border represents stolen land and dangerous passages for migrants escaping a global system of racialized inequality. In her seminal book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) extends this very critique, suggesting that the border is not solely a geographical line in the sand but also an ideological space. She is concerned not just with the border wall between two countries but also the linguistic separation, the racial implications, and the dichotomization of people as safe and dangerous. She calls this ideological space the borderlands, a zone that extends beyond the border fence and into all systems that maintain harmful dichotomies between people.

Anzaldúa muses that the "mill with razor white teeth" is the mechanism of the borderland; yet, just what is this "mill with razor white teeth" (p. 217)? In part, it is the expansive system of border security, an ever growing force of manpower and technology that seeks to stop trespassers, rumored to be sick, violent, and dangerous. This border security exists not just on the border but throughout the interior, seeking out and detaining bodies that slipped between the cracks in the border walls. This "mill with razor white teeth" is ideological, highlighting the deficiencies and destructiveness of immigrants, and demanding that foreigners assimilate into "safe" bodies, void of difference or nuance.

However, the borderlands consist not only of securitization forces: increasingly, the borderlands are filled with humanitarian voices. In 2014, a crisis was declared at the border when, seemingly out of nowhere, thousands of youth arrived to United States without legal guardians. Humanitarian forces responded to this border crisis with vigor, expanding the existing aid apparatuses in order to accommodate these youth. These humanitarians created an uncomfortable treaty with the securitization forces that already existed. Charged with protecting migrants, humanitarians have had to work with and against securitization forces, learning to both coexist with and disrupt dangerous borderland technologies (Cook 2011). In doing so, these humanitarians created a new borderland space, what I call the "humanitarian borderlands," which seeks to protect young migrants from the securitization machine, but often must do so in a way that assuages that very machine. Thus, like the securitization borderlands, the humanitarian borderlands is expansive and ideological. Its goal is to protect migrant youth, but it must simultaneously turn these youth into palatable victims, "smelling like white bread," for a skeptical public. Indeed, I argue that the humanitarians often find themselves to be complicit in shaping and enforcing a neoliberal global order that relies on cultural hierarchies, victim subjectivities, the logics of personal responsibility and the control of immigrant bodies.

In this work, I map the humanitarian borderlands and simultaneously interrogate the humanitarian technologies that process unaccompanied immigrant minors.[1] I rely on Anzaldúa's theories of the borderland as a dichotomizing space in order to explore how humanitarians have

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[1] In this paper, I use the terms unaccompanied youth, unaccompanied immigrant youth, unaccompanied immigrant minor, and unaccompanied immigrant children interchangeably. The government has traditionally used the phrase Unaccompanied Alien Child (UAC), and many humanitarian workers use simply the acronym UAC. However, I avoid this term due to the use of "alien" as a dehumanizing descriptor. The Office of Refugee Resettlement recently updated its website to the phrase Unaccompanied Child (UC). Also frequently used in government and legal documents is the term "unaccompanied immigrant minor," which sanitizes the age range into "minor." While my personal preference is "unaccompanied immigrant youth," this is not a common phrase and is clunky at best, although it is my preference as it replaces the word "child" with the more agentic term "youth."

grappled with borderland logics of belonging and danger while helping unaccompanied youth. I argue that because the humanitarian borderlands exist as a borderland space, they are often forced to flatten youth into one-dimensional humanitarian subjects, ignoring the complicated, intersectional experiences in youths' real lives. Youth agency is particularly contested in this space, despite it being the very thing that defines this population. Indeed, youth agency disrupts the humanitarian technologies which rely on passive, malleable subjects. My map of the humanitarian borderlands organizes humanitarians into three primary fields, which each work to respond to youth who live on the edge of four primary institutions: the field of family reunification attempts to integrate youth into a family system; the field of legal relief attempts to integrate youth into the state; and the field of immigrant student outreach attempts to bring youth into the institution of education. Simultaneously, family reunification and immigrant student outreach work to integrate youth into the institution of American adolescence. I argue that these fields overlay securitization ideologies and so while humanitarians might try to work against this aspect of borderland, they become complicit not only in the local manifestation of these securitizing processes in youths' lives (that is, failing to truly respond to youths' needs) but also in the larger neoliberal order that creates global humanitarian crises in the first place.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the history and conceptualizations of the borderlands as a geography of securitization, meant to protect American citizens from "dangerous" outsiders. I then explore the emergence of humanitarian zones in the borderlands, particularly the borderland spaces that work with unaccompanied minors. I follow with a detailed exploration of how the borderlands process unaccompanied youth, and I provide a basic map of the humanitarian borderlands. Next, I explore conceptualizations of immigrant youth, generally, to understand the

specific position of unaccompanied youth. Finally, I detail my argument that the nationwide expansion of networks that process these youth has created the humanitarian borderlands.

A Securitization History of the U.S.-Mexico Border

In order to conceptualize the humanitarian borderlands, I start with Anzaldúa's (1999) argument that the borderland is a landscape of dichotomies, both physical and ideological. The most obvious dichotomy is the distinction between citizen and alien, and over the past century and a half, the border has functioned to maintain that distinction.

Throughout its relatively short history, the border between the United States and Mexico has often been a source of political conflict. Much of this original conflict centered on the land that composes modern day Texas. The U.S. believed this land to be under its sovereignty according to the Louisiana Purchase. However, the boundaries were originally established as part of Mexico through the Treaty of Limits, making Texas a Mexican territory in 1828. Yet, as the American population grew rapidly, spreading West, and the ideology of Manifest Destiny encouraged the expansion of American governing and ideals into other territories, American citizens continued to settle in Texas. These settlers created frequent conflicts with the Mexican government. These conflicts eventually led to the Texas revolution, and by 1845 the United States had annexed Texas from Mexico. The following year, President Polk declared war, which proved devastating to Mexico. The U.S. seized the land including what is now California, New Mexico, Utah and Colorado. Soon after, in 1854 the U.S. purchased much of the territory in Arizona. This newly established border meant that many Mexicans found themselves living in the United States; while they were promised citizenship, this was often denied on racial grounds (Nevins 2000; Glenn 2002; Gonzalez 2011).

In the following century and a half, this border operated as a valve for foreign labor. The United States frequently vacillated between opening the border when there was a demand for foreign workers and then quickly rejecting those same workers through various securitization technologies, including the rise of border enforcement and restrictive immigration policies. In the late 1800s, Chinese immigrants became some of the first to undergo widespread and frequent unsanctioned border crossings. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 limited Chinese immigration, but as the need for Chinese labor remained high, Chinese workers would pay up to 45 dollars to be smuggled across the California Mexican border and into southern California (Andreas 2009). In response, the U.S. dispatched its first form of border control: mounted guards were sent to patrol the region in 1904 ("U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2014). Yet, demand for labor continued and in the following decade, railroad companies and other industries began to recruit Mexican workers and the companies themselves started to hire individuals to smuggle the workers across the border (Barry et al 1994). In response, the official Border Control was created in 1924, under the Labor Appropriate Act, although border crossing in the 1920s remained relatively easy (Massey et al 1987). In the following decades, particularly during the Great Depression, the Border Control grew and the government implemented mass deportations and scare tactics throughout the country, forcibly removing upwards of a million Latinos from the country (Balderrama and Rodriguez 1995).

Agricultural labor shortages in the 1930s and 1940s caused the U.S. government to reconsider more open immigration policies. In 1942, the government instituted the Bracero Program, which provided Mexican laborers contract work, although these laborers faced an array of abuses (Bracero History Archive 2014). However, by the 1950s, anxieties about a surplus of labor rose again, with particular concern focused on Bracero workers who overstayed their visas.

In response to this concern, the government instituted Operation Wetback. This policy was enforced by border patrol as well as state and local police forces, who were tasked with deporting Mexicans throughout the southeastern states—even those who were born in the U.S. This legislation began a new and more dangerous era of policies that used violence and scare tactics for maintaining control of the immigrant population, and it effectively expanded the borderlands into the interior of the United States.

Amid growing concerns about racial inequality, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was an important turning point in immigration policy. Eliminating quota systems and prioritizing family reunification and skill-based migration, this bill promised a less discriminatory immigration system. Yet, in practice, the bill created a class based system which made it increasingly difficult for non-professionals to obtain legal entry in the United States. This, combined with increasing global inequality and continued demand for non-skilled labor in the US created an even greater flow of undocumented workers crossing into the United States.

With the increase of poor, undocumented laborers, another large shift occurred. The late 1980s and 1990s ushered in a new era of restrictive border enforcement in response to the public view that the border region was uncontrolled and undocumented migration rampant. As Massey et al (2002) explain, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which increased the border patrol by fifty percent, "transformed what had been a well-functioning, predictable system into a noisy, clunking, dysfunctional machine that generated a host of unanticipated outcomes that were in neither country's interests" (p. 2). Multiple restrictive and militarizing policies quickly followed, increasing border control agents, surveillance methods and sensors. These new measures included Operation Blockade in El Paso (1993), Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego (1994), and Operation Safeguard in Tucson (1994). In 1996, Clinton signed the Illegal

Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act which, once again, tightened barriers at the border, advanced border technology, and increased criminal and civil penalties for illegal entry (Pub. Law, no. 104-208, 1996). At the same time, the United States had entered into an era of mass incarceration, raising concerns about the overpopulation in the prison system. Rojas Macías (2016) argues that in response to this, the government implemented the Criminal Alien Program, which focused on deportation of so-called "criminal alien." This created the rise of "crimmigration" in which criminal law and immigrant law became one and the same.

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 marked yet another era for the United States. While the previous decades had been preoccupied with security, in this era, the threat of terrorism became one of the primary justifications for securing the border with even greater zeal. Whereas the border was seen as a place of chaos and disorder prior to 9/11, it was now viewed as "a conduit for weapons of mass destruction and terrorists" (Ackelson 2005 p. 183). Immigrants themselves quickly became conflated with terrorists (Rana 2011). This belief has manifested in the acute militarization of the region and increased scrutiny and racism towards immigrants (Correa 2013). Indeed, immigration politics became so intertwined with national security interests, that the Homeland Security Act of 2002 reorganized immigration agencies, moving immigration into the Department of Homeland Security and splitting the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) into United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The militarization of the border region continued at full force, and in 2004 Congress passed the Defense Authorization Act which provided funding, when needed, for the National Guard to assist at the border in the event of "a threat or aggression against the United States" (Mason 2013). Operation Streamline, in 2005, continued the militaristic nature of border enforcement by turning undocumented immigrants

over to marshals instead of to immigration court or back to Mexico (Barry 2011). Just a year later, Congress authorized further construction of a border wall with the Secure Fence Act of 2006 (Secure Fence Act of 2006);

Despite the increasing resources allocated by the federal government, individual states also continued to flex their muscles at the border with increasing force in the mid-2000s. For example, with Operation Jump Start, President Bush deployed over 6,000 National Guard members to the border (Mason 2013). At the same time, Texas's Operation Linebacker directed $6 million in state resources to border counties for extra "manpower, specialized equipment and planning resources" as well as funds to "train local volunteers and strengthen community awareness and involvement in border protection" (Office of the Governor Rick Perry 2005). In the following year, the governor of Texas issued Operation Rio Grande, stating: "The state will not wait for Washington to take all the necessary actions. What we can do, we will. Starting now." (Office of the Governor Rick Perry 2006).

Today, the border continues to be seen as dangerous and porous region, with incoming migrants threatening both our economic system and national security. President Donald Trump campaigned on the promise to build "an impenetrable physical wall on the southern border, on day one," stating clearly on his official website that "Mexico will pay for the wall" (Trump, Pence: Make America Great Again 2016). Since his inauguration, Trump has made frequent references to his desire to stop undocumented migration and has quickly begun implementing changes in immigration policies. Among these changes, Trump signed an executive order with the purpose of "enhancing public safety" which cracks down on sanctuary cities—jurisdictions that do not prosecute undocumented through local law enforcement (Exec. Order No. 13768). His administration launched a new office through Immigration and Customs Enforcement called

Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement Office" which, among other objectives, provides lists of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants (Office of the Press Secretary 2017). And recently, a new policy broke which suggests that the administration will begin prosecuting the parents of unaccompanied youth as they are seen to have colluded with criminal smuggling organizations (Kelly 2017).

Enforcement of the border region is not limited to the US side of the wall. Indeed, border enforcement has extended into other countries over the past few years, and today the U.S. borderlands include much of Mexico itself (Isacson et al 2014). Projects such as the Migration Program for the Southern Border of Mexico are US-backed operations to create further infrastructure to close Mexico's southern border to Central American migrants. In January 2014, the US and Mexico announced the new Center for Migration Intelligence, with the intention of creating additional migration filters at the Mexico-Guatemala border. US assistance in this region has included scanning equipment, patrol boats, night vision equipment, helicopters, and training.

A thread throughout the history of the border is the constant fear that surrounds the politics of immigration. On the most biological level, migrant bodies have been seen as diseased and a menace to biological integrity of the country (Ong 1995; Rose and Novas 2003; Kraut 1994). They are suspected of damaging fertility rates (Chavez 2008). They have been characterized as corrosive to our values and morality (Gee 2003; Peña 2005). Undocumented migrants are believed to "diminish the value of citizenship" (Ngai 2004; Chavez 2008). There is concern that migrants drive down wages and hurt the economy (Noah 2012). Indeed, the very existence of undocumented immigrants is a social problem (Ackleson 2005). Rana (2011) shows how immigration has been coupled with discourse on crime and terror, thus coupling the very

images of the immigrant and the terrorist. Chavez (2008) calls the accumulation of these discourses regarding Mexican and Central American immigrants the "Latino Threat Narrative," and provides numerous examples of the way discourse is framed by this threat narrative, using themes of invasion, the loss of control, and *Reconquista*, an allusion to the original founding of the U.S.-Mexico border and the belief that Mexicans are attempting to reestablish sovereignty in these territories. Rosas (2012) refers to this as the "dark fantasy"—a nightmare that legitimizes warfare on the border.

It is this history of the borderlands that supports Anzaldúa's notion that the borderlands are ideological, creating dichotomies of belonging. In addition, this borderland history demonstrates that the border is not just a physical barrier but also a system of exclusion. Policies such as Operation Wetback extended far beyond the border region, thus expanding the geography of borderlands. Today, immigration laws are carried out not only by ICE, but also by a wide reaching system of surveillance, including police departments, courtrooms, and even hospitals (Williams 2016). The borderland security apparatus maintains tight controls over all immigrants who enter it.

A Humanitarian History of the Borderlands and Unaccompanied Youth

The long history of borderland securitization exists alongside of a much shorter history of humanitarianism, which prioritizes human life and works to reduce suffering at the border. Humanitarian efforts exist in multiple forms: Human rights groups have long discussed the abuses that exist at this border, with concerns about migrant deaths and mistreatment (Androff and Tavasolli 2012; American Civil Liberties Union 2012; Amnesty International USA 2012), abuses in immigration detention (Hernandez 2015; Human Rights Watch 2010) and legal discrimination (Hughes 2009; Todrys 2009) at the forefront. Humanitarian organizations such as

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the Samaritans and No More Deaths have worked to provide water and basic medical aid to migrants, and other groups work to humanize migrants to the public through art and performance (Squire 2014). Legal groups have volunteered in border detention centers, providing both legal aid and holding the U.S. government accountable for rights violations (Lyda and Lyda 2009; Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. 2016). These groups rely on political, moral and religious motivations, underpinning their belief in human life and dignity (Cook 2011, Potter 2011).

However, humanitarian organizations have not emerged without problem amidst the securitization landscape of the border. Many humanitarian groups have faced increasing pressure and scrutiny from private citizens and government entities alike, who argue that the humanitarian work defies federal and state policies. In extreme cases, humanitarian actions at the border have been criminalized (Cook 2011 Androff and Tavassoli 2012). However, disrupting humanitarian efforts is not always this obvious. In fact, theorists have recently demonstrated that humanitarian efforts can be coopted by securitizing forces who use humanitarianism as a mere guise for warfare (Weizman 2011; Khalili 2013; Bonds 2013). This process has been seen clearly on the U.S.-Mexico border. For example, Dunn (1996) explains that the Low Intensity Conflict doctrine at the U.S. border between 1978 and 1992 included the "incorporation of so-called humanitarian aid—particularly that provided by private organizations—into military and police-related projects" (p. 29). In another example, the 1998 Border Safety Initiative was a partnership between the United States and the Mexican government to warn migrants of the dangers along the border; however, the underlying purpose of this campaign was to reduce migration. This ideological initiative continues to this day, with both governments reminding potential migrants through a multitude of public service announcements: "*No Mas Cruces en Las Fronteras*"

("Cross the Border No More") and warning specifically of the risks of "falling under the prey of smugglers" (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2012). Even the narrative of border enforcement demonstrates the cooptation of humanitarianism. Spener (2004) effectively argues that discourse on border crossings often suggests that human smugglers are criminals, migrants are victims, and border enforcement acts as the hero, rescuing these migrants.

Williams (2016) argues that border enforcement has taken up the guise and narrative of humanitarianism for three primary aims: as a response to humanitarian organizations concerned with the violations of human rights; to further justify border militarization; and to continue to "reinforce the territorialised framework of rights and sovereignty" (p. 34). Indeed these new efforts work to regulate human life "in the name of persevering biological life and alleviating suffering," which has created a policy of contingent care, wherein care becomes merely a process toward deportation (Williams 2015). Using a Foucauldian analysis, Walters (2015) explains that border humanitarianism is always situated among other border strategies, specifically securitization forces; imperial regimes can co-opt these humanitarian endeavors.

The tension between humanitarianism and securitization is even more pronounced when dealing with unaccompanied youth migrants. Unlike their adult counterparts, when viewed as children, young migrants are often viewed through a humanitarian lens (Malkki 2010). International standards require baseline treatment of youth migrants (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Nov. 20 1989), and a 2014 Pew Survey suggested that nearly 70% of the American public felt that these youth should be allowed to reunite with family members in the United States (Pew Research Center 2014). While they certainly do not escape the threat narrative (as I explore later in this chapter), youth have more room to negotiate narratives of threats and narratives of victimhood in ways that adult migrants often cannot. Thus, the history of

humanitarian obligations toward unaccompanied youth is instructive in understanding the current humanitarian/securitization climate.

Unaccompanied youth have been acknowledged in government policies as early as 1907. The Immigration Act of February 20, 1907 instructed border officials to hold unaccompanied children under the age of 16 for "special inquiry," admitting them only in the case:

> "(1) that they are strong and healthy, (2) that while abroad they have not been the objects of public charity, (3) that they are going to close relatives who are able and willing to support and properly care for them, (4) that it is the intention of such relatives to send them to school until they are 16, and (5) that they will not be put at work unsuited to their years"

There is a dearth of information about unaccompanied youth migration over the next half a century. However, by the 1970s, human rights groups began to raise concerns about the treatment of these youth (Romero 2006). By the 1980s, the numbers of youth arriving alone to the U.S.-Mexico border began to increase, coinciding with increasing conflict in Central America (Bryne and Olga 2012). While organizations continued to highlight the plight of youth, very little was done in terms of national policy and for the next two decades (Ehreneich 1997). This changed in 1997. After a decade of lawsuits against the government regarding the treatments of unaccompanied youth, the Flores Settlement Agreement of 1997 explicitly laid out national standards for the detention, treatment and release of youth (Flores v. Reno, 507 U.S. 292, 1993). This case mandated base level treatment for minors and dictated the responsibilities of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) concerning future influxes of unaccompanied youth. It created new guidelines regarding the detention of youth, mandating in particular that youth be placed in the "least restrictive setting" appropriate for their needs.

However, within a few years, human rights groups began to highlight new concerns regarding the conflict of interest that existed as INS remained responsible for both the legal

prosecution and the protection of unaccompanied youth (Bryne and Olga 2012). To absolve this tension, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 divided responsibility for unaccompanied youth between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). With this reorganization, the ORR was made responsible for the care and reunification of unaccompanied youth while DHS remained in charge of the prosecution of the youth. However, Somers (2010) suggests that there remains an imbalance between the roles of DHS and ORR, as the needs of DHS are consistently viewed as more important than the role of ORR. Several years after the separation of responsibility, the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA) further increased the protections for immigrant minors, out of concerns that youth were not being adequately screened for trafficking concerns or repatriated with the appropriate resources. The TVPRA required that all youth from non-contiguous countries be transferred to custody and placed in removal proceedings while youth from Mexico and Canada be provided with a screening before their immediate transfer to their home country (Kandal 2016). The combination of these three legislative interventions created the current Office of Refugee Resettlement Unaccompanied Minors Division, which has quietly processed these youth through a system of detention for the past decade.

Amidst these changes, unaccompanied youth were slowly gaining recognition in popular culture. One of the first mainstream attempts to unveil this clandestine population was the book *Enrique's Journey*, written by journalist Sonia Nazario in 2006. In this book, Nazario documents the story of a young boy from Honduras as he makes the harrowing trek to the United States on the tops of trains. Nazario's book won several awards and quickly became a best seller—thereby making the plight of unaccompanied youth widely known for the first time. Several years later, the 2009 documentary "Which Way Home" (Cammisa 2009) made a similar impact, raising

awareness of the population but still not fully settling into the nations' conscience. Despite the impact of these works, the existence of unaccompanied youth as borderland subjects remained relatively unheard of in the general population until the summer of 2014, when unprecedented numbers of youth began crossing the border. Indeed, in just five years, the numbers of youth detained alone from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras surged from 3,304 in 2009 to 46,894 in 2014 (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2016). By June of 2014, President Obama had declared their presence an "urgent humanitarian situation" (The White House 2014), and social services agencies on the border and across the country geared up to respond to this unprecedented influx. This network of social service agencies, government entities, attorneys and legal clinics, advocates, educators, social workers, and counselors created a humanitarian network, responding to what was termed, in some circles, a refugee crisis.

This humanitarian response did not exist in a neutral vacuum, however. Hernández (2015) suggests that the so-called crisis was not a crisis at all, but a predictable escalation of youth migration based on historic trends. Indeed, Hernández opines that just as in other refugee emergencies, we have preferred to view youth migration as a momentary crisis instead of a pattern rooted in US intervention and based on historical precedence. He states:

> "Most often, the 'crisis' served to mask, or at best only partially explain, the more profound reasons children and families would flee their home countries. It made the migration of these persons seem impulsive, resulting from individual choices regarding safety or false rumors of easy acceptance after arrival to the United States" (13).

Furthermore, despite the history of legislative changes providing humanitarian responses to youth migrants, both Terrio (2015) and Heidbrink (2014) argue that securitization forces still severely impact the treatment of youth as they are processed through these humanitarian systems. Plus, the most recent legislative changes have been met with sharp criticisms and threats to roll back these changes abound. Anti-immigration advocates are concerned that humanitarian

policies and action encourage undocumented migration (Whitaker 2009) and that legislation such as DACA directly results in youth migration. Although these claims are largely unsubstantiated, there is some evidence that the TVPRA has, indeed, increased the number of lone child migrants (Amuedo-Dorantes and Puttitanun 2016).

In addition to the tension between humanitarianism and securitization, the humanitarian responses to youth must be further framed by the neo-liberal economy within which it operates. Tracing its origin to the rejection of the welfare states and the global economic turns of the 1980's led by the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, neoliberalism relies on a belief that liberating the economy will increase human well-being (Harvey 2005). Steger and Roy (2010) argue that there are three dimensions of neoliberalism: "(1) an ideology; (2) a mode of governance; (3); a policy package" (p. 37). As an ideology, neoliberalism is a discourse of consumerism and free market. As a mode of governance, neoliberalism celebrates self-regulation and the use of business models over public goods. And, as a policy package, neoliberalism implements deregulation, liberalization of trade, and privatization. Neoliberalism is a powerful economic and political force; indeed, Braedley and Luzton (2014) argue that "neoliberalism is no longer an alternative to hegemonic political thought as it was in the mid-twentieth century. It *is* hegemonic political thought" (p. 10).

Scholars argue that the implementation and effects of neoliberal policy are deeply racialized and gendered (Thomas 2014). In this vein, there are several particular facets of neoliberalism are particularly important when exploring immigrant communities and humanitarian responses. Indeed, Silva (2016) suggests that Latinos broadly speaking must be concerned by the influence of neoliberal policies in terms of privatization (specifically of the detention system), efficiency (specifically in regards to deportation), and personal responsibility

(in terms of death at the border). Similarly, Varsanyi (2008) suggests that there has been a devolution of responsibility to immigrant rights from the federal government to state and local bodies. Immigrants themselves are valued with the logic of economic growth and efficiency (Roberts and Mahtani 2010). The privatization of detention facilities has been a primary concern of immigrant rights groups (Doty and Wheatley 2015). And, Tyler et al (2014) extend this critique to the charity and voluntary organization that are roped in to participating in this immigration market. Indeed, they suggest that "One of the risks for migrant support groups in an era marked by the rise of mandatory partnership working is that they become entangled within the very governmental systems of immigration and border control which they ostensibly contest" (p. 14). Similarly, Longazel and Fleury-Steiner (2013) suggest that even pro-immigrant groups working on such campaigns such as anti-*notario* fraud, become subsumed by the neoliberal politics of personal responsibility. With this in mind, the humanitarian borderlands must also be situated in this broader economic and political context, where market forces are prioritized over public good and where individual responsibility reigns.

Humanitarian projects in the borderlands have long struggled against securitization forces. Humanitarians have been both criminalized and co-opted by securitization apparatuses. However, in response to unaccompanied child migrants, a widespread humanitarian system emerged, combining both governmental and non-governmental actors, although this system still remains intimately intertwined in securitization ideologies and neoliberal logics. In the next section, I further describe both the particular workings of this system and youth's journey through it.

Unaccompanied Youth Today and the Shape of the Humanitarian Borderlands

Table 1. Unaccompanied Immigrant Minors Detained in the Fiscal Year by Country of Origin

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
El Salvador	1,221	1,910	1,394	3,314	5,990	16,404	9,839	17,512
Guatemala	1,115	1,517	1,565	3,835	8,068	17,057	13,589	18,913
Honduras	968	1,017	974	2,997	6,747	18,244	5,409	10,468
Mexico	16,114	13,724	11,768	13,974	17,240	15,643	11,012	11,926

(U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2016)

Mainstream discourse on unaccompanied youth today begins with the influx of 2014. Figure 1 details just how surprising the numbers appeared to the public. Indeed, between 2009 and 2014, the number of detained youth from the countries of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala had increased from just 3,304 to 51,705. Including all other countries of origin, there was a total of 68,541 detained at the border that year. While the Central American countries saw a steady increase of youth migration during those years, the same trend is not seen with minors from Mexico. In 2009, 16,114 unaccompanied Mexican minors were detained. This number dropped for the following three years, peaked again in 2013 and then dropped slightly in 2014 at 15,634 (US Customs and Border Protection 2016). Since the summer of 2014, the numbers of unaccompanied youth have fluctuated but remain high: after dropping by over 28,000 youth in 2015, the total numbers of detained unaccompanied youth reached back up to 59,692 in 2016. These waves were dominated by teen boys, although girls have made up between a quarter and a third of the youth, over the last several years (See Figure 2).

Youth migrate alone for multiple, often overlapping reasons. Traditionally, scholars focused on family reunification as the primary push factor; parents, having immigrated first to the US, would raise enough money to pay for smugglers and send for their children. Or, in some cases, children would embark on migration in order to reunify with parents without the initiation of their parents. More recently, however, attention has turned to more independent and agentic reasons youth migrate alone. Instead of following family members, youth may make the decision

to leave their home country based on problems within that country: violence and threats by organized criminal networks in their communities, abuse and violence in the home, and deprivation and poverty. [2]

Table 2. Percentage of UACs by Age and Gender, Transferred to ORR in the Fiscal Year

Age	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
0-12	11%	11%	14%	21%	17%
13-14	10%	11%	13%	16%	14%
15-16	38%	39%	40%	36%	38%
17	40%	38%	34%	27%	30%
Gender					
Male	n/a	77%	73%	66%	68%
Female	n/a	23%	27%	34%	32%

(Office of Refugee Resettlement 2016)

A 2014 UNHCR report of 404 children between the ages of 12 and 17 suggested that 58% of the children were "forcibly displaced because they suffered or faced harms that indicated a potential or actual need for international protection" (p. 6). In the same study, 48% of children interviewed discussed violence by armed criminal actors in their communities and 21% mentioned violence in their homes. This report also acknowledges a distinct category of criminal

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[2] Violence in Latin American countries is on the rise with terrible consequences for the poorest and youngest citizens. According to a UN report, between 2000 and 2010, lethal violence has increased in Latin America by 12 percent—the only region in the world in which lethal violence increased in this time period (United Nations Development Programme 2013). Human rights groups criticize the Latin American governments for being unwilling or unable to protect their citizens. Yet, the U.S.'s complicity in creating the situation is rarely acknowledged. The U.S.'s political intervention and influential zero tolerance policies have created international gangs and supplied weapons for violent political forces in El Salvador (Zilberg 2007). In the 1980's the U.S. worked to militarize Honduras, inadvertently creating death squads that ruled with impunity (Kruckewitt 2005), and a similar theme played out in Guatemala as well (Jonas 1991). With economic and security interests in mind, the US has supplied technology and military training to Mexico (Norget 2005). Neoliberal policies and trade agreements such as NAFTA have undermined Mexican's corn economy, as Mexican farmers could not compete with subsidized American farmers, ultimately destabilizing that economy and resulting in increased migration flows (Babb 2004; Bank Muñoz 2008; Gonzalez 2011). And, the strengthening and militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border has done little to decrease the undocumented population in the US, but it has created greater dependence on networks of human smugglers (Guerette and Clarke 2005; Payan 2006; Angelucci 2012)—networks which some scholars suspect to be integrated into other criminal syndicates (Laufer 2004; Slack and Whiteford 2011). Thus, an analysis of the push factors for Latin American youth migration is not complete without the acknowledgement of the important role the United States has had in the region.

networks threatening children in Mexico: 38% of Mexican children in the study reported recruitment into and exploitation by the human smuggling industry. Notably, while there exists a common refrain that parents send their children because they believe immigration reform would allow them entry, only one child from El Salvador reported this to be the case (p. 8).

Recent academic studies have provided more nuance to the basic claims made in the human rights literature. In my previous work (Ruehs 2016), I argue that for young men, factors of violence and poverty are overlapping and intimately connected to boys' sense of self: they choose to migrate to pursue masculine identities outside of the limited options their communities provide. Tucker et al (2012) suggest that a combination of individual, family, and community influences push migration. And, Hamilton and Bylander (2016) argue that youth migration decisions are often dependent on age, with primary school-aged children migrating in response to violence and educational barriers, while secondary school-aged children tend to migrate for economic reasons.

There are a variety of ways that youth embark on international migration alone, dependent often on their country of origin and financial resources. Nazario (2006) and Cammisa (2009) both document the scores of youth who make the journey across Mexico riding the tops of trains. Youth in my study also made their way through Mexico in buses with fake documents or even by planes with human smugglers, if financially feasible. Once at the U.S.-Mexico border, youth may cross alone or with a smuggler, hiding in trucks, or crossing the Rio Grande on rafts and the borderlands by foot (for a complete analysis of the types of smugglers that are available, see Spener 2004). The commonality in these experiences lies in youth's vulnerability in clandestine, international crossings. While all migrants are susceptible to violence an

exploitation, these risks increase tremendously for youth ("United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees 2015).

Upon arrival to the US, there are three possible outcomes. The first is that the child enters into the country undetected by border control becomes a member of U.S. society. While some organizations reach out to these children, these youth often actively remain hidden, sometimes forming their own support groups, as documented by Canizales (2014 and 2015). The second possibility is that the youth is detained by border enforcement and is subjected to "voluntary return." This is the case for most Mexican children who are typically deported within hours of apprehension (Gonzalez-Barrera et al 2014; Isacson et al 2014.). However, many of these children will often return immediately with another attempt to cross into the United States; one report found that 15% of Mexican children in detention have been apprehended at least six times (Gonzalez-Barrera et al 2014). Finally, as stipulated in the TVPRA, youth from non-contiguous countries and Mexican youth who appear to have a viable claim to asylum must be allowed to argue their case in immigration court. These youth are held in detention for up to 72 hours before being transferred into a shelter system run by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Youth are simultaneously placed in deportation proceedings.

The ORR is required to place children in the "least restrictive setting that is in the best interests of the child, taking into consideration danger to self, danger to the community and risk of flight." (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2016). Based on an assessment of psychological and behavioral concerns and criminal history, youth are placed into shelters that vary in degree of security, therapeutic treatment, and concerns for 'tender-age" or pregnant teenagers. (See Heidbrink (2014) and Terrio (2015) for extensive analysis of these facilities.) In the fiscal years 2015 and 2016, youth stayed in these state-sponsored shelters for an average of 34 days, while

workers sought out the placement options that they felt was in the best interest of the youth (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2016, Office of Refugee Resettlement 2017). Youth might have their first court date while in this shelter and are often brought to court with a group of youth by the shelter facility staff. Facility staff, meanwhile, begins exploring youth options for release. Ideally, youth will be placed with an immediate family member, but if no one is available, staff look for extended family members or family friends, called "sponsors," who will take in the child. If these options fail, youth may be placed in foster care or, if old enough, independent living facilities.

Facility staff are tasked with vetting families or sponsors (a process I explore more in Chapter 3). This vetting process includes background checks, fingerprinting and phone interviews regarding the type of support the family can provide. If red flags are raised regarding the ability of the parent or sponsor to care for the youths' particular needs—or if there are concerns about human trafficking—workers may go to the home to conduct a home study. Workers must eventually make a placement recommendation, although they do not have the final word in these placements. In the past several years, youth have been released to sponsors in all fifty states, although the highest receiving states during the fiscal year 2014 were Texas, California, Florida, New York, and Virginia (Office of Refugee Resettlement" 2016).

Historically, youth who have been released often did not receive further contact by the government, although recently the ORR changed this policy to provide post-release service to youth who raised concerns. Currently, the ORR reports that in 2016, they received 59,170 referrals from the Department of Homeland Security. Of these, 3,540 received a home study service, and 10,546 received some post-release service. As of August 2015, the ORR began issuing calls to released youth within 30-37 days of relief. They report that in the first quarter of

fiscal year 2016, workers reached 87% of youth and 90% of their sponsors (Office of Refugee

Resettlement 2016). These calls raised relatively few issues, with only 5% being referred to

assistance for legal and educational needs and only 0.1% needing to be reported to state child

protective services or law enforcement. Further, only 0.5% reported that the child no longer lived

with the sponsor.[3]

Since youth have historically been released into communities with no further government

support, activists have argued that there needs to be more assistance upon release (Faries 2010).

Over the past decade and a half, individual organizations have stepped up to fill the gap. In 2003,

the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights was the first program to provide volunteer

child advocates to youth who raised specific concerns regarding complicated legal cases or

barriers in community resettlement (The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights 2016).

The advocates often begin meeting with youth while they are in ORR shelters and are

intentioned to follow the youth upon release, helping them to gain access to legal assistance,

education and other resources. In theory, the volunteer advocate is the only individual who will

remain with the child throughout his or her entire case. However, in practice, this has proven

more difficult for advocates on the ground (Caswell 2016).

Once released to families, sponsors, or foster parents, youth continue to fight their

deportation proceedings in court. While they are not currently guaranteed access to an attorney,

the government provides lists of pro-bono and low-cost attorneys in their areas, and some of

these attorneys provide case screenings after group hearings. There are several relief options for

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[3] As I will argue in Chapter 3, I am suspicious of this data as it does not coincide with my data or personal experience. My suspicion is that a 30-37 day follow-up is not enough time for problems to arise and is thus not truly a good indicator of placement success.

unaccompanied youth, although the most common are asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile

Status, T Visas, and U Visas (Chen and Gill 2015).

1. Asylum: Asylum, like refugee status, is based on the claim that an individual either has
   no country or is unable to return to his or her country due to fear of persecution due to
   membership in certain groups. Approval of asylum application varies drastically by
   region; an Associated Press article reports that in the San Francisco office which covers
   the Pacific Northwest, 86% of unaccompanied youth asylum cases are approved in
   comparison to a low of 15% in the Chicago offices, which covers 15 Midwest states
   (Taxin 2016). The fear of gang persecution is often the most relevant asylum claim, but it
   is rarely accepted in court as the threat is not based on membership in a social group
   (Carlson and Gallagher 2015).

2. Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS): Children can be granted SIJS if they unable to
   return to their home country due to abandonment, abuse or neglect by one or both
   parents. Notably, Frydman et al (2014) report that children who have legal counsel are
   often eligible for SIJS, but most children lack this legal counsel.

3. T Visas: These visas may be granted in the case of human trafficking and other crimes,
   although these cases may be difficult to identify.

4. U Visas: A U Visa is available for immigrants who "have suffered substantial physical or
   mental abuse as a result of having been a victim of certain serious crimes." (p. 47). The
   victim must also be able to provide the authorities with helpful information regarding
   criminal activity for investigation.

In addition, children may be granted prosecutorial discretion, which does not provide a

pathway to legal residency but administratively closes the removal proceedings. The Obama

administration also granted parole to youth who did not qualify for refugee status, allowing them to continue to live and work temporarily in the United States. However, the Trump administration has since reversed this policy (Yee and Semple 2017). Human rights groups have presented numerous concerns about the immigration process and children's access to these options. While many unaccompanied children might be eligible recipients of these programs, their lack of legal representation often inhibits this process. Other issues raised by human rights groups include the lack of a best interest standard, inadequate protections, inappropriate service delivery models, and lack of reintegration support (Chen and Gill 201; Frydman et al 2014).

Youth who wish to obtain these visas, often must comply with specific guidelines regarding work and education. For example, those who wish to receive SIJS must be enrolled in and actively attending school. However, school systems have responded to these youth in a wide variety of ways. Some school districts actively support unaccompanied youth by creating official liaisons dedicated to youth (Lee 2014); other districts have actively attempted to exclude these youth, bringing in lawsuits about the legality of youth's access to public schools (Burke and Sainz 2016). In addition to educational assistance, youth may also receive further assistance from social service agencies and counselors; programs throughout the country have received grants focusing in trauma counseling in order to assist youth as they adjust to their communities—if only temporarily.

I argue that this system composes the humanitarian borderlands. (See Appendix A for a visual representation of the humanitarian borderlands.) Beginning with apprehension and transfer to ORR custody, youth are processed through multiple organizations by numerous individuals, from government social workers, to independent counselors, to human rights attorneys, sometimes spanning multiple states. Even educators play a role in this system, by providing—or

denying—an education that works to support access to legal relief. The individual people and organizations working in the humanitarian borderlands are at once interdependent but insular: there is often minimal institutionalized contact between actors and organizations, making it difficult to track youth across the system. At the same time, these actors are often dependent on one another for resources and support. This is a complicated and sometimes secretive system. In the next section, I outline the subjectivities of the youth in the borderlands.

Unaccompanied Youth as Borderland Subjects

Public perceptions of unaccompanied youth are complicated and also contradictory. They are seen as both humanitarian symbols and teenage threats, and they defy cultural understandings of childhood agency. Yet, the lived experiences of individual youth vary based on multiple intersecting identities. Scholarship on immigrant youth, more generally, can help to frame the ways in which unaccompanied youth are viewed as they move through the humanitarian borderlands.

As humanitarian subjects, youth are never actors: they are always acted upon, and dependent on public sympathy for their plight. Malkki (2010) suggests that youth symbolize several important ideals in humanitarian discourse, including being the "embodiment of basic human goodness," "sufferers," and "seers of truth" (p. 60). These perceptions make it easy both to sentimentalize children and to create symbols of them. Yet, Malkki suggests that viewing children as symbols simultaneously robs them of their agency and truth telling abilities. So while children are seen as bearers of truth, they are also seen as "irrational, fanciful… [and are] denied existence as complex social beings who know the world and represent themselves" (p. 60). This denial of a complex, social identity creates another problem: Fassin (2012) sees the images of suffering children manifested in three forms: the sick child, the abused infant, and the orphan.

His concern is not that the figures are false—indeed, these situations exist—but that we must be aware of the "exaltation of misfortune, the exaggeration of the figures, the exhibition of horror, the staging of suffering, the catastrophization of the social world," as these create "fragile and ambiguous" mobilizations (p. 180). While these stories create compassion, they also reify the victimization of children and ultimately spare the public from taking complete action.

Yet, unaccompanied migrant youth in the borderlands are not only humanitarian symbols. Indeed, children can represent both innocence and threat, as Clarno (2009) demonstrates with the case of images of Palestinian children. Unaccompanied migrant youth are thus also viewed as frightening teens, both dangerous victims and the manipulators of childhood ideologies (Ruehs n.d.). Teen-agers, in particular, are often at odds with the humanitarian conceptualizations of innocence: they are frequently seen as problems in and of themselves on the very basis of being an adolescent (Maira and Soep 2004). Malkki (2010) explains: "When children are referred to as 'teens' or 'teenagers," their moral authority as innocents is attenuated. The temporal progression built into the category of 'children' is also a moral progression: it is easiest to attribute to children a pure innocent presociality when they are youngest" (p. 63-4). The image of immigrant teenagers complicates this narrative further, by placing together both teenage threat and immigrant threat narratives: As an example, Brindis' (1995) focus on the increased risk-taking behavior of immigrant youth implicitly suggests that the youth themselves are the problem. Waters (1999), too, suggested that the process of migration can create criminal and gang behavior in immigrant youth; and while nodding to structure, he places the ultimate burden of youth crisis onto the youth themselves. These types of conceptualizations suggest that immigrant teens are uniquely positioned as anti-social threats to society.

Beyond contested perceptions as humanitarian symbols or teenage threats, unaccompanied youth defy traditional notions of childhood, agency, and migration. Traditionally, scholars who studied immigration focused on the immigration of adult men. Many of these original studies focused not on men as men or adults but rather as a neutral category of immigrants (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003). Youth were rarely a part of this literature (Chavez and Menjivar 2010), and when they appeared in later years, they were often seen as extensions of migrating adults (Abrego 2014; Dreby and Stutz 2012). A few authors have looked at migration among youth, framing this migration in the context of youth decision making; but even this work often places youth within the family system, looking at decision making within these structures rather than youth as autonomous actors (Tucker et al 2012; Hamilton and Bylander 2016). Migration was viewed as impacting youth's lives, but rarely did youth seem to have agency over these migration decisions and impacts.

Another wave of scholarship has suggested that there is a connection between migration and adulthood: this scholarship focuses on how migration impacts youth's life course, but it is simultaneously stuck in narratives that overemphasized structural limitations. Some scholars suggest that immigrant youth must enter into adulthood more quickly than their native born peers due to responsibilities such as translation for parents in adult situations (Orellana 2009) and that immigration itself acts as a mechanism into adulthood (Martinez 2009). Other literatures suggest the opposite: transition into adulthood can be delayed for immigrant youth as their immigration experience and legal status might impact their ability to gain employable skills and education and their ability to enter into full time work (Fulgini and Hardway 2004; Perreira et al 2007; Gonzales 2011; Gonzales and Chavez 2012). These pieces, while providing important

understandings of the structural limitations in immigrant youth's lives, fail to address the ways in which youth push back and exert their agency in their own development.

This is not to say that there is no precedence for understanding immigrant teens as agentic beings. Books such as Taft's (2010) work "Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change across the Americas" have been important in changing the traditional understanding of youth culture as one that is active instead of solely acted upon. Oliva (2010), for example, writes about immigrant youth's participation in immigration protests. Others have explored youth's active construction of their subjectivities: Bejarano (2005) examines how Chicano and Mexicano youth negotiate borderland identities; Flores-Gonzalez (2010) explores how second-generation actively work to establish identities as immigrants and citizens; and Garcia (2012) explores second generation Latina girls as they navigate sexual identities and experiences, not as a youth-in-crisis narrative but as a practice of agency amidst structural limitations. Rosas (2012) approaches youth living underground in the *Barrio Libre* of the border by understanding the ways in which they negotiate the structural forces of the borderlands. These works are instructive in creating a lens through which to view youth agency. This literature shows how to center both youth agency and structure to provide a full picture of youth experiences; by focusing on structure, we see limitations in youth's lives; yet, by focusing on youth agency, we see the ways in which youth can actively work against imposing structures. In this way, agency and structure are always intertwined. This balance avoids problematizing youth as a category and places the onus for social problems on society at large.

Humanitarian symbolism, threat narratives and youth agency are not understood in the same way for all youth. Indeed, each individual has multiple, sometimes shifting identities that create multiplicative experiences of oppression (Collins 2000). Here I draw upon diverse

feminist thinkers, who have conceptualized the ways in which oppression intersects. Claudia Jones referred to the "triple oppression" of poor black women and Boyce Davis called this the "superexploitation" (McDuffie 2011). In 1977, the Combahee River Collective, produced a statement in which they look at their own positionality as black women, some queer, and their relationship to three separate movements: the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and lesbian separatism, showing ultimately that they must not fight just one or two separate oppressions but rather "address a whole range of oppression" (214). Their different social locations were in no way separate and could not be viewed as such. Anzaldúa refers to the "doubly threatened" undocumented woman, pointing to both sexual violence experienced as a woman with the simultaneous experience of a refugee, venturing into the unknown. "This is her home, "Anzaldúa writes, "this thin edge of barbwire" (p. 35). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) called this phenomenon "intersectionality" and used it to understand how different locations structure one another. The idea of "intersections" conjures up the image of a street in which different positions in society converge to create a unique experience of oppression or privilege.

Unaccompanied youth, too, have a wide range of identities that intersect in important ways. My research has revealed diverse, multiplicative experience based not only on age and migration, but also experiences of gender, race, sexuality, ability, and both physical and mental health. This intersections create varying responses to youth. For example, Uehling (2008) explains how global smuggling of children by "*polleros*" and "*coyotes*" in Latin American has historically been given unequal importance and weight in comparison to child smuggling by "snakeheads" in Asia, due to racialized conceptualization of human smuggling. These intersections are essential to understanding youth's experiences; they are also essential in

understanding humanitarian responses and the conceptualization of youth agency and family position.

In this project, I attempt to pull together these diverse understandings of childhood and agency to understand the experience of unaccompanied youth in the borderlands. I see the humanitarian borderlands as a multifaceted influence: the humanitarian borderlands are meant to protect youth against the cultural strains that view youth as problems and immigrant as threats. Yet, in doing so, the humanitarian borderlands must flatten youths' histories, identities and actions, ignoring the complicated, intersectional and often agentic experiences in youths' real lives. Yet, despite these structural limitations, youth in this research are never passive victims: the very deed of agentic migration proves their ability to be independent actors, and as they navigate the humanitarian borderlands, they are constantly making individual decisions to work with, against, or around the humanitarian apparatuses they encounter.

My Argument: The Humanitarian Borderlands

In this work, I develop the concept of the humanitarian borderlands in order to explore the complicated and contradictory network of aid that youth encounter when they enter the United States. My map of the humanitarian borderland overlays the tensions of securitization and humanitarianism that are integral to the U.S.-Mexico border, and, by extension, humanitarian workers as a group become complicit in many of the same systems they want to fight. Before I conclude, I would like to justify my reliance on the concept of humanitarianism to describe the actions in the borderlands that I consider for this work.

When the presence of youth at the border was declared a humanitarian crisis by the Obama administration (The White House 2014), the networks of responders for this crisis extended throughout the country, including social workers, government employees, attorneys,

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teachers, community activists, and volunteers. Individuals in these networks may align themselves more closely to the logics of human rights or social services. However, Ticktin (2010) argues that while humanitarianism and human rights are often seen as "parallel or competing moral project" she argues that we should "read across them… recognizing them as two different ways to name and enact a politics based on care and produced as a moral imperative." (16). In the same way, I use humanitarianism as an umbrella term to understand the shared logics of aid throughout these networks of individuals and organizations. I find that the term "humanitarianism" is useful based on the following theoretical developments that underpin my understanding of this borderland system.

First, the humanitarian borderlands exist as response to a supposedly momentary crisis. Calhoun (2008) suggests that humanitarian action arises from a "sudden, unexpected, and morally compelling crisis" (p. 94-5). A morally compelling crisis needs a morally compelling humanitarian subject: these must be ahistorical victims, with no political or historical memory that would implicate the humanitarians in the humanitarian crisis (Ticktin 2010). They must be further be viewed as "problems amenable to a 'solution'" (Gatrell 2013). Hernández (2015) argues that while unaccompanied youth do, indeed, exist in a long history of government misdeeds, they are viewed as a crisis in order to obscure this history.

Second, the humanitarian borderlands arose to respond to suffering and lives at risk. While definitions of humanitarianism vary, the general agreement centers on the alleviation of human suffering as the primary goal. Barnett and Weiss (2008) suggest that humanitarianism is an "act motivated by an altruistic desire to provide life-saving relief; to honor the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence; and to do more good than harm" (p. 11). Humanitarianism is concerned with "lives at risk" and "lives hanging in the balance." Redfield

and Bornstein (2010) argue that humanitarianism's primary tendency and motivation is to ease physical and emotional suffering. This is a "species level" effort, responding to basic human needs. The humanitarian borderlands, too, respond to physical and emotional suffering, although this suffering is often in the past or future—if not always in the present. Suffering—violence and extreme poverty—often exists in the histories of youth; it is this story of suffering that creates the moment of crisis that provokes the humanitarian response. But, as residents of the borderlands, suffering is also always a looming possibility in the future. Youth in these borderlands exist on the edge of this suffering, and the humanitarians' duty throughout the system is to protect youth from that impending return.

Finally, the humanitarian borderlands must contend with the humanitarian reality that is the inevitability of the uneven distribution of aid. Hoffman and Weiss (2008) proclaim that humanitarianism is "almost always controversial." (p. 268). In this vein, critics of humanitarian logics have revealed ways in which humanitarianism privileges some victims over others, based on performances of suffering. Suffering is never neutral: sufferers are privileged around racial and national lines (Fassin and Rechtman 2009), authorities have more voice in the validity of suffering (Ticktin 2010; Fassin and Rechtman 2009), and the distribution of rights is unequal and perpetuates violence (Fassin 2012). Access to humanitarian resources is legitimized only through this suffering (Nguyen 2010; James 2010), moral legitimacy (Ticktin 2011), and the body (Petryna 2013, Rose and Novas 2005; Ticktin 2010). The humanitarian borderlands must also respond to humanitarian subjects based on this unequal distribution, sorting and choosing youth based on levels of deservingness.

My dissertation looks at how these particular humanitarian logics function when confronted with the logics of the borderlands. I am concerned not with the "humanitarian border"

as Walter (2011) details—that is the concentration of services where the Global North and the

Global South meet, emerging only when it becomes clear that the border crossing is a life or

death matter (p. 138). Instead, I am concerned with the humanitarian borderlands that emerge

from that border in response to a specific crisis—in this case, unaccompanied immigrant minors.

While other researchers have begun to explore the dilemmas of the specific institutions

responding to unaccompanied youth, I look at how humanitarians operate throughout multiple

institutions, in attempt to provide assistance to unaccompanied youth. Yet, I argue that

humanitarians unwittingly become part of a larger, global system of inequality. I also analyze the

role that youth themselves take in responding to these institutions. Believing that most

humanitarian workers are deeply concerned for the well-being of unaccompanied youth, I reveal

how these workers navigate the ethical and moral dilemmas that arise in the humanitarian

borderlands. I argue that despite best intentions, the humanitarian borderlands still operate as

*border*lands, using rigid frameworks that maintain stale dichotomies. I critique not the

humanitarian workers themselves, but the unforgiving roles that they often must play in helping

youth actively conform to borderland narratives

In the chapters that follow, I organize the borderlands into three primary borderland

"fields," that is, the networks of organizations and individuals that attempt to integrate youth into

the family, the state, and the education system. Each chapter focuses on a specific field in

attempts to understand both youths' complicated subjectivities in relation to that field and also

how the field must flatten youths' experiences in order to maintain borderland logics.

In Chapter 2, I explore the methods used in this research. I have chosen to dedicate an

entire chapter to the methods as I encountered significant difficulties in accessing borderland

institutions. I detail how this difficulty is intimately connected to the functioning of the

humanitarian borderlands. I argue that humanitarians continue to rely on borderland logics by building walls around knowledge and using a framework of best interest to support secretive practices.

In Chapter 3, I explore the system of family reunification to argue that family reunification itself is a process that relies on cultural othering and child dependency. I provide further nuance to understandings of youths' decisions to migrate, looking at the function of parental control and youth agency in understanding these decisions. I contribute to the literature on transnational families by complicating the relationship between youth, parents and migration. I then explore how the borderland responds to these transnational families through the process of family reunification and sponsor placement. I argue that the field of family reunification responds inadequately to the needs of youth and their families by judging family constellations through white American, middle class logics of parenting, childhood and adulthood and ignoring the structural realities of transnational families. In this way, humanitarians use "family values" to create cultural hierarchies and enforce hegemonic ideologies of family.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I begin to explore the field of legal relief. In these chapters, I argue that humanitarian actors work to create victim subjectivities among youth, which enforce a neoliberal reliance on personal responsibility and work to control immigrant bodies. In Chapter 4, I outline my concept of a "borderland legend." I argue that the "borderland legend" is an idealized version of youths' lives that ignores structural realities and places responsibility on youth to both overcome global inequalities and create themselves into humanitarian subjects. The legend thus becomes a measuring stick, used to exclude most youth who are unable to live up to its expectations. In Chapter 5, I detail the process of legend making. I explore the three-pronged strategies used by borderland humanitarians, particularly attorneys, to teach youth to tell

and become borderland legends. I argue that this process relies on cultural hierarchies and victim subjectivities, in which youth must buy into American ideas of trauma and abuse in order to tell their own legends. In this chapter, I also reflect on youth agency as a wrench in this humanitarian system, demonstrating how youth attempt to push back against these legends, controlling their own narratives through the use of truth and falsehoods.

In Chapter 6, I conclude my argument about borderland fields by exploring, first, the system of educational outreach. I show how youth's access to this system is often required for, yet predicated on, youth's ability to integrate into the institutions of family and state that I discussed previously. I also demonstrate how the education system functions to secure youth's position as children, as opposed to adults. I then argue that the three fields that I have discussed throughout the dissertation—family reunification, legal aid, and immigrant student outreach— are simultaneously intertwined yet independent. I explore the ways in which humanitarians and youth work between borderland fields, using flexibility, creativity and resistance to overcome the blockades created in the borderlands. Finally, in the last chapter, I summarize my key findings and arguments in this dissertation before providing specific policy implications as well as recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2: An Ethnography of Methods

"We each are our sisters' and brothers' keepers; no one is an island or has ever been. Every person, animal, plant, stone is interconnected in a life-and-death symbiosis. We are each responsible for what is happening down the street, south of the border or across the sea. And those of us who have more of anything—more brains, more physical strength, more political power, more money, or more spiritual energies—must give or exchange with those who don't have these energies but may have other things to give."
(Anzaldúa and The Gloria E. Anzaldúa Literary Trust 2015 p. xxviii)

This research was a multi-method exploration of the humanitarian borderlands and the experience of unaccompanied youth within these borderlands. I use a combination of qualitative interviews with borderland humanitarians and unaccompanied youth and autoethnographic observations of my own participation in the borderlands. While research methods are often delegated to the appendix or briefly summarized in few pages in the introduction, the methods in this project proved to be as important to the story as the data collected. Indeed, I quickly learned that borderland knowledge is guarded with the same zealousness by which the physical border is guarded. The walls in the borderland surround countries, yes, but they also surround information, creating zones that are difficult to penetrate. Furthermore, the logics of humanitarianism often guard information even more tightly, out of (often) legitimate fear that information compromises youth safety. For this reason, I dedicate an entire chapter to explaining the methodological constraints in this research. Indeed, I argue in this chapter that knowledge itself cannot escape borderland logics. Knowledge operates under the same constraints as immigrant youth, relying on false dichotomies of safe/dangerous, within a system of hegemonic control. In this chapter, I first detail the problems of access with this research, framing these problems as an ethnography in themselves. I then explain the actual methods that I used. In the following section, I explain my methodological and epistemological approach, detailing two specific ideas: my use of

"healing *testimonios*" as methodology and the difficulties in "researching at the threshold" and critiquing humanitarian organizations.

An Ethnography of Access

Perhaps not unlike most novice researchers, I approached this research with high degrees of optimism and naivety. My methods classes had prepared me to consider problems of access, using texts such as Muñoz's (2008) study of a transnational tortilla company to discuss the issues researchers encounter when gaining entry to secretive spaces. However, I used these not as warnings but as inspirations of researchers who had successfully edged their way into difficult research fields. With this in mind, I sought out to conduct an ethnography of the humanitarian spaces that youth traverse when navigating the borderlands. However, I quickly learned that the borderlands are filled with border walls, both literally and metaphorically. These walls shape the knowledge that is produced in and about the borderland, with the humanitarian and securitization apparatuses acting as gatekeepers in the process.

Border Walls in the Humanitarian Borderlands

My first proposed site was at a government shelter facility run through Bethany Christian Services[4] (BCS), an organization with which I was formally employed. I had worked as a case manager in the refugee resettlement department and had occasionally done trainings and programming with unaccompanied youth in their youth department. In addition, I had volunteered as a mentor in the unaccompanied youth department for several years. I had left the organization in 2010 on good terms, maintaining connections with many employees. I was planning to go directly to graduate school at the end of my employment, and in my exit interview with my director, I was encouraged to "come back any time" to conduct research.

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[4] Bethany Christian Services did not participate in or endorse this research

I was more than happy to take up that offer and planned to work directly with this organization's unaccompanied youth program. I contacted them as I prepared my proposal, and although there were new employees by this time, my resume and enthusiasm got me back in the door for a meeting with a supervisor and several staff members. They were thrilled about the prospect of research when I proposed a partnership and an ethnographic study of their shelter program. I was warned that I would have to seek approval from several overseeing bodies, but this was little deterrent for me, and we promised to be in contact once I finished my dissertation proposal.

Several months after this initial meeting, my proposal defense was on the horizon and I decided to move forward with gaining approval to access the site. The director at BCS explained that I would need to have board approval from their organization as well as approval from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which oversees all government programs dealing with unaccompanied immigrant youth. I did so immediately, optimistically, composing a letter to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, inquiring into the process of requesting approval for research.

Within days, I received a response, stating simply:

> "ORR policy does not permit access to the children for purposes of research or media inquiry. This applies to children in shelter care as well as those in foster care, to ensure their privacy and protection while they remain in federal custody. Even with IRB clearance, I'm afraid we cannot grant access to the children in our care." [5]

After wrestling with vacillating feelings of panic, frustration and a hint of pride having chosen a controversial and interesting research space, I composed another e-mail to ORR, asking to speak with someone about the blanket research ban, emphasizing the importance of research on creating better systems and institutions for the youth. The immediate follow up e-mailed explain that "the policy is designed to protect the privacy and security of the children while they await

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[5] Office of Refugee Resettlement, Personal Correspondence, March 19, 2015

further immigration proceedings, for as long as they are in federal custody."[6] I was then invited

to submit an official proposal although I was advised that "student access has not been granted in

the past, and we do not anticipate it being granted in the near future, for the reasons specified

previously."

> Only a day later, I receive another e-mail, this time from Bethany Christian Services:
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> "ORR contacted us today and reminded us of this policy and also indicated that children who are in both federal and state jurisdiction cannot give consent for a project like this. Of course any adult is able to make the independent choice to be interviewed by you, but we were advised to not participate (i.e. provide contact information on previous clients) as it would appear that both Bethany and ORR participated in the research, which is not allowed under policy."[7]

I was dumbstruck by these e-mails. I had anticipated a long approval process with numerous

hoops but I had not anticipated being completely blocked at the outset. I was also astonished at

the thoroughness of ORR, to reach out to the organization to remind them of their obligations of

confidentiality.

I created and sent out a proposal and did not hear anything for several weeks. Three

weeks later, I e-mailed again, inquiring if my proposal had been received. Two days after that, I

received a one sentence response: "After careful re-consideration of your proposal, we are

unfortunately still unable to grant permission for this study to be conducted with children in

ORR's temporary care."[8] With this exchange, my relationship with both ORR and BCS

effectively closed.

Returning to the drawing board, I decided that if I could not observe or interview youth

under federal custody, I would focus my efforts instead on the people who the youth encounter in

the humanitarian borderlands. Yet, this too was wrought with difficulty. After receiving an e-

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[6] Office of Refugee Resettlement, Personal Correspondence, March 19, 2015
[7] Bethany Christian Services, Personal Correspondence, March 20, 2015
[8] Office of Refugee Resettlement, Personal Correspondence, May 11, 2015

mail from the ORR, the gates were effectively closed with current employees of BCS. Yet, I

hoped that other organizations would be less wary of my requests to talk with employees.

The ORR's official policy on researchers is stated on their website in two sentences and

pertains particularly to researchers requesting to visit ORR facilities:

> "Interested parties, including advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, researchers, government officials, and other relevant stakeholders who wish to visit a care provider facility must request a visit through ORR. ORR considers various factors when responding to these requests as described in 5.2.1 with the best interests of the child of paramount importance." (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2015)

The ORR more thoroughly documents media inquiries. This written policy suggests that grantees

may use discretion when responding to these requests:

> "*ORR requires that grantees make a case-by-case evaluation of each media inquiry in a timely manner*, while recognizing the overarching mission of providing for the physical and mental well-being of unaccompanied children in our care.
> ORR funded care providers may be approached by members of the media for background information, requests for interviews with staff and unaccompanied children, and requests for tours of the facility. *ORR grantees can respond to any and all media inquiries about their organization and any of the organization's activities* as described in 5.1.1. ORR works with the ACF Office of Public Affairs (OPA) to address media requests that are outside the scope for care providers as described in 5.1.2." (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2015, italics my own)

Sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 allow grantees to discuss their own organization but suggest that

grantees should refrain from providing information on specific cases or the addresses of facility

locations. Further, Section 3.1.3 suggests that the media may interview children in exceptional

circumstances, and it outlines questions that should be addressed when grantees consider these

interviews.

Within these guidelines, it is clear that although researchers may not tour facilities

without ORR approval, grantees are, indeed, able to provide information about their

organizations and even provide occasional interviews with youth in exceptional circumstances.

Yet, in practices, many organizations did not feel comfortable speaking with me. Some simply

failed to respond to my e-mail requests and others rejected my requests altogether. Despite the written policy, there remained a culture of caution towards researchers. I believe this to be mainly due to how the official policy was communicated by the ORR to their grantees: my impression was that despite the relative openness of the written policies, organizations felt that the subtext was that they should not communicate information to the media or researchers. In addition, I wonder if my status as a graduate student decreased my perceived legitimacy. Of course, it would be an exaggeration to say that all government-funded agencies felt hesitant to talk. Indeed, several were very open to researchers, sharing in great detail their and day-to-day operations and stories of their successes and failures.

Through my personal networks across the country, I was also able to contact workers within organizations that had declined to participate in the research. I would approach these individuals to ask for interviews not as employees of the organizations but as individuals with experience in this line of work. This was the most successful way for me to gain access to humanitarians—as individuals instead of members of institutions. In one community, I was able to break into a network of these individuals, each passing my name onto the next in a clandestine manner. These workers approached interviews with trepidation, expressing strong concerns about confidentiality, but feeling that the risk they took in the interview was a moral protest again the ORR's ban on research. The irony of the situation was not lost on me: to create knowledge on the borderlands, I was using covert means to circumvent the walls that were built by borderland institutions. Knowledge production directly parallel the lived experience of migrants on the borderlands.

Workers in non-government funded organizations were by far easier to access: counselors, attorneys, and workers in community centers gladly provided their insight into

unaccompanied youths' experiences. Once I broke into these networks through persistent e-mails and phone calls, I rode a wave of easily accessible interview participants for several months. Accessing educators who worked with unaccompanied youth proved much harder. I had developed a list of districts that were known to have high rates of unaccompanied youth, and in the beginning, I attempted to simply contact individuals in charge of the districts. I discovered very early on that when I contacted a school or district, asking to speak with a teacher or counselor who worked with unaccompanied youth in their school, I was immediately directed to the IRB process at their school—a process that would take months and was simply not a reasonable use of my time, considering that I was looking for just one or two interviews in each district. In these cases, I would attempt to explain that I was not interested in researching their schools; I only wanted the opinion of a much larger issue from one specific employee. This argument never proved fruitful. So, once again, I would circumvent the system, no longer e-mailing general school addresses but instead searching for specific educators within school systems that might be willing to speak with me—as individuals and not representatives of their districts. In one case, I had e-mailed both a school principal and a teacher. They both responded in the same day, the principal directing me to seek IRB approval and the teacher immediately responding that she could speak with me. I was open with the teacher at that point, explaining that the principal had directed me to receive IRB approval first, something which I could not do given the time constraints of my research. In her response, the teacher dismissed the rule in principle, applying my own argument that she could speak with me as an individual.

My last scheduled interview was with a post-release specialist for a large government funded agency. I had gotten into contact with the worker out of sheer chance—she was a friend of a friend. She invited me to come to her office building to speak with her, which should have

been a red flag to me that she did not fully understand the research limitations within her

organization. As I sat across from her in her cramped office and passed her a consent document,

there was a sharp knock on her door. Someone asked to speak with her quickly and only a few

minutes after she exited the office, she returned with an apologetic look. I found myself in the

director's office soon after, feeling a bit like a child who had been called to speak with the

principal. I explained to the director, one last time, the purpose of my research. With a smile that

was hard to interpret, the director explained that the post-release specialist would get back to me

once they ran my research request past a "higher up." I left the building, knowing I would never

hear from them again, and formally concluded my data collection.

On Being In and Out: A Clandestine Autoethnography

The second location for my proposed ethnographic observation was through the Young

Center of Child Immigrant Rights.[9] I stumbled upon this organization early in the proposal

writing stage. It is the only organization of its kind in the United States, training volunteer child

advocates and pairing them with unaccompanied youth in shelters to provide youth with an

advocate as they stay in the shelters, navigate the courts and are released to sponsors. I was

excited about this hands on experience, hoping to be able to pair volunteer work with

ethnographic observations of shelter facilities in the Chicago area. I immediately applied for a

position, and after a several month waiting period, a two-day training, and multiple background

checks, I joined their team of advocates.

However, by the time I was trained through the Young Center, I had received the e-mails

from ORR declining my research request. Although I had been forthcoming with the Young

Center that I was also a researcher, I had been waiting for ORR approval before approaching the

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[9] The Young Center did not participate in or endorse this research.

Young Center regarding conducting official research through this work. At this point, I found myself in a delicate situation. I was effectively "in," entering buildings that were blinded on maps, accessing courtrooms that were closed to the public, speaking with the youth who are hidden from the media. And yet, I was still officially "out," unable to conduct any formal observations of the spaces and stories I encountered, as all of these spaces resided firmly and entirely under the auspices of the ORR. Furthermore, I had signed multiple waivers with the Young Center, promising confidentiality and promising to decline media inquiries into my work. Of course, maintaining youth's confidentiality was never a conflict: as a researcher, I, too, have the obligation to maintain complete confidentiality and privacy of my participants. However, what happens when you are the media that you are supposed to decline?

Being in and out encouraged some ethnographic flexibility; while I had no official permission to observe the spaces I encountered, I could observe myself in these very spaces, mindful of my own movements, aware of every interaction I had with youth. I could deconstruct my thought process, as I navigated the fog of truth and memory, as my heart opened and closed upon witnessing these truth-telling moments. I could witness my grappling, as I navigated the hidden bureaucracies of unaccompanied minors programs.

Although autoethnography is often marginalized as a social scientific method, self-reflection has been used successfully to unveil wide-ranging lived experiences, including experiences of gender (Lucal 1999), disability (Patrycja 2012), and mental health (Orr 2006). These projects, and others like them, provide evidence that deep insight can be revealed when the self is the subject of analysis. In this work, I argue that I can more fully understand how humanitarian logics are created and employed when I am one of those very creators. While this

project may not be feasible solely based on autoethnography, I believe that I can provide more nuanced insight as I analyze myself as a humanitarian.

Why Is There a Research Ban?

The question of this ethnography of access is, of course, why the ORR is so adamantly opposed to research. Indeed, it wasn't long before I discovered that the denial of my research request was not personal but systemic. Informal conversations with other researchers as well as recorded conversations with interview participants suggested that the research ban was far-reaching, for PhD candidates and established senior scholars alike. For example, Heidbrink (2014), who recently published her book on the unaccompanied youth immigration system, details the great lengths she went through in securing approval to conduct research on the ORR. She explains that her research was conducted in a political moment in which public outcry regarding the lack of ORR transparency was at an all-time high:

> "My request for access to the detention facilities directly benefited from the timing of these reports and public calls for transparency and supervision. Since then, the window has closed and several researchers have been denied access." (pg. 13)

In personal communications with her, she explained that she did not know anyone who had gotten permission to conduct research in recent years. Similarly Terrio (2015) reports that she faced significant barriers in access specific areas of the ORR system, with her requests to interview federal field specialists and the directors of ORR being ignored or denied.

Similarly, one of my participants who conducts psychological evaluations on children in ORR custody complained that this lack of research impeded her ability to accurately perform her duties:

> "I am very research oriented…. So I have tried repeatedly to make [my work] into a clinical research project allowing me to use that archival data [that I've already collected]… I am a psychologist and it is horrifying to me that I am giving questionnaires that have never been normed on them. So I am comparing unaccompanied immigrant

minors to norms based on kids from Cincinnati or something like that. It is absurd. And [my request for research] has just been repeatedly shut down by ORR. And I totally understand that they have concerns about the kids and they don't really get what it is that research is trying to do, and I think that they are trying to err on the side of safety, but that really blocks the science. We can't move forward as a community of providers if we can't use any of this data."

She explained the absurdity of her particular situation, as a person who already interviews children and wants to use de-identified data to create better tools for her work:

"I was continuously routed to public relations people who were like: 'We are sorry but we need to decline your interest in interviewing the kids.' I was like, I don't want to interview the kids for the 7 o'clock news. I already interviewed the kids."

Her frustration in this interview was palpable, as another individual who is already in the system and sees tangible research that is imperative for the better functioning of the programs the government provides.

While there is no official research ban, the ORR explains their hesitancy to participate in research as follows:

"As a federally funded program, ORR is committed to public transparency and accountability. As a service provider, we are committed to protecting the privacy and safety of the children in our care. Accordingly, ORR requires that grantees make a case-by-case evaluation of each media inquiry in a timely manner, while recognizing the overarching mission of providing for the physical and mental well-being of unaccompanied children in our care."

With ORR's emphasis on safety, perhaps one cannot be too critical of the tension that the ORR faces. There are, indeed, exceptional needs for privacy in situations with migrant youth, who are in high risk situations for human trafficking and exploitation and who have become object of ridicule by anti-immigrant protestors who have staged protests outside of facilities. Numerous interviews that I conducted with humanitarians detailed the great lengths they went through to protect child from returning to traffickers and who have faced protestors when the location of the

facility was revealed in the media. The safety of children should be of the utmost importance to researchers and government agencies alike.

And yet, this very idea that youth safety is the priority begs the question: Who is the keeper of safety? Historical precedent suggest that the U.S. government has had little accountability in this regard. Human rights reports have long been critical of the U.S. response to unaccompanied children and immigration detention, even after a 1997 settlement, Flores v. Reno, required the INS to make significant changes in its treatment of children (Ehrenrecih, 1997; Amnesty International USA, 2003; Barraza, 2005). In 2003, custody of unaccompanied youth was transferred from INS to ORR and while conditions for youth seemed to improve under the new oversight, there were still questions about how the ORR policy integrated standards implemented by the Flores Settlement (Byrne, 2008) and the use of former INS facilities (Nugent, 2005). Other reports explore the problems with the immigration system, specifically the lack of representation for the children (Frydman et al 2015), and the significant issues arising in the current repatriation of unaccompanied children without a clear policy (Thompson 2008). In addition to this history, there are inherent tensions in a system built to both care for and prosecute children, raising constant dilemmas for practitioners (Byrne 2008; Heidbrink 2014).

Given a history of questionable treatment and the tensions that are inherent in this work, it is my view that accountability *is* child safety; these are not competing or opposing interests at all but rather interests that go hand in hand. In the same vein, Fassin (2010) suggests that "criticism becomes critical" when analyzing "a social world that presents itself as imbued with a sort of moral supremacy—a world, therefore, that claims it needs not to submit to any external oversight." Thus, I join the leagues of frustrated researchers in imploring ORR to re-open access

to its shelters for researchers to help maintain the accountability of a system who has children's best interests at heart.

Methods, In the End

Despite the hurdles in accessing spaces, gaining approval, and proceeding ethically with my research, I was able to collect a wide range of data for this project, including interviews with borderland humanitarian workers, interviews with youth, and supplementary data from previous research.

Interviews with Borderland Humanitarian Workers

With the limitations in accessing government facilities, I expanded my research to include the wide variety of overlapping institutions that comprise what I call the humanitarian borderlands. While my original research design would have allowed me to conduct an institutional analysis at a single location, this new research design stepped back from specific institutions and provided an analysis of expansive system of aid and the discourses, preconceptions and ideologies that surround this system.[10] Some of the people I interviewed worked within established institutions but many worked between, around and even against them. Without exception, the individuals I interviewed conceived their role to be one of protection and advocacy and their relationships to the borderland institutions as a whole were often wrought with tension.

The 48 professional interviews include seventeen attorneys, thirteen workers in facilities and organizations with government contracts, six educators in public schools with large populations of unaccompanied youth, three volunteer child advocates, and nine social service

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[10] Coincidentally, my institutional analysis would have proven superfluous anyway, as Lauren Heidbrink (2014) and Susan J. Terrio (2015) published books during my research that do an incisive job providing institutional critiques.

providers (including counselors and case managers for community organizations). (See the appendix for the complete list of these participants.) These professionals work in a dozen states, in regions including the southwest, midwest, south east, and both coasts. For the sake of confidentiality, I use only the region when indicating the geographic location of the participants.

My data is thus not a portrait of a single institution but a diagram of the humanitarian borderlands as whole: a vast network that youth traverse. I picture my data on a map of the US, with a pin in the different locations a youth might travel. On this network map, there is a pin for a case worker in a shelter that receives youth who have been recently detained. Another pin is a worker who places the youth in a home several states away. There might be a cluster of pins where the youth is placed, for the counselors, social workers attorneys and teachers with whom the youth may or may not connect. Another pin may be a post-release case worker who lives hours away and attempts to keep track of the youth from a distance. These pins may be connected—but they also may not. This is not a precise data set because the humanitarian borderlands are not precise. They are expansive and include institutions that are simultaneously insular and yet interdependent. My data set is, indeed, indicative of how youth may actually experience the humanitarian borderlands.

There are, of course, limitations to such a broad net of data collection. I acknowledge that geography is important in understanding how both humanitarian and securitization techniques operate, and my research data cannot explore site-specific manifestations of these ideologies. I cannot speak to the nuances of place and the particular politics of a community. Further, I am not able to follow the details of a particular person's experience without the specifics of the environment around him or her. Future research would benefit from focusing on a specific

location to explore how an individual community within a set location responds to unaccompanied youth.

I located interviews with participants in several ways. First, I used my existing networks from my current advocacy work and my former employment to identify possible participants. These networks were useful but limited due to the restrictions described in the previous section. Other possible participants were contacted through blind e-mails and calls. I relied on both the US government websites, which lists their contractors and pro-bono attorneys as well as newspaper articles that would highlight migrant programs that served unaccompanied youth in various communities. I also focused my e-mail campaigns on areas that received high numbers of migrant youth, sending blind e-mails out to schools and social services in those communities.

Starting with my own networks and with blind outreach, I proceeded with a snowball sampling method described by Lofland et al (2006). The snowball sampling technique provided useful pockets of people in various locations across the U.S. Because of the interdependence of many of these workers, I could often rely on an attorney to find me a school teacher who could then find me a counselor in the area, providing data on how these networks functioned in numerous locations.

I followed semi-structured interview guides, created specifically for attorneys, teachers, social workers, and shelter workers, adjusting the questions as necessary to the specific participant. While each interview guide had a set of questions tailored specifically to the participants' expertise, all of the interview guides shared some areas of questions in common. Specifically, I asked all participants about the networking they did with other professionals, the most and least successful cases they had experienced (and how they defined that), the difficulties of building rapport and interpreting truth with youth, and the impact of trauma on youth's

experiences. Finally, I asked all participants to discuss the different barriers faced by youth with difference social locations, asking specifically about gender, ability, language, and criminal history.

Interviews with Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth

In addition to the interviews with the professionals, I collected seven interviews with unaccompanied youth, three of them were girls and four were boys, ranging from ages 17-24. I had received specific IRB approval to interview youth as young as 13 without legal guardians, providing youth with a research advocate who they could talk to if they had concerns about the research. Like the professional interviews, I located these participants through my own networks and via snowball sampling. However, as I focused primarily on accessing youth via institutions, I came upon major road blocks and thus did not contact as many youth as I had hoped.

All of the youth interviewed met the following criteria:

- Between the ages of 13 and 26 at the time of interview
- Crossed the U.S.-Mexico border at least once without authorization after 2006
- This crossing took place while the individual was under the age of 18
- The individual was not accompanied by a legal guardian during the crossing

Originally, I used the time marker of 2006 as it indicated the most recent major intervention by Congress at the border. While all of the youth in this dataset meet these requirements, as my focus of interviews shifted, the date of 2006 became irrelevant, since border interventions were less important in the story that emerged than was another data: 2003 was the year in which the Office of Refugee Resettlement began to care for immigrant children in federal custody. Thus, this date is more meaningful as it relates to substantive changes in the care and treatment of unaccompanied youth.

The participants were from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Ecuador. All of the youth in this sample had been detained by immigration upon entry in the US and had been placed

in government shelters before being released. One was placed in a foster home, five were placed with families or sponsors, and one participant aged out of the system before placement. Of the five placed with families or sponsors, only one remained in his original placement.

In the interviews with youth, I used a semi-structured interview guide, but followed it only in cases in which youth were not providing information on their own. My preference was to ask several general questions and allow youth to talk without interruption. The questions I focused on were:

- Tell me about your childhood in your home country
- Tell me about why you decided to come to the US
- Tell me about crossing into the US
- Tell me about your experience once you got here

I allowed the youth to talk openly and freely with no interruptions. When youth fell silent or finished their stories, I would retrace their steps with follow up questions. I attempted to use what I call a "healing *testimonio*" method, which I will elaborate on in the following section on methodologies.

Autoethnography

My autoethnographic account of my work as a child advocate began in May 2015 and continues at the time of this writing. I have yet to officially "exit" this space, as the work of an advocate is not on one's own timeframe and my commitment to my current case exceeds the importance of a clean research exit. As a volunteer child advocate, I received an informative two-day training with the Young Center and started my advocacy work as soon as my background check and finger prints cleared. My job is to visit the youth in the shelter on a weekly basis, advocating for the child if any problems arise in the shelter, in the court, or upon release. All of the youth who receive a child advocate have been flagged as being at high risk for reasons ranging from mental health to difficult family placement issues. As I visit, I try to gain

information that will help the case and determine the best interest of the youth, be it a specific type of placement in the U.S. or return to the home country. I maintain contact with an attorney to discuss concerns that arise. If necessary, I serve on a Best Interest Determination (BID) Panel, to provide recommendations to the state regarding the youth's future placement options. When the youth is released, I follow up by phone with the youth to make sure that s/he is connected with appropriate services in his/her area. (For a thorough description and analysis of advocates' work, see Caswell 2016).

I have worked on five cases during this my time as an advocate—two girls and two three—residing in three different government shelters. I have attended court hearings multiple times, contributed to one Best Interest Determination panel in which experts gather to discuss the possible release options for the child, and visited shelters every week with crafts, games, nail polish and, in one case a clandestine cake, to entertain the youth and win their trust. I have also remained active as a member of the Young Center, receiving additional trainings and attending events which allowed me to interact with and learn from fellow advocates.

When reflecting on my experience as an advocate I use not the stories of the people I encounter but rather the stories of myself as one of these actors (and significantly changing any identifying information about people I was in contact with). Using Reed-Danahay's (1997) typologies, my autoethnographic position can be identified as the "autobiographical ethnography," where I use personal experience to illuminate other observations and findings. Following Chang's (2007) advice, I treat my autoethnography as any ethnography, collecting field notes and self-observations. Chang suggests that, "Like ethnographers, autoethnographers are expected to treat their autobiographical data with critical, analytical, and interpretive eyes to detect cultural undertones of what is recalled, observed, and told to them" (p. 209). To help in

detecting these cultural undertones, I have kept weekly autoethographic notes reflecting on my feelings and positionality in this process. In conjunction with these notes, I had the rare opportunity to be interviewed by a fellow researcher about my experience as a child advocate. This interview has been shared with me, and I have analyzed it along with my other interviews as a reflection of my own thought process and experience.

Supplementary Data

Finally, this data is supplemented by interviews completed in 2011 for my Master's research. This original data included five educators and seventeen young men who formally identified as unaccompanied minors. However, in supplementing my current data set, I used only the 2011 interviews that met the requirements for my current interviews, namely the professionals and the youth who crossed as minors since 2003. This reduced supplementary data set includes interviews with 8 youth, all boys, from Mexico and Honduras.

Interestingly, my access to youth in 2011 was significantly more fruitful as I used many informal means in the recruitment process. As I detail in a forthcoming publication (Ruehs, forthcoming), this is in significant contrast to my data collection in 2015-2016 which was attempted through institutional means. I found that when I asked for networks through churches and community members, I was led to participants relatively easily. On the other hand, the vast majority of the professionals that I interviewed in my 2015-2016 sample felt uncomfortable or restricted in giving me the information for the youth that they worked with. Those who did were teachers, attorneys (although most attorneys did not feel comfortable doing this), and workers in a community organization who were not restricted by government oversight.

Methodologies and Epistemologies

Healing Testimonios and Silences: A Methodology

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In interviewing youth, I developed a methodology that I call "healing *testimonios*." This concept is interdisciplinary, bridging sociology with Latina feminist thought. I have done so intentionally, mindful to erase borders between disciplines while also exploring methodologies that arise from immigrant experiences. Using "healing *testimonios*" is a way to acknowledge knowledge production that is uniquely positioned to understand Latino immigrants. The concept of "*testimonios*" comes from Chicana feminist writings and is distinguished from other types of interviews, particularly oral histories, in that it has a transformative purpose. Cotera (2008) suggests moving from a "simple recounting of life events" to telling a testimony: a "testimony is storytelling with a purpose... it comes equipped with relatively visible rhetorical objectives that, in the words of Shari Stone-Mediatore, have the capacity to 'transform obscure experience into critical knowledge'" (179). Similarly, the Latina Feminist Group (2001) suggests that *testimonios* are "a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle" and "an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves as political subjects" (p. 13). Thus, the intention of the *testimonio* is not just to obtain information but to collect critical knowledge from individual experience, allowing participants to assert themselves as subjects in the process.

The concept of *testimonios* in the plural also suggests a capacity for creating a shared history out of the many individual stories—a type of community disclosure (Latina Feminist Group 2001). Tuhiwai Smith (1999) suggests that communities can be developed in "physical, political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic, cultural, and spiritual spaces" (128), and that these communities are made up of intersecting identities that represent the "multiple layers of belonging as 'nested identities'" (129). Furthermore, Cotera (2008) suggests that the purpose of gathering multiple stories is to "meld together" the "personal and collective histories" (179). For youth in the humanitarian borderlands, a community of knowledge is

created through nearly all of the spaces outlined by Tuhiwai Smith. My job in collecting stories from these communities, then, is to remain consistent with the nuances that distinguish every individual experiences while simultaneously drawing upon commonalities that create a collective history. In this way, I intentionally perform the role of the "active listener" by identifying and presenting links between individual experience and the "mouth almighty" of the community (Cotera 2008, p. 180).

The concept of the healing power of *testimonios* came out of my 2011 research in which several of my participants confessed the need they had to vocalize the traumas they had faced. One man requested that I give him the transcript of his interview; this material was a way for him to honor his own story. My experience is not unique, and other scholars, too, have discussed the healing power of the *testimonio*. Indeed, after sharing her *testimonio*, an individual from the Latina Feminist Group (2001) remarked, "I shared something that I never shared with anyone else. What a relief to finally let it go!" (p. 14). Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) refers to Anzaldúa's writing to discuss a similar concept of healing: "Anzaldúa calls a healing image, one that transforms consciousness, bridges our mind, body, and spirit, and reconnects us with others" (p. 367). Hesford and Kozol (2005) explain that *testimonios* can provide a means of resistance for third world women, empowering women through their truth telling. In this way, the methodology of *testimonios* allows my youth participants to claim agency over their crossing histories and to claim the spectrum of trauma and success that they have encountered. Thus, these stories are "healing" *testimonios*.

It is with conscious irony that that I collect healing *testimonios* for a project that is steeped in critique of humanitarianism. How do I collect these authentic narratives and not resort to the dehumanizing use of "confessional technologies" (Nguyen 2010)? James (2010b) explains

that authentic trauma narratives "have a pace of their own, are often non-linear, and are sometimes full of gaps and pauses" (p. 110). This is distinguished from formats made for humanitarian organizations, which are narratives that are "shaped by the practice of legal depositions requiring testimonies to have a rational, linear, teleological format" (p. 110).

This was a useful distinction and helped me to navigate authentic narratives from prescribed technologies. In keeping this distinction in mind, I tried being aware of the types of questions I ask as well as the ways in which my participants responded. However, in practice, I navigated the interviews with some degree of difficulty, perhaps failing more than I succeeded. In one interview with Cynthia, a 24 year old woman from Guatemala with whom I have a personal relationship, I became acutely aware that the interview had descended into the realm of a confessional technology. While the interview felt authentic in the beginning, as we talked about her experience of crossing, her words became stiff and her narrative seemed linear and rehearsed. At one point, she yawned as she spoke about the trauma of crossing the border and the rapes that she witnessed, expressing through her body language a complete disengagement from the horrific story she was sharing. My stomach churned as I listened to the details, and yet she uttered them almost thoughtlessly. I returned multiple times to this yawn as I reread her transcript in the months that followed. Was this a coping mechanism to steel herself from unhealed trauma? Was this actually evidence of trauma that had been dealt with over the years? Was this what I feared—a memorized utterance that had been repeated to so many official people before me that she no longer engaged with the words that she was saying? Or was the yawn simply indicative of the exhaustion she felt, coming off of a long shift in health care, a two year old running about in the next room and a baby in her belly?

On the other hand, Nicolas, a 18-year-old from Ecuador, had arrived to the United States less than a year prior to our interview. His engagement with the court had been limited thus far, although a case for asylum was under way. In our conversation, he was fully present, painfully so, allowing me to bear witness to suffering that lingered from violent experiences both before and during his migration. Unlike Cynthia's story, which was easy to follow and progressed chronologically, I had to ask Nicolas follow ups and write down dates in order to pull together his disparate commentary. It was clear that he had yet to learn how to tell this story in the humanitarian borderlands, and I felt privileged to hear it in its raw form, before it became a formulaic account of his life. At the same time, I wondered if my partiality for his narrative form and affect was simply my own commitment to humanitarian logics. (In chapter 5, I explore more thoroughly how affect—or lack thereof—becomes a tools for youth to become humanitarian subjects.) There was no clear answer as I recorded these *testimonios*, but it is my hope that an openness to listening without judgment, coaching or goal provided a space for a true recounting.

Even beyond the distinction between authentic narrative and confessional technologies, my collection of healing *testimonios* is further problematized by my own embodied position. As a white, educated adult citizen, it is presumptuous for me, as an outsider in almost every sense of the word, to assume that I am the appropriate listener and interpreter of the stories of youth migrants. Hesford and Kozol (2005) caution feminist researchers to "resist seeking 'experience' or 'truth' outside of discourse" (p. 8) and call these researchers to "listen and learn… without presuming that this evidence is transparent" (p. 8-9). I take these words of advice to heart, being fully aware of the limitations in transparency.

In addition to these worries, I was furthered prepared to face silence from some potential participants, and here I draw upon Naber's (2012) analysis of silence. Naber brings forth the

concern that her research is "airing some voices" while "creating some silences" (p. 23). She acknowledges that this is true of any project, and she points out the places in which she sees herself as a "guest" or as starting with "only minimal relationships of mutual trust and respect." While Naber's concern lies in the partial stories that silences create, I argue that silences are also agentic and empowering: "silence" can be just as important as "voice."

The silences in my experience came in the form of disappearance. I had made contact with one youth—he reached out to me enthusiastically through social media after being referred by his attorney. We chatted on the phone as we planned the time to meet. He explained that he was eager to talk with me, and that he owed everything to his attorney since he had once "disappeared" on her and she took him back anyway. We set a date to meet. However, through an unfortunate and unavoidable mix up, I had to cancel my meeting with him; I messaged him ahead of time as we had taken to messages rather than calls at this point and explained the situation, asking if we could meet another day. He responded that he was confused. I tried to explain again, apologizing for the mix up and suggesting some other dates and times. I never heard back from him. I tried to contact him several more times in the following weeks, through text and messages, but he never responded. We are connected through social media, and I see his activity almost daily. Yet, he has chosen to disappear himself from me. This disappearance was due, perhaps, to my embodied distance from him and the lack of respect for the relationship that we established. I see his disappearance as his right to silence. I honor the story that he has chosen to keep to himself and acknowledge that his voice is still heard through this silence. His story is his alone to tell, if he decides to share it.

Researching at the Threshold: An Epistemological Dilemma

While methodological dilemmas are often concerned with the conflicts inherent in researching "inside" or "outside," I found myself grappling with an epistemological dilemma of how to research "at the threshold" (Fassin 2010). As a former social worker and humanitarian, my professional participants were truly my peers. More often than not, I found myself interviewing women the same age as me, with similar experiences and work histories and compatible worldviews. My concern with this position is distinct from the insider/outsider methodological dilemma discussed by researchers such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). My concern is not about power as much as it is about knowledge production. I rely often on the epistemological argument of Patricia Hill Collins (2000), here, who suggests that oppressed people (in the case of her writing, black women), have specific standpoints that allow them to fully explore systems of oppression. In the case of my research, I am not viewing systems of oppression as the recipient of the oppression or as the creator of the system. As a current volunteer, I was just as easily a part of the system as I was an observer of it. Fassin calls this position "the threshold of the cave, where a step in on or the other direction puts one either inside or outside" (2010; 39).

This position proved humbling, as I had approached the research with wild arrogance. I had day dreams about being a heroic, investigative researcher, pulling back the curtain on the system of corruption and condemning people who were heartless and worst and naïve at best. That would have been a simple story to tell. It fits well into my critical, conflict theorist tendencies. But really, when I pulled the curtain back, I saw myself. I saw myself in each of the workers, as they struggled with the dilemmas and tensions in their roles. White teachers waxed poetic about white privilege and attorneys let out deep sighs as they explained the complications of their roles. These humanitarians were compassionate and deeply thoughtful about their

positions. Instead of revealing the evils that I was sure existed, the more interviews I conducted, the more hesitant I became to provide any critiques of the humanitarian workers at all. Indeed, I found that critiquing them meant critiquing myself.

This discomfort in providing a critique is situated in the fact that the critique is of people and organizations that I view as inherently good. Fassin explains that a critical analysis when one is "at the threshold" of humanitarian organizations "is both loyalty and displacement" (42). I continue to feel this sense of loyalty to the participants I interviewed and to myself, as a holder of the same truths that they proclaimed. It is this sense of loyalty that makes Fassin's claim about humanitarian critiques resonate so deeply:

> "The accuracy on an analysis can be measured by the discomfort in both the person who produces it and the person who receives it. With regard to humanitarian organizations, neither (of course) admiring support nor (paradoxically) virulent denunciation constitutes a moment of truth; the truth will only rise toward the surface if we stick as close as possible to the action." (p. 42-3)

So, as a researcher at the threshold of the cave, researching across to my peers, I will attempt to neither admire thoughtlessly nor denounce unreasonably. Instead, I take a hard look at the world that we humanitarians have created, interrogating its shortcomings but also celebrating its goodness.

Chapter 3: Measuring Transnational Family Dynamics with Borderland Logics

The first major field in the humanitarian borderlands is the field of family reunification, in which social workers and government contractors attempt to integrate youth into a family system. This field is constructed on preconceived understandings of youth agency, family decision making, and parental suitability. In this chapter, I explore the transnational family and youth agency in relationship to humanitarian borderland logics. My interventions in this chapter are two-fold: First, I argue that family reunification decisions rely on and, indeed, reify hierarchies of cultural difference, using the vulnerability of transnational life against these transnational families. Second, I argue that humanitarians have an inadequate understanding of youth agency, thus creating systems that buckle upon displays of this agency and work only when youth can enact their social dependency. The stakes of my argument lie in youths' lives: humanitarian systems fail to respond adequately to youth, leaving these youth vulnerable to outcomes including abuse and homelessness.

I begin with a brief summary of literature on transnational families and unaccompanied youth. I then describe the varying experiences of youth independence, parental control and decisions to migrate, highlighting both the diversity of these experiences and the role of youth agency. I then provide a brief description of the process of family reunification and sponsor placement when these youth arrive alone to the United States. I follow by providing two main critiques regarding this process. First, the borderlands dichotomize parents into suitable and dangerous, using measurements based on white, American, middle class; these measurements fail to account for the realities of migrant parents in transnational families. Second, the humanitarian borderlands rely on placements strategies based on dichotomized understandings of adult/child. These understandings fail to account for the wide spectrum of youth agency and

sponsor resources. As a result, placements are often inadequate in regards to the needs and desires of unaccompanied youth.

Transnational Family Literature

The literature on immigrant youth often assumes that children are inexorably linked *with* their parents. The legal designation of "unaccompanied" supposes that youth exist *without* parents. Yet, the reality of unaccompanied youth and their relationship to parents (and parental figures) is much more complicated than either of these conceptualizations suggest. Youths' decisions to migrate, experiences while migrating, and lives in the United States upon arrival are often linked in complicated ways to adults. As Heidbrink (2017) states, "the term *separated child* more accurately reflects the contingent and temporary nature of separation" (p. 37). Further, as borderland subjects and through borderland logics, youth are, in fact, *required* to connect themselves to parental figures in ways that often contradict the nuanced realities of their lives. So, whether youth have left parents, have been pushed to immigrate by parents, hope to reunite with parents, or have no legal guardians and must be placed with other adult caregivers, adults are important figures in this story. Thus, unaccompanied youth must be understood in relation to transnational families.

Much of the literature on transnational families explores the dynamics that arise when parents migrate and leave their children behind (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Suarez-Orozco, et al 2002; Abrego 2009; Dreby 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al 2010; Dreby and Stutz 2012; Abrego 2014; Baldassar and Merla 2014) or when parents are forcibly removed from the country (Wessler 2011; Enchautegui and Menjívar 2015). Researchers highlight the damage that transnational lives can cause to families, such as increased depressive symptoms among children (Suarez-Orozco et al 2002; Suárez-Orozco et al 2010) and poorer school performance relative to

children who are not separated from their families (Gingling and Poggio 2012). Yet, despite these negative consequences, scholars have also pointed out the ways in which parents actively work to maintain connections with their children. For example, Dreby (2009) notes the differing ways in which parenting is played out through financial giving by fathers and emotional intimacy by mothers. Baldassar and Merla (2014) suggest that belonging in transnational families "is sustained by the reciprocal, though uneven, exchange of caregiving," looking at family unity as a circular process that is highly influenced by both the sending and receiving countries' political and social climates. Menjívar, Abrego and Schmalzbauer (2016) also suggest that these immigrant families are not static but "dynamic and malleable forms of social organization" (25). Thus, despite tremendous difficulties and vast geographical distance, families are still able to maintain important connections.

The role of youth in these transnational families is often overlooked, with a few notable exceptions. Boehm (2012), for example, suggests that children and youth are actors in migration, although this agency is "always mediated by adults" (117). And Dreby (2007) details the ways in which children and adolescents exert power over their migrating parents. While other authors may nod to the existence of unaccompanied minors (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001) literature on the relationship that these youth have with their parents is highly underdeveloped. Further, while researchers are often critical of American government policies that tear families apart and force families into transnational systems (Carling et al 2012; Dreby 2015), there has been little attention paid to the government systems that are meant to place families back together.

Youth Agency, Parental Influence, and Migration Decisions

The connection between youth migration, agentic decision making and parental influence varies tremendously among the wide-spectrum of youth who are considered unaccompanied minors. While the humanitarian borderlands are premised on the logic that these relationships mirror ideal-type white, American middle class families, I argue that these transnational families demonstrate a wide range of family dynamics. I have identified several common scenarios regarding these relationships, as noted in Table 3. The table lists the residency of the parents and indicates who primarily initiated the decision to migrate: the youth, the parent, or both. Rather than suggesting the statistical prevalence of each scenarios, this chart merely supports the idea that youth have a wide variety of relationships to parents and migration decision making. It should be noted, however, that my participants were all over the age of 13 when they migrated, so these findings cannot be generalized to children but rather account for the specificity of young people in their early teens. Further, while this chart is helpful in distinguishing common scenarios, it still obscures the nuance within each of these scenarios. For example, while the majority of the youth in my research had parents in their home country, this designation does not indicate if the youth lived with these parents or the type of relationship that they have with their parents. Below, I detail several stories that further explain the relationship between youth

Table 3. Parents' Residence and Migration Decisions

		Parents' Residence		
		Home Country	United States	Father in US Mother in Home County
Decision to Migrate (Who Initiated Migration)	Youth	Andres Angelica Cynthia Florencio Jesus Marco Nacho Nestor		Mariana Nicolas Salvador
	Parent		Edwin	
	Both	Carlos Isaiah	Javier	

agency, parental control, and migration decisions. These stories also explore the intersecting

influence of age, class, and gender in migration decision making.[11]

Cynthia and Angelica: Choosing to Leave

The most common scenario among the fifteen participants in my research was one in

which youth lived with a parent or parents in the home country and made an independent

decision to leave the family home and travel to the United States alone.

For some of the youth in this scenario, the decision to migrate was prompted because of

the family dynamics themselves. For these youth, family was not a safe haven but a place of

stress, insecurity, and danger (Davis 1999). This was the case for Cynthia, whose story will be

discussed at length in Chapter 4. Growing up in her rural community, Cynthia lived with her

mother and younger siblings. While Cynthia's mother was not physically abusive, she had

emotionally violent outrages and neglected to provide for the basic needs of her children.

Cynthia, at a young age, was forced to fend for herself, due not only to poverty but to her

mother's alcoholism. Cynthia independently made the choice to migrate because of the abuse in

the household. She did tell her mother that she was going to leave and her mother agreed to the

decision because Cynthia promised to send money home. However, she withheld the plan from

her grandparents, who had threatened to lock her in a room if she tried to leave. In fact,

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[11] There are, of course, other scenarios of parental relationships, agency and migration that are not reflected in my data. The young men and women in my sample were all connected in some way to parental figures who often helped them plan, pay or negotiate the decision to migrate. There is, however, a segment of unaccompanied youth who have no parents to speak of in their home country. The documentary *Which Way Home* (Cammisa 2009) documents some of these "street kids'" experiences. In these scenarios, youth who have long ago been abandoned or orphaned by parents, live on the street or jump from house to house of relatives and friends. Their migration decisions are always made without adult intervention and unlike some of the youth in my data, they also don't have the financial support of parents. In addition, my data lacks the experiences of younger child migrants. Hamilton and Bylander (2016) suggest that children under age five migrate based on parental decisions alone, older children have more variation in migration decisions, and secondary school-aged children, such as the ones in my data set, are more likely to migrate with little parental involvement. Future research could explore these distinct experiences.

Cynthia's departure was carried out in secret, in the darkness of night, so as not to be stopped by her grandparents. Her migration was also not paid for by family members—indeed, she was contracted to work off her migration debt but out of sheer luck managed to escape this fate.

Angelica, too, lived with her parents and also initiated her own migration. However, unlike Cynthia, Angelica's parents had provided her a loving home and were also more involved in the logistics of migration. Angelica comes from a small city in Central America that was largely controlled by local gangs. She explains that gangs had taken over her family's property, using the yard in front of the house as gang territory. Police would come often and gun fights would erupt, terrifying both her and her parents who would hide inside. Living in this environment, Angelica always wanted to migrate to the United States to look for a better life. Plus she hoped to work so that she could send money to her family. When she first brought up the idea to her parents, they were not excited about this possibility. However, she begged them on a daily basis to let her leave. This took months of convincing before they agreed. They, too, saw that she had no future in her home country. Her father helped to arrange a coyote to take her North, but despite this assistance, her parents remained hesitant of her migration plans. Angelica describes through tears the morning that she left. Her mother made breakfast, her back turned toward her daughter, refusing to make eye contact. Her father pleaded with her to stay, begging her to remember that she had everything she needed with them. But Angelica persisted, stating "This is what I always wanted, and if I don't go today, I will never go. I will never fulfill my goals." She recalls that her mother's grief spilled out in anger, and she pushed Angelica out the door with a cruel, "Go already! I won't detain you and take your time any longer." Angelica refused to look back at her house, crying silently in the car as her father drove her to meet the group with whom she would travel.

While both Cynthia and Angelica clearly initiated their own migration, they had very different experiences in doing so. Cynthia left to flee an abusive family, and she largely found her own way north. Angelica had a loving family who she needed to convince to let her leave. Although her parents were never fully supported on the idea, they did give her the assistance that she needed, including the financial support, to carry out her migration. Class certainly played a role in these differing experiences. Cynthia, who came from an extremely impoverished family, had no family resources to rely on, even if her mother was willing to be supportive. Indeed, it was only with the promise of remittances that her mother allowed Cynthia to leave. Angelica, on the other hand, was able to use her family's resources to fund her trip to the United States. Her decision to leave was not largely based on an ability to send money home but rather to escape violence and increase her own future opportunities. Cynthia's story also demonstrates the importance of not just parents in decision making but extended family members as well. The importance of familial influence lies not just in the relationship between parent and child but includes extended family members, grandparents, and even influential friends and community members.

Carlos: Mutual Decisions

While Angelica and Cynthia came from very different family backgrounds, they share the common experience of being largely in control of their final decision to migrate despite being discouraged to do so by their family members. Their experiences vary in this sense from young men, such as Carlos, whose parents encouraged migration.

Carlos grew up with both parents in Mexico. He dropped out of school at a young age, working in agriculture with his father. He describes wanting to immigrate as early as ten years of age, when an older brother had migrated, but his parents felt that he was too young. However, by

age fifteen, Carlos still had a strong desire to migrate and, by that age, his father supported and encouraged the decision, although his mother remained unconvinced. Carlos describes a conversation in which his father said that it was Carlos's decision to migrate but that he needed to be brave. Carlos's father then arranged for a coyote. In Carlos's description, there is no clear individual who initiates migration. Carlos, himself, surely wanted to migrate, and discussed this with his parents at a young age. But his immigration was not initiated until his father also agreed and provided the support for him to leave. Further, since Carlos's parents remained in Mexico, he knew that his migration was also an obligation to send remittances to them. There was an unspoken family contract that Carlos's migration was meant for him to work and support his family.

It is clear that Carlos's family came to a mutual decision for his migration, through both gendered and classed logics. While the stories of the two girls mentioned above reveal that a girl's migration may be contested by the family, Carlos received encouragement from his father to migrate. The conversation he recounts in which his father encourages him to be brave suggests, that his migration was further informed by masculine ideals (Ruehs 2016). Similarly, since Carlos's mother was excluded in the final decision to migrate, and as Carlos was following an older brother, it is clear that migration was a masculine endeavor in his family. Carlos's brother also provided a migratory model for Carlos to imitate, having already established a family dynamic of migration. Finally, with the family's financial needs, Carlos's parents also depended on Carlos to use migration to support the family. Carlos's solitary migration was thus a decision based on financial need and gendered values that was made both by Carlos and with the assistance of his father.

Edwin and Mariana: Reunifying with Parents

Edwin was the only individual in my sample who describes the migration decision being carried out solely by parents. This is perhaps due to the age range of my participants. At age 13 during migration, Edwin was the youngest in my sample, and his relative lack of agency in migration is perhaps a result of this difference.

Edwin grew up in Honduras with his grandmother. His father had migrated to the United States when Edwin was a young boy. By age thirteen, Edwin was no longer in school but had started to work to help his grandmother. Edwin describes coming home from his construction job one day, sweaty, tired and filthy. He laid down in a hammock to take a nap but was approached by his grandmother: "Hey, your dad says to get ready. He says that you're leaving, that he has money for the coyotes to bring you." Edwin was ecstatic at this news, saying: "Oh my God! This is my time! I'm going to go there!" Edwin's grandmother, however, was not excited and begged Edwin to stay. Nevertheless, Edwin had dreams of reuniting with his father, learning English, going to school, and ultimately working hard enough to buy his grandmother some land and a house. The words that Edwin uses to describe the migration decision make him a largely passive recipient of the decision. While Cynthia fled, and Angelica begged, and Carlos discussed, Edwin was told. He was, however, quite happy to comply.

Like Edwin, Mariana also reunified with her father in the United States. However, her story is quite different than Edwin's. Mariana was living in Honduras with her mother, and she describes being very happy with her life. However, as she entered her teen years, some members of a local gang began to follow her every time she went to school or left the house. She describes becoming more and more fearful until the stalking culminated to her being held at gun point by one of these men. After this incident, she called her father in the United States. Although they did not have a close relationship, she asked if he would fund her migration north. Her mother did

not like the idea of Mariana migrating, but she ultimately told her daughter that it was her decision alone to make. So, with her mother's reluctant support and her father's financial assistance, Mariana was able to leave Honduras at age sixteen.

Although both Mariana and Edwin were from Honduras and ended up reunifying with fathers in the United States, there stories are distinct in important ways. Mariana's migration was initiated due to gendered violence, and her goal for migration was to start a safer life with a better future. This migration was largely initiated out of her own will. With her father's remittances, Mariana's family did not have a financial need for her to work or send remittances herself; indeed, Mariana was still in school in Honduras and continued school when she arrived to the United States. Further, reunification with her father was merely a side note in migration and in no way a driving factor. On the other hand, Edwin describes a much more impoverished upbringing, where he had left school at a young age to help support the family financially. His father initiated Edwin's migration to allow Edwin educational opportunities in the U.S. but also with the hopes that Edwin would also help in sending remittances to his grandmother. Edwin also articulates that he was excited to be reunified with his father. While his grandmother had been Edwin's caregiver for many years, Edwin expressed a keen interest in being with his father again. However, his grandmother's presence as well as her discouragement regarding Edwin's migration suggests, again, that extended family also exerts important influence in migration decisions. Finally, the idea that Ewin is told to immigrate allows him to maintain an identity as a child since there is still an adult making a migration decision based on what his father perceived to be in his best interest. Further, Edwin's father would receive him, so the decision was to send Edwin between one adult (the grandmother) to another (the father); whereas Mariana decided to switch from one household to another.

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The Family Reunification Process

The above section demonstrates the wide variety of relationships youth have with their

parents as well as the control youth have over their immigration decision. However, at the point

that youth are detained in the United States, the government begins a process that flattens these

diverse realities and requires very clear relationships between parents and children.

When unaccompanied youth are detained and placed into short-term government shelters,

caseworkers immediately get to work in finding them placement. Through interviews with the

youth, caseworkers identify possible placement options. There are four potential categories. The

first, and most preferable of the categories, is a placement with a parent or legal guardian. The

second is an immediate relative, such as an adult sibling, aunt, or grandparent. Category three

consists of distant relatives or unrelated individuals. Placement preference is given to parents,

except in situations in which there is "substantial evidence that the child would be at risk of harm

if released to the parent or legal guardian." (Children Entering the United States

Unaccompanied"). When no placement is available, youth are placed in foster care or, in some

situations, independent-living transitional facilities.

The determination for sponsorship is conducted by case managers through interviews

with the youth and then verification of the sponsor's identity and relationship to the child

through documentation and fingerprinting. All adults residing in the household must have their

identity proven, fingerprints taken, and background checked. Case managers then conduct

assessments regarding the suitability of the home. The assessment criteria includes the "nature

and extent of the sponsor's previous and current relationship with the child"; "the sponsor's

motivation for wanting to sponsor the child or youth"; "the child or youths' view on the release";

and "the sponsor's strengths, resources, and mitigating factors in relation to any risks or special

concerns of the child or sponsor such as criminal background, history of substance abuse, mental health issues, or domestic violence" (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2015).

Potential sponsors must also attend orientations regarding their responsibilities to the released child. The adult who is tasked with the responsibility to take care of the youth must sign an official "Sponsor Care Agreement," which outlines thirteen basic responsibilities, including: "provide for other physical and mental well-being of the minor, including but not limited to, food, shelter, clothing, education, medical care and other services as need"; "make best efforts to establish legal guardianship with your local court within a reasonable time" and "ensure the minor's presence at all future proceedings before the DHS/Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the DOJ/EOIR" *(*Office of Refugee Resettlement 2015).

Based on requirements of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, further scrutiny of sponsors is required for cases that raise red flags. These "red flags" include suspicions of trafficking, children with disabilities, victims of physical or sexual abuse, and concern that the "child's sponsor clearly presents a risk of abuse, maltreatment, exploitation or trafficking." In these situations, a home study is required, in which a social worker goes to the home to conduct in person interviews and evaluate home conditions. This report is considered a "collaborative psycho-educational process" in which the case worker both evaluates the sponsor and provides resources for areas of possible concern. If a sponsor or an adult member of the household fails to pass a background check, he or she is further evaluated based on the severity of the offense, the time passed, and the evidence of rehabilitation. A denial of release to a particular sponsor will occur based on several conditions, including convictions related to child abuse, convictions in the past five years related to physical assault or drug use, or convictions related to trafficking in person. Upon release, some families that raised concerns receive post-

release service provisions. Case managers are also required to provide a 30-day well-being follow up call. The success of this call closes the government's intervention in the case.

This framework is set up with the good intentions of protecting vulnerable youth from very real threats of exploitation and victimization. Multiple case managers with whom I spoke told harrowing tales of traffickers and other criminal elements who would take advantage of youth vulnerability. However, as I detail in the following section, this framework is also set up based on several faulty assumptions. First, this framework judges parents based on white, American, middle class standards, with little insight into the nuances of parenting in international contexts, transnational families, and migrant lives. Second, this framework assumes that transnational youth maintain American, middle class dynamics with their adult caregivers. The category of "youth" is viewed as a mutually exclusive from "adult." The crux of this dilemma is that borderlands leave little space for ambiguity. Here, there is only safe and unsafe, adult and child, and humanitarians in the borderland system must follow these dichotomies while working in the very ambiguous terrain of borderland life.

Measuring Transnational Families: Suspicion and Blame

Over the past several decades, researchers have pointed out that mothering, in particular, is a cultural performance, often based on race, class and gender ideals (Tardy 2000, Byrne 2006; Carter and Anthony 2015). Hays (1996) coined the idea of "intensive mothering," which is a hegemonic ideology regarding mothering styles based on self-sacrifice, the commitment to following expert guidance on parenting, and specific expressions of love. However, mothers from diverse racial and class backgrounds often fail to meet these standards, due to significant structural differences in lifestyles (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). Further, this type of mothering is also not valued equally among racial and class groups. Indeed, Romagnoli and Wall (2012)

show that while this type of neoliberal mothering is often mandated by government services, young, low-income mothers who are required to perform intensive mothering do so while resisting its internalization. Fathers, too, have faced judgments regarding their adequacy as parents, although they have not historically been held to the same standards as mothers. Rather, they are traditionally judged as breadwinners rather than caregivers (Warin et al 1999; Speakman and Marchinton 1999). However, there also exists a cultural preoccupation with the perceived problem of absent fathers, particularly in communities of color (Way and Stauber 1996; Jordan Zachery 2007). Further, stereotypes of Latino machismo suggest that Latino fathers are not involved in their children's lives, although research does not support this claim (Coltrane et al 2004; González-López 2004).

These cultural beliefs about parents are reflected in government bureaucracies, such as the child welfare system, which are tasked with measuring parents' abilities to meet these ideals. Race has long influenced government determinations of parental adequacy, from a history of boarding schools among Native Americans (Rodriguez 2016) to current research that suggests that parents of color are judged more harshly than white parents (Berger et al 2005; Hines et al 2004; Harris and Courtney 2003; Rodriguez 2016). And, while Osterling and Han (2011) suggest that Mexican immigrant parents are actually *more* likely than non-immigrant parents to be reunified with their children in the child welfare system, this likelihood decreases if the parents are undocumented or do not speak English as a primary language. Further, Rodriguez (2016) argues that ideas of best interest for Mexican children living in the United States maintain ethnocentric beliefs that the U.S. is the best place for a child to be raised, thus discriminating against parents who reside in other countries. As a consequence of these biases, child welfare

systems are used to discipline families of color (Reich 2005; Collins 1998), and gendered understandings of parenting remains part of these judgements (Staiano 2013; Reich 2005).

While distinct from the child welfare system, the Office of Refugee Resettlement is tasked with making similar decisions about parental suitability for the reunification of unaccompanied youth with their families. In doing so, the ORR relies on the same cultural scripts as the child welfare system regarding adequate parenting. The government contracted case workers who make determinations about placements expect parents of unaccompanied youth to perform adequate versions of parenting in accordance with American cultural values. In addition, due in part to the very real threat of human trafficking, all potential sponsors, whether parents or not, are presumed dangerous to the youth until proven otherwise. I argue here that the ORR's requirements regarding parental adequacy fail to account for the specific experiences of parents who may be undocumented, who may have maintained transnational ties with their children, and whose parenting experiences have been largely outside of the context of the American middle class.

Lisa was an educator who advocated for unaccompanied youth in her school district. Prior to her employment in her school district, she was not familiar with the population of unaccompanied minors. She recalls her initial response when she learned about these youth: "When I first heard about kids arriving alone at the border, I also wondered. My first thing was, I got angry. Why are their parents sending them alone? Are they crazy?" Although Lisa was not tasked with making reunification determinations for these youth, her response to youth is instructive in understanding the expectations that many humanitarians have when wrestling with this issue. By their very status of being parents of youth who have migrated alone, parents of unaccompanied youth have already failed to meet these cultural expectations of "appropriate"

parenting (Heidbrink and Statz 2017; Heidbrink 2017). Indeed, they are seen as culpable for their children's solitary migration. Lisa explains that eventually she began to understand the parents' point of view. After learning about the violence that often prompted children's solitary migration, she began to soften her critique of these parents, seeing their decision as a logical response to environmental factors. And yet, Lisa's maintains that parents are ultimately responsible for this migration and fails to understand the dynamics of youth agency as well as broader structural factors that may also influence migration decisions. And, it is this suspicion of these parents' inability to adequately parent their children that underlies much of the policy around family reunification.

The first barrier faced by transnational parents is supplying the correct documentation to prove the relationship between the sponsor and youth. This includes providing documentation, such as official birth certificates to prove the identity of the youth. Heidbrink (2017) argues that the requirements for such documents in both "frightening and onerous" for parents due to the complexity of the bureaucratic system (p. 43). Using an intersectional lens, my research reveals that the ability to provide birth certificates is further complicated when working with poor, transnational families from rural areas. Linda, an attorney, provided an example of such a scenario. Linda explains that her client's birth certificate had the grandmother's name instead of the mother's name:

> "We got a DNA test to demonstrate that in fact, yes, it was the mother. All of this because, in the country that they are from, you have to obtain an ID before you can register someone's birth and the ID costs money. So if you don't have the ID because you didn't have money to pay for the ID, you can't register the birth."

In this scenario, familial relationship were difficult to prove due to the class and cultural differences of the particular family. In another example, Mercedes, a case worker who primarily worked in family reunification decisions, described at length the difficulties of getting some of

this documentation for youth from rural communities. She tells one story in which she attempted

to obtain a youth's birth certificate from a mother who lived in a rural community in Guatemala.

The mother spoke an indigenous language that was used only in that community, making

translation virtually impossible. Further, when Mercedes was able to communicate that the

mother needed to fax a copy of the daughter's birth certificate, the mother did not understand

what a fax was—much less know where to access one. Mercedes laughs as she explains that she

advised the mother to go ask young people or educated people in the community what a fax was.

The situation was eventually resolved after the mother traveled a great distance to a university,

where she was able to send the birth certificate. Although these situations were less common

when families lived in urban areas, they were significant barriers for rural families or families

who spoke lesser known languages. This could hold up reunification cases for months, thus

extending the youth's stay in the government shelter.

Once identities have been established, case managers must begin to dig into the

monotony of everyday life. Nicki, who conducts home studies for cases that have raised red

flags, explains that she follows a check list, looking for everything from income to the physical

household:

> "There is the description of the sponsor's home and of their community. I have to see
> every room in the home and make sure that there is nothing of concern in the home,
> including smoke detectors and that the minor has a room of his/her own. And I have to be
> shown that room. And to see that there are signs that they're preparing for the minor to
> come: maybe a bed or some clothes that they have prepared. And then I talk to them
> about their relationship and motivation why they want to take on this task of being a
> sponsor."

Some of these requirements are objective, for example, the requirement that a youth have a

private room. Yet, this objective requirement is steeped in assumptions about class and culture. It

ignores, first, the realities of income and space, especially for poor families living in expensive,

metropolitan areas. Further, it is rooted in an American standard of privacy, which was only accessible to the average American teen post-World War II and has been driven by consumption practices and beliefs about the site being a tool in teen maturation (Reid 2012). In short, this "objective" standard is chock-full of class and culture biases.

The more subjective areas of the evaluation include understandings of relationships and motivation. Family reunification specialist, Nicki, discussed how she must "read between the lines" in her interviews to determine if she believes the sponsors will truly "step up to the plate" to parent the youth. Ashley, another worker who evaluates the "red flag" cases, explained that she looks at the discipline techniques a parent might use: "How do you discipline your kids? What would be appropriate discipline for this child? What are your rules going to be in your home?" If parenting techniques are not deemed suitable, Ashley provides education to shape parenting practices to align with American standards of discipline. Nicki does the same:

> "I try to have a discussion about the parent, about what their parenting style is like and their discipline and how they might imagine parenting, you know, whether it is an adolescent that they don't know very well or a younger child. So what their discipline style might be like, as well."

These questions also instill dichotomized understanding of child/parent relations: by teaching parents appropriate discipline techniques, Ashley and Nicki are also reminding parents that they are responsible for and in charge of youth. The possible agency and independence of youth is largely lost here. Ashley, too makes clear that these evaluations are left to her subjective decisions: "Sometimes I just felt like we weren't using tools. It was kind of like: 'Well, if I feel like this is okay, then I can argue in my report.' As long as I am an effective, persuasive written, then I can get done what I think needs to be done."

Parents who are undocumented also face a different set of barriers in proving their ability to care for their own children. Being undocumented does not preclude a parent from being

reunited with his or her child. However, it does create tensions that appear to case managers as red flags. For example, youth are often afraid of discussing their parents with social workers in the shelter, if they know their parents to be undocumented. Merecedes explains "Many times they don't want to tell us 'My mom is here,' because many times the mom doesn't have legal status, so they don't want to say this and put the mom in danger." This was the case for Edwin, who migrated at age thirteen. Although Edwin's father lived in the U.S. and had made the decision for Edwin to migrate, he did not come forward to have Edwin released from the ORR shelter. Instead, a family friend who was documented completed the sponsorship process, and once Edwin had been released to him, promptly turned Edwin over to his father. This issue may also occur when case managers attempt to contact family members in the home country in order to ask about the sponsor: these family members are also wary of providing information if they know that the potential sponsor is undocumented.

In addition, undocumented status can also influence the mundane of everyday life. Mercedes explains that a particularly frustrating aspect of undocumented status is having what is called a "transportation plan" in place. Parents must prove that they are able to transport their children safely and legally. Undocumented parents who drive without a license must set up a different plan for their children. This frustrated Mercedes tremendously. She comments that she knows full well that in an emergency, the license-less parent will surely drive a car. But instead, she must ask for a specific transportation plan. "I feel so stupid asking for that. The sponsor was like, 'well he's going to school by bus, and we live in a little city, so we can use public transport if I can't drive my kid.' And I was like, yeah, okay." Similarly, Nicki explains that she requires undocumented parents to provide a safety plan for the care of their children in case they are deported. The irony of the situation here are the multiple, contradictory roles carried out by the

U.S. government in relation to these transnational families. Thus, being undocumented, while not an impenetrable barrier, causes further problems that are not adequately acknowledged.

The barriers of being undocumented continue when parents must agree to certain tasks once the children are released: several workers commented on the difficulty of convincing undocumented parents to take their children to court when the parents themselves felt unsafe in doing so. Veronica, who advocated for youth in shelters and upon release, was frustrated that the sponsor, who was an uncle of a young woman, was procrastinating on attending a sponsor orientation:

> "But he kept saying that he was busy because of work and he kept putting it off. And I would think to myself how he has already been through so much in having her in his home because of all of the interviews you have to go through to make sure it is a safe home. I couldn't really understand why he didn't go to that workshop. And then when he told me that he wasn't going to drive her to court, that also seemed odd to me, until he didn't have another choice but to tell me that he didn't have status…"

Yesenia, a community social worker, told a similar story, of a sponsor who was afraid of losing his job, and thus didn't follow through on taking his son to court. She expressed frustration both at the parent for his perceived lack of follow through, but also acknowledge the fear he felt when approaching this legal institution.

Parents have more difficulty in proving their caretaking abilities when they themselves have been victims, such as in relationships with intimate partners. Cases of domestic violence, for example, complicate governmental beliefs about parental adequacy by creating a concern that abused mothers are more likely to abuse children (Lapierre 2010). Lindsey, a case manager working on family reunification, tells a story about a mother who had been a victim of domestic violence:

> "She has a restraining order against her ex-partner, which is important for us because we obviously don't want that man around the house. But I end up asking her all of these questions about her domestic violence past, requesting the restraining order documents,

and it was really just invading her privacy. And she was like, I don't understand why you need this information. This man is out of my life. I just want my daughter."

The issue becomes more complicated when there exists a history of domestic violence and the culpable party remains in the home. Kantor and Little (2003) explain that a woman who is unwilling or unable to leave an abusive partner is seen as negligent or abusive herself. Further, domestic violence has become medicalized as a chronic condition (Sweet 2015). Ashley details:

> "The hardest [cases] for me were DV [domestic violence] situations. So, like, they were reunifying with the parents, the dad has previous DV records, you meet with them, they seem find, but it is kind of like, we are throwing this girl to the wolves because you can't really prove… The nature of DV is they might not be actually admitting it… It's like, I want to believe you, I don't want to keep your kid from you, but at the same time, you never know."

Parents are also culpable for any other danger that has befallen their children, with the underling presumption that they were unable or unwilling to prioritize their child's safety, thus indicating their inadequacy as parents. Lapierre (2010) suggests that mothers use many strategies to protect their children physically and emotionally during domestic violence, but these strategies are often unrecognized by government institutions. Mercedes, again frustrated by this system, explains the bind she found herself in when trying to prove a mother's ability to care for her child, despite a situation in which the child was abused by another family member.

> "The kid was physically abused by an uncle in home country and finally he runs away and wants to go to America. Because of the abuse, this mom has to undergo a home study. The home study takes one or two months and the kid has to be with us for one or two months when the mom is like, 'In the moment I realized about the abuse, I took the kid out of there.'"

Mercedes expresses frustration that the mother was blamed for the abuse, despite, in Mercedes estimation, having done everything she could have when she became aware of the abuse. Here, parents are blamed for much larger structural issues with little acknowledgement of the differences of parenting children in dangerous environments.

As Mercedes demonstrates, humanitarians are not necessarily unaware of the binds in which parents find themselves when trying to prove their parenting abilities. Just as general child welfare case managers feel constrained by the welfare system (Shdaimah 2010), these humanitarians are also trapped in a system that views these parents with suspicion and blame. Several case managers, particularly those working directly with the family reunification process, expressed the frustrations they felt when they wanted to release a child to a parent but could not do so legally. Lindsey explains:

> "Since we are in touch with the families and see the kids every day, we get a real sense of who these people are. So a lot of times, actually, I will think that the family is totally ready, the child is ready. Just by the conversations I have with them and the day-to-day interactions. Whereas ORR sees it as documented on paper, they want more concrete documentation and things like that to prove the relationship and their intentions behind sponsoring the minor."

Mercedes agrees:

> "ORR has no idea about these kids. They don't know these kids. For them, the kid is just the case, and it's just a number… But you are there, you are dealing with the kids, crying many times, crying many nights, and the sponsor says to you: 'How many more things do you need from me? I mean, I'm the mom!' So you are there in the middle. Many times I would really like to call my federal field specialist from ORR and say to her: 'Hey, come here. Like really, come here. Meet this kid and talk to the mom on the phone and tell me that they don't have a good relationship and this is not a good environment." "Why do we need to know someone's life, their whole life, in order to get their own kid? ... If we think that it's not a safe environment, it's like: 'Oh, I know you are the mom, but you are not going to get your kid.' Really? Who are we? I don't think that I have the power or I should be deciding if a mom can have her kid or not."

Thus, humanitarians in the borderlands are asked to judge parental adequacy based on standards that are often inappropriate for the particular situations in which parents find themselves. Parents are expected to jump through transnational hoops that don't align with the resources that are available to them. Immigrant parents are expected to comply with American standards of parenting. Release requirements are often inappropriate for the structural barriers

faced by undocumented parents. And parents who are victims of violence themselves or whose children have been victims, are seen as failing in their parental duties.

Placement Decisions: Inadequacies of the Adult/Child Binary

Once placement decisions are made and sponsors are deemed adequate, youth are then sent to live with either parents or other adult caregivers. Generally, the social workers that made these placements felt positive about the youths' futures with their sponsors; these social workers felt that they had followed the rules and had adequately prepared youth and families for reunification. Further, the ORR currently conducts 30-day follow-up calls to determine if these placements are adequate. According to the website, ninety percent of parents and sponsors were reached in this 30-day follow up, and of these, only five percent reported problems that required interventions ("Unaccompanied Children's Services" 2016). However, this number does not coincide with my qualitative findings—possibly because 30 days is very little time to measure the success of a placement. In my findings, of the seven youth with whom I spoke for this project and who had been given a placement from the government, only two had remained with those placements while minors (see Table 4).

Table 4. ORR Placement Outcomes

Pseudonym	Age at Arrival	Initial Placement	Remained in placement while minor?
Youth Detained at Border (Placement decision made by ORR)			
Cynthia	14	Foster mother	Yes
Javier	15	Parents	No –moved with uncle
Marco	16	Cousin	No –moved with church member
Mariana	16	Father	No –moved with community member
Angelica	16	Uncle	No –moved with separate family and then with boyfriend
Nicolas	17	Father	Yes
Edwin	13	Family friend	No – moved with father and then moved to independent living

There are multiple reasons that placements do not work. I argue that these failed

placements are not necessarily the result of parental and sponsor inadequacy or insufficient

adherence to ORR standards but rather ORR's inability to match placement standards and

sponsor resources to the real-life scenarios of youth. In particular, there is a distinct failure to

recognize life processes that vary from traditional notions of American adolescence as well as

non-traditional relationships between the adults and youth in a household. Thus, the government

expectations for these households and the support provided do not match the realities in which

youth find themselves.

Sponsors: Foster Care without the Check?

Non-parent sponsors are considered a riskier placement than parents, so in addition to the

stated policies from the above section, case managers have specific expectations for the type of

relationships that sponsors will maintain with youth. They are, for all intents and purposes,

tasked with parenting the youth. Sponsors must agree to complete some practical elements of

youths' incorporation into their new homes, such as helping youth sign up for school and

accompanying youth to their court hearings. They also must provide for the physical and mental

well-being of the youth. Taylor, whose job is to verify these placements explains that she looks

for a sponsor who is "aware of developmental needs of youth and children":

> "What we always look for is sponsors who are very aware. They are aware that a minor
> has been through this journey, that a minor has experienced sexual abuse or has reported
> some kind of abuse. They are aware that that is something I should pay attention to,
> something I should stay on top of, something that I am responsible for."

Sponsors who aren't willing to take this type of responsibility are often flagged with suspicion.

Brenda explains that one red flag for potential sponsors is the unwillingness to help out the youth

financially:

"A lot of the youth and their families acquire a debt for the journey, and I ask: Is the minor going to be responsible for paying that? If they say yes, that is kind of a red flag. Then I ask, so, is he going to be responsible to pay it off right away or is it going to be something that once the minor can legally work and has graduated high school—although we know that in many cases they are not going to do that, especially older kids… but I inquire about their long term commitment, especially if this is a kid who is 17. I say, well, even though your legal responsibility is going to end when he turns 18, you understand that the kid is going to need help beyond the age of 17."

Sponsors are clearly tasked with providing parental support in emotional, physical and financial ways. Non-parent sponsors are treated by humanitarians as if they were foster parents, although they receive neither the training nor the financial support that foster parents do. As Layla, an educator who I interviewed, wryly stated: sponsorship is "foster care without the check." In my findings, both with the youth that I interviewed, and also in talking with humanitarians who worked with youth after released, sponsors often did not or could not live up to these high expectations. Although youth frequently did find the support that they needed to thrive, this was often not through the ORR-appointed sponsor.

Angelica's story provides a clear example of this discrepancy. Through ORR, Angelica had been placed with an uncle that she did not know. She did not talk a lot about this uncle, other than explaining that he lived with his wife and daughter, and that she felt uncomfortable living with someone who was virtually a stranger to her. Angelica says she put up with only two weeks there before she sought out someone else that she knew who would take her in. There were family friends that lived in a town nearby who went to a church that she wanted to be a part of. Angelica told her uncle that she would move in with them instead, so that she could go to the church. The uncle agreed to the move. This new family provided a stable home for Angelica for several months, and they helped her to register for school. However, she soon became unsettled there as well. She explains that it is sometimes difficult when one is raised in a different country to get along with people here. Angelica felt uncomfortable sleeping in a make-shift bed in the

corner of the daughter's bedroom. Plus, the family often wanted Angelica to do the cooking and cleaning for the household. Angelica explains that she was trying to go to school and keep up with the family's chores, and she often wasn't able to get enough sleep. Further, the family didn't provide Angelica her own food, so Angelica was forced to buy this on her own. Angelica's boyfriend—who had immigrated to the states a year and a half before her—began helping her pay for food. Soon, Angelica made the decision to leave this family and move in with her boyfriend. She explains that he has always supported her and her desire to finish her education. Although she must still work several hours a week to help pay for expenses, her boyfriend has been fully supportive of her education, and he pays for the bulk of food and rent so that she can finish high school.

In Angelica's story, it is clear that the government appointed sponsor, although related, was simply not a viable option for Angelica. Further, despite government policies regarding sponsors' obligations to the youth, this uncle did not seem concerned in letting Angelica leave. His sense of obligation, at least based on the story Angelica tells, was minimal. The second family had not agreed to any governmental requirements, but did provide some support, such as helping Angelica pursue school. However, it was clear that Angelica was required to earn her very meager keep in this household, which made Angelica uncomfortable. She felt conflicted that she was both a dependent of the household and also, for all intents and purposes, an employee. Angelica finally landed in a safe home with her long-term boyfriend. This became the first house in which Angelica felt welcomed, supported and, indeed, loved. It is also a placement that is strictly forbidden by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, since Angelica is a minor, and a placement that precludes Angelica from pursuing a Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa as a relief option, since this option requires her to have a legal guardian.

Similar to Angelica, Marco also experienced instability after being placed with a sponsor. Marco's family had a difficult time finding him a placement when he was detained. He was supposed to be released, first, to a cousin, but the cousin was honest that he was not able to cover the expenses of supporting Marco. Eventually Marco's family found a friend who, in Marco's words, agreed to help Marco "get out." The friend went through the approval process and Marco was eventually released to him. However, this friend was undocumented and lost his job not long after Marco arrived. At this point, the friend asked Marco to find a different living arrangement. Through the local church, Marco connected with an older man who agreed to take him in. Marco says that he is like an adopted son for this man and he feels like a part of the family.

While Angelica chose to leave the sponsor's home, Marco was asked to leave. In this scenario, the issue was financial and legal, with the sponsor not receiving the support that he needed to take on another mouth to feed. Plus, since Marco wanted to go to school and was required to do so due to the SIJS relief that he hoped to pursue, Marco was not able to work and thus relied on adults for financial support. Marco was able to utilize the local church to find a better home situation, and he says that he feels very lucky in this aspect. He sees other kids around him suffering, but he has the opportunity for a stable home that allows him to finish high school.

Humanitarians who worked with youth upon release, specifically teachers, told me many more stories of failed sponsor placements. Karen, who was an educator that worked with at-risk populations in her school district, spoke of multiple scenarios in which migrant youth were living with family friends and expected to pay for housing and food, send money back to the family remaining in the United States, and still attend high school. In these cases, despite good intentions, sponsors do not always have the financial means to support youth who wish to attend

high school. When this happened, youth were often asked to find a different living arrangement. Lisa, another educator working with migrant youth in her district, recounted many similar stories, with youth ending up in abusive placements or homeless. Lisa told me that she had recently helped one young man who had felt unsafe in his sponsor's home: the sponsor was violent and pressured the young man to drink. Lisa was able to use her Facebook network to find a room for the young man to rent from a community member. In these stories, there was a significant disjuncture between the governments' belief about sponsors and the realities of these situations. In both Karen's and Lisa's stories, youth are perceived as burdens to the sponsors, either because they are another mouth to feed for families that are already struggling or because they bring legal attention to the sponsors, who fear this attention due to their immigration statuses.

It is important to recognize that there *are* adults who are essential to youths' success in the U.S. Community members such as teachers and church members are often vital in providing youth support, guidance, and in some cases, legal guardianship. The cases above show that these relationships may look like foster care placements (such as was the case with Marco), but just as often, they are better modeled after peer support or mentorship models (like Angelica's case). Just as several researchers have demonstrated the importance of these mentor-like networks among immigrant communities (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011; Ramirez 2011; Canizales 2015), my research further supports the idea that youth can be successful in sponsorship models that are more mentor-based than parent-based. For example, Andres, a young man from Mexico, migrated by himself at age 14 with the intention of supporting his younger siblings' education. Once he arrived in the U.S., he bounced around between living an uncle and living with forty men in a trailer supplied by his employer. It was at this time that he reunited with a friend from

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home, who was only a few years older than Andres, who had also migrated alone as a minor. This friend took Andres under his wing, bringing him to a job with better pay and helping Andres to locate better living conditions. The friend also encouraged Andres to go to high school, bringing Andres to the local school and helping him sign up. This story demonstrates that parental figures are not always the best and only resource for youth. In chapter 6, I will explore an organization that relies on this type of mentorship in lieu of government-assigned sponsors.

These wide-ranging stories paint a complicated picture of sponsorship. ORR policies anticipate "normal" family-like dynamics between youth and their sponsors. However, when these dynamics do not naturally emerge due to challenges faced by the families, there is minimal support provided to create these dynamics. And, in cases where youth are released to virtual strangers, there is often little incentive for either the youth or the sponsor to attempt to create this type of household. Further, what a youth needs and wants out of a sponsor also varies tremendously. Although the youth that I have featured here all valued the ability to attend high school and wanted placements that would allow them to do so, many of them also wanted the independence to work and design their own future. Adequate placements would acknowledge this diversity and provide appropriate support for sponsors. They would further understand the range of supportive relationships that can occur between youth and adults, such as peer-based or mentorship assistance. While case managers were tasked with documenting legal relationships and teaching discipline techniques, youth would be better served by structural resources that truly responded to the diversity of their needs.

Falsely Glorified Family Reunification

While ORR case managers often felt confident about sponsor placement decisions, they were even more optimistic about family reunification between parents and their children.

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Reunification specialist Lindsey commented that it was the best part of her job: "My favorite part is working with the sponsors, being able to facilitate that reunification. It is a beautiful thing, being able to see a child and a mother, for example, and how they interact after being separated for so long." And yet, researchers have already established that even placements with parents are complicated, after years of family separation. Lam et al (2011) explains that family reunification is often highly anticipated but leaves many teens disillusioned and alienated. Fresnoza (2015) suggests that this is especially true of older teens and in cases in which the parents have started new families. And, when talking with research participants who saw the aftermath of this reunification, these realities were clear in my research as well. Susana explains:

"A lot of people really romanticize the reunification process. This kid made it here, and now he's going to be together with his mom or uncle or whoever. And that situation, at first, seems really exciting. But then all of these issues start coming up."

Four of my research participants were reunited with parents immediately: Nicolas, Javier, Mariana, and Edwin (although Edwin had been placed with a friend but quickly reunified with his father). However, Nicolas is the only one to remain living with that parent. He reported that feels comfortable in his dad's house, although he says that he doesn't feel like he knows his father very well. The other three participants did not remain with their parents while minors for several reasons.

Javier was generally reticent when he discussed his migration with me. I asked him questions, such as why he immigrated, and he would respond: "It is really difficult to explain. It is hard to explain." However, when I ask what happened when he was placed with his family and why he didn't stay with them, he quickly and easily articulated the details:

"Because I haven't known them since I was a boy. I haven't seen them. Or rather, we talk but it's on the phone and we don't know if it is really them or if they are other people, like friends. That's why when I arrived, I saw them and I started thinking: let's see if they are really my parents or not. I have younger sisters that are from here, two of them. But I

don't get along with them either because I feel like they bother me, that's why. And when every day I would fight with my dad—there are times that he would tell me things and I would get angry… and that's why I went to live with my uncle because I don't know if my relationship [with my dad] will ever work."

Javier moved in with an uncle who, according to Javier, treats him like his own son. I ask what the difference is, and Javier explains that he doesn't fight with his uncle and his uncle gives him advice. Javier says that his father would give him advice too, but this advice would make him angry. For example, his father would tell him not to do drugs, but Javier insists that he would never do drugs—he has been like that since he was a kid. Although Javier doesn't articulate this directly, this comment seems to be full of resentment for his father, who never really knew Javier. Javier's difficulties living with his family stem both from his anger that his father does not understand him but also the difficulties of entering a "blended" family, with some of his sibling born in the United States. Just as other youth shared, Javier found the cultural difference with his siblings paired with his own alienation from his parents, too much to bear.

Edwin shares a similar experience with Javier. ORR did not release Edwin to his father but to a family friend; however, when this man picked him up from the airport, he told Edwin that he would be living with his father after all. However, Edwin did not remain with his father either. When I spoke with him, at age 17, Edwin was living on his own, attending a high school and working as a bus boy. He explains that his father had a new family and so Edwin had left the household. Like Javier, Edwin experienced a profound sense of alienation from both his father and also his American half-siblings. In addition, although he had lived with his grandmother in his home country, Edwin was largely independent as a child. He had been working to feed his family since a young age, and he was largely comfortable continuing to live in this independent way in the U.S. Edwin explained that he no longer needs his father or his father's advice: "I don't want his advice anymore. I can live my own life." Unique to Edwin's situation was the fact

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that Edwin was able to manage work full time and attend high school while living independently. This was not without significant barriers, of course, but Edwin felt more at ease balancing these demands by himself than he did living with his father.

The issues of disconnection and resentment came up with multiple humanitarians who witnessed this stage of family reunification. Aurora, a child advocate, talked about the resentment a teenage girl felt when reunifying with her mother:

> "I think she is very angry all the time. She is very angry at her mother. She felt that… her mother picked her boyfriend over her. Not only did she pick her boyfriend over her, but she left when she was a child. She abandoned her in Mexico. And now when she is finally reunited with this mother that she doesn't really know much about, because she left when she was young, like three or four, and now she gets back when she's 12 so she doesn't know her mom."

And Tiffany, a teacher, saw in her reunited students, a difficulty in feelings of belonging:

> "He lives with his parents, but it has been very difficult. They are very cordial with each other, but he never really felt like he belonged. Because they went so many years at such a critical time growing up."

Emmanuel, a counselor, talked about working with youth on becoming part of the family system again.

> "There is a lot of disconnection and there is a lot of hurt feelings from the youth that their parents or their relatives kind of left them in their native country on their own. So they're living over here and the idea of reuniting—there is still a lot of lack of connection, lack of trust, a lack of relationship. So when family members have certain expectations of them—like, oh you've got to behave in this manner, the youth, not only do they have trauma, but they are already have their way of living… it is difficult to listen to [their parents] when there is no trust or relationship."

Emmanuel notes that youth were often resistant to the idea of having to live under the authority of parents for the first time in their memories. They have already established themselves in independent ways, and moving in with parents is a significant emotional challenge due both to their independent sense of self and also expectations and resentments that have been harbored.

Mariana's reunification with her father had far worse consequences than these examples. Mariana was placed with her father and his new wife once she was released from the immigration shelter, but within weeks she knew that this new situation was not going to work. She describes her father as a jealous man who would not let her leave the house, who demanded the passwords to her social media accounts, and who insulted her. This culminated one night when she woke up to him on top of her, touching her, drunk and mumbling that she looked like her mother. Only nights later, he arrived to the house intoxicated again, and began hitting his wife. Mariana's stepsister called the police, and within two months, her father had been deported. While her father's deportation relieved the violence in the household, Mariana soon discovered that with him away, she was no longer welcome. Like other youth in this research, Mariana's ability to integrate into a blended family proved difficult, and her belonging in this family was contingent upon her father's presence. The family wanted her to pay rent, which she could not afford as she wanted to finish high school. Mariana was fortunate to have a supportive school system, and when she told her school counselor what had happened, the counselor worked to help find Mariana an unofficial foster family in the community. This family has provided Mariana tremendous support, and she remains with them to this day.

The ORR has strict mechanisms in place to avoid placing youth in abusive situations. However, in this case, these mechanisms failed, leaving Mariana vulnerable to violence and, ultimately, trapped in a household that did not support her goals and growth. As in other cases mentioned above, the school system proved to be Mariana's lifeline, finding her supportive community members who could provide the financial support and caring environment that she wanted. In Mariana's situation, a positive placement was one in which she did not have to work; she was happy to focus on advancing her educational goals.

Family reunification poses unique challenges. While parents might have more motivation than sponsors to keep youth in the household, this does not always play out as everyone hopes. Youth might have resentments toward their families or, as they have often grown up independently, might be uncomfortable subscribing to the rigid adult/child binaries. With this in mind, I argue that placement decisions need to understand the gray area between adolescence and adulthood and realistically consider the balance that youth will need to negotiate with their parents.

Conclusion

The humanitarian borderlands often rely on adult, parental figures to help youth navigate their new lives. Whether through sponsor placement or family reunification, the borderlands anticipate that adults will be an important part of youth resettlement. However, the ways in which the borderland approaches these parental figures frequently relies on American, middle class understandings of parenting and adult child relationships. In this chapter, I complicated transnational family literature by focusing on the agentic role of youth in these families. I argued that ORR policies do not account for youth agency and further rely on narrow understandings of family experiences and dynamics when making placement decisions. In particular, I showed how white American, middle class logics are applied, first, to judging parental behavior, in order to determine parental adequacy; however, these logics unfairly place suspicion and blame on parents who have parented in very different environments from the American middle class. Then, I argued that government placement decisions and support incorrectly assume that all unaccompanied youth will maintain traditional familial dynamics with their parents and sponsors and that youth and adults fall squarely into binary understandings of adulthood and childhood. However, the reality is that youth placement needs very tremendously, based on a spectrum of

independence that youth display. This faulty assumption results in inadequate support and dire

consequences when these placements do not follow the assumed paths.

Chapter 4: Borderland Legendry

The second major field of the humanitarian borderlands is the field of legal relief, in which attorneys attempt to integrate youth into the state. This field is constructed almost entirely through storytelling. Stories are powerful tools. Stories give oppressed peoples the ability to self-define (Collins 2000), make political alliances and advance their needs (Polletta 2006), create communities and legitimize experience of marginalized groups (Swerts 2015), and contribute to peace making and peace building (Senehi 2002). Stories, when given an authentic voice of the oppressed, are potent tools that dismantle power structures. But stories are also tools to maintain power. "Storytelling often represents the most ideological moments," explains Eduardo Bonilla Silva (2010, p. 75). Stories can help to frame the world we live in while also obscuring the complex and sometimes hidden nature of that world. In this way, storytelling promotes the status quo. It may obscure racial inequalities (Bonilla Silva 2010), stir up national panics (Chavez 2008), or rationalize inadequate responses to injustices (Ruehs, n.d.).

Storytelling by humanitarian subjects has a particular function. Humanitarian storytelling is used to reveal past suffering with the purpose of legitimizing that suffering as psychological trauma. This trauma, in turn, guarantees humanitarian subjects the ability to receive aid from NGO's and government entities. Nguyen (2010) refers to this as therapeutic citizenship, a "thin citizenship" in which access to safety and resources are not issued by a state but rather a collection of organizations that require created subjectivities around suffering. Victims who can master these "confessional technologies" are more able to access benefits and safety (Hunt 1997; Nguyen 2010). Similarly, James (2010b) calls these "technologies of trauma," which are the means by which a humanitarian subject can be granted legitimacy as a sufferer. In order to gain legitimacy, humanitarian subjects and their stories must be ahistorical and often rely on racialist

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and colonialist scripts (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). For example, Cantú, Luibhéid, and Stern (2005) demonstrate how LGTBQ asylum seekers must often rely on stories that frame their home cultures as deficient and backwards while furthering a narrative of the United States as a progressive haven. Humanitarian stories must also stand upon tightropes of moral legitimacy and continued suffering (Ticktin 2011). In this rests a strange irony: suffering—the language of the humanitarian subject and story—is privileged, and those who can best tell their story receive more rights from government entities than those whose stories and suffering are not legitimized (Fassin 2012). Further, stories of suffering garner legitimacy to humanitarian subject, but they also become productive things for governments and bureaucracies alike (James 2010a). Testimonies of suffering can be used by governments and the international community, not as a method of empowerment as they are framed but rather as a collection of facts that can recognize victims and indict war crimes (Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

In this chapter, I outline the storylines of unaccompanied youth that are used to turn these youth into humanitarian subjects and thus integrate youth into the institution of the state. I put forward the concept of a "borderland legend," that is a narrative about youth that manipulates the facts of youths' lives in order to turn youth into neo-liberal subjects that can be processed by the humanitarian systems. I argue that although humanitarians individually might display compassion for all youth, the securitizing mechanisms of the border force these humanitarians to play into a system that dichotomizes youth based on these legends. The problem with borderland legends is not that the stories are false. Rather, the problem is that the stories are filled with paradoxical traps yet the telling of these stories smooths over the tensions, nuances and complicated realities of youths' lives. Borderland legends rely on neoliberal logics of personal responsibility and ignore the difficulties that structural barriers impose on youth. In doing so,

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borderland legends create impossible standards for youth whose lives depend on these fantastical

story arcs. Real youth and their real stories rarely measure up to legendary youth. My

intervention in this chapter is thus a critique of neoliberal subjectivities and how these

subjectivities rely on legend-like material that transcends everyday realities of youths' lives.

In this chapter, I explore the story arc of borderland legendry, using the example of a

young woman named Cynthia. I provide her story, first, with little nuance, to demonstrate the

characteristics of a borderland legend. I then follow with a critique of the telling of the story. I

identify two salient tensions that exist in such borderland legendry: dependent agency and stable

instability. Next, I argue that borderland legendry is required not just for legal relief but to fulfill

the social contract of humanitarianism. Finally, I demonstrate how perceptions of criminality

haunt these stories, creating deadly consequences.

Story Arcs

A borderland legend is a very particular type of story that is constructed by humanitarians

in the borderland that creates humanitarian subjectivities within the constraints of borderland

logics. That is, the tension of these particular stories rests in the competing logics of aid and

threat: humanitarian subjects must simultaneously prove that they are deserving while also

responding to the dichotomizing ideologies of safe and dangerous. Because of this tension, these

legends rely even more on neoliberal displays of personal responsibility. Borderland legends are

used by humanitarians as the currency of humanitarian aid. They are, in the most practical sense,

currency to be exchanged for legal relief, an affidavit or testimony to be handed to a judge in

hopes of U.S. residency. They are also currency exchanged among humanitarians, the media, and

politicians. These legends become fodder in political debates about the U.S. response to youth,

passed among stakeholders as justification for immigration reform. Simultaneously, they are

used to rationalize the inclusion of some youth and to justify the exclusion of others in humanitarian systems.

I am not immune to borderland legendry with its miraculous, yet utterly predictable story arc. A borderland legend begins with a strong character, children whose origins of poverty and violence do not dim their internal lights. We must root for these characters, and feel deeply that they are innocent and deserving. The rising action of the legend is when youth make the extraordinary decision to rely on their own strength and resilience to flee this dangerous beginning. The harrowing quest follows, where, despite their great vulnerability, youth traverse international borders, escaping, if not unscathed, still relatively whole in body and spirit. I love the arrival, that is, the falling action: the warm welcome into the generous country that opens its arms to the refuse of the world. And then the resolution: youth find a loving home, they receive help and education, and we watch them walk into the bright horizons of their American dreams.

Cynthia was my first legend. I've known her since she was fifteen as I was a volunteer advocate for her, and I have felt both admiration and pride when I think about her life. When I told her last year about my research, she volunteered to participate, and we met in her home for an interview. Cynthia fled a perfect storm of legend-making: poverty, neglect and patriarchal oppression. She was a desperately poor indigenous girl in rural Central America. Her father was gone and her mother was neglectful, frequently disappearing on drunken binges, leaving Cynthia in charge of younger siblings for days on end. Going on just 10-years of age, Cynthia would stop her infant brother's crying with water and coffee—the only sustenance that was available while her mother was gone. Cynthia laughs bitterly as she tells me this; her own infant is in her arms, drinking a bottle of formula. But Cynthia doesn't hate her mother. She explains:

With her, when she was… when she wasn't drunk like that, she would help me and all that. She was good. But when she would leave, she would leave for weeks. She wouldn't come back and I would have to look for her because she would leave us with nothing.

Cynthia began working, washing clothes to buy shoes for her brother: *Era como mi hijo* (He was like my son). But life did not getting better: as rumors swelled about her mother's licentious money-making, Cynthia, too, became an object of ridicule. "*Puta!*" ("Whore!") people would yell at her, as she walked down the streets. Cynthia describes being suicidal at this point, unable to cope with the hardship around her. So, she began weighing her options: She considered going to the capital to find better work and send money to her siblings. Instead, she heard a rumor that a man was taking women and girls North to find work. He would find them work in the U.S., and they could pay him through that work. Cynthia didn't hesitate.

At the point that I'm listening to Cynthia's story during our full interview, I've known Cynthia for years and I had put together bits and pieces of her life through multiple conversations. But I am struck by this moment, this rumor of a man who will bring her to the United States. I stop her mid-story, a bit shocked: "Did you trust him?" I ask. Cynthia reflects on this question:

> In those times, I didn't know evil. As they say, I was really ignorant. I didn't know anything about life. For me, everything was normal: "Oh, they just want to help." But I didn't know what was happening. Now I realize: Oh wow. That happened. Well, knowing what I know now, I wouldn't have come. With how much they kill, they rape and they do all of those things…"

Cynthia's story continues. She decided to trust this man and leave. She describes her leaving as an escape: her mother wanted her to migrate North, but her grandparents were not convinced. They believed she was just looking for men and, regardless, immigrating was not a woman's role. The day that her grandparents threatened to lock her in the house so she cannot

leave, Cynthia escaped at midnight into the mountains. She met up with a woman from the community who was also going with the man, and they began their journey.

It is difficult to follow Cynthia's recollections of this journey because it was difficult for her to understand everything. The man brought them to Mexico where Cynthia believes that he sold them to police—or other coyotes—she is not sure. She believes they are sold again, probably to new coyotes. They traveled between houses, and Cynthia explains that the coyotes would call the girls into separate rooms by themselves; the girls would always come out of the rooms crying. Cynthia thought to herself: "I don't know. Maybe they don't have money or something happened." One night, the men called her into the room. The woman from Cynthia's community exclaimed: "What are you going to say to her? She is my daughter. I have to go with." The men decided to take another girl that night instead.

And eventually they arrived to the U.S. border, where they are apprehended the first time they cross. Cynthia tells the border agents who have caught her that she is from Mexico, and they send her back across the border. She and the group try to cross again the next night, and they are apprehended again. In the third crossing and third apprehension, in which Cynthia is stuffed in a trunk with four other migrants, the truth comes out: she is a 14-year-old from Guatemala, and this fact qualifies her to fight for her right to stay in the U.S.

It is hard to say how Cynthia's story would have played out had she been 18. At 14-years-old, Cynthia was separated from the rest of the group and put in a cell for minors. She never sees the group again. I feel incredibly grateful as she explains this. I ask if she ever paid the coyote who brought her from Guatemala:

> "No, because we all got separated. I don't know anything about him now. I don't know if he exists or if he is alive. Nothing…. And thank God I don't know because imagine the debt I would have on top of it all. Because he paid a lot of money."

My stomach turns as I listen to this: Cynthia is much more than an interview participant to me. I feel tense just knowing the what-if's.

Cynthia's story arc has a happy ending, like all good borderland legends. She was transferred to a small, home-like shelter run by the U.S. government, where she felt loved and cared for. She believes that she had been gifted, for a moment in time, the childhood that she never had: she received clothes, the staff took care of her when she was sick, and she was taught daily lessons in English and other subjects. She remembers, in particular, that Don Victor would make pancakes for breakfast. Cynthia reflects on this time as some of her happiest days. After a stay in a shelter, Cynthia was transferred to a foster home in the Midwest. Her foster mother was loving but very religious and very strict. School was terribly difficult, and Cynthia cried often in the bathroom, but she moved forward with significant help from her foster family, social workers and volunteer advocates. She dug deep into her reservoirs of tenacity and resilience and pushed forward.

The short story from there: Cynthia graduates high school, gets her license as a certified nurse's assistant. She is able to receive immigration relief, although she cannot tell me what kind. I ask if it is SIJS (Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa), and she says that sounds right. She has a baby, gets married, buys a house, and has another baby. She and her young family adopt a tiny Chihuahua, and they own a more expensive car than I do. Cynthia laughs about this: I am eight years older than she is, and she is now 23, the same age I was when we first met. I do not have a house, a husband, or a baby. Although I was *her* mentor, she has always been and still is much more adult than I am.

The story I've told about Cynthia is legendary, but it is not the whole truth. During our interview, I ask Cynthia if she is happy. She gives me a tired smile. She responds that she wishes

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she could do things differently. She got pregnant too early and married too fast. Work is exhausting, and she and her husband (who was also an unaccompanied youth migrant) work opposite shifts to save on childcare. She battles with intense guilt associated with her abandonment of her younger siblings, although her own children have helped to assuage this pain. She was able to visit her home country a few years ago and was entirely disillusioned: she had planned to stay for a month but lasted only a week before purchasing a return flight home. Both she and her son had gotten sick, and she was overwhelmed caring for him without her partner's support. Her mother had continued drinking, her younger sister is now married, and her brother, who she had left at age two no longer recognized her. In the end, this is a bittersweet legend.

Yet beyond the bitterness and sweetness, Cynthia's story is also filled with important moments of tension that she has managed to balance. At the very least, the story I've told you about Cynthia has obscured these paradoxes. I've smoothed the rough edges and blurred the lines, and so despite its utter improbability, Cynthia can be used as an exemplar of a borderland subject. There are numerous tensions and traps in this story that the legend has concealed.

First, the character development of Cynthia places her as an innocent subject, despite the hidden messages of criminality throughout. Indeed, she navigates suspicions of her criminality though her embodied and enacted innocence. Second, the rising action demonstrates her agency and personal responsibility to take control over her life and situation—despite the trap that she must enact social dependency in the U.S. In the falling action, we see Cynthia settle into her life in the United States, where she must not display remnants of a traumatic past or instability. Finally, in the conclusion, Cynthia, apparently willingly, transforms herself into a neoliberal subjects who presents herself for final consumption as a borderland legend. In order to become

integrated into the state, Cynthia has had to live in a way that allows her story to be told without these tensions. Her life—but especially the narration of her life—must obscure the strain of these competing demands. In the next sections, I provide more explanation and critique of each of these areas, using examples of youth who are unable to negotiate these tensions.

Plot Twists and Death Sentences

The ultimate plot twist in a borderland legend is the revelation of criminal behavior. Real or perceived criminality is ever present in youths' lives yet a detrimental plot twist in the telling of a borderland legend. Indeed, in these borderlands, youth are criminals by their existence and guilty until proven innocent. Criminality comes in several forms: it is an embodied history, it is the inherently criminal status of the present, and it is a future possibility. So, youth who receive aid in the borderland must actively navigate the ever present accusation of criminality.

The Embodied Past

For youth in the borderlands, past guilt and innocence are believed to be embodied in the present. Humanitarians in general are often asked to read bodies to determine the voracity of trauma stories (Petryna 2002; Ticktin 2011; Ong 1995), but humanitarians in the borderlands are also asked to read criminality on the body. Jessica, an attorney, reveals her reliance on bodily markers as she reflects on whether or not she trusts her youth clients.

> "Most of the kids that I have run across came here because they were asked to be in gangs and they refused for a number of reasons… but I wonder sometimes if one or two of them are lying to me. But most of them are pretty young. None of them have tattoos. None of them seemed hardened, you know, like they've been in gangs or anything like that."

Jessica makes determinations regarding youth through physical indicators: "pretty young," "no tattoos" and "seeming hardened" can be read on the body and reveal truths. The suspicion of a lie is contested by the appearance of innocence. Similarly, Ashley, a social worker, emphasizes

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corporeal markers to argue the innocence of one of her youth clients. Her description of this

young man is peppered with terms like "bitty." She says that he was twelve but looked eight: "he

just looks like a really, really petite little guy!" He had gotten in trouble at school, acted violently

against a teacher, and was sent to a juvenile detention center. Ashley explains:

> "He lost fifteen points, and he's a little itty bitty kid. He went from 80 pounds to like 65
> pounds while he was in the juvenile detention center. Thought the he was going to be
> deported the whole time and he was petrified… He is just this really, really sweet little
> kid but has had no guidance."

For Ashley, his innocence, despite his actions, was an embodied and enacted quality. Whereas

large, strong bodies are associated with masculinity and adulthood (Swain 2003; Mora 2012), the

"little guy" in her story could only be read as a child. Since he had not matured physically into a

masculine, adult body, his stature and his weight gave him access to innocence in the realm of

humanitarianism (although, this did not protect him from the securitization mechanisms of the

borderlands).

While innocence is read through stature and presentation, criminality is also frequently

indicated through embodied identifiers, such as tattoos. Aurora, a child advocate, tells a story

about one of her first visits with a young man who had been placed in a juvenile detention center,

instead of a shelter, while his case was being processed. Aurora's understanding was that the

young man had been sent to the juvenile detention center due to a lack of beds in shelters and

because he was caught smuggling drugs, although this was believed to be part of a trafficking

ring in which he had been kidnapped and forced to commit the act. He had not been charged

criminally. Aurora had been called in to work on the case as the boy had expressed an explicit

desire to return to his home country, and the social workers on his case felt that this was not in

his best interest. Aurora's job was to learn more about his situation and work with him to learn

about his best options. Aurora held the young man in high esteem: it was clear to her, despite

some suspicious details, that he was a victim of circumstances and was highly vulnerable to violence and exploitation in his home community. She also explains that "he's witty, he's charming, he knows how to talk to people… he knows what people want to hear." However, her perception of him becomes complicated due to an embodied marker:

> "I remember so clearly a couple of things: one is that as we were talking and I'm looking at him, I saw a tattoo on his hands… And I saw that tattoo, and I'm just, I'm like [deep sigh]. I knew something wasn't right…. I didn't ask him anything. I just took a good look and called a friend, a sheriff in a police department that does gang related stuff. I drew it for him and sent it over, and he confirmed with me the gang affiliation. I'm like, oh man. I call the [social worker from his case] and am like, we have a problem. I don't know how serious this is , and I don't know if the detention facility has realized this yet, or if his attorney knows this, or how is this information at all going to… you know… not be so good for his case."

Aurora eventually decides to approach the young man directly about this tattoo. He reports being harassed by some of the kids in the facility—the main population of the juvenile detention, not the other immigrant youth. They end up discussing what he needs to do. "The last thing we talked about [before he was transferred to another state] was the need to remove that tattoo or cover it, because you're not safe… He definitely said, 'Oh yeah. I want to cover it, I want to get rid of it.'" In this story, the tattoo is an embodied marker that can both contradict established beliefs of innocence and also creates dangerous interactions with other youth. It was clear for Aurora, that the body needed to be changed for both the safety and success of this client.

Many other attorneys reported similar experiences when a tattoo was revealed on a youth client. Caroline told me about a new client that she had recently started representing:

> "This particular young gentleman does have a tattoo. It is always good for me to research this. What were the circumstances for getting this tattoo? What does it mean? Make sure it's not gang affiliated. I still have some pending questions with him. I should just know all of the details and be clear and open because as you know, immigration very serious about gang involvement. And I would like to have full disclosure and know exactly the circumstances of his tattoo."

Linda describes a case that proved impossible to when due, in part, to the embodied criminality of a tattoo:

> "One time I had a kid who had MS-13 literally tattooed on his forehead. You are probably not going to get an indiscretion. That kid was committed to that gang life. He just, it was the only place he could find family. He was here alone, had no support, that gangs literally took him in. So when it was time to put in work for the gangs, he did it and he was very proud of it."

Linda explained that although the young man was willing to explore tattoo removal, this was not sufficient for the judge who issued him a deportation order.

Tattoos were not only revealed but also discovered. Kathy told a story of a young man who clearly had not been involved in a gang. On the contrary, his testimony and corroborating evidence suggested that he was fleeing recruitment and had come to her for help. To build her case, she suggested that the client undergo a physical exam to provide corroborating evidence regarding violent acts against him. However, during this exam, a tattoo on his back was revealed. While the young man maintained that this was not a gang-related tattoo, the judge remained focused on this embodied piece of evidence, asking what it meant and why he had gotten it. Kathy asks: "How do you prove the negative, that you were not involved in gangs, especially when you have a tattoo or appearance that looks otherwise?" Similarly, Caroline told a story of an unaccompanied youth client who had been attacked and had been taken to the hospital. However, while at the hospital a tattoo on his body was revealed and he was immediately transferred to ICE. Both of these situations reveal the uncomfortable tension between humanitarian forces (physicals meant to corroborate evidence or hospitals meant to heal the body) and their connection to securitization. Without these humanitarian interventions, the judge would not have focused on an irrelevant detail that and the young man would not have been deported immediately.

These stories also reveal the potency that tattoos have despite all other evidence. Tattoos as embodied criminality were a common theme in interviews with humanitarians, just as they have been among researchers. A robust literature reveals a cultural preoccupation regarding the correlation between tattoos and other deviant behavior such as drug use (Dukes 2015), various criminal acts including assault and homicide (Liao and Chang 2014), and suicide (Carroll et al. 2002). Notably, other research points out that these relationships may in fact be spurious instead of causal, tattoos are a symptom instead of a risk (Jennings, Fox and Farrington 2014). However, Roberts and Ryan (2002) suggest that a "tattooing on an adolescent can serve as a useful, easily visible, clinical marker that may identify adolescents who are high risk of engaging in risk behavior" (p. 1061). Humanitarians use the same logic presented by Roberts and Ryan, viewing tattoos as markers of past indiscretions; their very presence marring the innocence required for humanitarian assistance.

Unfortunately for the young people that bear such tattoos, the consequences are severe as they cannot escape the intense scrutiny around these markings. Hagedorn and MacLean (2012) suggest that jurors and judges often rely on their own folk knowledge of gang tattoos, often drawing incorrect conclusions that the existence of these tattoos represents a "deep commitment" to gang life, and by extension, a wide range of anti-social behavior. However, the authors provide stirring evidence that tattoos—even with gang related symbols—do not always provide a direct link to past deviant behaviors. Further, these tattoos are often used as evidence without a simultaneous examination of the mechanisms that prompted the tattoo, such as the local community influences, a need for belonging, personal protection or even self-expression. The tattoo itself cannot speak for violent acts, criminality, or an immoral person. Hagedorn and

MacLean argue that it is the attorney's duty to break down stereotypes around gangs and draw the structural picture around the individual.

Tattoos removal is a viable option for some youth who have the resources and willingness to undergo this long, painful process. Tattoo removal can provide freedom for individuals who feel trapped by an oppressive past (Bazan 2002; Phillips 2011). However, Cerbino (2011) suggests that the criminalization of tattoos along with the practice of tattoo removal in order to find belonging in society represents a new institutional violence against poor young men in Central America. Indeed, one of Cerbino's interview participants, a young Honduran man, reports that getting a face tattoo was a positive experience in which he felt belonging into a group and a sense of power by displaying on his face something that would produce fear in others. On the other hand, in discussing tattoo removal, Cerbino remarked of the man: "*Sólo habla del dolor que ha probado, de la soledad en la que estuvo, de la verguenza que sintió y de la caída de un estado de resignación*" (p. 31).[12] Tattoos, Cerbino suggests, are a symbol of relative sovereignty over the body, while the removal of the tattoo "transforms a person into a passive or docile entity" (p. 32). Through tattoo removal, unaccompanied youth are transformed into docile humanitarian subjects. Their agency as adults is replaced by an institutionalized violence against their bodily sovereignty, reminding them of their dependency on and their precariousness in the humanitarian system.

While embodied qualities such as stature can provide "proof" of innocence, tattoos are seen as embodied proof of past criminality. Ayana, an attorney, mourned that Latino young men were often viewed as suspicious by skin color alone. They stand before a judge, often in groups, appearing as the rumored hordes of violent gangbangers. Attorney Heather explains, "There

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[12] He only talked of the pain he experience, the loneliness that was there, the shame that he felt, and the fall from a state of resignation.

definitely are some who come here who were former gang members, and they might not have…

a formal criminal history, but if they belonged to a gang in Central America, they've done some

shit. There might not be a record of it, but that's another thing." This perception is precisely the

problem, in many attorneys estimation: past criminality is a suspicion that is fueled by embodied

marker, and everybody with embodied markers has "done some shit."

Present Criminal Status and Suspicions of a Criminal Future

Past criminality or suspicions of past criminality can be embodied in the present, but this

embodiment exists alongside another present reality: all unaccompanied youth are criminals by

presence alone. Their clandestine entry into the United States and their undocumented status are

ever-present reminders of current criminality.

Reminders of criminality begin immediately when kids are detained. They are transferred

to a holding cell for up to 72 hours, which is known colloquially as *La Hielera*, or the Ice Box.

This play-on-words refers to both the Immigration and Customs Enforcement—or ICE—but it is

also a physical description of a painfully cold, cement building where detainees are covered with

nothing but foil blankets. The *Hielera* came up in most stories told by the youth about their entry

in the US, and it was a painful memory. For most, the *Hielera* represented the darkest moments

of their suffering. It was the first suggestion of their presence as criminal. Cynthia describes her

detention in la *Hielera*, which lasted a day:

> "They had me locked up for one day. They lock you up. I don't know, I never was in jail,
> but maybe that was it. They lock you up with metal, cold, with a stiff, ugly blanket. I
> cried, I yelled, I apologized: 'Why did I come? Why? Why?' I kept throwing myself on
> the floor, getting up again, and crying."

Similarly, Nicolas perceived immigration detention as a punishment. He explains that once he

was apprehended by border enforcement: "they brought us to jail." I asked how he was treated

and he complained that the lights were on twenty-four hours a day, confusing his temporal

reality. He also expressed his discomfort with being in a space reserved for criminals:

> "Well, in the jail, it was really hard because we weren't used to that, and when I was in
> jail it was really… they didn't have anything to sleep on, there was just like a cement
> bench that you could sit on, that was it. If you wanted to lay down, it was on the floor.
> That was really difficult."

Whether or not this temporary detention center is supposed to be a jail, it is very clearly read by

youth as a jail. Instead of arriving into the arms of a country that wants to provide humanitarian

assistance to vulnerable lives, they arrive into a dark, scary cell where they experience

tremendous fear, desperation and physical discomfort.

From the *Hielera*, youth will be transferred to a long term shelter as they await for

reunification. When youth face suspicions about more overt criminal backgrounds, they will be

transferred, instead, to juvenile detention centers. Aurora explains that the young man she

worked with was confused about his placement at one of these centers. As mentioned previously,

this young man had been apprehended smuggling drugs but was believed to have been forced to

do so through a trafficking ring. Aurora explains:

> "He didn't understand why he was with other criminals. Like in a jail. But he had great
> behavior. People there had nothing but good things to say about him… But definitely he
> felt that he shouldn't be there with all these other kids who committed crimes and
> horrible things, according to him."

Aurora describes this center as a punitive space. While immigrant youth are separated from the

main population, they would sometimes mingle with others and would get in trouble along with

the rest of them. All activities were monitored and everything was scheduled. There was intense

surveillance, and the young man complained about not receiving enough to eat and being

constantly cold.

> "He was wondering why he was there. Why am I here? I didn't commit a crime. And I
> always felt that it was such a punitive place to be in… for a victim of a crime… I felt that

it was such a contradiction to ask—not only to place him there, and all of the other kids there, eight of them I think—to ask of them to be on their best behavior and to be all of these things. It was such a contradiction. But he did the best he could. He was doing well, but he was at the breaking point. He didn't want to be there anymore."

Aurora's point about the contradictions of his detainment is apt. While the young man was a victim, he was perceived to be a criminal, he was placed with other criminals, and then expected to remain outside of the fray. Further, even youth who are transferred to shelters, instead of secure facilities, learn quickly that this placement is precarious. If they act out or demonstrate any modicum of connection to gang behavior, they can very quickly be downgraded from a home-like shelter to a youth detention center. Indeed, their humanitarian subjectivity is always in question and always at risk of being removed.

The reminders of criminality are also enforced through legal education. Youth are often given legal resource guides—a "Know Your Rights Handout"—by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a department created with the intention of separating care for children from the organization that prosecuted those children (Bryne and Miller 2012). This guide features on the front page clip art images of a police officer chasing a man and a set of hand cuffs. It begins with the question "Why am I being detained?" The guide explains:

> "Many of you arrived at the United States border and entered without permission or without proper documents. Maybe some of you were already living in the United States without permission before being stopped by the police or immigration authorities. You may have even been arrested and detained and taken into custody by immigration authorities." (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2014)

While the guide provides youth with information regarding their rights, it makes clear that youth have, indeed, violated a law. Humanitarians, too, are often tasked with the responsibility to remind the youth that they have broken the law, even if their personal stance differs from this political statement.

"I like to educate people no matter what. So I always explain everything to them. Everything. And sometimes it is the first time that somebody has explained everything. I say, okay, when you came into the United States—I start off, you know, countries are like houses. You can't just come into a house, I mean come into a stranger's house. You have to ask permission and get invited in. And that's house countries work. So I really just try to explain the whole process to them and educate them. And my personal stance is, I'm not here to judge anybody, so I hope that is what is coming across too. I'm not here to judge you. I'm here to help you with any context that I might be able to help in this juncture in your life." (Susana, attorney)

Here, too, we see a tension between the security and humanitarian mechanisms: Susana simultaneously reminds youth that she is here to help them, but they that have committed a criminal act.

Finally, criminality exists constantly as a potential future. Attorneys often communicated their fears that youth would become involved in legal problems. Nathan explains: "I think as the kids get more advanced into the teen years, we do have to really be concerned about the company that they are keeping and the peer influence." He goes on to say: "But as kids get older, they are becoming their own people. There is a little rebellious streak that can sometimes occur, and we have to do our best to try to help them understand the consequences are going to be steep with them." Nicki explains that she had concerned about a young man "starting to go out on his own and kind of get involved in the wrong crowd… kind of falling back into behavior he had in his own country with the gang." The youth are also reminded constantly that they are on probation as possible future criminals. Nancy explains to the youth that she counsels:

"Until you become a US citizen, you are under the microscope of the government so even after you get your green card no drugs, you can't drink and drive, you can't get in a fight, you can't. Everything has to be above board. You have to be better than me. Because I was born here so I get to mess up left and right… if you make similar mistakes, if they are very serious mistakes, they can put you in jail, take away your stuff and then they can send you back. Just because you have asylum, just because you have SIJ, just because you have a green card doesn't mean you get to stay here forever. It is a benefit. So explaining to them, like, if you are at a party and someone has weed, you are to walk out the door. Don't get yourself caught in these stupid situations that every kid in our country has a right to get caught in… These kids don't really have that luxury. They

can't make small mistakes. Anything with drugs, they get in a fight with their girlfriend, throw her cell phone: that could be domestic violence. So everything you do, you have to be better than people who are born here."

Nancy does not relish this conversation. Indeed, it pains her but it is necessary because the consequences are very real and very severe.

Ricky provides an extreme example of these consequences. Toward the beginning of our interview, Ricky had mentioned with a tight throat that he had lost one of the kids that he worked with. A little later, I pressed him for more information. He struggled to tell the story. The young man was spending his first Christmas in the United States. Ricky explained: "You know, Christmas is a very difficult time for a lot of the kids, because the way they celebrate Christmas in their country is very different than here. " Ricky explained that kids often get into trouble during the holiday season as they attempt to steal gifts—since they are often still not allowed to work and do not receive enough money to purchase gifts. In this case, the young man along with several friends decided to rob a house; they were apprehended as they tried to drive away. Ricky's story was cut short here: The young man is quickly deported to Central America. Within three months, his body is found on a street corner. Ricky said:

> "They throw him in a corner with burns. Tennis shoes and clothes that he had the moment he was taken were not the same as the one that he had at the moment [he was caught]. More raggedy… So they throw him in a corner and put a sign with a… *narcocorrido*. I don't know. I never found out what it was, what it said. But that is how they found him. Burned. Mostly his face is burned, chest, and he is tortured… and they throw him right in front of the corner with houses and all that. You can see the pictures. That was the end of it."

And that is the terrible plot-twist in the border legend gone wrong. Indeed, humanitarians feel it necessary to remind youth of their criminality to save them from an even worse ending.

Dependent Agency and Neoliberal Victims

Dependent Children

In order to receive the rights of minors in immigration court, unaccompanied youth must act as children. The institutions in the humanitarian borderlands, from the immigration shelters, to the court system, to the family unit, to the educational system all anticipate and, indeed, require, that unaccompanied youth are willing and able to enact characteristics of American teenagers.

The immigration shelters that youth enter shortly after apprehension are the first spaces in which dependency is required. In these shelters, youth are often required to follow strict schedules, abide by various rules regarding their dress and behavior, and attend classes. These structures are placed with the intention of providing trauma-informed care and stability to youth who have faced significant emotional and physical suffering and to allow youth to become accustomed to the structured educational system in the U.S. However, this structure also contradicts the life experience and self-concept of many of the youth residents. Rosa, a case manager in a Midwest shelter, expounds on the difficulties that many youth have when they first arrive to the shelter program:

> "Sometimes they all go crazy because they are like: 'I have never had structure in my life! I lived on the street! What the heck is this? Why are you telling me what to do? Fuck you!' … Teenagers who, some of them are working and have children or whatever (they certainly get to date)…really being like little adults working and providing maybe, and all of a sudden to be like, 'Nope you can't get water from the water fountain until we say… you can't leave your room right now.'"

Rosa begins her reflection with a critique of the rigid structures that do not fit youth's experiences but moves to seeing this also as an issue of cultural beliefs around adulthood. Whereas many of the youth she encounters have had lives that demonstrate significant responsibility for themselves and others, they feel suddenly infantilized by an institution that will not allow them to get water without permission. In Cynthia's story above, this infantilization was

a welcome reprieve from what she viewed as a stolen childhood, but for many other youth, the structure is an assault on their self-concept and life experiences.

The legal system—in conjunction with family and education—also require youth to prove their dependency. As youth pursue legal relief, they must prove both their vulnerability as minors and also their dependence on adult institutions. Youth pursuing SIJS, for example, must demonstrate their dependency on a legal guardian (or a public or private agency), and they must be living with this guardian ("Eligibility for Status for SIJ" 2011). If they are married, they are ineligible for relief: indeed, one attorney discussed pursuing a divorce for a young woman who was married, in order to complete her SIJS application. School attendance, although not required by law, presents favorably in front of a judge. It helps to establish character, dependence and works to show that staying in the United States is within the youths' best interest (Kids in Need of Defense 2015).

However, dependency is not always easy to prove or enact. Indeed, youth often display "inappropriate agency," although this is perceived in gendered ways. Many youth are more interested in working than attending school, especially as some have already been employed for years and have families—parents, siblings, or even their own partners and children to support. The idea that they must be dependent on a new family system and forego employment for education contradicts many of the reasons they may be in the United States at all. Jessica, an attorney, explains that she often encounters problems when working with older teens who may be eager to enact this "inappropriate agency."

> "My 18-year-olds, 17-year-olds usually seem to want to get out of school much quicker than the younger kids do. I feel like I am constantly battling with them, trying to tell them why they need to stay in school, why they need to listen to their legal guardian."

Here, Jessica explains that part of her work as an attorney is to convince youth to enact childhood in order to qualify for relief.

Many of the humanitarians I interviewed indicated that this tension was particularly prevalent for young men. Young immigrant men are often pressured to support family members at home (Abrego 2009) and may also deal with a self-concept that conflates this adult responsibility with their own masculinity (Ruehs 2016). Nancy, an attorney, describes the difficulty of getting boys to comply with requirements of schooling, when their goal is often to work.

> "I have the hardest time with [teenage boys] because their impulse is to be: 'I want my work permit. I don't care what you do, just get my work permit.' I will say, 'Yes, I can get your work permit but it is here [motions far away] and we are still back here.'"

In both of these quotes, boy's agency is perceived as detrimental to their cases, although the attorneys report understanding why their pull towards adult behavior exists. Boys are discouraged from adult behaviors, but they are not personally shamed.

While boys were seen as exerting inappropriate agency as they pursued work and adult activities, the rhetoric around girls and inappropriate agency took on a different focus. Girls' existence as unaccompanied minors was often met with disbelief. For example, Kathy, an attorney, tells a story in which girls' agency is questions. She describes a case in which two sisters, both pre-teens, came into the US to be reunited with an older brother. During the court proceedings, the judge focused in on the brother, asking" How could you let these girls come by themselves?" As Kathy describes, the decision to migrate was largely the girls' and yet this was not validated by the court. Rather, the court incorrectly inferred that the older brother was responsible for the migration of the girls and that the girls, themselves, were not agentic beings. Their agency was summarily dismissed.

Even more notable, girls were sometimes shamed for their agency. For example, attorney Lavonne is critical of young girls who decide to immigrate by themselves and believe that they can do so without consequence. She states:

> "It is amazing to me how many girls come from Central America alone. And why they think they will be safe on that journey! Really, you didn't think that anybody would take advantage of you? You thought you could preserve your virginity on this trip? I don't know why you thought that. But that is a very hard subject to discuss with girls."

Lavonne's comments depart from many other humanitarians' interpretations of sexual violence, but she remains consistent in her questioning of girls' ability to make informed, independent decisions. Similarly, she continues a cultural discourse that places blame on girls for sexual violence (Calhoun et al 1976; Anderson 1999; Davies et al 2001; Cohn et al 2009). She blames girls' traumatic experiences on their inappropriate agency.

Agency as Neoliberal Subjects

While dependency is required for youth to navigate humanitarian system, and while agency is often seen as inappropriate, unbelievable or shameful, agency is simultaneously required in the form of personal responsibility. While responsibility for children is often placed on the family (Rose 1990), Cradock (2007) argues that foster children are taught to enact personal responsibility since their claim to family life is tenuous. While children in foster care have little rights in determining their life situation, they can "act out" in order to assert some agency over placements. In doing so, these youth exert self-determination. Cradock explains that "such self-determination comes with a price. The freedom children in care purchase through acting out also brings responsibility for the self" (p. 168). I argue that unaccompanied youth operate within these same neoliberal logics: their agency through immigration and their tenuousness in the family system (as explored in Chapter 3) means that they are treated as

neoliberal subjects who are required to exert personal responsibility as they simultaneously enact their dependency.

Youth are reminded in both subtle and explicit ways that while they might be dependent on adults and humanitarian institutions, they must still take responsibility for their actions and life outcomes. Although humanitarians have a wide-range of personal beliefs regarding the role of personal responsibility versus structure in youths' outcomes, they are all still tasked with emphasizing personal responsibility to the youth. Dan, an attorney in the Midwest, often lectures youth on taking responsibility for their actions. In describing how he talks to these youth, he says:

> "You told me the life that you fled. You have shown such independence and strength and resiliency to be able to make it here: all of the sacrifices all of the work and time and energy and effort it took to get here. Are you willing to throw all of that away over hanging out with this crowd? Or making this bad decision, whatever the case may be? Do you really want to throw that away?"

In this lecture, Dan emphasizes the independence of the youth clients in their journey north, noting the sacrifices and reminding youth that bad decisions will squander these sacrifices. He notes, specifically, the importance of youth in making the decision to stay away from bad crowds. Later on in the interview, Dan recognizes the structural limitations for youth as they attempt to make "good decisions," but he poses to the youth themselves that they have the responsibility over their own actions. Similarly, another attorney, Julie, sees success as a matter of choice. In describing how she counseled a troubled youth, she explains:

> "I told him very clearly you have got to change your ways, you have got to keep your nose clean… You need to think like an adult here. You can't blame other people, you have got to take responsibility and realize what an opportunity you have. … I try to impress upon them: it is hard, but you need to keep trying to talk to people and learn the language and not be afraid of saying the wrong things. That is how you learn. Go to school and study all those things."

Julie suggests that youth who are successful in the borderlands are youth who must think like adults and take responsibility for themselves. Both Dan and Julie present logics that align with neoliberal personhood: the neoliberal subject embraces choice, self-regulates, and avoids vulnerability (Rose 1990, Baker 2010). Thus, unaccompanied youth must present their extreme vulnerability while simultaneously making no excuses for it. As Cradock (2007) laments, "In neoliberal forces of governance, responsibility settles on the weak and unprotected" (p. 168).

Youth's ability to take responsibility for themselves while in the U.S. also becomes a mechanism by which humanitarians can identify if youth's problems are due to structural limitations or the youth's personal flaws. If youth behaved "badly" in their home country— perhaps participating in gang activity—humanitarians could create a story about structural influences on youth behavior. But if youth continued this type of behavior in the U.S., this was no longer attributable to structure but to youth's personal choices. Susana explains:

> "You're here, you have the opportunity to try to turn things around. If you behave in a way that you start associating with gangs over here, then it is like, okay, this is a pattern for you. But if we want to prove that you were just young or just did this out of need or coercion, it will look very good if right now you are just going to school, you stay out of trouble."

The rules of neoliberal logics applied only once the youth entered into the United States, and the ability to take responsibility for one's actions in the U.S. became a mechanisms by which youth could prove their eligibility as humanitarian subjects. Thus, personal responsibility and humanitarian subjectivity became intertwined with an enactment of acceptable victimhood.

The tension between dependency on institutions and the requirement of personal responsibility plays out in a story told by Ricki, a social worker. Ricki compares the experiences of two boys ("Abel" and "Byron") from the same country who lived in the same foster home for a period of time. Abel was transferred to a more supportive foster home, where he was able to

eventually graduate high school, attend community college and obtain a green card. Byron was

not transferred to a new foster home. He dropped out of school, left his foster family, and started

working without a permit. While there is an obvious structural difference in the boys' lives,

when I ask Ricki directly why the two had differing outcomes, he suggests:

> "Their priority was different. Byron's priority was more: 'I want to do my own thing, I don't want to listen to anybody. I get in trouble, and every time I get in trouble I go back to [the social service agency] for help.' Abel saw the opportunity of really changing his life. And also the responsibility back home of helping the rest of his family. And so he made that decision of continuing education… One of them was able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Byron was short sighted."

In this example, we see clearly the tensions regarding agency and dependency in this articulation

of humanitarian legendry. Byron, the "less successful" youth, had not adequately complied with

dependency and agency: he refused to be dependent on educational and foster systems—but he

also, apparently, refused to take responsibility for himself and relied on the social service agency

for support when he got in trouble. Abel, the "humanitarian legend," on the other hand, displayed

appropriate dependency and life course decisions regarding his foster family and education. He is

shown to "take responsibility for himself" although he, too, had a family in his home country to

support. There is a lot left out of this story: We do not know how Abel's family was supported

while he attended school. We do not know why Byron made the decision to begin work. We do

not know the differences between the backgrounds of the boys. This narrative focuses, instead,

on the ability of the young men to enact dependence while taking responsibility for themselves.

In the humanitarian borderlands, a productive legendary story arc maintains a fine

balance between agency and dependency. Legendary youth are able to escape difficult lives

through independent migration; and then, they easily slide back into life courses governed by

American understandings of life stages. Once they fully immerse themselves into these teenage

life course, they continue to "think like adults," taking responsibility for their actions. These

youth seem to overcome structural barriers through sheer force of will, a personal responsibility that transcends all obstacles they face. Cynthia's story, from the previous section, is legendary because she maintains this balance. She raises her siblings virtually by herself as a young child, and she begins work before she becomes a teenager. But once in the borderlands, she is happy to give up this adult life and step back into the life process of American teenagers. She finds that life in the shelter is deeply comforting. She embraces dependency, living peacefully under her foster mother's roof, foregoing employment, and returning to school. Furthermore, she takes responsibility for herself. She works hard to get through school and learn English. Many other youth do not strike this balance as easily.

Stable Instability and Trauma Transformed

I recently encountered a situation in which a 13-year-old girl at an immigration shelter had received a determination to be released to foster care. She was put on a "list," waiting for an opening, but her placement never happened. Within a few months, she was taken off the list. It seems that no one in the foster system wanted to take in a girl with her background, which included traumatic events of sexual violence; and, her erratic behavior while in the shelter further exacerbated her unattractiveness to potential foster families. An attorney working on the case said to me in frustration: "It's like they only want to take kids who don't have problems. But if they didn't have problems, they wouldn't be here!" This is the crux of the second paradox of borderland legends: while unaccompanied youths' lives are inherently unstable and often contain traumatic events, youth themselves must exhibit stability through good behavior and the transformation of trauma to health.

From the very beginning, stability is used as a measurement for allowing youth to travel through borderland institutions. As discussed in Chapter 3, case managers who work with youth

detained in government shelters must evaluate parents and potential sponsors for youths' release. The background checks required of families become significantly more rigorous when youth show signs of behavioral difficulties or emotional instability. In these cases, potential families or sponsors must demonstrate that they can "handle" the behavior of the youth. However, signs of instability are often broad and overreaching. Mercedes explains the dilemma that she faced as a case manager who had to make release recommendations:

> "Many of the minors, when they arrive here they are super sad, super alone, and they can have depression. And it's fine. And you ask them in the interview, have you ever been, have you ever had any mental health issue—if they use the word 'depression' that's an automatic home study. When they say 'depression,' I'm like, I don't want to hear this! So I try to be like, well, did you, where you diagnosed with depression, or it was just you being said and adjusting to the new life? 'Oh no, I was just feeling depressed.' Okay, feeling depressed is another thing. But if they say 'depression,' then: home study."

In this situation, parents or sponsors who attempted to take children out of shelters were charged with proving their ability to care for the child, including their ability to access services such as counseling. Of course, parents in rural communities had a much more difficult time proving that they could provide this type of support in their native language. Further, by stalling children's release, the shelters inadvertently created further instability for the youth. Research shows that migrants who face long periods of time in detention show increased depression and anxiety (Keller et al 2003); however, the release process fails to account for this reality. Several facility workers commented on the detrimental nature of these long-term detentions on youth's mental health—a vicious cycle in which instability prevented a quick release which in turn caused more instability and more issues for case managers to work through.

The catch-22 of the stable instability occurred, too, in issues of mental health. I met with Nancy, a passionate attorney in the Midwest, who told one story in particular, which demonstrates the fine balance of stable instability. I had asked a question about disability, and

she launched into a story about Josefina, a young girl from Honduras with serious mental health

issues.

> "All the kids have anxiety, all the kids have depression issues but Josefina has, um, attempted suicide so she is in residential treatment on and off for a year. It has been hard to work with her only because I can't really get to her half the time because she does not--they don't want her to talk about trauma."

Nancy explained that Josefina was the ideal candidate for asylum based on her history of

persecution, but she was not emotionally stable enough to participate in the asylum interview.

> "There is no way she can go to the interview, talk to an officer for 3-4 hours--that is how long these interviews take to rehash all of her trauma. In fact, her therapist at the time was like, 'You can't talk about her trauma, you can't even bring it up because we are just trying to keep her stable.' So we had to withdraw her asylum claim."

It was Josefina's very instability that made her a viable candidate for asylum; but that same

instability prevented Josefina from being able to present in front of an asylum interview. Nancy

knew that Josefina was simply unable to complete an asylum case, and she decided to try a

different route that had less demands regarding emotional stability: SIJS. I asked Nancy,

apologizing for the callousness of my question, if all of these problems of instability could

actually be beneficial. Despite the difficulty of getting Josefina to court and enrolled in school

and emotionally stable, could this not just be proof of trauma?

> "Yes definitely. I think so. I think that is partly why I wanted to try for asylum for her because she is so damaged from her life… She is so damaged from her life and the abuse that she has suffered and the fear that her mom is going to come back and take her away, and she has no coping skills what so ever and that would so clearly come through in an asylum interview. And here at the local courts for the family court stuff for her, especially the juvenile status visa, that clearly came through and continues to come through every time she checks her… She is eligible for her relief, and it's manifesting very clearly in her, unfortunately, but in a way, it is helpful to her case."

Josefina, in the end, becomes a successful example of the stability paradox. While her instability

prevent her from obtaining her best option for relief, and while it caused significant barriers in

completing basic tasks for the court, and while it could even be an obstacle in future citizenship

pursuits, Josefina's mental health problems are ultimately proof of a background that provides a pathway to immigration relief.

Stability is not just something that happened to youth, however. Indeed, being stable is yet another aspect of personal responsibility. Taking responsibility for trauma shifts culpability of that trauma off of historical and structural inequalities and onto individual behavior (Waldram 2013). Stability is seen as the result of a package of personal characteristics and behaviors. A stable youth was one who was in school and staying away from legal trouble.

> "Kids who cannot stay away, cannot stop getting in trouble, juvenile problems--it is difficult because you want, for the legal case, we kind of need to try to stabilize things and have the child be in school and doing well. But if you have kids who don't have access to the services that they need to be successful, that can be really heartbreaking." (Samantha, attorney)

> Ideally, handling a case in immigration court system, you would love to have a client who is very stable, who is doing everything he or she is supposed to do in terms of acquiring positive equities, doing well in school, developing friendships and relationships with people who can be kind of character references." (Dan, attorney)

Indeed, stability was just one more requirement demands of youth as neoliberal subjects. Youth had the personal responsibility to remain stable. Dan, in particular, noted that youth were "supposed" to "acquire positive equities." It became their responsibility to go through a checklist of requirements to prove their stability: do well in school, develop friendships, find character references. Youth were responsible for controlling the chaos in their lives. Samantha recognizes the structural constraints of youths' lives (their access to services) but still relies on language of agency: some youth "cannot stay away" from trouble and problems.

Successful borderland legends similarly took responsibility for their past traumas. As evidence of this, Allison a foster care social worker offers up a comparison between two twin girls who arrived together as unaccompanied youth: One ended up in prison for child abuse

while the other went to community college. When reflecting on why the community college

youth had been successful, Allison comments:

> "A big part of this is that she recognized her own junk, her own trauma, and was like, I
> want to work on it. And so she would go to therapy and would talk to me about her
> issues. And she would talk to me about what he wanted to do about it and where she
> wanted to go in life."

Allison calls the difference resiliency, and she implicitly suggests that the failure of the second

girl was not due to structural pains or historical barriers but to her unwillingness to deal with

trauma in an effective way, that is, bringing trauma to a licensed therapist and discussing it with

adults.

The ability to "recognize one's junk" and effectively deal with a traumatic past was seen

as a transformative process and often embodied. Just as proof of suffering and trauma must be

accounted for in body or in affect, (Petryna 2002; Ticktin 2011; Ong 1995), the healing process

is also embodied. Clara, a therapist, discusses a young women who had experienced traumatic

events:

> "She was 16 and in her journey she was raped by several guys in the process, the coyotes.
> She got pregnant from that. She felt guilt. We were able to [work through this trauma.]
> When you see her now, she does her hair and her nails. She is a different person."

Bianca, Clara's coworker, agrees: "You can see [unaccompanied youth] change here, dress like

kids, get their hair cut. They are able to be more present here once they work through the

trauma." In these examples, trauma is an embodied and enacted trait that can be effectively

eradicated, and the evidence that suffering has been eradicated is in the presentation of self.

Similarly, in my own relationship with Cynthia, I saw her health enacted and embodied through

the miracle of modern dentistry: A large, white smile is the image that I call on when I think of

the transformation that Cynthia has undergone.

As established in literature on humanitarian efforts, humanitarian narratives are frequently buttressed by Orientalist cultural narratives that positioned the U.S. as the modern contrast to more savage, backwards cultures (Cantú, Luibhéid, and Stern 2005). Narratives of personal transformation often used this same logic. Rosa, a shelter worker, tells a story about a young woman who also "transforms" her suffering into an embodied and enacted healthy present.

> "[The participant comes from] a very patriarchal society and so she is like 15 and was married off, like was going to be married to this much older man. Without any say and she ran away. And she like somehow came here… When she first got [to the shelter] she was just… so shy, painfully shy. Like it just hurt you how shy she was and scared. You could see that she was scared, and she was like this little, so timid, and couldn't make eye contact.... it wasn't just super fear based but just this shyness and having no voice, no voice at all. And she blossomed into our most--her smile! She was never not smiling, and I don't ever remember having her mouth closed! I just remember her big smile… She had this amazing transformation. She learned so much English and she got so much confidence."

This youth was successful in the time that Rosa knew her, although her overall outcomes were unknown to Rosa. In this story, Rosa sees the immigration shelter as a mechanism for transformation and a contrast to a backwards culture. Thus, while Rosa was often critical of the shelter system, she still saw it as potentially positive institution.

The paradox of stable instability is a paradox grounded once more in neoliberal logic. While instability is often the for youth who migrate alone, the neoliberal victim has personality characteristics that refuse to place blame for failure on anything but oneself and one's own decisions. A successful borderland legend thus transforms their instability into stable, healthy present, with no residual problems from past traumas.

Borderland Legends as Debt

In his seminal book "The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies," Mauss (1923-4 [1970]) suggests that in primitive societies, gift giving is laden with morality and

power. Gift giving is both a moral obligation and one that creates a social contract, demanding

that the gift be returned. Humanitarian literature has taken up this analysis, looking at how

charitable gifts to the needy create social contracts (Redfield and Bornstein 2010). In the same

way, the humanitarian gift to unaccompanied minors, although positioned as a free offering from

a generous country, is also a social contract that creates an imbalance of debt that youth owe the

humanitarians. The debt can be paid in the form of inspiration for humanitarians' consumption.

Indeed, the humanitarian legend itself is the currency for these exchanges.

Humanitarians demand to be inspired. Borderland legendry provides humanitarians the

motivation to continue giving. Advocate Aurora finds "privilege and joy" in the gifts that she

gives as a child advocate, and Jennifer, as an attorney, claims that her inspirational youth remind

her of her own childhood story of overcoming all odds, and she sees the "potential for greatness"

in the youth with whom she works. Her youth clients give to her the gift of nostalgic inspiration.

In discussing a successful case, Nathan explains:

> "I just had the utmost respect for this young girl, as young as she was, taking these matters into her own hands as a matter of survival. And then making it to the U.S. and just absolutely flourishing. So inspiring. So inspiring."

Samantha agrees:

> "The clients you work with are incredibly compelling and have faced huge adversity in their lives… One of the things that drives me to continue the work is how fulfilling it is to see these kids, with just the little piece that we do, giving them that little bit of stability, able to just do incredible things."

Youth are expected to respond to our gifts with their success and inspiration. However, once

again, youth fail at this exchange as often as they succeed.

Michelle tells a story that provides an example of the tensions that occur when youth fail

to compensate the gift-giver with success and inspiration. As a teacher, Michelle worked with a

young man that she names Oscar. In Michelle's words, Oscar was smart and personable but

could not conform to the "mainstream kids" at the school. "That wasn't him. That wasn't his personality, that wasn't his culture," she explains. Several men at Michelle's church had expressed interest in mentoring Oscar. Within this mentorship there was the implicit requirement that Oscar would fulfill his end of this exchange bargain: he would evolve into a young man who took responsibility for his actions, stayed out of trouble, succeeded in American society, and inspired with this transformation. However, mentor after mentor failed to see this legend take shape. Michelle explained:

> "A lot of adults, especially males, wanted to be part of his life until he would do something, as they would say, 'stupid.'… And I would say to them, after three or four men came in and out of his life: 'If you are not willing to put in the time with him and be there when he messes up, then you need to stop.' And several decided that they didn't want to because they just didn't—they thought, 'Well, I'm in his life. He owes me something.'"

Similarly, Stephanie, a social worker, explains her disappointment after working with two young women. She had brought them to a leadership conference and was optimistic about their futures.

> "[One] wanted to be a pediatric doctor. The other one had the most amazing relationship with her [foster] family, and I thought her foster parents were dynamic. And then a year later they are completely off…. They are both out of the [support] program, pregnant, or had run away from their families… So that was so hard. Because I felt like I had invested a lot of time and energy into that relationship and it didn't go as planned."

Later in the interview, Stephanie explained that some of the foster families that took into unaccompanied youth also had expectations for the youth.

> "I remember a lot, thinking about… we were placing expectations of what the foster parents had on the child. Meaning, like, 'Maybe I've never had a child and my expectations is that this is going to be the child I've always wanted.' Or expectations of, like, 'We are really devout Seventh Day Adventists, so this kid that is going to come into our house is going to do exactly the same.'"

Stephanie's colleague, Allison, agreed with Stephanie's explanation regarding the expectation of some foster families:

> "I think the religion thing was a big issue for a lot of the parents that I worked with. We had foster parents that were coming into fostering as a mission. As an opportunity to answer God's call, or however they would phrase it, by taking care of these kids. And I think they had the intention of, like, 'We'll just take them to church and that is going to fix everything.'"

In all of these examples, there exists a façade of a free gift, but this façade is quickly lifted to reveal an expectation that youth do or be something in return. The men in Oscar's life felt that he owed them something, while Stephanie views the time and energy she spent to be uncompensated by the youth. Foster parents expected youth to fulfill their own fantasies about raising children or converting youth into the church.

In their own way, each of these humanitarians wanted the assurance of their own professional or personal identity. Youth's success thus reflects back onto humanitarians in providing evidence of their own competency and morality. This is an example of the classic "looking glass self" where humanitarians' self-concept is based on their interaction and success with others (Cooley 1908); humanitarians believe themselves to be effective, moral people only when the subject of their humanitarianism reflects success back to them. Indeed, researchers suggest that when social workers fail to help their clients, they must actively shape their biographies to account for these failures, often doing so by placing responsibility on the client, instead of themselves (Kolb 2011). This, in turn, perhaps provides further explanation for the reliance on neoliberal framing of personal responsibility: when a youth does not succeed in the borderland, it must be his/her own doing rather than the failure of the humanitarians.

Finally, unaccompanied youth who present themselves for humanitarian consumption are actively proving their deservingness as victims. Marcy, a director of a shelter for unaccompanied youth, explained that she liked working with these immigrant youth because they were more

grateful than "other populations" of at-risk-youth with whom she worked. Although Marcy's

time with these youth rarely lasted over a few weeks, she had nothing but positive feedback:

> "The [unaccompanied immigrant] kids' attitudes were completely different than a normal
> population. So, they were extremely appreciative, they wanted to go to school, they
> wanted to experience everything... So it was very heartwarming to be in the human
> service field and to have a large group of youth who you work toward and can see the end
> result very quickly. Whereas in most human service fields, when they are working with
> kids in a situation like we are in, you don't normally see the appreciation or the end result
> of your work until many, many years later sometimes."

Marcy's interview was unwaveringly positive. She seemed eager to demonstrate to me the

deservingness of unaccompanied youth as victims and did so by repeatedly referring to their

gratitude, eagerness and sense of personal responsibility. However, she does so by placing these

youth in contrast to "other" youth, thus reifying hierarchies of deservingness.

Conclusion

The humanitarian borderland operates on storytelling. To receive rescue in these

borderlands, youth must construct their lives into legendary narratives that inspire national

sympathy. These borderland legends are used in court and as political fodder, and they exist as

yardsticks that test the true stories, measuring youth by degrees of deservingness and

victimhood. Yet, these narratives are replete with paradoxes that can be impossible for youth to

balance. While a humanitarian subject must project innocence, youth are seen as inherently

criminal and are often marked by embodied past criminality and suspicions of present and future

wrong-doings. Youth must prove their agency and their willingness to take responsibility for

their past—but they also must be happy to settle into dependent roles of teenagers in the United

States. Their lives are instable by definition; but, they must find enough stability to work through

a bureaucratic system. And finally, they are told they are receiving a gift of humanitarian

assistance, but there is an implicit requirement that they repay this assistance by becoming

humanitarian subject that repay their new country through providing inspiring stories. In the next

chapter, I explore the mechanisms that both youth and humanitarian use to shape their lives into

these borderland legends.

Chapter 5: Legend Making

Borderland legends do not exist as real people. They are only stories told about people. These stories are carefully crafted by borderland humanitarians, particularly attorneys, who must use these stories in court. The crafting of a borderland legend requires a balance between humanitarians and the youth who must learn to draw on very particular aspects of their lives to construct narratives that comply with the requirements of both U.S. law and also American beliefs about victimhood. Humanitarians must teach youth to identify the parts of their histories to share, frame this history within cultural logics of trauma, and give emotive performances regarding this trauma. In the previous chapter, I looked at the story arc and traps of borderland legends. In this chapter, I explore the process by which youth learn to tell this borderland legendry and, in doing so, become humanitarian subjects.

To understand youth's ability to position themselves as humanitarian subjects, I turn to the sociological tradition of identity as a performance (Goffman 1956). There is a vast literature on how social locations are performed, especially around identities such as gender (Butler 1990; Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; West and Zimmerman 1987), race (Markus and Moya 2010, Lee 2015) or class (Bettie 2014). This research also reveals the ways in which these performances are rewarded: Hoang (2013), for example, shows how Vietnamese sex workers who perform third world poverty are rewarded by johns who seek their services. Performances that are not up to standard may result in social sanctions: Betsy Lucal (1999) explains that her decision to not perform a feminine gender display results in confusion and sometimes anger by those around her. In this chapter, I argue that like these performances of gender, race, and class, immigrant youth victimhood itself is a performance that is culturally-contingent and must be taught and learned. When performed correctly, youth transform their

lives into a productive story of self that can then be used to seek aid from social services and legal relief from the government.

Several scholars have analyzed the process by which "victims" learn to construct themselves into narrative forms. Trinch and Berk-Seligson (2002) show how paralegals work with domestic violence victims to construct reports—in contrast to stories—to present to the court. These reports of domestic violence include key elements such as orientation clauses (dates and times) and eliminate other storytelling elements such as discursive techniques meant to create suspense and "kernels" that have no explicit purpose for the court. Nguyen (2010) explores how HIV patients in West Africa who could "tell a good story" (p. 99) had better access to antiretroviral drugs. However, the reliance on this narrative performance of self results in what Blommaert (2001) calls "narrative inequality." In her research on African asylum-seekers in Belgium, Blommaert demonstrates how asylum seekers have differing access to linguistic resources in creating a discourse for a bureaucratic system. Further, this use of the narrative self can work to alienate individuals from their own experiences. Krause (2010) explains that migrant youth must always tell their stories to an audience, which thus distances them from the authenticity of their own lives. Youth's words are "truly overpopulated with the intensions of others" (p. 20) and are thus never really their own.

As unaccompanied youth attempt to navigate the humanitarian borderlands, they must learn a very specific humanitarian performance: they must "do" victimhood and "do" unaccompanied immigrant minor. That is, unaccompanied youth must develop a performance of self that places their histories within the story arc described in the previous chapter. My intervention in this chapter is to unveil the ways in which the process of legend-making acts to reify cultural hierarchies. I argue that this process works to blame human suffering on cultural

and individual failure while relieving the United States of complicity in economic inequality and global violence. These stories thus actively work to maintain American hegemony in the global order. However, I also argue that youth's enactment of agency through the use of falsehoods is one way in which youth actively work against these technologies, attempting to mold the humanitarian machine to truly meet their needs. In the following section, I explore the process in which unaccompanied migrant youth are taught to perform their identities and create appropriate stories of victimhood. I detail three specific aspects of this process: finding stories, teaching trauma, and coaching affect. I then explore cases in which humanitarians make decisions to reject youth as humanitarian subjects. Finally, I reveal ways in which youth claim authentic space in these stories.

Legend Making

Teaching youth the narrative performance of their history is often a three-part process between attorneys and youth, although other humanitarians might also provide support. First, attorneys must sift through the histories of youth to identify events that can become the center of the humanitarian legend. Although the attorneys may do this alone, they might also rely on child advocates and social workers to work with youth to reveal these events. Second, attorneys must teach youth to reframe these events in terms of American understandings of trauma and abuse. Social workers and counselors may assist youth in internalizing that narrative. Finally, attorneys coach youth on displaying culturally appropriate affect in order to provide a credible presentation to an immigration judge or asylum officer.

Finding Stories and Confessing Traumas

The attorneys who work with unaccompanied migrant youth see their job as sifting through the history of a child in order to uncover traumatic events that align with specific

requirements in immigration law. They hope to reveal what already exists but is not always centered in youth's telling of their lives. The type of events that are suitable for relief are narrow in scope yet rely on broad narratives on Latin American inferiority. They rely on stereotypical notions of failed Latin American institutions—such as the family and state—while privileging individual (rather than structural) stories within these institutions.

Jacqueline explains the difficulty that she has when searching for this specific story:

"Some kids will say, the first thing they want to tell you is: "Yeah, I've been recruited by a gang." And you're like: "What happened?" And the details come out and they're not really strong, and you're like, well, tell me about your home life. What was life like in your house? It comes out that they've been abused by an uncle for three years straight and raped multiple times. And you're like, oh my God, that is so much stronger. And they don't necessarily—of course they don't know asylum law. They don't know what is important and what isn't… the fear is much more of the gangs, whereas the stronger asylum claim they may have is maybe based on something happing in in the home. They don't really think about it that way. That's not why they came to the U.S. Sometimes I think it is all part and parcel of the same thing."

Jacqueline rightfully sees youth's lives as a culmination of multiple, overlapping violences that arise from intersecting systems of power (Collins 2017). Yet, the story she must create privileges certain types of violence and ignores what often is most salient in youth's lives. While there are active campaigns to change the practice (Carlson and Gallagher 2015), the U.S. currently refuses to acknowledge victims of gang violence as a potential relief category. Indeed, Jacqueline must pinpoint an individually experienced violence (family trauma) outside of the structures that create it. This individual violence may be seen as "clean" in that it does not have to implicate global systems. On the other hand, the structure of community and gang violence, while more salient in the youth's chosen history, is based on a historical system of global oppression which often implicates the United States in the instability and violence (Kruckewitt 2005; Norget 2005; Zilberg 2007).

Paradoxically, while "useful" violent events must not implicate global systems and much be told as an individual experience, they must also be located in cultural practices, and thus based on stereotypically notions of Latin American inferiority. Nancy, an attorney for a legal aid clinic, discussed working with a young man from Central America who did not immediately reveal a "useful" event. She explains, "I'm sure the kid did have an abuse story somewhere. I can't imagine a child in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico without a horror story." Nancy's comment encapsulates a paradoxical truth regarding laws made for the relief of these youth. She inadvertently shows that her work is to reveal an individual story that fits into stereotypical understandings of Latin American life as violent and traumatic. Nancy knows that gang violence itself is not the "horror story" that she can use. So, when she "can't imagine" a child without an abuse or horror story, what she cannot imagine is a child who has not experienced abuse in the home or persecution or neglect by an inadequate government. Thus, relief law for unaccompanied youth currently privileges individual, unique stories that can be located within "inferior" cultural practices while ignoring the often more salient structural oppression that may implicate the United States in global inequality.

Besides identifying appropriate stories, attorneys must create a space in which youth are willing to reveal histories of trauma. In doing so, attorneys sometimes must stake personal claim over the best interest of the youth: the attorneys must simultaneously work with youth's desires but also must make decisions regarding their own beliefs about youth's past and future options. Even when youth are not forthcoming with their histories or hesitate to share these, attorneys make decisions to reveal youths' pasts, using the logics of best interest to overrule beliefs about ownership of one's history. The productivity of human suffering (James 2010) is deemed more important than the privacy of the individual. Nancy says to youth clients: "if you don't admit

[your trauma] to me, I can't help you." Her use of the word "admit" has an air of culpability, suggesting a process by which the attorney acts as a priest listening to the confessions of his flock. Thus, the process of revealing a story is creating a space for "trauma confessionals", by which youth reveal intimate details of their lives for an authority figure to cast judgment over their past and determine their future. Trauma confessionals turn private, painful histories into productive narratives.

When humanitarians engage youth in the telling of a trauma confessional, they must also perform an identity that draws upon their own beliefs on human rights, humanitarianism and social justice. Sylomovic (2005) explains that human rights performances occur on multiple levels—internationally, nationally and through intersubjective experiences. Listening to victims of rights violations tell their histories is an intersubjective performance of human rights. I asked Jennifer, an attorney, how she would try to get youth to tell these difficult stories. She explained that she does her best to try to give youth a safe space to share parts of their stories.

> "Some kids are ready to talk. Some of them aren't. For the ones who are, it is easy just to ask those follow up questions: Can you elaborate on this a little bit? Can you tell me more about this? For the ones that aren't, you just have to walk through it. I always tell them, you know, if you can paint me a picture with your words of what happened, even if it is not a pretty picture, it is still the one I would love to see because it is you."

Here, Jennifer positions herself as a performer of human rights, emphasizing to her youth clients that she wants to see their histories although they might not be "pretty." Thus, the performance of victimhood is also intertwined with the performance of the humanitarians themselves.

However, when youth refuse to engage in this performative exchange of human rights, the results can then impede upon the humanitarians' own sense of identity and performance. Allison, a social worker, described a scenario in which she couldn't elicit the trauma confessional from several youth clients:

"I had a number of youth who I really suspected had been victims of a crime, either by a border patrol agent or somebody in detention… And when we tried to get them to talk about it, they would stop it…. They would tell their friends about it, and I would hear about it through other angles, but they weren't going to talk about it in therapy, they weren't going to talk about it with me, and they certainly weren't going to talk about it with law enforcement."

Allison expressed frustration with this issue. She knew that the youth she cared for had viable claims for relief based on being victims of crimes, but their refusal to engage in a confessional exchange stymied her ability to work between youth and their attorneys. In an article on advocates and counselors for victims of domestic violence, Kolb (2011) explains that when cases do not unfold as planned, social service workers must attempt to "construct coherent and consistent narratives of themselves as competent service providers" (p. 87).

I, too, found myself tasked with receiving trauma confessionals in my work as a child advocate. In one particular case, a young man had refused to be released from immigration custody to live with a family member, but he would not reveal to the family reunification workers why. They requested the assistance of a child advocate, and so I was asked to meet with him regularly to have him confess to me the true reason he did not want to be reunited with his sponsor. After several weeks of meetings in which I attempted to create a safe space—my own performance of human rights—he finally confessed, in written form, a long, painful story of abuse and violence. I immediately used this written material as evidence that his expressed wishes should be respected. Later, this trauma confessional would be submitted to court to fight an immigration case. Although I communicated to him that I would share his story with other humanitarian workers, he later felt deceived by the extent to which his story had been distributed. Although I had worked hard to create an environment of trust, this was quickly lost once his personal story turned into a productive confessional. Although I felt that his "best

interests" had been sought—and, indeed, I engaged in conversations around this best interest—I

was personally wracked by guilt with how this situation had unfolded.

The revealing of trauma confessional is a process that requires overlooking the

individual's true history and privileging stories that conform to ethnocentric narratives about the

values of other cultures rather than that culpability of the U.S. in the global system. This process

requires a performance both from youth but also from humanitarians who must enact human

rights to create a space for sharing.

Teaching Trauma and Abuse

Once a story is identified as a valid option for legal relief, attorneys must then help their

youth clients to frame these stories through the lens of trauma and abuse. They must create

shared meaning around human suffering. The problem was that attorneys often faced a

discrepancy between what American humanitarians considered unacceptable and what youth

believed to be injustice. Lisa, an educator, provided a clear example of how this discrepancy

could play out in youth's lives. One of the young men in her high school was having difficulty in

his placement with a sponsor. The man sponsoring him was often intoxicated and frequently

pushed the youth to drink him. When the youth refused, the sponsor would often respond in

violent, physical outburst. When Lisa discovered what was happening, she attempted to

intervene. But the student refused help, saying, in Lisa's words:

> "'Miss, I'm really okay. I suffered so much before, and it took me so long, and it was so painful, everything that happened on my way here. I'm afraid if something happens, they are going to send me back… All of my family is in [home country], and they are suffering, and they don't have any money, and they don't have anything, but I'm here and I'm safe, and I'm in school, and I have food and I'm not cold, so I think it is okay if I have to suffer a little bit.'"

Lisa felt devastated by this remark. She commented that this example was simply one of many

similar experiences, and she felt moved to help youth understand their rights in their own homes.

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Lisa and the young man attributed very different meanings to suffering and possessed contradictory views regarding the role of suffering in life. For Lisa, suffering was to be avoided—and she had a professional and ethical obligation to intervene in a situation defined as child abuse. For the young man, however, suffering was part of life and was, indeed, his cross to bear.

While Lisa felt that she could not reach common ground with some of the youth, Ricki told stories about the process of reaching shared meaning around trauma. He often underwent a process to teach youth to identify their past experiences as traumatic. He explains:

> "Trauma is a huge part [of the youths' lives]… Once they are able to understand. Because it is a trauma for us. For them, it is normal. It is everyday living. Waking up and having to do things they were doing or experiencing the things they were experiencing was a part of life. It only becomes a trauma when we help them understand that that was a very traumatic experience. That that should not happen to somebody at the age of 10, at the age of 5, 6, 15. That is when they are aware that that was a trauma."

For Ricki, events "become" trauma when labeled as such. The experiences of violence and criminality exist but cannot be overcome until they are labeled. In a study on Southeast Asian refugees, Ong (1995) explores the rise of immigrant psychology, which medicalizes refugees' mental health into categories that flatten experiences into Western boxes. Workers sought to teach these refugees the language of mental health—particularly PTSD—ultimately creating a "scheme of power that defines the form and content of refugee illness and wellbeing" (p. 1247). In the same way, humanitarians like Ricki enact forms of biopower to turn youth into governable bodies. That is, the process of medicalizing youth's emotional experiences allows humanitarians to understand youth's lives through a Western lens and then respond accordingly. Through the medicalization process, youth's experiences can be labeled as deviant and thus fixed through therapy and medications. Further, when youth themselves claim labels such as "trauma," they demonstrate their governability to the court.

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As discussed in the previous section, traumatic events that are located in the family are privileged for relief. However, attorneys can and do find ways to turn community violence into asylum claims, if they can simultaneously prove that the youth client was personally persecuted by this violence due to membership in a social group. Again, even when look at the context of community violence, it is the unique, individual story that is privileged. However, even in this way, framing community violence through humanitarian standards requires youth to buy into labels which may or may not reflect their personal views of these experiences. On one hand, youth may not want to discuss their own histories of trauma, as exposure to community violence is associated with youth delinquency (Chen et al 2013), so, youth who live in complicated communities often have complicated lives. Nicki, an attorney explains that youth may not want to disclose trauma because they fear that they will ultimately also be implicated in the same systems of criminality.

> "I have dealt with a lot of kids who were, you know, involved in gangs back home and involved in activities that maybe they were forced to do, but that, you know, criminal activity. And then there is shame about that and lack of wanting to disclose any of that because they feel like people would think less of them and they don't understand the context."

Context matters, of course, and the attorneys' job is to tell a story of context—while focusing on the individual. They must position both youth behavior and youth trauma as part and parcel of the same forces. The trauma of being acted upon must be seen as the same trauma as acting. However, youths' perceptions of their actions do not always align with the narratives their attorneys attempt to shape. Victoria discusses the complex relationship between youth's sense of self—which can be wrapped in beliefs about criminality—and the traumatic backgrounds that often lead to these.

> "A lot of kids, I've met with them, and they're like: No, I wanted to do these [criminal] things. I needed to make money. And some of them are even, like, cocky about it. They

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are proud of what they've done. And then, I think when we are talking through to them, we're like, well let's talk about your mom and your dad. And there is a lot of counseling almost. Because we see all of the facts when they tell us their story, sometimes we can put it together. But getting them to admit it is a whole other different thing."

So, Victoria teaches not just trauma, not just abuse, but also a very specific context. She teaches youth to see themselves in the web of community and family violence and position their very personal narratives within this framework. However, as she states, her focus is not on the impact of community violence—that may be too structural for the relief she would like to pursue. Instead, she focuses on the relationship with the parents as an impetus for later criminal behavior.

Like trauma, the concepts of abuse and neglect are labels that can be used to govern youths' bodies. Abuse and neglect have culturally contingent meanings, but when used by humanitarians they "structure the domination of biomedicine over (inappropriate) cultural knowledges" (Ong 1995, p. 1248). In this way, while trauma is located in the individual, the labels of neglect and abuse are used to medicalize not only youths' mental health but also pathologize family relations. The humanitarian's definitions of these concepts are used to teach youth about appropriate family behavior. While mental health diagnoses are typically carried out by therapists and social workers, in this case, attorneys found that they often need to teach their clients the language of abuse and neglect. Attorney Nancy explains:

> "Every kid I meet has anxiety and depression and PTSD, definitely, but I think a lot of the cultural norms make kids matter of fact-ly tell you things: 'Oh no, I was never abused.' And then I would say: 'Has anyone ever hit you with a belt or have you ever had to sleep outside?' and they would say: 'Oh yes, whenever my Dad got drunk, he would hit me with his belt.'"

Here, Nancy engages not only in the medicalization process discussed by Ong (1995)—"PTSD, definitely", she states—but also works to change youths' perception of child abuse. She explains

that she must walk through these experiences with her clients while actively labeling them as abuse.

Similarly, attorney Jaqueline reveals the same dynamic as Nancy, but expressly connects the lack of shared meaning to negative cultural values:

> "It has been interesting how, especially in cases of the child experiencing abuse in the home, they don't think about it in terms of criminal behavior or 'I'm afraid to go back'. They don't. I don't know if it kind of extends from the whole way the country views it: issues in the home stay inside the home."

In this comment, Jacqueline places child abuse within a framework of a deficient culture. She continues to follow a script that understands child abuse as a problem unique to a country with values that apparently differ greatly from American values. She implicitly suggests that American cultural, in contrast, has wide-spread cultural agreement on the meaning of child abuse and discipline as well as culturally open conversations around family behavior.

Teaching abuse is purposed, explicitly to help youth access the Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa. Implicitly, the language of abuse becomes a force to govern youth migrants' bodies and families. The language of abuse and neglect negates complex and gray realities of family life, and in doing so, creates heart wrenching dilemmas for youth who must position their desire for immigration assistance against their loyalties to their families. Testifying before a judge for SIJS often requires youth to reframe their own childhoods to make clear dichotomies of good and bad parenting. Attorneys would explain:

> "It is a tough situation, having a kid who adores his mother say, 'This is how my mother punished me, and I think this is abuse'…. Because many of them won't say a bad word against their mother." (Linda)

> "Sometimes the way a child might feel about their parents can interfere with how they convey what has actually happened to them. We've had cases where the child has been brutalized. Brutalized. I'm talking about being hit with vines, lemon tree branches, forced to kneel in the sun naked. I mean, things that would make anybody say, 'Uh uh. That is out of bounds.' But to them, they have normalized it. So when you are talking to them

about what has happened to them, they cannot articulate that their parent has done wrong. They will put the blame on themselves. They will say things like, well, I hadn't done my homework or I hadn't done what she asked me to, or he was drunk. They are unable to articulate, like, 'I didn't want that abuse to happen to me.' And they won't testify, they refuse to testify negatively if it implicates their parents." (Lavonne)

For some youth, pursuing SIJS means making a morally complicated decision regarding the telling of their family history. Their testimonies must center the worst of their parents' behaviors while ignoring the love and affection that may have existed simultaneously, and, indeed, may be more salient in youths' memories and self-concepts. Both Linda and Lavonne lament that youth might prefer to shape their histories with loyalty to their parents over shaping histories in a flat, productive narrative. Further, these telling of abuse and neglect stories often (purposefully) fails to provide a context in which these dynamics may arise. While family violence arises as a result of multiple factors such as access to employment and economic stability (Lindo et al 2013) the telling of these stories locates family violence in bad parents and a deficient culture, not the complex structures around the families.

Like abuse, and perhaps even more so, neglect is a difficult label for attorneys to communicate and youth to accept as it is culturally contingent and often clearly related to structural constraints rather than parental intent. Susan, an attorney discussed the difficulty of communicating definitions of neglect to youth:

"Especially with kids who have been neglected, a lot of kids don't want to say anything bad about their parents, and I can kind of tell. I try to explain again, like, 'Hey, I'm not saying that this was bad or good or anything, but this is what neglect is in this country.' I explain it, like, 'In this country, kids have to go to school. They can't decide when they're ten that they are going to work the fields.' Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

The International Labour Organization estimates that, as of 2012, 16.7% of children globally were employed and 10.6% of global children were employed illegally, according to ILO standards (Diallo, Etienne and Mehran 2013). Scholars have proposed multiple reasons for the

existence of child labor, focusing specifically on how poverty drives the need for child labor and hypotheses regarding the belief that children are more suited than for certain tasks then adults, thus increasing a demand for young labor (Basu and Tzannatos 2003). However, as an attorney, Susan must convince youth that their own childhood labor was a result of neglectful decisions made by the parents—not a result of economic constraints. This coaching effectively shifts the blame for a child's life from the structural to the individual, releasing global inequality and poverty of any wrongdoing and implicating parents for irresponsible parenting.

Frameworks of abuse and neglect for the purpose of pursuing SIJS implies that the youth should be separated from the abusive or neglectful parent. Indeed, unlike other relief options, a youth who pursues SIJS agrees that he or she cannot sponsor parents to come to the United States. Yet, attorneys pointed out that even when a youth decides to frame his/her childhood through a lens of abuse, this does not mean that the child is, should be, or wants to be estranged from his or her parents. This is evident in Susana's description of a situation in which she is preparing a SIJS application for a youth based on father abandonment, only to discover later that the youth is living with the father. This living arrangement meant that the abuse claim was invalidated. In Susana's estimation, the child was not lying on purpose but was trying to supply Susana with the information that she wanted. Linda explains a similar situation in which a child does not want to testify against his or her parents—indeed, they are still be in contact with one another.

> "The parent will tell them, look, you need to improve your life. *Seguir adelante*. You want to go forward. So this is your way to go forward. And eventually they come to the conclusion that they do want to apply [for SIJS]."

In this situation, the youth must rationalize two opposing realities: one in which a childhood with his/her parents was unhappy and abusive and the second in which these same parents are willing to put their own identities on the line for the child's success.

Coaching Affect

Once a story is confessed and once it is labeled with the language of trauma and abuse, youth must engage in performing the emotions of the story. The final job of the attorney, therefore, is to help youth present emotions that can be fully read by the public and, most importantly, by the judge. The problem, of course, is that emotional presentations vary by individual and are also influenced by outside factors. For many youth, the sheer repetition of their story may work to distance them from their feelings. As attorney Linda explains, youth often reveal their histories to multiple adults, including border control agents, shelter staff, advocates, and counselors. Linda worries that this repetition may dilute the story of its emotional quality or, on the other hand, make the storytelling so painful that youth are no longer able to do it for her.

> "Remember, these kids have been telling their story multiple times by the time I see him. And now here is another person with another role asking details about a time in his life that he may not want to discuss for valid reasons. Sometimes, it is that people respond different. Sometimes people shut down and are not able to articulate what they told you in the office three months ago. I think they just shut down. Some of them sob and cry. It is difficult to relive some of these stories. Some of them present well. Some of them manage it better than others."

Linda emphasizes the importance of storytelling in how youth "present" and "manage" their telling of their histories. Histories thus do not speak for themselves but are performances that Linda harnesses and directs.

Similarly, Julie explains that she was working on an asylum case for a girl whose family had been targeted by gangs. Julie had trouble working with the story because, in her words:

"[The client] didn't seem to be afraid. I don't know if that is the defense mechanism… I mean, I think she really has issues but it doesn't come across." Julie continues to explain that she understood that trauma could manifest in different ways, but she felt unable to help in this case, as she didn't have the skills of a social worker or psychologist that would assist in navigating those emotional issues. In the absence of visible fear, Julie struggled to show the veracity of the asylum claims.

Nancy expressed a similar dilemma, but she attempted to "solve" the problem of faulty presentation in explicit ways.

> "So they don't connect the abuse and the trauma to their coping skills now or the depression or anxiety now… [You have to] help them attach it to the emotion… I am almost trying to bring them to the point of crying and being emotionally tapped to that fear. It feels really awful and cruel, but I usually only do that when I have caseworkers nearby or they are about to go to therapy after."

Nancy's explanation conjures images of a director attempting to produce realistic emotions in his or her actors. Affect can be coached, it seems.

The display of and expectations for emotional responses are experienced in intersectional ways. For young men, therefore, expectations regarding emotive responses to their histories may clash with their own identities and sense of self, especially since the process of migration can often be tied to masculine, adult identities (De Keijzer and Rodríguez 2003; Huacuz Elias 2007; Hernaández Hernández 2012; Ruehs 2016). Young men who have chosen to migrate alone—for whatever reason—may cling to a narrative of bravery as proof of their independence and success. So, when attorneys hope for these same young men to present histories of trauma with convincing emotional displays, they often come up short. Grace, an attorney, explains:

> "I think a lot about teenage boys who in some ways seem like they have to put forth a front or act and how that can sometimes work against them in their case. You know, make it harder for the officer to want to approve their case."

Humanitarians make the mistake of ignoring the social positions of young men who have

migrated alone. Scholars have argued that masculinity itself is a performance and act (Connell

and Messerschmidt 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009), and the requirements of a different

presentation of self fail to acknowledge the competing demands faced by these young men. By

ignoring how masculinity is shaped and the demands of a masculine presentation of self,

humanitarians fail to meet youth clients where they are.

However, these humanitarians sometimes place blame for this incongruence on racialized

understandings of the young men rather than questioning the humanitarian mechanisms that

create a need for standard emotive displays. Nathan, an attorney, blamed the stereotypical culture

of machismo on these young men's refusal to display emotions of fear and victimhood.

> "There is a little more of the machismo culture that comes in. Acting tough, not wanting
> to be perceived as afraid to go back home or having been motivated out of fear as the
> reason why you don't want to go back home. That can sometimes be a challenge, so
> having to counsel those young boys to say, 'Look. We are pursuing asylum. We are doing
> that only if you have a well-founded fear of future persecution. It does not mean that you
> are not manly. It doesn't mean you're not brave. It doesn't mean you're not
> courageous…' We can't jeopardize our legal case here out of some silly macho man type
> of behavior." (Nathan, attorney)

This "silly macho man" behavior, according to Nathan, is a cultural barrier that young men need

to address in order to effectively express their trauma. He delegitimizes the real pressures young

men who have grown up in violent communities, where displays of masculinity may be essential

for survival (Goffman 2014; Rios 2011). Masculinity may, indeed, be the way the young men

have learned to counter dominations (Gutmann (2007, p. 17), and, by extension, may continue to

provide an edge in the power-laden interactions with humanitarians. Further, the use of

machismo further relies on tired stereotypes of Latino men that have largely been rejected by

scholars of Latino masculinity (Guttman 2007; Mirandé 1979; Coltrane, Park and Adams

(2004)). So, while macho behavior is framed as a problem of individual young men expressing

harmful cultural messages, a more productive understanding would explore the nuances of power in these men's lives.

Controlling the Narrative: Voicing Truths and Telling Lies

A discussion regarding the process of teaching, learning and doing victimhood would not be complete without an acknowledgement of the role that youth play in their commitment to and rejection of creating humanitarian narratives. Attorney Lavonne tells a story of an asylum interview for a six-year-old boy who was determined to make his voice heard. He had been severely abused in his household and was determined not to return. Lavonne explains the interview:

> "And so they put what they call the monitor half way through the interview that listens in on this speaker phone on the desk. And this little shit, at the age of 6… Climbed up on his hands and knees in the middle of the desk and said to the monitor…. 'I am going to tell my story, and I am going to tell this once. Get this because I am never going to speak of this again.' I think it was the impersonality of talking to the machine that was what allowed him to discuss it all. Rather than having to say it to a female translator, you know, somebody in person. He could talk to the toy. Then he just unleashed with it. You can't send him back to them now, can you? [Laughs] Can't put him back in that house!"

Lavonne reflects on this moment with humor, affection and mild annoyance. The young boy had clearly asserted his will and had done so successfully, winning his case for asylum. As with this six-year-old boy, youth often find ways of making their voices and desires heard and respected. And, when their voices are not heard, they are still resilient and resourceful in standing and claiming their space.

A primary way in which youth who participate in humanitarian systems may claim agency over their story is for them to use truth and falsehoods to their advantage. Youth could use falsehoods to assuage the system in the direction they wanted—often when they felt stymied in making choices about their own lives. Allison, a social worker, told me a story about a group of siblings who relied on false allegations to work their way out of the shelter: "That was an

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allegation that was made… strategically… to get them where they needed to go. They wanted to get out of detention. They made up the story to fast track them, and it did." In this scenario, while humanitarians viewed the detention of youth as a humanitarian intervention, this group of siblings found that their detention was unbearable and their only power against it was in the form of falsehoods.

My interest in this analysis is not in determining the falsehood or truth itself. Rather, it is in the productivity of that falsehood, the determination of lie and truth, and the power relations that exist when identifying truth. In an article about a young man in a vocational program who is identified as a "fantasist" by the adults around him, Rosie (1993) suggests that multiple productive narratives may be created around youth by different actors. While the narratives by the young man were designated as "fantasy narratives" by the adults in his life, Rosie understood that these falsehoods were "explicable as a device to take control of part of his life, that part where he could express his fears and hopes" (p. 151). These narratives, while viewed as lies, exposed other complex truths of the young man's emotions. Similarly, unaccompanied youth's lives exist in multiple narrative forms over which they have varied control. Youth can provide narratives with elements of falsehoods in order to use those to achieve desired means. These falsehoods give youth a modicum of power in controlling their cases. Falsehoods allow youth to control the performance.

Yet, while falsehoods may provide youth a claim to power in an exchange with a humanitarian, the power to identify a narrative as true or false lies solely in the hands of that humanitarian. Attorneys, in particular, rely on their unique set of skills to determine lies and verify truth. Their job, of course, is to corroborate stories that youth describe. Attorneys use multiple measures at their disposal to verify the truth: they describe matching weather data to

youths' description of events or finding news articles that would corroborate stories. They

engage in intense questioning regarding the specifics of an event. Sometimes, they simply used

their intuition and their ability to read youths' emotions. However, ultimately, if a stories cannot

be corroborated by these measure, they are considered lies.

Lies may arise from (mis)information that youth have about their options for relief.

Lavonne provides an example of the struggle for truth, based solely on her intuition

> "[My client' dictated this grandiose story about a kidnapping in the Zetas and making a
> women of her and, 'Oh, he didn't rape me, he only threatened me and did this, and I did
> that. Lalala.' …and I said, 'This is no.' I said, 'This, no. You are from Guatemala?'
> 'Yep.' 'And all this happened in Mexico?' 'Yep.' 'Well, then it doesn't work for
> asylum.' 'Why?' 'Because the harm has to happen to you in your own home country, and
> this happened in Mexico.' 'Oh.' 'Now they didn't tell you that in the shelter when they
> told how to make this great story for asylum' did they?' 'No.' I said, 'Now you are going
> to listen to me and you are going to tell me the truth. Or are you going to do what you are
> hearing in the shelter?'"

In Lavonne's estimation, the story told to her by her client was clearly false. Lavonne believed

that misinformation spread through the shelters when youth would advise other youth how to

proceed with their legal cases. Heidbrink (2014) discusses the case of a teenage boy in a shelter

who was called "*el notario*" by his peers for his legal acumen. I, too, found that youth often

shared information, much to the chagrin of the humanitarians, since the information was not

always complete or would disrupt the practices that the humanitarians hoped to employ.

Lavonne, complained:

> "The kids, I think, are spending too much time in the shelters and they become such
> survivors in there. They talk way too much... What happens is, they all talk. They are out
> there: 'Naw naw naw naw naw. Tell them this. Tell them this.' Yeah, they all talk. So the
> longer they are in the shelter, the worse it gets."

So, while misinformation and falsehoods were seen as an annoyance by many humanitarian, I

argue that the spreading of information and youths' employment of these strategies represents

agentic moves by youth who wish to have control over their fate.

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The stories humanitarians told about youths' falsehoods were revealing in and of themselves. Although not exclusively, stories of falsehoods often centered on girls' sexuality and sexual violence. Family Reunification specialist, Lindsey, for example, provided a story about a girl who had lied about a possible sponsor:

> "I know one girl, she said she was going with a distant cousin who was treated as a category three[13] because they weren't able to give us proof of relationship via intermediary birth certificates. So we took her at her word because we had no other choice… but in the end, we found out that that was her baby's father."

Stories about girls lying in order to live close to or with adult boyfriends were numerous, and reflective of larger cultural currents regarding the perceived hypersexuality of Latina girls (Gutierrez 2008; Garcia 2012). Beliefs around the politics of respectability were institutionalized, so girls who lied about their boyfriends might not be released near those boyfriends. Notably, I did not hear similar stories about young men. Rather, the narrative around sexuality and young men was to teach men to not break laws regarding statutory rape.

There were also numerous stories regarding allegations of sexual assault that humanitarians believed didn't happen, as in the case shared by Lavonne above. This is consistent with a long history of the invalidation of women's stories of sexual violence (Kelly and Radford 1990). However, I also came across many cases in which humanitarians believed that sexual assault had occurred, but this sexual assault would be omitted by girls when they feared (for good reason) that it would delay their release from custody. Lindsey explains this situation:

> "For example, if a girl comes and says that she was sexually assaulted, we are going to have to do a home study and the process is a lot longer. If word of mouth spreads, they find out that if you report a history of trauma, it is going to be a longer stay [in the shelter]. If you don't [report the assault], you get out of here."

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[13] Family Friends

So, girls, in particular find themselves faced with specific dilemmas regarding the productivity of truth and falsehoods, specifically regarding their sexual experiences. Inscribed into these stories are condemnations around girls' sexuality and questions about the veracity of girls' claims of violence. Girls are faced with the dilemma that stories of sexual violence may both work against their desires for freedom while simultaneously being necessary for their stories of victimhood.

Stories We Refuse to tell

Humanitarians across the borderlands were committed to excavating the storylines that could provide youth with legal relief and access to resources. However, every humanitarian had limits to the youth that they were willing to fight for. Wolkomir and Powers (2007), in research on workers in an abortion clinic, suggest that workers often make conscious decisions to invest in "easy" clients and detach from clients who were deemed more difficult; in doing so, they saved themselves from burning out from the intense emotional labor required by the difficult clients. Similarly, there were stories that the humanitarians refused to tell—youth they simply could not be saved. These were the youth that could not—or would not—become humanitarian subjects.

The limits of youth's feasibility as humanitarian subjects is not a clearly defined category. Each humanitarian defined his or her own moral boundaries. When I was trained to become a child advocate, for example, the volunteers were invited to reflect on stories that we could not handle. Perhaps our own traumatic backgrounds would cause difficulties in working with youth with similar trauma histories. Perhaps we did not possess the moral capacity to work with youth who had committed specific crimes that we found repulsive. Perhaps there were lines that we simply felt we could not cross. We were encouraged to be honest with ourselves and with the organization regarding our moral limitations.

Linda, an attorney, explains how she tries to process the viability of relief options for

youth with a checkered past. Her decision to pursue relief options was based on how youth

articulated their past criminal behavior:

> "Some of it [criminal history] was kids who wanted to join a gang or who had to break a
> rule or law in order to be accepted by a gang. Sometimes it was just poverty. Sometimes
> it was just, I was hungry, I had nobody. I actually had a homeless unaccompanied kid that
> basically had 17 arrests because that is how he ate… The case that is most sympathetic is
> the kid who is stealing to eat. The kid who imagines himself as the local boss of the gang
> is going to have a harder time. But not an impossible time."

Linda is optimistic that even the "kid who imagines himself as the local boss of the gang" is not

a lost cause. She sees the issue of this case not in the actions committed by the youth but the

commitment to the performativity of the gang history. She believes that can still walk this youth

through the steps of identifying stories, framing trauma and coaching affect.

Joel, a volunteer in radical hospitality, was perhaps the most open in embracing diverse

histories as worthy of humanitarian assistance. Joel actively helped youth released from shelters

by providing them a place to stay in his personal apartment. His activism was stunning in its

breadth—he worked tirelessly and purely voluntarily, to help youth find adequate shelter,

medical resources, emotional support, and educational enrollment. Along with several friends

and colleagues, Joel was a beautiful example of immersive activism. But Joel, too, had moral

boundaries. He describes an example:

> J: I had this one kid who I finally cut loose. He is from Honduras, he is rather violent. He
> has been through a lot of bad stuff. He is part of the few that I actually had legal
> guardianship of when he was under 18. I actually went to court and acquired legal
> guardianship so he could adjust his status. He has a girlfriend that he has a really not-
> okay relationship with. Like, he is controlling. He is in one of the sick, patriarchal
> controlling abusive relationships. For a while, I was trying to figure out, like… I don't
> know. I don't hang out with people who hit their girlfriends. That is not… fuck that. But
> at the same time, trying to figure out, he's also a kid who's seen a lot of violence and who
> is traumatized himself, and how do I reconcile those to truths without making excuses for
> abuse. Also, I'm sort of one of the only people in his life he goes to for advice. For a
> while, I thought maybe it is better to not [pull away] so that he can come for advice and I

can tell him, like, dude, that's so fucked up. But then he'd say: "Well *reconozco que tengo un problema y yo quiero cambiar y no quiero golpearla*."[14] Like, no. Dude. You don't want to hit her anymore. You want to be the person who is controlling and jealous and manipulative but doesn't hit? That doesn't… If you think she's your property, then why should you hit her, if you think she's your property. She's not your fucking property.

E: And you told him that?

J: Yeah, very outright. I don't like the way you treat her, even when you're not angry. That's the thing. And if you don't change the way you think of this relationship when you're not angry, then it could be abusive whether you're hitting her or not. "No, no, it's not like that." No, it actually is. Everybody sees that. And eventually I shut him out. You can't come around here anymore.

Joel's story became even more complicated when the girlfriend began coming to Joel's organization for help and the boyfriend began to demand the Joel explain what the girlfriend needed. Joel's moral tension in this scenario was palpable during our interview. When I asked what had come of the situation, Joel paused before explaining that he believed that the girlfriend had asked about where to get a restraining order. In regards to Joel's relationship to the young man, he says:

"I have made it clear to him to not come around here anymore, that he is completely cut off. Which… I mean, there was no ambiguity on that decision for me, but I don't know, I think it was right to keep trying and mentoring and trying to see if I could, like… for the first while. But I don't know, should I have cut him off sooner? Did I do anything… I don't know."

For Joel, this story was the unspeakable of the humanitarian borderland. The moral repugnancy of this young man's life precluded him from rescue. Despite Joel's open border mentality, he drew moral boundaries in the sand and felt that there were ethical lines that should not be crossed.

Decisions to represent and advocate for youth were often based on youth's ability to be molded into a humanitarian subject. In future research, I would like to delve into the process by

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[14] I recognize that I have a problem, and I want to change, and I don't want to hit her.

which youth are excluded at each point in the humanitarian borderlands and the logics that underlie this exclusion.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I outlined the shape of the humanitarian story. Here, I have explored the process by which humanitarians teach youth to tell this story. Through teaching youth to identify a story that centers their individual experience, inscribing that story with the language of abuse and trauma, and then directing youth to manage emotions in a particular way around that story, humanitarians socialize youth into a narrative performance of victimhood. However, this process is not neutral but rather infused with beliefs about inferior cultures as well as gendered and racialized beliefs around young men and young women, thus creating contradictions and tensions for the youth and humanitarians alike. Youth must also navigate their particular social positions, where they are stereotyped with beliefs around machismo and hyper-sexuality. However, youth work to claim space in these narratives, sometimes utilizing falsehoods to their advantage. In the next chapter, I move the focus from the institution of the state to focus on the institution of education as well as the ways in which humanitarians move between and around all of the major institutions of the borderlands

Chapter 6: Borderland Fields, Institutions and Individuals

Unaccompanied immigrant youth in the United States are precariously balanced on the edges of three primary institutions: family, state, and education. Each of these institutions is important in youths' ability to navigate life in the United States, but multiple factors leave youth at the edges of these system. As discussed in Chapter 3, youth are often tied to a family structure while not always being fully sheltered by it. This is especially complicated for youth who are also on the border of adulthood and childhood. Migrant youth also exist on the border of nation states, and are thus not protected as they try to navigate legal and government systems. Chapters 4 and 5 explored the stories that are used to help youth enter into the institution of the state. And, as I will explain further in this chapter, while education may be an important factor for some youth's life process and also for their access to legal relief, the educational system responds to these youth in unpredictable ways. Youth who are on the edge of childhood and adulthood may find their access to education blocked, especially due to the ambiguous terrain of legality and individual school obligations. Each of these institutions also depends on youth being full enmeshed in the other institutions. Thus, while individual humanitarians might exist fully within one institution—or outside of all institutions—these humanitarians find that to be successful in their roles of assisting youth, they must break through the institutional boundaries and fill the spaces between institutions.

In this chapter, I explore my guiding argument that the humanitarian borderlands can be understood as three primary fields that work to integrate youth into the institutions of state, family and education. I show how these different fields operate paradoxically with one another, being at once independent yet dependent and overlapping. To successfully navigate these gray areas, both youth and the humanitarian actors who support them must be comfortable with

flexibility, creativity, and resistance. In the following section, I outline my argument about

borderland fields. I follow with a brief explanation about youths' access to the institution of

education, as this is the only institution I did not explore in detail in other chapters. The final

three sections explore the dominate ways in which borderland actors relate to their roles in their

fields. First, they must respond flexibly and expand their roles when confronted by role strain.

Second, they disrupt legitimate practices with creative means. Finally, through resistant acts,

they circumvent established fields entirely.

Borderland Fields

Friedland and Alford (1991) assert that adequate social theory must address the multiple

organizational levels of society, particularly the individual, organizational and institutional. Here,

I explore similar levels, focusing on the relationship between primary institutions in society, the

fields that support these institutions for unaccompanied immigrant youth, and the individual

actors in these fields. I argue, first, that unaccompanied migrant youth largely exist outside of

three primary institutions: family, the state and education. These primary institutions are "stable,

valued and recurring patterns of behavior" (Huntington 1965, p. 394) and largely structure the

lives of individuals in the United States. However, as undocumented migrants, unaccompanied

youth do not fit into government designations of legality, thus existing outside of the purview of

the state. As unaccompanied youth, they appear to survive outside of family structures (although

this is a complicated, nuanced relationship). And as youth who sometimes bypass American

adolescence (willingly or not), they do not always have full access the American educational

system.

Because youth are not integrated into these institutions, several fields have arisen with the

implicit purpose of incorporating youth into family, state and education. I follow Zietsma and

Lawrence's (2010) definition of organizational field as "a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field" in addition to DiMaggio and Powell's assertion that organizational fields "constitute a recognized area of institutional life" (p. 148). As seen in Figure 1, I have identified a specific field within each institution that functions to integrate unaccompanied youth into that institution. Within the family, the field of family placement is meant to help youth connect to and build intimate families. This field consists of social workers, government workers and foster care workers who collectively attempt to find families, assimilate youth into those households, and ensure that this integration is successful. The legal advocacy field is meant to help youth fit into the state citizenship system, with the assistance of pro bono attorneys, legal aid organizations, and advocates. Within the institution of education, immigrant student outreach is a field of teachers, administrators and school liaisons that work to register immigrant students in local school systems. Finally, both the field of immigrant student outreach and the field of family reunification work to socialize these youth into "normal" teenage life course. While many humanitarians often work within one particular field, there are also several types of humanitarians that exist largely outside of each of these fields, including community volunteers, activists, counselors, and the youth themselves. The problem is that while each of these fields is purposed to help youth fit into that particular institution, the success of a youth in one institution often depends on youth already being integrated into the other. Thus, for youth to be successful, both they and the humanitarians must act as "institutional entrepreneurs" (Battilana 2006), being willing to stretch their roles, create informal organizations (Roethlisberer and Dickinson 1939) and employ both flexibility and creativity to carry out the goals of responding to unaccompanied youths' needs.

HUMANITARIAN BORDERLANDS

Adolescence

Institution →	State	Family	Education	
Field →	Legal Relief	Family Reunification	Immigrant Student Outreach	
Actors →	Attorneys Legal Advocates	Family Reunification Workers Post Release Workers Foster Care Workers	Community Liaisons ESL Teachers Administrators	Volunteers Activists Counselors
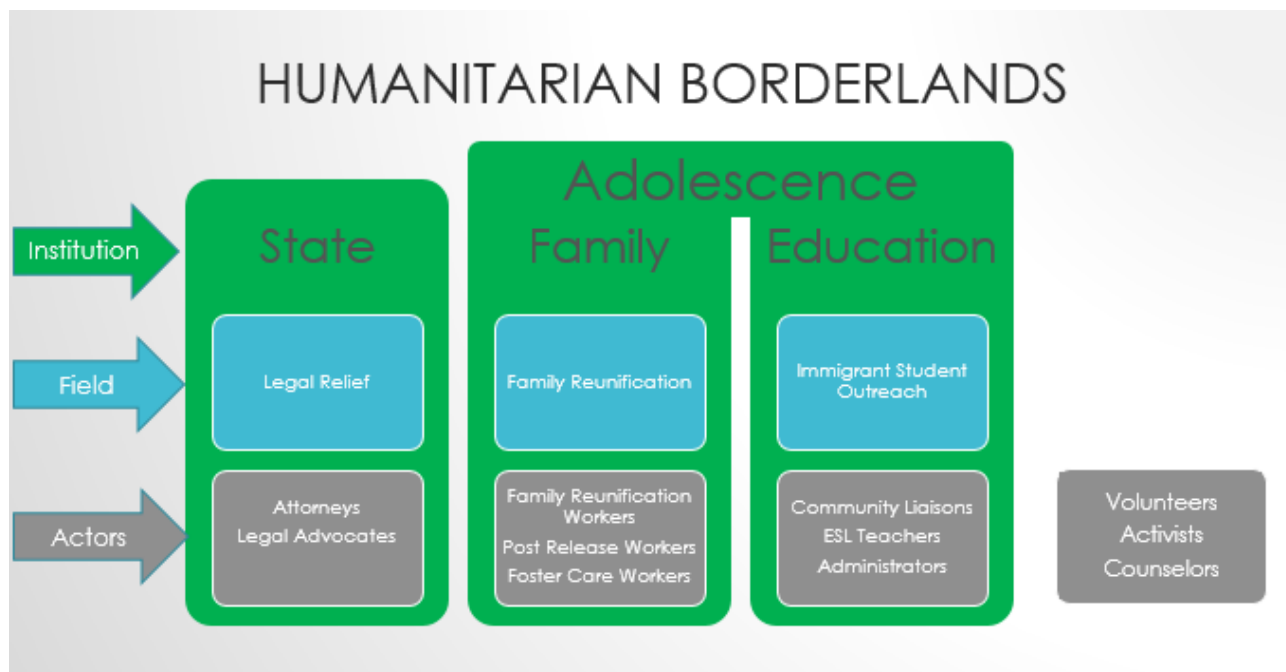
Figure 1: The Humanitarian Borderlands

Blocked from the Institution: The Case of Education

While previous chapters explore the institutions of family and state, in this chapter I will explore the institution of education to demonstrate the difficulties youth have when attempting to integrate into this institution. Education is an essential socializing institution in society, social roles, and social values (Parsons 1959, Halstead and Taylor 1996). Beyond learning subject matter, children are socialized into American values and culture, including racial, sexual and class systems (Martin 1998; Bettie 2003; Morris 2005; Garcia 2009). I argue that for unaccompanied migrant youth, integration into the institution of education is also a process of socializing youth into values of life course. Being integrated into education is a way to youth to prove that they are, indeed, youth and not adults, and thus deserving of humanitarian assistance. The importance of this is made clear when attorney's recommend that youth enroll in school to prove their character to a judge. School enrollment is read favorably by the courts as compliance

to American values of education and childhood. However, migrant youth's ability to enter into schools was often stymied by a variety of factors, both in and outside of the institution of education.

For many youth, the ability to enroll in school was sometime dependent on being simultaneously enmeshed in a family structure. Although educational policies vary by state, many youth are dependent on legal guardians to enroll them in school. At the very minimum, a lack of a legal guardian creates multiple bureaucratic difficulties in enrolling undocumented youth in schools. Midwest advocate Veronica expressed frustration with these types of policies: "When it is a young person, they are even more limited because if they wanted to do something on their own, they can't. They're dependent on the adults they live with." Marta, a community social worker in the Southeast, explains her frustration with this issue when she described a father who had recently been reunited with his adolescent son. The father was an undocumented field worker and could not take time off of work to register his son for school, as was stipulated in the youth's release. This made Marta furious:

> "I said, 'Why did you bring him here? Why did you bring him? For what? This is your son! I'm not the mother! You have to be responsible! If you don't respond to us or his needs, I'm going to take your child away, and I'm going to adopt him!'"

School enrollment thus depended on not only youth being enmeshed in family institutions but also traditional relationships of parents and children in which the parents are both willing and able to carry out those types of duties.

Even when family structures were in place, youth sometimes found that their ability to enroll in school was stymied by their legal status, that is, their existence outside of the state. Although schools are required to enroll undocumented students according to Plyler v. Doe, 457

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US 202 (1982), there were frequently cases in which schools used loopholes to reject this statute. Journalists across the country have documented cases in which schools refused to enroll students (see, for example, Burke 2016), and my participants from multiple different locations reported the same issue happening in their communities. For example, Allison, a foster care worker for unaccompanied youth in the Midwest discussed the difficulties of enrolling her unaccompanied migrant clients in the local school. Allison explains that in one school: "The secretary would not even take the paperwork. Would not enroll the child. Told us that we are not taking thugs here, so you better turn around and leave." Similarly, two community workers in the Southeast explained that the Department of Justice (DOJ) was coming to investigate their local schools because the schools were refusing to register unaccompanied students. Yesenia, one of these workers, explains:

> "When we were registering some of the kids, [the schools] were saying, no, you're already old--some were 16, 17--telling them, no, you should go to a night school. You belong in night school. Because probably of the English barrier, or because their levels were low compared to wherever they belonged. And then some of the kids, the counselors wanted them to sign up for a school called East Side, and then we discovered that East Side was a school for kids that come out of jail or were detained. Those are troubled kids. I don't think you would want to send a refugee kid to them, because they are not coming from that side of the surge. They are fleeing violence. It was a little hard, so that is why in May the DOJ from the education department will be coming to do an investigation."

Even when youth did find ways to get enrolled in schools—sometimes with the assistance of multiple community actors and the threats of local attorneys—the schools did not always make themselves welcoming to the students. Allison explained that sometimes, after an attorney had fought to force a school to educate a student, the student would "get in the classroom and experience so much racism and discrimination" that the environment itself made it difficult for students to stay enrolled.

Besides schools actively working against the enrollment of unaccompanied immigrant students, other schools found their own bureaucracies prevent youth enrollment, despite the best intentions of the schools. Lisa, a teacher in a suburban school with a stated commitment to helping migrant students, explains this issue with one of her students. The young man was 18 already but wanted to finish high school in order to provide evidence for his legal case. However, he was found noncompliant with vaccine requirements and was faced with the prospect of being barred for school because of this. Lisa explains;

> "Based on the funding and everything else that I don't understand, the [local mobile clinic] isn't able to give him any more vaccines, because their vaccines are only for 18 and younger. Supposed to be just for students. The public health department doesn't have vaccines. The community clinic, they cannot provide vaccines to anybody who is 18 and younger. So I said, okay, what do we do? He needs to get the vaccine to stay in school. He is going to be out of compliance with this health requirements if he doesn't do that. It took us almost a week calling every pharmacy in the city to see who had that vaccine. Finally we found it at Meijers. From all the places! Meijers! But it was almost $200 and he doesn't have the money to pay that. That is not covered by the homeless services that we have at the school, but the school district just grabbed the bill and they paid for it. The administrators paid for it because he needed it to stay in school."

In this case, the young man's existence on the edge of adulthood and childhood barred him from accessing basic services needed to get him into the school system. It was the school itself that broke out of the bureaucratic requirements to help fund the young man's vaccines to keep him in school.

Finally, there were instances in which the only barrier for unaccompanied youths' matriculation in local schools was a lack of information for both youth and schools. This was particularly true for youth who were on their own and not connected to any of the borderland humanitarian fields, and who were simply unaware of their rights and ability to register for school. Florencio was one of these young people. He migrated alone at age fourteen, and he was eighteen when I spoke with him. He explained that one thing that he regrets is that he left

Mexico before finishing his education. He says that he believes he cannot return to school; now that he is eighteen, schools will not accept him. Florencio felt that his time had passed for any assistance. He did not know who to talk to or where to go to find out of this was true or to explore his options. Even the school districts themselves did not always have the necessary information to help unaccompanied youth. Put simply, Allison explained: "Some of the rural schools… really meant well. Really wanted to help. But had no idea what to do." This lack of information by both youth and schools often prevents very basic conversations from happening and negatively influences youths' chances of success.

The relationship between unaccompanied youth and schools varied widely in my research. Some schools felt committed to their population of unaccompanied students, even assigning specific advocates to help these students navigate the education systems. Other schools actively worked against the enrollment of unaccompanied students. And others still simply did not have the knowledge or resources to give unaccompanied youth a fair chance at enrollment and success. Thus, just as unaccompanied migrants struggled in integrating into family and the state, they also struggled to be fully enmeshed in the educational system. In the following sections, I explore the ways in which youth and humanitarians worked outside of their particular roles to make integration into American institutions possible.

Flexibility: Responding to Role Strain

Individual humanitarians in each field often held very specific roles in relation to their field. These roles were frequently limited to work in the field, but the most common complaint I heard from nearly all humanitarian actors was that they felt inadequate in fulfilling these roles or unable to complete their duties without stretching these roles. Goode (1960) calls this role strain, which he defines as "the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations" (p. 483). More specifically,

role ambiguity occurs when there is a "lack of necessary information available to a given organizational position" and role conflict arises when the "behaviors expected of an individual are inconsistent" (Rizzo, House and Lirtzman 1970, p. 151). Such role strain often arose when individual humanitarians were trained for a specific position but discovered that their training and expectations did not match the needs of unaccompanied youth clients.

Attorneys, in particular, were the most vocal about this role strain, ambiguity and conflict, especially regarding the necessity of providing emotional labor to youth (Hochschild 1983). It is notable in this discussion that fifteen of the seventeen attorneys I interviewed for this project were women, reflecting a gendered bias in helping work. Women are not just more likely to participate in jobs that require emotional labor (Guy and Newman 2004); they also feel differently about it. The American Bar Association reported that women are more slightly more likely than men to believe that their pro bono clients need their help and that they are extremely passionate about doing pro bono work. They are also more likely than men to report that they would take more pro bono cases if they could (American Bar Association 2013). In addition, when women and men do the same job, women are often expected to attach emotional qualities to that job, as demonstrated in Pierce's (1995) study of paralegals. So, when understanding the role strain that attorneys feel, it is necessary to understand the gendered experience of these attorneys.

The attorneys I spoke with discussed having the education to deal with legal aspects of migrant cases but having no knowledge or training in dealing with the emotional or physical needs of youth clients. Samantha explains:

> "Often times we do a lot more than you typically do as a lawyer for a client. Because if I don't do it, this kid is not going to be successful, and there is no one else to do it. I am often the only English speaking, professional person that this kid knows... So I'll call the school. I'll work with the school social worker, I'll help them set up their cognitive

evaluation, I'll help them get into therapy. I'll do all kinds of social work-y kinds of things. It is not that I—it is more that it is not a lawyer role. But if I don't do it, this client's case is going to lose. We cannot win without these things. And my job is to help this person succeed."

Providing a long list of extra tasks, Samantha emphasizes that she is the only person that can assist her client and that the success of her actual job—to win the case—is dependent on all of these things happenings (emphasizing, again, the importance of the institution of education on the institution of the state). Julie discusses the same strain, noting the emotional labor that she feels inadequate in providing. .

"It takes time to build confidence and get that [migration] story to come out. It requires some services and therapy and stuff and I am not... I am a caring person, I want to help people, but I don't have the skills that maybe a social worker or psychologist would have to deal with situations like that."

Julie laments that she does not have the skills that a psychologist or social worker has, but it is notable that she emphasizes that she "is a caring person" and she "wants to help people" anyway. She makes sure to separate her personal characteristics (caring and helpful) from her professional training as an attorney. Similarly, Jessica, an attorney, explained that she often felt that she had to step into a social work role. I asked her what that meant:

"I mean, it only happens because the clients think that that is my job. So they come to me for that job. So I just have to sort of do it because that is what they think I am sometimes. I guess it has just been difficult because I am not one. Mostly it has just been trying to find services for them… Some work hours have gone to just trying to find somebody to help them... Sometimes we've referred them out to private therapists, if the family is able to at least pay a little bit. I feel like I am not equipped to deal with their issues, other than their legal case. Sometimes that is a little frustrating… I don't think I'm a very good social worker. I'm a failed one."

While Bogoch (1997) suggests that women attorneys do not "speak in a 'different voice' than men, clients respond to women differently than they do men. So, when Jessica notes that the clients think that social work is her job, she is experiencing this same client bias. Further,

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Jessica's states that she is a "failed" social worker, suggesting that being a social worker has been attached to her job description, although she has failed at this particular component.

Jessica, Julie and Samantha all expressed similar concerns. They felt competent in handling legal elements of cases but discovered that they could not be successful in these elements if they were not also fulfilling other needs of the clients. They often felt underprepared to undertake the emotional labor of social workers and therapists and also expressed frustration in taking extra time away from their legal obligations to fulfill the social worker role of connecting youth to the community.

Acting as social workers was one thing, but some attorneys felt that they were asked to bridge parenting gaps as well. This is, quite literally, the "mothering" that Hochschild (1983) suggests is often subtly attached to women's job descriptions. Susana tells a story about a family who had been reunited with a teenage daughter:

> "It is crazy because the parents, I think sometimes they are trying to get us to raise the kids, to help with the discipline. They will call and are trying to threaten the kids: "Hey, I'm going to call your attorney because you need to do this, if not you're going to get deported or something." It's like, oh man, I'm always thinking, I can't raise the kids for you. It is a huge drain in our resources, actually, dealing with all of this. Mom will call me and say: 'She ran away and I know she is with her friend [inaudible].' I'm like, first, let's make sure she's okay. I try to get in touch with the child, I try to bring the child in, I try to refer them to the social worker, and then the parent will come in, and this whole time I could have been working on your case, but now I'm just like—before the social worker came it was even worse. Now I'm playing mediator or psychologist, instead of really, really working on your case."

The responsibility to parent felt inappropriate to Susana but also necessary for her to complete her job.

The reasons for this role strain were varied. Many attorneys who worked independently with youth clients did not have organizational support to provide for the variety of youths' needs. They attempted to fit youth into the client mold that adult clients typically inhabited. In working

with adults, attorneys would typically rely on adults to "take responsibility" for themselves, but saw that youth clients did not always have the structural support or knowledge to do so. These attorneys often made a choice to step in and fill that gap. Others worked for new organizations that were still scrambling to find funding and did not yet have the capacity to hire the necessary support staff. This was the case for Susana, who was eventually able to convince her organization to hire an actual social worker, which alleviated, although did not erase, some of this burden. And, others still, found that there were not the appropriate resources available to them at all. For example, attorneys working with rural clients did not always have access to Spanish-speaking therapists, and thus found themselves taking on the role of a therapist.

Attorneys were not the only humanitarians to experience role strain. Interestingly, social workers found that they needed to work as attorneys, too. Marta, a community worker in the Southeast talked about needing to help parents locate their children in detention centers. The parents often couldn't afford legal assistance, so they would come to Marta and her organization.

> "It was a big challenge. But the biggest one was learning how to do the paperwork, faxing to them, getting contact with the caseworker or the officer in—using the ICE locator. It is not easy because they are minors, and they wouldn't show up with information about what you are looking for. But, thank God, all of us women working together, finally we got everything under control! [Laughs] We are still getting cases, and now we know how to do stuff, like when they change the venues from one state to another, all of that stuff."

Marta and her colleagues did not feel adequately trained to provide the legal assistance that their youth clients needed. As a social worker, she did not struggle with providing the emotional and physical support to youth but rather struggled when working with the technicalities of the legal system. Eventually, however, with the brain power of "all of us women," she and her colleagues were able to wade through the bureaucratic system. So, while the labor itself was not gendered, the allocation of the labor was.

Humanitarians who dealt with role strain were successful when they were willing to be flexible with their own roles. In the above scenarios, each of the humanitarians describes discomfort with her role but also concedes to the unwritten demands of the job, expanding her role to include other commitments. As Binder (2007) demonstrates with her research on a transitional housing organization, individual workers must often respond to competing demands and must do so with creativity. She explains that individuals respond to external environment depending on "department members' creative uses of institutional logics and local meanings, which emerge from their professional commitments, personal interest, and interaction, on-the-ground decision making" (p. 547). In the case of borderland humanitarians, individuals often justified their expanded roles and the time they put into these expanded roles, as a requirement for getting the job done and fulfilling their personal obligations to the client.

Another strategy that humanitarians used to deal with role strain was to facilitate connections outside of their particular field, also known as boundary spanning (Tushman 1977). This boundary spanning often occurred between each of the institutional fields. For example, attorneys often needed youth to enroll in school in order to complete an application for legal relief. The attorneys might contact the schools themselves in order to start the enrollment process. Sometimes, they would have to threaten schools with legal action when schools refused enrollment. There was also important boundary spanning outside of the three major borderland fields. For example, attorneys would often partner with therapists who could provide the emotional labor that attorneys felt inadequate to provide. Clara and Bianca worked as therapists in a trauma-centered program in the Southeast, and they often worked with attorneys who represented unaccompanied clients. Bianca explained that youth are sometime resistant to opening up about traumatic events to an attorney:

"[One youth client] was leaving the most traumatic thing that brought him here for the last... [The youth] wasn't opening up to [the lawyer] at all. So I told [the youth] that here we are person centered. We are going to do whatever you want to work on, but in order for that evaluation to hold something and be strong and for the judge to see why he can't send you back, you are going to have to open up and tell me what happened."

However, this type of boundary spanning doesn't always work. Bianca and Clara were both frank that sometimes when attorneys sent them clients in order to work through a traumatic event, the client my not be interested in therapy. Clara explains: "Even though the lawyer may stress about it, but [the youth] don't want to [go to therapy]. We cannot force anything."

Role strain is widely prevalent in borderland fields as each field is dependent on the other for the overall success of youth. Because of this, humanitarians often find themselves facing duties that are far outside of their particular field. Personal flexibility and boundary spanning are both ways for humanitarians to complete their jobs while still abiding by the logics of their organizations. However, as I explore in the next section, sometimes humanitarians are also willing to work outside of legitimate institutional practices to make sure their youth clients receive the care and services that they need.

Creativity: Disrupting Legitimate Practices

Humanitarians in the borderlands often found themselves facing difficult ethical dilemmas that pitted their organizational roles against their moral obligations to help youth. This was particularly true when they dealt with youth facing difficult situations, such as homelessness or deportation. Pache and Santos (2013) describe these dilemmas as competing institutional logics. Citing the work from DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Pache and Santos explain that "organizational responses are driven by a concern to satisfy institutional referents to ensure survival" while "individual responses are mainly driven by concerns related to social acceptance, status, and identity." (p. 12). For humanitarians, identity and self-concept is often defined

through service to youth, and this sometimes leads humanitarians to react to these competing

logics by compartmentalizing their adherence to each.

Educators were the humanitarians who most frequently revealed issues with competing

logics in their work with unaccompanied youth. While teachers are firmly embedded in the

institution of education, they often have a front seat view of problems that arise between youth

and family systems, especially when youth face homelessness due to tensions in the household.

Being witness to these events prompted several educators to work outside of the institutionalized

roles as school employees.

Michelle, an ESL teacher in a Midwest school district, provided one of the most

compelling instances of this type of competing institutional logics. She worked within a district

that she describes in hesitant language: "unfortunately, without saying too much about my

school, they're not super respectful of other cultures." Later she says: "Our school didn't have a

whole lot of respect for other cultures and languages. A lot of [teachers] would scan the hall and

say: 'Don't speak that language in here! We speak English!' A lot of that kind of thing." Her

school culture was not accepting of immigrant students in general, and she was furthermore

confined by legal and professional obligations around her status as a teacher. For example,

researchers have noted that teachers are expected to carry out emotional labor of carrying and

connectedness with their students, but that this labor must have boundaries and be confined to

the teaching role (O'Conner 2008; Aultman, Williams-Johnson and Schutz 2009).

Amidst these logics, Michelle had strong feelings about her personal, spiritual mission to

her immigrant students. She explains:

> "There's white privilege, and I try to use—I think there are way too many marginalized,
> and there are way too many of us who have the ability… In infuriates me when I see
> people who have the ability to step up and they don't. And it costs me nothing. It really

doesn't... If we don't use the privileges that we have to help someone else, I think it is wrong."

Michelle articulated the importance of advocating for and protecting her most vulnerable students, and her actions proved that this was more important to her than her professional obligations and boundaries.

Michelle frequently confronted situations in which her limitations and school culture— and sometimes even her legal obligations—went against her own personal moral compass. Michelle told numerous stories in which she went above and beyond her role as a teacher—often stepping outside of what are generally accepted professional boundaries for teachers. Michelle told stories about talking with youth's attorneys, bringing youth to drug counseling, and becoming involved with youth's families. She talked about making decisions to not follow her duty to report child abuse, because she knew the family to be undocumented. Instead, she took matters into her own hands. Michelle also frequently brought youth to her home to work odd jobs when they needed money. Sometimes these youth would end up living with her and her husband for months on end, when they found themselves out of a home.

I was curious with how the administration at her school responded to Michelle's somewhat unorthodox relationship with her unaccompanied migrant students. She explained that she "got away" with breaking institutional norms and rules because:

> "There was an unspoken rule. I was the translator so it was like, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. My principal was very aware of what was going on. My assistant principal—if you make my life easier, I'll make your life easier."

So, while her institution did not explicitly support Michelle's decisions to maintain very personal relationships with unaccompanied migrant students, they were willing to look the other way as her skills were essential in her school district.

Michelle was not the only teacher who would allow unaccompanied youth to live with her. At the end of my interview with Lisa, she brought me to the classroom of another teacher who, at the time, was talking with a student who was unaccompanied. The student had recently been kicked out of the home he was staying in, as his sponsor was afraid that his presence was raising flags for immigration. The teacher and student were reflecting on whether or not staying at her house was an option—they decided eventually that she lived too far away, but that he was welcome to stay there until he found a more long-term option. Lisa, however, felt that this was a boundary she couldn't cross: when youth fell into homelessness, she went out of her way to find connections in the community through her social media networks and through her church, but she felt that she could not break the rule of letting students live with her.

While these examples explore the gray areas of boundaries between teachers and students, other types of humanitarians also had to work outside of their professional roles. These humanitarians often participated in disrupting "practice work", what Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) refer define as "the work of actors to create, maintain, and disrupt the practices that are considered legitimate within a field." Ashley, who provided post release services, described a case in which a 16-year-old was released to live with his father. They had no relationship prior to this reunification, so Ashley was sent to the family to provide post-release services. Everything seemed to be proceeding as planned: the young man was enrolled in school and the family appeared to be getting along. However, when Ashley went to visit the family the second time, they were no longer residing in their apartment. She tracked down the father and discovered that he was no longer living with his son and, according to the father, the son had not left information regarding where he could be contacted. Through some creative detective work, Ashley discovered that the young man was now residing in a different state with his 18-year-old brother.

When she caught up to the brothers, they reported that they had left the house due to an abusive and neglectful arrangement, in which they felt highly uncomfortable. Although the brothers were safe living together and were making enough money to support themselves, they indicated that they wished to be enrolled in school, which they were unable to do at the same time. Ashley began looking for legal placement options, but she discovered that Child Protective Services wanted them to go back with the father. Plus, due to their inter-state move, neither state felt that it had jurisdiction over enforcing the case. Ashley explains that she finally found a local organization that identified a family that agreed to take in both of the brothers. She describes this as an "under-the-table foster placement." By looking outside of the institutionally approved means of finding home care, Ashley essentially "disrupts" the legitimate practices in her field. She does so as her commitment to the safety and success of her client overshadowed her commitment to the legitimate practices of her organization.

Attorneys told similar stories of disruptive practice work, when they found themselves needing to work on the edges of the legal system. Jessica, an attorney, explains how she and her colleagues would work around a particular judge who was, in her view, anti-immigrant. For attorneys to proceed with the option of a Special Immigrant Juvenile visa for youth clients, the youth first needed to have their guardianship with a sponsor approved in family court.

> "We do have one judge in [our county] who refuses to issue SIJS orders. Guardianship orders for the purposes of applying for SIJS. So that has been difficult, trying to navigate around that guy. And the few, the three or four kids who live in [the county], he absolutely won't issue them. That has been a hurdle. We were able to get around it by finding a guardian in a different county and applying in that county."

In this case, Jessica worked to find her client a new family system altogether in order to circumvent an antagonistic judge. She was able to bridge this gap with the help of a community organization that was committed to helping unaccompanied youth.

Sometimes, even the youth themselves engaged in disrupting practices as they navigated the various borderland fields. One example of this was an unaccompanied student in Karen's school. Karen explains that the boy had become homeless and began using the school as his home. It was months before a janitor discovered that he had been sleeping in the school every night. The young man's decision to sleep in the school was made out of necessity but demonstrates a creative way in which he disrupted the intended logics of the school for his own needs.

Resistance: Changing the Goal

In the previous sections, I explored how workers respond to institutional pressures by expanding their roles or disrupting legitimate practices in their institution. The final way in which these actors respond is by actively resisting the goals of borderland fields all together. While each of the fields is meant to integrate migrant youth into borderland institutions, some humanitarians and some youth reject these goals outright.

In the third chapter, I argued that family and sponsor placement is not always adequate for the needs and histories of unaccompanied youth. I came across at least one alternative model that presented another option for youths' release that did not depend on family institutions. Joel was community activist in the Southwest who had been working with unaccompanied youth since 2013 in various capacities. He is involved with an activist method that he calls "radical hospitality" which as he explains is based both on his Quaker faith and the Sanctuary Movement. Joel works with a network of individuals and families who open their homes to youth who are released from shelters—particularly those who are turning 18—to allow youth to get on their feet and establish themselves in communities. The idea is to get youth out of government shelters

before they are transferred to detention and to provide youth an alternative to family placement, when family placement is not feasible.

Joel has personally housed multiple youth himself, with four in his house at any given time. He sees these placement options as significantly preferable to adult detention when youth age out of government shelters or homelessness if youth are kicked out of their placements. He is also adamant in his belief that the government does not care for these youth and does not have their best interest in mind. However, Joel does not sugar coat the difficulties of this activist movement: it is difficult to find households willing to take in youth, especially if there is no exit strategy; households often prefer to take in girls, although most of the cases they work with are boys; some of the most generous activists do not live in communities that are appropriate for integrating these youth; and youth bring in a wide range of needs based on cultural backgrounds and traumatic histories that homes are not always adequately prepared for.

The network of individuals remains largely informal, although they have formalized one aspect of the network which now buys apartments and then in turn leases these apartments to youth. Joel explains that youth often have a difficult time renting when they have no credit history. This program now has three apartments with four to five youth in each. Joel also explains that the youth themselves have formed a mentorship network so that they can support one another without government intervention. This mentorship network allows youth to provide support to one another without family institutions.

Joel's organization provides an alternative arrangement for youth to migrate to the U.S. and find success without buying into some or all of the borderland institutions. However, youth do not always desire to be integrated into these American institutions, at all. There was one

effective way for youth to assert themselves over these institutions, and that was to disappear entirely.

Disappearing

Disappearance was a common occurrence that humanitarians discussed with some frequency, although the reasoning for these disappearances varied. Disappearances also provide an interesting lens into the tensions between agentic decision making and the limiting impact of borderland structures for youth. On one hand, a disappearance represents a rejection of borderland pathways. On the other hand, disappearances may also shine a light onto the cracks of the humanitarian systems through which youth may fall.

Some humanitarians who discussed disappearances made clear that they believed these to be a result of a conscious choice on the part of youth, albeit a choice with which the humanitarians strongly disagreed. Attorney Jessica tells the story of a case that she felt "fell through the cracks." The young man who was applying for SIJS. He had turned 18, which made getting a guardianship order difficult, although not impossible. She had told the young man that he needed to be in school for the judge to "buy our arguments," but: She explains:

> "This young man just, unfortunately, didn't see how beneficial it would be to have legal permanent residency. In other ways, he had a really good SIJS case. His father was alcoholic and abusive. So it was a good abuse SIJS case. He just—he didn't want… we couldn't, no matter how much we tried to get him to see the value in becoming a legal permanent resident here, how lucky he was to have an opportunity to do that, since so many people here have zero path to citizenship or to legal permanent residency. And he dropped out of school, decided he just wanted to work, he didn't want to pursue it anymore. That was kind of devastating that we had tried for a little while to convince him. Someday I think he'll regret that decision."

In Jessica's telling of this story, she centers the youths' decision, emphasizing that he will regret his choice later. She makes mention of his desire to work, but does not consider other constraints

that might have influenced his decision. Nancy provides a similar scenario of a young man who

refused to engage further in his case because he preferred to work:

> "That was devastating because you put a lot of work into his asylum and his special
> juvenile visa, and he had a great case. But he couldn't… I think he couldn't hand, number
> one, not working… Especially the boys, you know, they are working since age 8 or
> something… If you go to the US, you better send money home, you need to pay for the
> coyotes—sometimes they are causing trouble back at home looking for the money. The
> amount of pressure I thinking that he felt. I'm guessing it came from the need to get out
> and work and do his own thing and not be under [the foster] program."

Unlike Jessica, Nancy provides a more nuanced understanding of the pressure that this client

faced. She knew that his need to work stemmed from his need to send money home or pay for a

coyote that might be making threats.

While work may drive the disappearances for some youth, others may disappear out of

fear or distrust in the humanitarian system. Ayala, an attorney in the Midwest, explained that

disappearances for her frequently occurred when her first claim for that client had been denied.

After having divulged so much information to the court and committed so much time and energy,

the first denial was extremely disheartening for her clients. While Ayala would still see a path

forward, she found that clients would often disappear after this, unwilling to spend more time

trying to fight their case. They lost trust in the humanitarian system and found it easier to try to

proceed alone. Ashley, a post release service provider sees these disappearances as youth "going

into hiding" because they do not trust the legal system. Similarly, Nancy, tells a story about

another young man for whom she had pursued a green card. However, as he was waiting for his

green card, he disappeared. He called into Nancy's several weeks later and asked the green card

to be mailed to a different location. Nancy explains:

> "You could just see that these kids have so much anxiety and they are so afraid. They do
> not even know what getting a green card means, even though we have been over it and
> over it and over, like, it is still scary to them. It is still the immigration process that has so

much mystery. They can't handle it, so they just run away. It is how they got away from the bad stuff that happened in their home country."

In this case, Nancy sees disappearance as a fearful response that has served youth well in their past. Other humanitarians called this "survival mode," explaining that youth who grew up in unstable environments often do not trust adults or institutions in the United States, either. However, this idea unfairly suggests that youth *can* trust the legal system to protect them. Indeed, disappearance is perhaps an entirely rational response when faced with a state body that has taught them to believe that they are criminals and do not belong.

Humanitarians had other hypotheses about these disappearances. Susana, another attorney, believed that the youth who disappear do so because of their inability to integrate into the family system in the U.S. They run away from their American families, because they have always lived alone and have always learned to run away. In this case, they prefer independence to dependence. Karen, an educator, saw unaccompanied migrant students disappear from her school, as well. Living in a Midwest district, she believed that the kids of "end up disappearing to Chicago," but she did not have a satisfying understanding of why this happens:

> "Some of them will hear bad news from home and go back… Some of them leave because they're trying to get siblings up, and so they'll go back to try and help the siblings make the journey up. Other, though, just disappear and we don't know what happened. Sometimes we find out much, much later that they were detained and they're in deportation proceedings. But other just completely go off the grid. Where do they go?"

The mystery of the disappeared youth was hard to pin down. I had several experiences with these disappearances. I was excited when I got a phone call from a young man whose attorney had referred him to me for an interview. He was eager to meet with me and tell his story, and he spoke highly of his attorney, who he said had "put up with him" even though he disappeared on her for months. I hoped to be able to ask him more about his self-described disappearance to help shed more light on the reasons youth decide to circumvent—if only

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temporarily—humanitarian systems. However, I had overbooked myself to meet him, and I messaged him several days prior to reschedule. He responded that he was confused, and then he disappeared. He did not return future phone calls or private messages via social media, which he had started using to communicate with me regularly. If it wasn't for his active social media presence, I would have been concerned that something had happened to him. To this day, I have not heard from him, and I cannot help but think that he had actively disappeared from me as well.

Around the same time as this disappearance, I was advocating for a young man being held in a Midwest shelter. I had promised to assist him upon his release, to help him enroll in school and seek legal relief. He was to be released to his mother, who had complied willingly with all of the case management requests made by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The young man had a clear path to legal relief due to the very visible results scarring on his body as a result of persecution in his home country. The attorneys and social workers I spoke to about his case felt optimistic that he would continue to abide by the processes and procedures that would allow him to assimilate into what is regarded as normative American adolescence.

He was released to his mother, and I was given the responsibility to follow up with him. I was able to reach him by phone after he was released from the shelter, and he also attended his first court date. Everyone remained optimistic about his legal case. However, within three weeks, I tried to reach out again, and his phone numbers had been disconnected. I called regularly for several weeks to no avail. Eventually, I reached his mother, who very quickly hung up the phone, saying that she didn't know where he was. It was clear that she was no longer interested in speaking with me. I was never able to reach the family again, and the young man failed to turn up to court in the following months. I do not know what happened to him, and for months his

disappearance left me unsettled. He had clear pathways for all of the typical goals for unaccompanied youth: he had legal options, he had a family system, and he was enrolled in school. And yet, with this disappearance, he left his family, the legal system and the educational system.

Like other humanitarians, I can only provide conjecture regarding the reasons for these disappearances. My feeling, in the case of the potential interview participant, was that I had broken his trust by canceling our initial meeting. However, I am at a loss regarding what happened with the young man I volunteered with. I hope that his disappearance was a decision to live his life on his own terms. However, I am fearful that this decision was prompted, instead, by a deep mistrust in the people around him. I am also concerned for his safety. I hope that his mother was lying when she said that she did not know where he was—a lie that would clear arise out of her own mistrust in the system. The humanitarian in me is frustrated at the outcome, disappointed in my own inability to establish trust with the family, and deeply worried for his wellbeing and future.

Humanitarians who build alternative pathways and youth who disappear are both engaging in practices of circumventing the humanitarian fields. In each case, the driving force of this circumvention is the belief that humanitarian systems, particularly those run by the government, cannot be trusted. Activists such as Joel build networks of people to do the job they do not trust the government to do, using values that are often outside of those held by other borderland humanitarians. The reasons youth disappear are unclear, but there is evidence to suggest that youth, too, view these American institutions with distrust, and circumventing humanitarian fields entirely may sometimes appear to be the best option for their lives.

Conclusion

Using an organizational lens, the humanitarian borderlands can best be understood as three distinct fields that work to incorporate youth into the U.S. institutions of family, state, education, and adolescence. However, the separation of these fields can be detrimental to youths' success. For example, youth may fail to integrate into the educational system if they are not enmeshed in the family system. And yet, they may not be able to access relief in the legal system without the state. The fields are thus dependent yet entirely interdependent. This creates role strain among humanitarian workers, who often feel that they must do work that is entirely outside of their job description. However, these humanitarians have learned to deal with this strain through flexibility and creativity. Furthermore, some humanitarians and, indeed, the youth themselves, may decide to circumvent these institutions entirely. However, I question whether youth who circumvent the system are acting as agentic being or rather are responding to the current limitations within the humanitarian system. This is an important critique in determining the ways in which the humanitarian borderlands meet and fail to meet youths' needs.

Chapter 7: Conclusion-Youth, Humanitarianism and the Borderlands

In this dissertation, I have explored the people and organizations that work to help and protect unaccompanied immigrant youth when they arrive to the United States. I have conceptualized these disparate individuals and organizations as the humanitarian borderlands. In doing so, I suggest that these workers make up a system of aid that responds to human suffering but does so within the limitations of borderland logics. Because of this , these humanitarians become entangled in neoliberal logics that rely on cultural hierarchies, victims narratives, personal responsibility, and the control of immigrant bodies. Simultaneously, I have highlighted the agency and perspectives of unaccompanied youth as they exist in and push against this system.

Chapter 3 explored the tensions between youth and (transnational) family systems. I argued that the field of family reunification often fails to respond to youths' needs, and it locates this failures in presumptions about the personal and cultural inadequacies of family members as well as youths' inability or unwillingness to enact social dependence. I uncovered how beliefs about youth dependency on families often did not align with the realities of youths' complicated lives. Within humanitarian logics, youth are either fleeing abusive families or awaiting a joyful reunion with their families. Youth are then placed with families based on white, American, middle class understandings of childhood dependency and family dynamics. However, I demonstrate that youth have a variety of nuanced experiences with families and there are multiple scenarios that lead to youths' solitary migrations. Because the humanitarian borderland system fails to recognize these nuanced lives, youth placements may be inappropriate and often receive inadequate support from the humanitarian systems.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I focused on how humanitarians assist youth in navigating the legal system through the creation of a borderland legend. This legend positions youth as a humanitarian subject and requires that youth walk a fine line between paradoxical experiences and identities: Youth are reminded constantly of their criminality while needing to also appear innocent. Youth must position themselves as dependent children while simultaneously acting as agentic adults. They must profess backgrounds of instability and trauma while acting as stable individuals. Finally, while the humanitarian assistance they receive appears to be free, youth must offer themselves up for humanitarian consumption. Humanitarians teach youth to enact this legend through a process of finding stories, instilling the language of abuse and trauma, and coaching youth in the performative aspect of their trauma. My intervention in these chapters was to unveil the ways in humanitarians require youth to enact personal responsibility over their lives and locate their trauma in the family or culture rather than global. Indeed, youth must become neoliberal victims in order to fully integrate into the state.

In the final chapter, I briefly explored the difficulties youth face when entering into the educational system. Then, I emphasized the interdependency of the borderland fields. Yet, because the fields are also separate, individuals face role strain and are often stymied by institutional requirements. I explore how humanitarians use both flexibility in extending their roles and also creativity in working around and expanding institutional rules. I finally discuss an alternative model of humanitarian relief that works outside of the institutionalized means of aid. One way that youth do this is through disappearance, although disappearance is a result not only of youth agency but also the limitations of the current humanitarian system.

This dissertation has highlighted the humanitarian technologies of the borderlands, revealing the paradoxes and limitations that exist as Americans attempt to provide aid to

unaccompanied immigrant youth. In this final chapter, I highlight the major sociological

interventions that are present in this work and the policy implications of each. Then, I present

recommendations for future research.

Interventions and Implications

Throughout this dissertation, I have provided several major interventions to other work

on youth, migration, borderlands, and humanitarianism. I outline these interventions in the

following sections.

Intervention 1: Humanitarian Borderlands

In this dissertation, I provided a clear map of the humanitarian borderlands. Unlike other

researchers who focus on specific points in the borderland, such as shelters, the court system or

the education system, I have mapped the connections between these, providing a holistic picture

of the experiences that an unaccompanied migrant youth might have upon entering the United

States. I have developed the term "humanitarian borderlands" to encompass the interconnected

systems that work to protect and assist unaccompanied youth migrants.

As I argued in Chapter 6, this system is composed of three primary fields that assist youth

in integrating into the American institutions of the family, state, and education. Youth first enter

into government shelters who are tasked with reuniting youth with family or placing youth with

sponsors who are tasked with becoming like families for these youth. Youth then must navigate a

legal system, with the help of attorneys, where they attempt to prove their worthiness for

humanitarian relief, thus entering into legal status with the state. Finally, educators and school

liaisons help youth enter the education system, which simultaneously helps youth perform

American adolescence; thus, the institution of education is also a socializing agent for age-

appropriate behavior.

The importance of the humanitarian borderland concepts lies not just in identifying each field but also in the mapping of the connections between these fields. Each field operates independently, and in many cases, workers may be unaware of the full operations of the other fields. And yet, these feels are entirely interdependent, with each relying on the success and cooperation of the other fields. There is no prior work to my knowledge that explores that interconnectedness and dependence of each borderland field, and this analysis thus has implications for public policy, which I below.

Finally, mapping the humanitarian borderlands helps to uncover the contradictions and tensions that are present in this system. While individuals working in these systems support the best interest of youth, the humanitarian technologies must still contend with borderland logics and neoliberal subjectivities in subtle ways. This tension is seen in the legal system, in which humanitarians must build stories to prove youth are worthy of humanitarian subjectivities. Family reunification systems must use dichotomizing logics of good and bad parenting in addition to dichotomized ideas of childhood and adulthood in order to be successful at integrating youth into families. And, the education system must support the complex lives of youth while insisting that youth fit into ideals of American adolescence. Indeed, I argue that humanitarians become complicit in the same borderlands that they often, as individuals, wish to work against.

Policy Implications

- *Institutionalized Group Services:* I have conceptualized the humanitarian borderlands as multiple interconnected fields, and yet the connections between the fields of family, state and education are not institutionalized and thus dependent on the imagination, networking and vision of individuals. Programs that further connect attorneys, social

workers, counselors and educators could ease in this fluidity. Currently, many existing

program provide just one service to youth: for example, a legal aid organization only

provides legal assistance. And yet, attorneys have stated that they cannot be successful if

the youth is not also being served by a therapist, a social worker and a supportive school

system. Increased funding to add a wide range of job titles to these organizations would

provide youth with the holistic assistance that they need. There are, of course, a handful

of programs that currently exist that provide grouped services. For example, community

organizations may have attorneys, therapists and social workers in the same building.

These organizations could be even more effective if they can also reach into the local

school district. Of course, there are many very important organizations in existence that

do not have the means of adding multiple staff. In this case, programs may consider

creating close connections with other services. An educator could bridge a connection

between the school, a local attorney, and a therapist to create a team of services for youth.

- *Integrate Shelters into Community Networks:* Youth shelters—euphemistically titled

    detention centers—are far from perfect solutions for the handling of unaccompanied

    youth: they can be punitive, they treat youth with a one-size-fits-all practice, and they act

    as surveillance into immigrants' lives. At the same time, they can be positive elements in

    youths' experience in the United States. Many of the youth I've talked to report that the

    shelters were places that they felt safe, were well-fed, met friends, and connected with

    therapists and social workers. When run thoughtfully, shelters can provide youth a safe

    landing space in the United States. Further, shelters provide a very necessary service of

    screening youth for trafficking and ensuring that youth are not returned to dangerous

    situations. I believe temporary shelters, when managed appropriately, are the least

possible evils for attempting to provide youth safety. However, shelters are not currently

being used to their full capacity. Currently, youth are sent to shelters based on space

instead of shelters that are in close proximity to possible parents and sponsors. This is

done for efficiency and also to help maintain the secrecy of shelter locations, due to the

threats such as trafficking and anti-immigration protests. However, youth may stay at

these shelters for extended periods of time, during which they make connections with the

social workers, therapists and advocates in the shelter. When they are released,

sometimes to families residing on the other side of the country, these youth lose the

valuable connections made during this time. If shelters were located in places where

youth would be released, there could be further connections between shelters, local

school systems, attorneys, advocates, and therapists. If shelters could connect with the

communities, shelter teachers could better prepare students for the local school system,

the therapists could work with youth before and after release, child advocates could

provide support for the long term, in person instead of by phone (which is not particularly

effective), and attorneys could start cases immediately instead of months after youths'

arrival. Admittedly, this system would not be perfect. Some youth do not know where

they will end up or may be released elsewhere. Further, not all communities have shelters

near them. However, many youth can tell border officials where their families are

located, and many of these families are centered in specific metropolitan areas and states.

For these youth, grouped services that include community-integrated shelters, would

provide tremendous assistance.

- *Expand Advocacy Programs for Before and After Detention:* The models of child

  advocacy that I've encountered are typically employed either during youths' stay at a

shelter or post release. Both of these provide important roles for youth. For example, with the Young Center, child advocates visit youth in the shelter to help problem-shoot issues that arise. When a child is released—often to a different state—advocates make several follow up phone calls and try to help from a distance, but their role is limited. Other programs have advocates work with youth in the communities as mentors. However, if shelters were located in the same communities as youths' release, advocates could provide a consistent source of support.

- *Expand Access to Attorneys:* There are already numerous calls for youth to have expanded access to attorneys, including the proposition that youth should have the right to an attorney. Many other publications explore the nuances of this proposal, so I will not reiterate them here, but I would like to add my support to this highly important proposal.

- *Allow research within the Office of Refugee Resettlement:* I detail this issue in Chapter 2, but it is worth repeating here. The Office of Refugee Resettlement does not currently allow research on the unaccompanied minors program. Although this ban may have good intentions, it prevents very important insight from developing and prevents increased understanding of youths' lives.

Intervention 2: Intersectional, Humanitarian Logics about Youth

In my mapping of the humanitarian borderlands, I have added to the literature on humanitarian logics by exploring the ways in which these logics apply to youth within the United States. I have highlighted, first, the ways in which humanitarian logics work to secure American hegemony by relying on stereotypical narratives of youths' cultures in building narratives about youth. Judgments about Latino parents' ability to parent their children rely on white, American, middle class logics. Beliefs about abuse in Latino family, for examples, are situated within failed

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cultural practices rather than looking at international order and economic disparities. When young men refuse to become humanitarian subjects, machismo is blamed.

I have highlighted specific humanitarian technologies involved in allowing youth access to American institutions. In particular, I have presented the idea of the borderland legend, a story used to accentuate an impossible tale of success. The idea of a legend as a humanitarian technologies emphasizes how humanitarian narratives take on fictitious, paradoxical qualities and can thus be used to limit most youths' access to relief. It further reveals the neoliberal influence of personal responsibility on how youth are perceived. I have developed the idea of a traumatic confessional, in which youth must present an emotional reveal of the worst moments of their lives to attorneys in order to receive judgments about whether or not these moments are deserving of relief. However, deserving traumas are often not the most salient traumas of youths' lives. Traumas that are located in individual, family and cultural deficiencies are more productive than traumas that are located in global systems of power, including poverty and gang violence. Thus, the humanitarian technologies of the borderland often fail to respond to youth's experiences, thus framing youth failure as a result of personal character rather than structural constraints.

Finally, humanitarian logics also require a distinction between childhood and adulthood, and in this work, I highlight how different borderland fields make that distinction. Youth who must work to support families or pay back debts to coyotes are seen to have entered into adulthood and thus are undeserving of protections for youth. Education is positioned as a choice youth make that ensures their position as minors instead of a privilege that youth can access only when they are not limited other demands and only when their local school system supports them. In addition, I have highlighted the ways in which victimhood and humanitarian subjectivities are

experienced intersectionally. A racialized and gendered lens is often applied to youth who act out adulthood through actions like employment (and, indeed, through solitary migration itself). Young men must contend with racialized and gendered beliefs about machismo as they chose when and how to perform humanitarian subjectivities. Young women must contend with beliefs about their sexuality, and they find that their assertion of agency is treated with mistrust, disbelief and disdain. Youth who come from poverty must face judgements about their family life, implicating their parents in neglect rather than pointing to the structural push for child labor.

Unaccompanied youth in the borderlands must walk a tightrope of paradoxes in order to be considered valid humanitarian subjects. These paradoxes are made all the more complicated by youths' positions of class, race and gender.

Policy Implications

- *Expand Gang-Based Asylum Opportunities*: I add my name to the long list of activists who are currently advocating to expand asylum to the victims of gang-violence. Advocates argue that gang violence and recruitment target young teenage boys, thus making "young teenage boys" in certain Central American cities a social group that should be protected through the system of asylum. Within this, policy makers should acknowledge the role the United States has played in creating transnational gangs and often providing arms to these same gangs. This requires a shift in thinking from savior to complicit actor. When the United States embraces its complicity in the global system—as well as the interconnectedness between national practices and international results—we take the first step toward truly protecting youth.

- *Trauma Based Training:* As the current relief system for youth is based on youths' ability to act their traumas in a productive manner, nearly all humanitarians must currently

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engage in multiple conversations with youth about their traumatic experiences. Yet, very few of these humanitarians have undergone any, much less extensive, trauma training. Humanitarians report feeling vastly underprepared in working on sensitive issues with youth. Those humanitarians that do have training in trauma-based counseling report being appalled by their fellow humanitarians' misunderstanding of trauma and inability to provide sensitive interactions about this material. Government funded organizations, such as shelters, should be required to implement training in trauma that is extensive and ongoing. Non-government organizations should include the same programs and provide the resources for volunteers, such as pro-bono attorneys, to undergo this same training.

- *Rural Outreach:* Youth in rural communities often have difficulties receiving the services that they need from Spanish-speaking therapists or attorneys. Many have only their school system to rely on, and as discussed in Chapter 6, the school system is not always a welcome environment. Although not ideal, some services can be carried out online through programs like video chat. For example, some therapists I spoke with offered online counseling. Attorneys can also meet with youth virtually. When youth are placed in rural communities, shelter workers should help make these virtual connections, perhaps using educators at the school as a home base.

Intervention 3: Youth Agency

Continuing with the distinction between childhood and adulthood, I also contribute to literature on migrant youths' life course. I avoid discussing youth as being positioned on one side or the other of a clear, dichotomous system of adulthood and childhood. I also avoid seeing a progression from childhood to adulthood as a linear process. Instead, I look at how youth must use their position in this dichotomy strategically. They must be flexible in jumping between adult

and child subjectivities in order to comply with borderland requirements. For example, youth who behaved like adults in their home country—living independently and working—may find that they are comfortable returning to a more "childlike" life in the U.S., living under the watchful eye of an adult and returning to school. Yet others find that they prefer to continue to live independently, work, and support their families.

By revealing youths' circular relationship to life course, it is clear that the humanitarian borderlands fail in providing adequate services to these youth due to normative understandings of age. When shelters insist on treating the youth in their care as children, they ignore the nuanced and often adult natures of their lives. When judges and attorneys insist that education is the marker of innocence and deservingness, they fail to consider the structural constraints in youths' lives that would encourage youth to work. When families, sponsors and family reunification social workers insist that youth live as dependents, they often overlook youths abilities to care for themselves and act with independence and responsibility. The disconnect between youths' lives and the narrow proscriptions of the humanitarian borderlands invalidates youths' self-concepts and goals.

In addition to complicating the linear dichotomy between adulthood and childhood, I have also attempted to explore the practices of youth agency in the borderland system. Many youth who travel alone make the decision to do so independently. They may use family assistance to make contacts and pay for the journey north, but they also may undergo border crossings on their own. Once in the borderlands, youth attempt to exert themselves over borderland systems through a variety of means. They may employ falsehoods in attempting to pursue the outcome they want. The may also evade humanitarian help altogether. They also find strength in each other, providing mentorship and support to one another as individuals and

through organizations. When youth are seen only as victims, they are robbed of their histories of independence and their present agency.

Policy Implications

- *Radical Interventions and Youth-Run Programs:* Through this work, I came across several programs that featured radical interventions in the system. Because they existed outside of the state-run services, these interventions often did not need to contend with borderland logics in the same way. One of the best examples I found was a program that rents properties to unaccompanied youth, so they can live together and build their own communities of support and accountability. These programs helped aid youth mentorship and thus honed in on youths' ability to live independently and make positive, agentic decisions. This also created an environment in which youth could receive support as minors but were also able to pursue work and other aspects of adult lives. It did not rely on linear conceptualizations of life course. I would like to see more such programs implemented, as these may be more appropriate for youth who are older and who have already lived independently in their home countries.

- *Access to Flexible Educational Programs* There is no one-size-fits-all solution for helping unaccompanied youth gain access to education. On one hand, some youth reported frustration that their local school districts blocked them out of the mainstream classrooms and pushed them into alternative programs. These policies often seemed racially motivated, instead of responding to the needs of the youth. On the other hand, other youth faced frustration when dealing with a full time school day and the need to work full time simultaneously. These youth would have benefitted from alternative school models, where they could still pursue the education that they wanted (and use this

for their legal case) but were also not discouraged from working to support themselves and their families. In both cases, youth need school districts to work with them to find the most suitable arrangement. Furthermore, some youth reported having misinformation about their ability to access educational systems, and many school districts did not have the skills or resources to work with unaccompanied youth. Several districts that I've encountered employed liaisons for the immigrant community and even for unaccompanied minors in particular. For school districts that do not have large numbers of these students, there should be online resources for districts to access where they can receive information about their obligations to these students as well as trainings on the needs of youth.

- *Age-Out Policies:* Currently, there are strict age-out policies for youth in shelters and for access to certain types of legal relief. These age-out policies do not acknowledge the non-linear nature of youths' lives and respond punitively to youth on their eighteenth birthday. Shelter workers with whom I spoke discussed the terrible experiences of youth being removed in handcuffs from shelters on their eighteenth birthday and placed in adult detention facilities, where they no longer had access to the resources and support in youth shelters. The government does this so as not to have "adults" held in the same facilities as "minors." However, there could feasibly be shelters that work with youth who are not legally minors.

Intervention 4: Transnational Families

My final major intervention examines how humanitarian systems in the borderlands respond to transnational families based on faulty assumptions about these families and youths' position in them. Families are thought to be either locations of violence and neglect from which

youth flee or centers of love to which youth run. There is a significant lack of nuance in these conceptualizations. Youth may indeed flee violent households, but they also may leave families that are filled with love and support or families that maintain a tense balance between these two. Youth who reunite with parents may find that these families are not who they thought they were, and thus even the ideal of family reunification may be filled with conflict and tension. These dichotomized ideologies are important beyond the family unit. Indeed, the treatment of transnational families reflects hierarchical logics about the value and morality of cultures, positioning the American family as the hegemonic ideal to which others must aspire.

In addition to complicated the ideas of family unity and distress, I have also attempted to complicate understandings of youths' position in their families. As I explore in Chapter 3, youth's decisions to migrate exist on a spectrum of support from their parents and extended family. Youth are not always and only dependent on adult family members. They may act on their own wishes with or without the support of adults.

I have demonstrates how, borderland technologies rely on this lack of nuance regarding youth and their transnational families. Relief options are based on the positioning of families as violent and neglectful and family reunification must work with the assumption that reunification is the best option. All of these must operate with the assumption that youth must be dependent on adult family members and do not exist as equal decision makers in the households.

Policy Implications

- *Stop the Deportation and Criminalization of Parents:* The Trump administration recently implemented a policy of criminalizing the parents of unaccompanied youth for having colluded with smuggling networks and put their children in danger. This policy is based on numerous faulty assumptions that I have challenged in this work. First, it assumes that

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parents made the decision to bring their children to the United States, ignoring the fact that youth themselves often make these decisions. Second, it assumes that being smuggled into the United States is more dangerous for youth than staying in their home communities. For youth fleeing gang violence, smuggling may very well be the safest option for their lives. Obviously, human smuggling is not the ideal decision for youth or parents; however, suggesting that this decision places youth in harm's way is utterly blind to the reality of youths' lives. Finally, this policy contradicts current asylum practices, in which the asylum seeker must be present in the U.S. to petition for this relief. Unless the government is willing to provide asylum option to youth within their home countries (another policy which was recently reversed by the Trump administration), they are blocking asylum seekers who have valid asylum claims.

Finally, the deportation of parents only breaks up families and creates further instability for youth. It tears at one of the few support nets that youth may have in the United States, and thus, on the most practical level, is bad social policy. It creates further problems instead of eliminating problems.

- *Expand Non-Family Networks for Youth Release*: A release to parents or family members may not always be the best option for youth. Indeed, my work has found that many youth who are successful found stability in friends, peers, and romantic partners. These are networks that are not currently being tapped. Indeed, these are networks that the Office of Refugee Resettlement actively avoids. Young women are often not released to situations in which a romantic partner may live. Shelters actively prevent youth from exchanging contact information with their peers, out of fear of human trafficking; yet, this practice

prevents youth from making connections that may prove valuable in the future. Instead of

discouraging these connections, humanitarians can help support healthy peer mentorship

- *Provide Further Support for Youth and Sponsors*: Currently, there is limited support

  when youth are released to families and sponsors. School districts have attempted to

  intervene by providing family counseling specifically for families who have recently

  been reunited with a teenager. These services could be extended.

Future Research

By providing a map of the humanitarian borderlands, I have laid the ground work for a

new type of research around unaccompanied youth as well as the humanitarian processes in the

United States. The concept of the humanitarian borderlands allows researchers to explore the

overlapping systems of the borderlands instead of focusing only on one aspect of youths'

experiences in the United States. Youths' outcomes in the United States can thus be tied to a

variety of factors and services. In addition, there remains a need to systematically collect youths'

stories, especially once they are released from custody. With the limitations of research through

the Office of Refugee Resettlement, access to youth is limited. However, there is a significant

need for youth to provide a greater lens to their experience with all fields of the humanitarian

borderlands. Further, a greater focus on intersectional nuances is important: I have provided a

general over view of the gendered experience of migrant youth, but there is much more to

uncover about how gender, sexuality, class, race and disability impact youths' journeys.

Another key element missing in this research and previous work on unaccompanied

minors in the experience that parents and sponsors have when reuniting with youth. We do not

know parents' perceptions of the family reunification system nor do we know what their

expectations are in regards to reunification with youth. We know even less about why sponsors

agree to take youth into their homes and the expectations they have for these youth. Future

research could interview parents and sponsors to help provide a more nuanced understanding to

these family and living arrangements.

Finally, each field could benefit from further research as well. Possible research

directions include more nuanced understandings of the role of school districts and teachers, the

impact of religious organizations on youths' outcomes, how attorneys choose who to represent.

This project cast a broad net to map the humanitarian borderlands. Future research can add

texture and color to this map.

Conclusion

While 2014 marked an important year for the "crisis" of unaccompanied youth at the

U.S-Mexico border, this crisis has proven anything but temporary. Over the past several months

alone, unaccompanied youth have continued to garner a range of media coverage. They have

been used a political pawns by the Trump administration, that is attempting to trade the Deferred

Action for Childhood Arrivals for the protection of unaccompanied youth. Several pregnant

unaccompanied teen girls have faced the spotlight in a battle over their reproductive rights.

President Trump continues to bemoan that the apparently lax policies on unaccompanied youth

have led to gang violence and homicide in cities throughout the country. Yet, while politicians

spew hateful, racist messages about immigrants, there remains a strong network of people and

organizations that are committed to the ethical treatment of human beings. Indeed, many

organizations serving unaccompanied youth have reported significant increases in volunteers,

donations and community involvement since the 2016 presidential elections.

Unaccompanied immigrant youth will remain an important part of the immigrant

landscape and political debate of the United States for the foreseeable future. The humanitarian

borderlands are not a perfect response to unaccompanied youth by any stretch. Yet, I believe that

pointed critique into these systems can help create a more just society for the youngest arrivals.

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Williams, Jill. M. 2015. "From Humanitarian Exceptionalism to Contingent Care: Care and Enforcement at the Humanitarian Border. *Political Geography* 47: 11-20.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCS- Bethany Christian Services

BID –Best Interest Determination

DOJ – Department of Justice

ICE – Immigration and Customs Enforcement

INS – Immigration and Naturalization Services

ORR – Office of Refugee Resettlement

SIJS – Special Immigrant Juvenile Status

TVPRA- Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2006

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPANTS

Borderland Humanitarians		
Pseudonym	**Job Title**	**Region**
Attorneys/Legal Representation		
Caroline	Attorney in Rural Immigrant Legal Aid Non-Profit	Midwest
Nancy	Attorney in Religious Immigrant Legal Aid Non-Profit	Midwest
Lavonne	Pro Bono Attorney, working in private practice	Midwest
Jenifer	Attorney in Religious Immigrant Legal Aid Non-Profit	Midwest
Dan	Director of Immigrant Legal Clinic	Midwest
Jacqueline	Attorney for Human Rights Legal Aid Non-Profit	Northwest
Nathan	Attorney in Religious Immigrant Legal Aid Non-Profit	Midwest
Grace	Attorney in Religious Immigrant Legal Aid Non-Profit	Midwest
Ayana	Attorney With Child Justice Clinic	Midwest
Samantha	Attorney in Immigrant Legal Aid Non-Profit	Midwest
Jessica	Attorney in Immigrant Legal Aid Non-Profit	Midwest
Julie	Pro Bono Attorney in Corporate Immigration Office	Southwest
Linda	Pro Bono Manager in Corporate Law Firm	East Coast
Victoria	Pro Bono Coordinator for Immigrant Legal Aid Non Profit	Southwest
Kathy	Pro Bono Attorney from Corporate Law Firm	East Coast
Heather	Attorney in Religious Immigrant Legal Aid Non-Profit	Midwest
Susana	Attorney with Immigrant Community Organization	East Coast
Advocates and Volunteers		
Veronica	Advocate, Paralegal in Immigration Law Firm	Midwest
Kendra	Unofficial Advocate in Community; Activist for UIC Rights	Midwest
Aurora	Advocate	East Coast
Workers under Government Contracts		
Riley	Facility ESL Teacher	Midwest
Rosa	Facility Case Manager	Midwest
Marcy	Facility Manager	East Coast
Ashley	Post Release Services; Home Study Services	East Coast
Mercedes	Family Placement	Midwest
Stephanie	Foster Care Case Manager	Midwest
Allison	Mentor Volunteer Coordinator	Midwest
Ricky	Foster Care Case Manager	Midwest
Nicki	Family Placement; Home Study	Midwest
Brenda	Family Placement; Post-Release	Southeast
Lindsey	Family Placement	Midwest
Taylor	Post Release	Southwest
Andrea	Freelance Psychological Evaluation for Government Shelters	Southwest
Educators		
Lisa	District Latino Advocate	Midwest
Tiffany	ESL Teacher	Midwest
Karen	District Special Populations Advocate	Midwest
Michelle	ESL Teacher	Midwest

Layla	District UIC Advocate	West Coast
Luisa	Immigrant Student Registration and Services	Southeast
Janet	School Counselor (interviewed in 2011)	Midwest
Don	School Counselor (interviewed in 2011)	Midwest
Brad	Principal (interviewed in 2011)	Midwest
Stephanie	School Counselor (interviewed in 2011)	Midwest
Valerie	School Counselor (interviewed in 2011)	Midwest
Social Service Providers (Non-government Contractors)		
Mario	Consulate Worker	Midwest
Luis	Consulate Worker	Midwest
Yesenia	Case Manager with Immigrant Outreach Program	Southeast
Marta	Case Manager with Immigrant Outreach Program	Southeast
Clara	Counselor with Trauma-Informed Therapy center	Southeast
Amy	After School Program Worker	Midwest
Bianca	Counselor with Trauma-Informed Therapy center	Southeast
Joel	Community Activist, Health Advocate, Radical Hospitality	Southwest
Emanuel	Counselor with Latino Outreach Program	Midwest

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Youth Participants						
Pseudonym	Age at Interview	Age During Crossing	Country of Origin	Detained at Border?	Region of Residence	Placement Outcomes while Minor
Interviewed in 2015-2016						
Cynthia	23	14	Guatemala	Yes	Midwest	Placed with foster family
Nestor	20	17	Honduras	Yes	Southwest	Aged out; no placement
Javier	17	15	Guatemala	Yes	Southeast	Placed with parents; moved with uncle
Marco	17	16	Guatemala	Yes	Southeast	Placed with cousin; moved with church member
Mariana	18	16	Honduras	Yes	Southwest	Placed with father; moved with community members
Angelica	18	16	El Salvador	Yes	Southwest	Placed with uncle; moved with boyfriend
Nicolas	18	17	Ecuador	Yes	Midwest	Placed with father
Interviewed in 2011						
Andres	18	14	Mexico		Midwest	Not detained
Carlos	22	15	Mexico		Midwest	Not detained
Edwin	17	13	Honduras	Yes	Midwest	Placed with family friend; moved to father and then independent living
Florencio	18	14	Mexico		Midwest	Not detained
Isaiah	21	14	Mexico		Midwest	Not detained
Jesus	19	16	Mexico		Midwest	Not detained
Nacho	22	17	Mexico		Midwest	Not detained
Salvador	20	17	Mexico		Midwest	Not detained

Emily Magee Ruehs

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EDUCATION

2018	Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology with concentration in Gender and Women's Studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago Dissertation: The Humanitarian Borderlands: Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth and Systems of Aid in the United States Preliminary Examination: Sociology of Gender
2012	M.A. in Sociology from the University of Illinois at Chicago
2008	B.A. in Spanish Language and Literature from Grand Valley State University Graduated with Honors, *magna cum laude*
2006	Coursework in Teaching English as a Second Language at Indiana Wesleyan University

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Migration/Border Studies	Gender	Teaching Sociology
Humanitarianism	Race and Ethnicity	Qualitative Methods
	Childhood and Youth	

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Ruehs, Emily. 2018. "Front Door, Backdoor, No Door? An Exploration of Formal and Informal Means for Recruiting Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth for Research." *SAGE Research Method Cases Part 2*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. DOI: 10.4135/9781526428011

Ruehs, Emily. 2016. "Adventures in El Norte: Masculinity and the Immigration of Unaccompanied Minors." *Men and Masculinities* 20(3): 364-384. DOI: 10.1177/1097184X16634796.

DOUBLE-EDITOR REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Ruehs, Emily. 2016. "Book Review: Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in between Journeys." *Teaching Sociology* 44(2): 142-143.

Ruehs, Emily. 2016. "Film Review: The Hand That Feeds." *Teaching Sociology* 44(2): 144-145.

ARTICLES IN PROGRESS

Ruehs, Emily. "Dangerous Victims and the Manipulators of Innocence: A Critical Discourse Analysis of 2014 News Coverage on Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth." *Sociological Inquiry* (Revise and Resubmit)

Ruehs, Emily, Regina Pessagno, Rachel Lois, William J. Scarborough, Michael De Anda Muñiz, Max Cuddy and Dennis Kass. "A Relevant Social Science: Outcomes from a High School Sociology Research Practicum." *Journal of Public and Professional Sociology* (Revise and Resubmit)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Ruehs, Emily, William "Buddy" Scarborough, Carolina Calvillo, Michael De Anda Muñiz, Jesse Holzman. 2014. "Bringing Public Sociology to High School Students: UIC Sociology and Chicago's Little Village Lawndale High School." *ASA Footnotes* 42(2): 5.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Sociology Courses
 2012 – present   **University of Illinois at Chicago**
                  Special Topics in Race, Class and Gender: Borders and Human Rights
                  Race and Ethnicity
                  Sociological Research Methods
                  Gender and Society
                  Sociology of Childhood and Youth
                  Social Theory (Teaching assistant)
                  Sociology of Asia and Asian Americans (Teaching assistant)
                  Global Theoretical Frameworks of Women (Discussion Leader)

 2012 – present   **Northeastern Illinois University**
                  Introduction to Sociology
                  Sociological Research Methods
                  Race and Ethnic Relations
                  Sociology of Intimacy, Marriage and Family
                  Women, Gender, and the "F-Word"
                  Men and Masculinities

 2016 – Present   **Dominican University**
                  Introduction to Sociology
                  Race and Race Relations in the US (hybrid course)
                  Research Methods (hybrid course)
                  Critical Race Theory (hybrid course)

Other teaching experience
2011 - 2014   **Universidad Autónoma de México-Chicago**
English Pronunciation and Conversation (Intermediate)
English Reading (Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced)
English Writing and Grammar (Intermediate and Advanced)
English Listening and Speaking (Intermediate)

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

2016   Dean's Scholar Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago
2016   Rue Bucher Memorial Award for Qualitative Studies. University of Illinois at Chicago
2015   Chancellor's Graduate Research Award Renewal, University of Illinois at Chicago
2015   Provost Award for Graduate Research, University of Illinois at Chicago
2014   Carla B. Howery Teaching Enhancement Fund. American Sociological Association
2014   Chancellor's Graduate Research Award, University of Illinois at Chicago

HONORS AND AWARDS

2016   SAGE Teaching Innovations & Professional Development Award, ASA Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology
2016   UIC Excellence in Undergraduate Mentoring Award, University of Illinois at Chicago
2015   UIC Excellence in Undergraduate Mentoring Award Honorable Mention, University of Illinois at Chicago
2014   Sociology Graduate Student Teaching Award, University of Illinois at Chicago
2014   UIC Excellence in Undergraduate Mentoring Award Honorable Mention, University of Illinois at Chicago
2013   David P. Street Masters Paper Award, University of Illinois at Chicago

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

2016   ASA Section on Childhood and Youth Roundtable Discussant
2016 – present   ASA Section on Childhood and Youth Student Representative
2016 – present   *Societies without Borders* Reviewer
2015 - present   *Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Research Journal* Reviewer
2014 – 2015   *Social Problems* Student Advisory Board Member
2013 – present   *Gender and Society* Reviewer
2012   National Latino Congreso Rapporteur, Arturo Velazquez Institute

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

2015-2017   Teaching Assistant Orientation, Panelist and Break-out Session Leader
2014   Society of Women Engineers "Miss Representation" Viewing, Panelist
2014   Model World Conference, Mentor/Instructor
2013 – 2015 Little Village Lawndale High School/University of Illinois at Chicago
             Department of Sociology Partnership, Mentor and Volunteer Coordinator
2011 - 2012 Chicago Ethnography Conference, Co-Chair
2011   Graduate Student Recruitment Day, Committee Member
2010 - 2011 Public Relations Committee, Committee Member

INVITED LECTURER

2016   "The Experience of Unaccompanied Youth Immigrants." Dominican
             University.
2016   "Unaccompanied Minors: The Basics." Depaul University. The Immigrant
             Experience

INVITED SPEAKER

2015   "Discussion Techniques." Colloquium on College Teaching of Sociology
2014   "Learning Through Discussion Method." Colloquium on College Teaching of
             Sociology
2014   "More Than What You Read in the News: Immigration Scholars Speak about
             Their Research." Department of Sociology Alumni Event
2014   "Immigration in the Suburbs: Insights from the 2010-2011 Chicago Area
             Study." Jewels of UIC Lecture Series
2014   "Content Based Learning." Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-
             Chicago Centro de Enseñazas de Lenguas Extranjeras
2013   "Masculinity and Immigration." Latin American and Latino Studies Brown
             Bag
2012   "Masculinity, Power and Choice for Unaccompanied Minors." Real Talk
             Seminar

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2011   American Cities Survey. Columbia University. Research assistant.
2011   Chicago Area Studies. National Science Foundation. University of Illinois at
             Chicago

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2017	"The Stories of Unaccompanied Youth." Association of Humanist Sociologists, Havana Cuba
2017	"Borderland Legendry: The Paradoxes of Ideal Victimhood for Unaccompanied Minors." Chicago Ethnography Conference, Chicago
2016	"Thugs or Refugees? Unaccompanied Immigrant Minors in 2014 Newspaper Coverage." Social Science History Association, Chicago
2016	"Thugs or Refugees? The Discourse on Unaccompanied Immigrant Minors." Society for the Study of Social Problems, Seattle
2016	"Deserving Thugs? Unaccompanied Minors in the US Immigration System." Chicago Ethnography Conference, Chicago
2015	"Clandestine Youth: Unaccompanied Minors in the Borderlands." Crossing Over Symposium, Cleveland State University, Cleveland
2015	"Clandestine Youth: Securitization, Humanitarianism, and Unaccompanied Minors in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands." Society for the Study of Social Problems. Chicago, IL
2014	"Becoming a Man in El Norte: Intersections of Identity for Unaccompanied Minors." Society for the Study of Social Problems Roundtable, San Francisco, CA
2012	"Adventures in El Norte: Masculinity and the Experience of Unaccompanied Minors." Chicago Ethnography Conference, Chicago, IL
2012	"Adventures in El Norte: Masculinity and the Experience of Unaccompanied Minors." Midwest Sociological Society, Minneapolis, MN
2008	"Pascual Duarte como la manifestación de una necesidad existencial." Congreso Internacional de Literatura Hispánica, Cusco, Peru

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2009 – 2010	Employment Retention Specialist, Program Assisting Refugee Acculturation, Bethany Christian Services, Grand Rapids, MI.
2008 – 2009	Workforce Development Specialist, Goodwill Industries/Work First, Grand Rapids, MI.
2005 – 2008	Trip Coordinator, Experience Mission, Port Townsend, WA. (Inscription House, Navajo Nation; Tecate, Mexico; Ruiz, Mexico; Bribri Reservation, Costa Rica)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

2014 – present	Society for the Study of Social Problem Sections: Global Division, Teaching Social Problems
2013 – present	Sociologists for Women in Society
2011 – present	American Sociological Association Sections: Childhood and Youth (student representative); Latino/a Sociology; Human Rights; International Migration; Teaching and Learning

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TEACHING AND PEDAGOGY

2016	ASA Teaching and Learning Section's Pre-conference Workshop, American Sociological Association, Seattle, WA
2014	Feminist Pedagogy Graduate Seminar. University of Illinois at Chicago
2014	Becoming an Undocumented Student Ally Workshop. Northeastern Illinois University
2013	Sociology Teaching Colloquium. University of Illinois at Chicago
2012	Sociology Teaching Colloquium. University of Illinois at Chicago

COMMUNITY SERVICE

2015 – present	Unaccompanied Child Advocate with the Young Center for Child Immigrant Rights, Chicago
2009-2011	Refugee Youth Mentor with Bethany Christian Services, Grand Rapids

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Spanish: Reading, Writing, and Speaking, Advanced Proficiency