



# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF LAW AND SOCIETY BERKELEY LAW

## CSLS SPEAKER SERIES

Monday, January 29, 2018

### KATHRYN ABRAMS

Herma Hill Kay Distinguished Professor of Law, Berkeley Law

#### **“Practices of Authorization: Storytelling, Performative Citizenship and Emotional Self-Regulation in the Undocumented Immigrants Movement”**

This study of the undocumented immigrants’ movement in Phoenix, Arizona asks how a group of activists, organizing in a hostile environment without the formal status that might connect them to the polity and command the attention of its officials, develop the sense of political authorization necessary to mobilize effectively for change.

Chapter 2 analyzes three practices that have fostered political authorization among undocumented immigrants. *Experiential storytelling*, which begins within organizations, fights the stigma of illegality by highlighting the strengths of undocumented immigrants, and forges strong affective bonds among them. Intra-group storytelling is also an arena in which undocumented activists can air ambivalent feelings, respond to experiences in the political field, and gradually shift the frames of the movement. Organizational emphasis on storytelling as a unique resource in public campaigns also helps participants to appreciate the value they bring to the movement.

Storytelling also places activists in contexts where they can engage in the second practice, *performative citizenship*. Through this practice undocumented activists take on roles conventionally occupied by citizens, from registering voters to engaging in civil disobedience. Inhabiting these roles enables them to challenge public expectations about the political capacities of undocumented immigrants. It also teaches activists about institutions from the inside, providing a sense of authorization, and an understanding of the accountability of elected officials, that support political self-assertion and demand.

Finally, an ongoing process of “feeling work,” which involves *manifestation and management of emotions* enables participants to marshal and direct their affective resources in a high-risk environment. Emotional practices fostered within organizations prepare participants to share painful emotions arising from undocumented experience, mitigate fear triggered by the possibility of enforcement, grasp the need for new political representations, and channel negative responses to political adversity.

Professor Abrams’ paper is available online at our website and in hard copy at the Center.

PLACE Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Avenue  
TIME 12:45 – 2:00pm. Coffee and water provided. Bag lunches welcome.  
INFO <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/center-for-the-study-of-law-society/>  
EMAIL [csls@law.berkeley.edu](mailto:csls@law.berkeley.edu)

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