

Reflection

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In the ethnographic research, “Building Your American Dream,” my field research was equally as important as the research I conducted through the online databases through the Kellogg Library. They each informed the other, with my literature helping provide insight for my research questions and how to engage with my participants. In addition, both my formal and informal interview data collection methods, which was influenced by studies found in the literature through the library, provided direction for the parameters of my research. By using scholarly articles found through Kellogg Library, I was able to create a strong research design that contributed to the academic conversation in sociology.

My search of the databases for peer-reviewed sociological articles in turn greatly informed my understanding of the data and the ways that I should analyze my findings, greatly helping to identify common themes in my raw data. While this process led me in a more concise direction I simultaneously began to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the data from my field notes. In turn, when I returned to the field for more data collection I was better able to understand social contexts and cues enabling me to develop better questions of the people I was trying to understand. This also allowed me to understand the theoretical ideas present in academia that could help make sense of the data I was collecting.

I began my research by doing informal interviews of the men I worked with as well as some of the men I had never interacted with who waited curbside outside of various home improvement stores. This initially informed my decision to do qualitative research of the unjust and horrific treatment of undocumented immigrant day laborers. I encountered problems almost right away with the men waiting outside looking to pick up informal day labor work. In short,

they didn't trust me. I was not getting the sense of their daily struggles and concerns. But I found assistance in the CSU San Marcos chapter of Border Angels, a group aimed at helping immigrants as they cross our deserts and disperse immigrant labor information about resources available to help them. Between the help from Border Angels and the scholarly articles I found through Kellogg Library, I learned the best ways to develop trustworthy relationships with my participants, ensuring I honored their lived experiences.

It was while volunteering with Border Angels on a day labor outreach outside a home improvement store I was able penetrate the wall of suspicion. The other volunteers were mostly bilingual and this made the difference in establishing a rapport and understanding. In order to get an even better understanding of their plight I felt it was also necessary to participate in a water drop. Water drops are made out in the desert where many undocumented immigrants are known to travel in order to get into the United States. Ultimately, the data I collected from this was just a better understanding, albeit superficial, of just how desperate conditions in migrants country of origins are to drive them to search for safe passage through these dangerous routes. It also highlighted the lack of research on day laborers in general and the conditions in which they work simply to survive.

But the journey sadly is just the beginning. My research exposes the abuses, dehumanization, and suffering these human beings go through regularly. As my research reveals, this takes the shape of institutional immigration policies that systematically oppress them taking away basic human dignity and rights and exploits their labor to build our "American Dream" as well as the smaller, micro level labor policies that makes their lives even harder. My research not only revealed exploitation like wage theft, but a surprising new exploitation of migrants bodies beyond the utility of their labor.

It's not something one reflects on when conversations include construction work and day laborers, but there is a new market for the services of the undocumented. Sex exploitation became a recurring theme in my findings, highlighting an entire other level of dehumanization for migrant workers. I initially developed this idea from the preliminary data I collected from the guys I worked with for years during our formal interviews. Because these guys have been here awhile, we were able to communicate, and in turn this provided an opportunity for them to tell me the stories that provided insight. Their stories also confirmed what few studies have highlighted, allowing me to contribute to research in an entirely different way. The Kellogg Database provided me an amazing avenue to research, and as a student, being afforded opportunity to research what already exists is invaluable. Without Kellogg Library, I would not have been as informed going into my research, and in turn been able to show value and respect of my participants as much as I had, nor be able to contribute to scholarly work. My research provided a surprising set of findings that I can only hope I can further study, encouraging more recognition in academia. I hope to provide a larger public awareness of the inhumane treatment and exploitation that is rampant within this vulnerable population.