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New Dreams: The Impact of DACA on Undocumented Youth in Southern California

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Edwin H Elias

December 2016

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Adalberto Aguirre Jr., Chairperson

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The Dissertation of Edwin H Elias is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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DEDICATION

To my family- Hernan, Rosa, and Karina Elias—and Isla Vista Pumas.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

New Dreams: The Impact of DACA on Undocumented Youth in Southern California

by

Edwin H Elias

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology
University of California, Riverside, December, 2016
Dr. Adalberto Aguirre Jr., Chairperson

Abstract: The aim of this dissertation is to understand the impact of new policy aimed at undocumented youth. Previous research has demonstrated the impact of law negatively affecting unauthorized youth. Primarily, they are denied from legally joining the labor force and applying the skills they learned in high school or college. Socialized as Americans, “illegality” impedes their development as adults and leading a normal life similar to their peers. Those who qualify under DACA will be given a chance to change their legal status from “illegal” to a quasi-legal status with the allocation of two-year temporary work permits. Therefore, this dissertation seeks how these DACA impacts them in the labor market, educational opportunities, how it alters their daily life, the process of those legally denied from legally participating in the American labor force.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction, Research Problem, and Methods

INTRODUCTION

Migration to the United States has been occurring since the inception of this country. The importance immigrants play in the development and continued prosperity of this country is always highlighted during presidential elections to garner the growing Latino vote. Despite being a self-proclaimed country of immigrants, immigration policy since 1965 has not been receptive towards immigrants. Economic downturns, off shoring of jobs, the global economy, and changes in the labor market have resulted in an anxious and upset American population trying to pin point the change in their economic circumstances in the United States. Too often, they blame immigrants. Immigrants, especially of Mexican or Central American origin, are seen as a growing threat to both the American way of life and the nation's economic success. This growing fear has resulted in the implementation of stringent immigration policies, in the name of protecting the U.S. from Mexican and Central American immigrants. Despite the attempts to appease the false fears of various Americans, immigration has continued. Consequently, continued migration and unreceptive immigration policies has created a growing population that is commonly known as "illegal immigrants."

Demand for low wage labor has pulled millions of Mexican immigrants to various regions in the United States- despite current immigration policy. Being undocumented or "illegal" refers to immigrants that unlawfully entered the country or overstayed their visa, meaning the state does not recognize them since they have no legal or proper status in which the state can recognize their existence. The migration to industrialized countries is

an occurrence at a global level– but the United States and the large number of immigrants from Latin America it attracts is at a stage more mature than any other receiving country. The number of undocumented immigrants is in the millions. Unable to return to their home country due to the emphasis on controlling the border and creating a sub-human experience to cross the border has resulted in the complete halt of circular migration between Mexico and the U.S. Staying longer resulted in the increase of immigrants bringing their spouses and children.

Involuntarily migrating to the United States situates children in a similar legal status as their parents. Many scholars, immigration advocates, a growing number of politicians, and the undocumented youth movement give voice to the unfairness of this. The growing number of undocumented college graduates from prestigious universities unable to utilize their newly acquired social capital, skills, and knowledge is a growing theme in various media outlets highlighting the “unfair” and unwanted predicament of these potential Americans. *Time* magazine has labeled the 1.9 million undocumented immigrants coming during their formative years to the United States as “Americans without papers” (Sun 2012; Vargas 2012).

Existing literature on undocumented youth, although small, focuses on their lives as they experience rites of passages associated with a normal American teenage life (Gonzales 2008, 2011), the social and labor market difficulties associated with their legal status (Gonzalez 2011, Gonzalez & Chavez 2012), and the financial difficulty of attending college (Abrego 2006). Several scholars highlight the excellence of undocumented college students who have flourished under stringent circumstance at

prestigious American universities (Huber and Magalon 2006; Perez et al. 2009; Contreras 2009).

This dissertation seeks to understand how undocumented immigrants are able to utilize their social capital, education, and social networks for upwards mobility, how they choose to identify in relation to the state, and what has been mental the health impact of living as an undocumented immigrant in the United States after obtaining Deferred Action for Early Childhood Arrivals (hereafter, DACA) status. DACA is an immigration program that allows qualified undocumented children to attain a semi-legal status that allows them to work and implement the skills earned in U.S. educational institutions. My dissertation seeks to document, through field research and in-depth interviews, the effects of DACA on the lives of undocumented children.

The aim of this chapter is to provide the research questions, methodological approach, and limitations of this research project. The first two sections will introduce the research problem and research questions this dissertation. Preceding these sections, will explain my role as an immigrant /researcher and the strength it provides in conducting research on undocumented youth. Next, the sample design section will provide sampling techniques, data, and limitations. Lastly, the conclusion will provide an overview the of the research it's influence on me.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

There are close to 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States. Despite the need to rectify current immigration policy, there has not been a

comprehensive immigration reform legislation since the Immigration Reform Control Act (hereafter, IRCA) amnesty provision in 1986. Currently, immigrants from Mexico comprise of the largest segment of the undocumented population with 6.5 million, which represents 58% of all immigrants (Passel and Cohn 2011). The next two largest undocumented populations come from El Salvador and Guatemala, they comprise of 6% and 5% of the population respectively. Together, immigrants from these three countries and Canada make North America the most likely region for those who are undocumented (Hoefler et al 2011). Undocumented immigrants from Asia make up 11% of the undocumented population. In addition, there are 1.7 million temporary legal migrants (Passel and Cohn 2011). Lastly, a quarter (2.83 million) of the undocumented population resides in California, consisting mostly of Mexicans and Central Americans

Although the current economic climate has dramatically decreased undocumented entry to the U.S., millions of families and individuals have been living in fear for various years, are subject to frivolous demands of employers, have minimal rights, and for the undocumented youth- their life is put on hold despite being socialized and adhering to the ideology and principles of a country they call their own. Immigration bills have been debated in congress and the senate but competing political ideologies have halted any real immigration reform. This impasse has created a demand by large portions of American society to solve an outdated immigration system, which has created an underclass of second-class citizens. Furthermore, the growing visibility and public sympathy for DREAMers (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors—undocumented youth) and the growing political clout of Latinos in American politics has resulted in the

political necessity for politicians to seriously consider immigration reform. Cognizant of this demand, under the auspices of the Obama administration, former head of the Department of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano announced the implementation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (hereafter, DACA). This new program focuses on undocumented immigrants from ages 15 to 31 who came to the U.S. before the age of 16 and have lived continuously in the U.S. for at least five years.

There are further criteria that a person must meet to be considered eligible for DACA. They are the following:

- They must be living continuously in the U.S. no later than June 12, 2007
- Must have entered the U.S. before the age of 16
- They were physically present in the U.S. in June 15, 2012
- Must be enrolled in school, have a HS degree or GED, or an honorable discharge from the U.S. armed forces by the time they apply
- Entered the country illegally or overstayed their visa prior to June 15, 2012.
- Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more misdemeanors; or otherwise pose a threat to public safety or national security.¹

Those eligible for the program can apply for their deportation to be deferred for two years, with the possibility of a legal work permit for the same amount of time. After two years, their work permit can be renewed after their case is reviewed. Each applicant is

¹ For clarification on the types of felonies, significant misdemeanors make someone ineligible for DACA see the National Immigration Law Center. <http://www.nilc.org/FAQdeferredactionyouth.html>

reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The program is not a path towards legal residence or citizenship. In addition, family members cannot be included.

The various qualifications required to be considered results in 1.7 million undocumented immigrants eligible for this program; 2.4 million meet the age requirement but fail to meet one of the qualifications (Passel and Lopez 2012). Close to a million are immediately eligible, and 700,000 will qualify in the future. Latinos comprise about 85% of those eligible for this new program. Of those eligible for DACA, just slightly under a million are under the age of 24, while those aged 25-30 make up 360,00 (Bataova and Mitterlstadt 2012). Those with a college degree consist of 80,000 with 140,000 currently enrolled in college (Batalova and Mitterlstadt 2012). Among those with at least a college degree, 44% have a college degree, 48% have associates degrees, and only 8% have an advanced degree (Batalova and Mitterlstadt 2012).² The majority of eligible applicants are enrolled in K-12 public schools (800,000) or completed high school or have a GED (470,000).

Contemporary Portrait of DACA Recipients

Southern California is an ideal place for research on DACA recipients. Southern California has been a traditional choice of residence and work for the latest wave of Latin American immigrants (post- 1965). Although it is a national program, 25% of DACA recipients reside in California (Hill and Hayes 2013). Indeed, more undocumented immigrants reside in southern California than in any other region in the U.S. Nearly two

² In comparison, where 46 % of the nation completed an associate's degree or higher, 36% have completed a bachelor's degree of higher, and 9% have completed a master's degree of higher <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=27>

million undocumented immigrants reside in Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, Orange County, and San Diego County (Hill and Hayes 2013). For the purpose of this research, my two primary field sites are Riverside and San Bernardino counties, with 150,000 and 146,000 undocumented immigrants respectively. The proximity of Riverside to Orange County, particularly Santa Ana, and Los Angeles provides access to the largest concentration of undocumented immigrants in the United States. The high cost of living is driving many out of Los Angeles and Orange Counties and their coastal cities, and forced immigrants to move to Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.³ For example, From 2007- 2011 over 42,000 Los Angeles county residents migrated to San Bernardino County.⁴

The current approval rate of DACA applications is 72%, while 1% of applications are denied; the rest are left under review (Singer and Svajlenka 2013). The Migration Policy Institute estimates that there are 298,000 immediate beneficiaries, 114,000 (ages 5-14), and another 127,000 possible beneficiaries if they finish their GED, in California. A third of applicants are between the ages of 15-18, and more than half (54%) of current applicants are under the age of 21. More than 72% of DACA recipients have lived in the United States more than ten years, close to one third (31%) arrived in the US under the age of five, and more than two thirds (69%) came to the U.S before the age of 10. California is the largest recipient of DACA recipients with a large segment under the age of 20. This demographic portrait suggests that a large number of DACA applicants are in

³ <http://www.dailybulletin.com/social-affairs/20140205/why-42000-people-moved-from-los-angeles-county-to-san-bernardino-county-from-2007-2011>

⁴ <http://articles.latimes.com/2014/feb/08/local/la-me-0206-downturn-migration-20140209>

high school, or in college. A large number of DACA recipients have lived the majority of their lives in the United States with many only knowing of their birth country through images or stories given by their family members.

With the increase of financial aid in California and other states have paved an easier path for undocumented youth to attend college. To older applicants, they must complete or have a GED to be eligible. Given the increase in competition of knowledge based jobs in the US from an increasing global labor pool- more youth are attending college. According to Fry and Taylor (2013) 69% of Latino students are attending college, 78% are enrolled full time, but only 56% are enrolled in four- year institutions. The great recession must be taken into account for the increase in college enrollments. Small businesses, particularly in the construction industry, took a major blow in 2008, displacing thousands of jobs in the Inland Empire alone. The implementation of E-verify has displaced thousands from steady jobs once their Social Security number was passed through the system. More importantly, 88% of Latinos view a college degree vital towards upward mobility in the United States (Fry and Taylor 2013). Although some of this data are not direct representations of DACA recipients, it does give up a realistic glimpse and understanding the increase of higher education enrollment of DACA recipients who are largely graduating from high school or currently attending college, most likely community college.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the new everyday experiences of undocumented youth under DACA? What new problems and issues do they face under this nebulous legal status? My methodological approach is influenced by the extended case study method, in which the researcher considers the economic, political, and social forces that impact the individual (Burawoy 2002). These external forces that have influenced the mental and psychological health, identity, and integration in American society have directly shaped the response and adjustment to the new legal status of undocumented youth. The aim of my research is to understand how DACA recipients respond to a change in their legal status, how it affects their life chances, and how it impacts their everyday life. This research then seeks to understand their experiences in the following manner:

1. What new job and educational opportunities have arisen, and who is benefiting from them? Has their previous legal status influenced or impacted their opportunities of integration and upward mobility in the United States?
2. How has this nebulous legal status impacted their identity and perception of incorporation in American society?
3. DACA recipients have been living under the shadows, seeking to avoid deportation of themselves and their family members, for many (sometimes over 20) years. Are there any residual effects, mental and psychological, of living as an undocumented immigrant for such a long time?

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the impact that the DACA program has on those who qualify, those who are in the process of applying, and those who are

ineligible. This dissertation aims to understand the impact of a work permit and legal identification on the life chances of previously undocumented youth, their emotional and psychological health, and their identity. A large portion of DACA recipients migrated to the U.S. involuntarily at a very young age, in many instances, many do not have memories of their country of origin. Arriving at an early and vital age of their development, many have been educated and socialized into American society. Their socialization and knowledge of American society differentiates them from previous immigrants arriving during their adult life. While DACA recipients have completed high school, a small but growing number have completed college, and a few have been able to gain advanced degrees despite the various limitations imposed on them. My dissertation seeks to understand the impact that DACA has on undocumented youth who are now able to implement the skills, social capital, and credentials earned in the labor market. Secondly, I seek to understand the impact of DACA on their identity.

Previous research shows how institutions (work and education) inform undocumented youth of their “illegal” identity, along with their rights and place in American society. This research examines whether their legal identity changes with the ability to work along with a state issued identification (resulting from DACA). Lastly, for the majority of their lives, DACA recipients have been socialized as Americans. Unfortunately, many have attempted to live their lives as “Americans” but have been made aware of their undocumented status and by institutions in American society, the state, and media. Experience of these various forms of rejection by the country they call their own has been a rite of passage for various undocumented youth. Now, through DACA, the state

recognizes their existence and grants them rights that allow them to work without the fear of deportation. As a result, this changes their relationship to the state and everyday life. I aim to understand whether undocumented youth feel included into American society with the implementation of DACA and their belief in the American ideology they have adhered to and followed.

Undocumented immigrants are not a homogenous population. Various circumstances have situated them to fall under this predicament. However, national origin, social capital, and education vary among all immigrants and it is not different with undocumented immigrants. These variables play an integral role in shaping their opportunities in American society. I seek to understand what are the differences and generalities among this group. What situates some to succeed and others to experience downward or lateral mobility compared to their families of origin?

Difference Between DACA and TPS

DACA is not a novel or a new immigration program. The basic foundations of DACA can be found in the Temporary Protected Status program (hereafter, TPS). Both programs share the following characteristics: 1) they are targeted to a specific population whose deportation is deferred for two years; 2) recipients are conferred a two-year renewal work permit. A work permit allows for the issuance of a Social Security number and the opportunity to access state issued drivers licenses and other state issued identification cards; 3) recipients do not have access to state or federal benefits such as access to health insurance. Lastly, recipients from both programs are not able to travel

outside of the country, only in specific circumstances. Although there are several provisions that differentiate both programs, the only and most prominent difference rests on the recipients.

TPS was the result of activists and various churches-demanding asylum for Central American refugees, primarily from El Salvador, escaping the violent civil wars resulting in thousands of deaths through war or genocide. The US funded the death squads and military that resulted in large numbers of migrations to Mexico and the US in order to escape that violence and torture. Despite US involvement in funding these wars, refugees from Central America, primarily from El Salvador, were not granted political asylum. This contradiction was the primary argument for proponents in the US to grant these refugees the status as legal permanent residents. Asylum was not conferred but the TPS program was created, allowing thousands of Central Americans to defer deportation for two years along with a work permit. TPS recipients primarily consisted of adult individuals who in many cases had a family of their own. In contrast, DACA recipients have spent their formative years in the US and have been socialized into American culture. This is the most striking difference among TPS and DACA recipients.

DACA recipients mostly consist of DREAMers who are similar in many ways to native born Mexican American and other Latino American citizens. Undocumented youth eligible under the requirement of the DREAM Act (2001) are identified as DREAMers. Recipients of DACA have gained media attention and sympathy from large segments of the American population. Even a segment of the Republican contingency has come to support and advocate for the legalization of undocumented youth so that they can

implement the skills and education earned in the United States. Similar to TPS recipients, DACA was created from a concerted effort by the immigrant rights movement, politicians, academics, and citizens advocating for legislation to occur due to the unfair and contradictory situation of undocumented youth. Similar to TPS, a path to legal permanent residence was not given. Similarly, both TPS and DACA recipients are in a nebulous legal area. They are allowed to legally work and have an increase of legal privileges, specifically work related, but still confront the threat of deportation contingent on the renewal of their work permit situations. For this reason, TPS and DACA recipients sit in what Menjivar (2006) terms “liminal legality.” Both DACA and TPS recipients situated in a legally gray area in which they are neither “legal” nor “illegal.” This gray area is important to understand how a similar program impacts the recipients with a similar immigration status, but with divergent and unequal access to resources, education, support, and social capital.

RESEARCH AS AN INSIDER/OUTSIDER

Growing Up in the Central Coast

Social science research is not conducted in vacuum. Therefore, it is important to gain insight of the personal history of the researcher and how it interacts with the population they seek to study. It shed light on the level on knowledge, familiarity, and understanding of the group they seek to interview and spend time with. This section will provide a brief introduction on my personal history as an immigrant and my knowledge on undocumented immigrants.

Growing up in an immigrant household, at a young age I was aware of different legal statuses through the community, social life, and school. However, I was not able to comprehend the limitations of being undocumented imposed on the individual. My family migrated from Guatemala in the late 1980's through a tourist visa and were able to obtain a work permit shortly after. They applied for asylum and were able to obtain legal permanent residency under the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA).⁵ Contrary to general perception, Santa Barbara has a large immigrant population with a sizeable portion being undocumented. At parties or gatherings, I would pass by men drinking beer outside the house, talking about their legal states, referral to a good lawyer that would not scam them, or their plans to return to Guatemala. The primary topics of discussion were the challenges of juggling multiple jobs, supporting their families back home, their horrible bosses, and yearning to return.

I attended a diverse elementary school, with the majority of the Latino students came from Mexico. My sister and I were the only kids from Central America. The majority of my classmates and friends were either Mexican immigrants or Mexican Americans whose parents were immigrants. As we got older, some of us played in a traveling soccer team. None of our parents had the luxury of weekends off. Our coach drove the entire team of fourteen players in one van. Traveling as a team created solidarity, friendship, and a strong bond that would not have occurred if we travelled separately. On the road we would play games and talk. Once in a while a player would

⁵ Some Central American were able to be considered as refugees and were able to qualify under NACARA. As a result, I was status was never unauthorized since my family immediately began the legalization process under upon entering the United States. This program provided my family and I a quick path towards legalization and eventual citizenship. For eligibility see: <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/asylum/nicaraguan-adjustment-and-central-american-relief-act-nacara-203-eligibility-apply-uscis>

state that he was “illegal” or that he could not go to San Diego. At such a young age, those statements did not resonate with me and I did not pay that much attention to them. Our club team was able to travel all over California with competitive players to play in extremely competitive tournaments. Sometimes our team played against teams three years older than us. Driving to Calabasas, Palo Alto, and Beverly Hills was always an interesting experience. Arriving at the soccer field, many of the parents and their kids would mock and make fun of our team since we all came in one car, were three years younger, and did not have a proper uniform and we carried our equipment in plastic grocery bags. On the soccer field, we would handily beat those teams 10-0, 7-0, sometimes even up to 17-0. Despite being three years younger and significantly smaller than our competition, parents at halftime or after the game demanded to see our birth certificates because only grown men could play with such skill. While playing we would hear remarks “that kid mowed my lawn yesterday,” “ he works at the local car wash,” “ look at the mustache on that kid,” “ that is a grown man from Mexico playing.” To avoid future problems, our coach carried copies of our birth certificate to validate our age. Fortunately, the racial and xenophobic remarks did not impact any of us. Only later in life, I came to understand the impact these acts had had on some of my friends, and the interconnection between race, class, and legal status.

Many of my friends were extremely gifted to the point that various clubs and semi-professional teams were willing to pay them to play. By the time we reached high school, many were starters on the varsity team as freshman. Coupled with our traveling soccer team, many were being scouted by the top division 1 soccer schools. In my eyes,

there was no doubt I would be seeing some of them play in the American professional soccer league MLS (Major League Soccer). Many wanted to attend college but did not understand the options available for going to college, such as through an athletic scholarship. The local colleges knew who we were and paid special attention towards a large portion of us as possible players for their teams. Such a bright future was evident in the radiant glow of their faces, by the age of sixteen their happiness turned to a stoic face filled with apprehension. They stopped playing club and high school soccer, their grades dropped and they showed no interest in school, and most started working after school as a dishwasher or prep cook. I came to find out that their legal status played a major role in their change in behavior and goals. Going to college was no longer an option. Instead, many were hoping for a job that paid well under the table. Our lives drifted apart, I have continued to keep in contact with my childhood friends. Many are working in tiring jobs and many started a family right out of high school.

My personal history as an immigrant provides me with insider status regarding the school experiences of undocumented immigrant youth. Being a Spanish-speaking immigrant from Guatemala, having friends who were undocumented, and being exposed to the problems immigrant face allowed me to understand the issues youth face.

However, I am an outsider relative to being a young undocumented immigrant for various reasons. Although aware of the experiences of undocumented immigrants through my friendships, I never experienced the daily problems they faced. This project aims to have a deeper understanding of the impact that legal status plays on various aspects of immigrants' lives. In comparison, my previous knowledge on undocumented immigrants'

experience was elementary, but it did allow me to support and empathize with their situation. Pursuing a doctorate and having several years of education, my experience is different from that of most of the young adults with whom I interacted in my field research and interviews. The privilege of attending graduate school shaped my social reality in ways that were vastly different from theirs as current or former high school students and undergraduates. Lastly, I am aware of the power dynamics between the young adults and myself. Being a citizen and a researcher impacts the dynamics of my interaction and relationship with these young adults. Some respondents may be apprehensive to share some experiences because they might assume that I could not understand or relate to their experience.

You are Just Another Researcher

Undocumented immigrants are physically present but legally absent in the United States population. A continuing Latino threat image created by the US media is closely associated with undocumented immigrants (Chavez 2003). Chavez (2001, 2008) argues that media promoted a fear of Latinos as a threat to the national security and cultural purity of the United States. Anti-immigrant media images, draconian laws, and growing state repression have constructed a life of constant fear of authorities among these immigrants. Despite being raised in the United States, DACA recipients live under constant fear of deportation and an anxiety associated with their legal status for many years. DACA creates a population more inclined towards disclosing their legal status that opens the doors for researchers seeking to understand how DACA impacts their lives.

DREAMers have dominated the media in their efforts to obtain a college education. Many are being interviewed through various mediums of communication where they disclose their legal status to the world. While the majority of DACA recipients do not have the privilege or the courage of some of their peers who identify or are labelled as DREAMers to openly talk about their life experiences in the media, they are less likely to talk to a researcher delving deeper into their personal lives. DACA recipients have lived in a constant fear associated with being undocumented in the United States most of their life. Fear of deportation, the stigma associated with their legal status, and persecution of government agencies have all been issues they have faced and endured. Moving towards a nebulous and temporary legal status does not alleviate their fears of living in the United States. This legal ambiguity does not alter that they continue to experience various obstacles in higher education, the labor market, and the fear their families continue to have is similar to their life before DACA.

The passing of DACA has created a surge of researchers aiming to gain access to study a visible but difficult to reach population. Increase in funding and research aimed at them created resistance from various activists and undocumented youth. Many are aware of research being conducted about them through survey questionnaires or qualitative research methods, such as my own study. As a result, two major problems gaining access to informants arose: gaining their trust and dealing with the surge of research focused on them that provides them with few possible gains. Despite gaining trust with two local immigrant youth organizations, PRISM and Mountain High Dreamers, and getting respondents through their contacts I received various warnings from the college students.

“Many of us are tired of being studied. We have taken various surveys, how is your study different?” Various surveys also compensated informants for their participation, usually \$20, but I lacked any monetary compensation for participants in my study. Fortunately, I was able to explain my research in a context they appreciated. I briefly explained the purpose of my study and the goal to be informative to the general public and the California educational institutions. Nearly 1/3 (25) of my potential informants allowed me into their personal lives. No one declined to be interviewed, but 3 people failed to meet at our scheduled time. Despite apprehension, upon the completion of the interview, many were happy to have partaken in the interview to share their story to the broader public, while other trusted me in sharing their story.

Secondly, various students and activists have been resistant towards new research conducted on their community. Several activists who I interviewed expressed their distaste for researchers as myself aspiring to understand their lives. Juan, an immigrant rights organizer in Southern California, expressed his apprehension and distaste “many of you people come use us for our networks with our people and then leave without giving anything back to the community when you are gaining out of studying us.... Various white people from Harvard and Stanford have emailed me asking me to get them so many people- the audacity! I never reply, but sometimes I wish I could send them a horrible email, but I hold back.” Juan is correct, I am aware of the power relationships and benefits associated with my research. Being part of my work does not improve their lives, nor does it lead towards a permanent legal status. Moreover, I did not just want to conduct my research and have no direct connection with the community and respondents

that were in my research. Aware of this personal, professional, and ethical dilemma, I tried to compensate my informants through various means that allowed me to be a part of their community. This included my involvement in efforts at my university to create equitable resources and opportunities for undocumented immigrants as part of contract bargaining with the graduate student union. I was also involved with the local high schools. I attended weekly Mountain High meetings for two years where I was engaged in activities, workshops, and engaged in informal conversations with their relatives and friends. My participation in these immigrant rights activities allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of undocumented immigrants', with or without DACA, everyday life and I became an advocate for them. Mountain High school counselor and Mountain High DREAMers advocate, Mrs. Ramirez, students from PRISM, and other respondents have contacted me over legal problems, college applications, AB 130 & 131 (CA Dream Act) applications, graduate school applications and opportunities, DACA applications, and talking to friends on the real possibility. Although I am not an expert on various fields, I have been able to guide them to the proper channels and people to properly assist them. This allowed me to be seen as someone they can trust and enabled me to obtain much more personal narratives than being an outsider with no connection with problems.

SAMPLE DESIGN

Sampling

Cornelius (1982) cautioned about the difficulty of gaining access to undocumented immigrants as a result of their living conditions, being uncooperative with

researchers, and the difficulty of locating them. These, along with the aforementioned problems, make it difficult to apply random sampling techniques. Given these difficulties, regardless of the sampling procedure used, the numbers of undocumented respondents (cases) in research studies tend to be smaller than survey research or other qualitative research projects. Nevertheless, various scholars have been successful in gaining access and produced valuable work in understanding the daily lives of undocumented immigrants (Cornelius 1978, 1981, 1982; Chavez 1991, 1994, 2012; Coutin 1999, 2000, 2007; Mejivar 2001, 2006; Gonzales 2008, 2011; Gleeson 2013). Like many of those studies, I have relied on snowball sampling to identify respondents, ages from 16-31 residing in Southern California, and recipients of deferred action.⁶

Previous research has informed various ritualistic stages or events play an informative role on the limitations of their legal status and plays a major part in developing their identity (Gonzales 2008, 2011; Gonzales and Chavez 2013, Abregro 2008). Considering the stage in their youth and age in which they are approved for DACA allows me to discern the change due to their new legal status by comparing their experiences to those of previous undocumented immigrants. I argue that the age and lifestage at which they received DACA plays an important role in the development of their legal identity, perception of being integrated in American society, and involvement in activism. Not being able to attend college, not being able to legally drive or have a state issued driver's license, and the embarrassment of being denied entrance to a bar play shape their experience of illegality as youth and young adults in the United States.

⁶ Criteria established by the Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.dhs.gov/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals>

Younger DACA recipients who are able to avoid these barriers towards inclusion, the debilitating impact on their self-esteem, and stunting their development as adults have a qualitatively different life experience than older DACA recipients.

I attempted to have a sample that adhered to the overrepresentation of Mexican immigrants and to adjust to legal and historical occurrences that increased the enrollment of undocumented immigrants into higher education. I only interviewed youth that were qualified for DACA given its eligibility requirements described above (see page 5).

The challenges of accessing this population results in a smaller sample size and cases than is found in other qualitative studies regardless of the sampling procedure applied (Gonzales 2008, Valdez 1993). I strived to have a balanced gender representation, but my main entrée into this population was a woman and so snowball sampling techniques led to an over-representation of female informants. In sum, women were nearly 65% of the respondents. I aimed to sample the range of age cohorts, educational attainment, and representation of country of origin of DACA recipients. The aim of this dissertation is to understand the impact of DACA on undocumented youth, but I also sample youth not eligible under this program. These cases allow me to use them as reference points to those who are DACA recipients and how this program impacts, positively or negatively, their lives.

Multiple methodologies-- participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and statistical data-- were utilized to gain a complete picture of the lived experiences of undocumented immigrant youth. My data informs us how new legal mechanisms impacts eligible recipients, informs their everyday life, identity, integration in American society,

and chances of upward mobility through their lived experiences and personal narratives. Secondly, we can examine the structural and contextual barriers that inhibit or enable former undocumented youth to experience upward mobility in a changing globalized economy. Lastly, I can point to specific on-going or new mechanisms that maintain the fear, apprehension, or continued legal marginality of DACA recipients.

Participant observations allow me to observe how this program impacts their daily lives, occurrences, and interactions. This allows me to uncover and understand aspects of their lives that they might not report in an interview but that are revealed in their interaction with friends or in their meetings. In depth semi-structured interviews provides insights, experiences, and unexpected and important findings that survey research is not capable of uncovering. Statistical data allows me to situate the respondent’s life within the current economic, political, and historical n undocumented immigrants currently live in today.

Below is a demographic profile of my 91 interviewees

Table 1: Educational Attainment of Participant by Gender (N=91)

	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>n</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent
No High School	1	1.09	1	0	0	0
High School/GED	17	18.68	7	7.7	10	11
Community College	30	32.96	12	13.2	18	19.8
4 Year University	38	41.75	14	15.4	24	23.4
Graduate/Professional	5	5.5	2	2.2	3	3.3
Total	91	100	36	100	55	100

Table 2: Age Range (N: 91):

High School, entering labor market, and applying for college :	16-18
College, Working, finishing college:	18-24
Working, starting, a family, college or professional:	25-31

Table 3: Respondents' Country of Origin (N=91)

DACA	DACA				Non-	
	<i>n</i>	Percentage	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Mexico	77	84.6	68	85	9	82
Columbia	2	2.19	2	2.5	0	0
Chile	2	2.19	1	2.5	1	9
Thailand	1	1.09	2	1.25	0	0
Philippines	2	2.19	2	2.5	0	0
Argentina	1	1.09	1	1.25	0	0
South Korea	1	1.09	1	1.25	0	0
China	2	2.19	2	2.5	0	0
El Salvador	1	1.09	1	1.6	0	0
Nigeria	1	1.09	0	0	1	9
Guatemala	1	1.09	1	1.6	0	0
Total	91	100	80	100	11	100

The passage of California Assembly Bills 130 & 131 (2013) occurred when I began my fieldwork. These bills increased the opportunities for undocumented youth in the state with the possibility of attending college or a four-year institution by allowing them to qualify state financial aid, most notably the California grant (UC and CSU) and the Board of Governors Waiver for community colleges.⁷ Recent statistics have shown Latinos increasing enrollment in college and four year institutions of 49% of recent high

⁷ See chapter 3 for a history of undocumented students access to higher in California.

school graduates in comparison to over 30 % in 1990 (Hispanic Pew 2013). Various California State Universities and University of California campuses are allocating resources for the retention, financial aid, scholarships, work study programs, and other programs specific towards the specific needs of undocumented students. Moreover, the California Supreme court allowed Sergio Garcia to become the first undocumented immigrant to practice law.⁸ His story not only allows for an undocumented person to practice law in the state of California –but it gives an image and reality to various undocumented students and youth of the material possibilities associated with completing their education. To distinguish the effects of between age, education, social capital, and labor market I created two categories-respondents that obtained DACA before the age of 18 and those who received them as adults- allowing us to discern these significant differences for heuristic and theoretical purposes.

Getting In

When I started my graduate studies my undergraduate mentor suggested that I touch bases with several student groups that align with my theoretical and political inclinations. He suggested that I contact the president of the student organization, PRISM⁹, that advocates for undocumented students' rights because he was aware of my desire as a graduate students to be resource and advocate for marginalized, first-generation college students. This student organization consisted of undocumented

⁸ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/03/us/immigrant-in-us-illegally-may-practice-law-california-court-rules.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1

⁹ PRISM is a pseudonym for the name of the university student organization.

students and their allies. PRISM is similar to the undocumented student group that I was exposed to during my undergraduate studies. My previous experience with the student group at my alma mater allowed me to legitimize my knowledge as an insider to PRISM. The fall of 2008 was my first year of graduate school and PRISM's first year as an organization. I attended several of their meetings but I was unable to attend because I needed to focus on my studies and examinations. My active involvement with the student group started in the fall of 2012. Their meetings took place in a small room with no windows and was cramped with over fifteen students. When first introducing myself to the other members, I did not inform them of my research project. At the end of each meeting, a block of time was allotted for members to express any frustrations they may have. I made an effort to explain my history as an immigrant and my understanding of their situation. In the fall of 2012, they suggested that I give a presentation on the economic and social impact of attending post-baccalaureate education for a session in their yearly conference. Two weeks after my presentation, I informed the students of my research and my hope that many of them would be willing to participate in it. Victor,¹⁰ the president of the group, made an effort to help me recruit participants for the study. His support for the project encouraged me to start my study.

Initially, I was anxious over members' response towards my research. Many of the students had applied for DACA or had already received their work permit. After Victor introduced my research and allowed me to speak on my behalf, various students came to me afterwards informing me of their willingness to talk to me. As time

¹⁰ Pseudonym

progressed, my involvement with the student group increased by attending other events and hanging spending time with them at the student center. Their increasing trust was evident when they asked questions regarding school and some of the intricacies of dealing with a bureaucratic system. Several had transferred from community colleges in southern California. If their friends were less than fifty miles away, they suggested that I talk with them after they reassured their friends that I was someone they could trust.

Sonia¹¹ previously attended a local high school and helped me to gain access to current high school students. She suggested that I meet with a high school counselor that was her friend. Although Mrs. Ramirez was not Sonia's high school counselor, she was impressed with the advocacy that Mrs. Ramirez provided for undocumented students. Coupled with her advocacy, the students from Mountain High School created the Mountain High DREAMER student group. Having Sonia as a reference legitimized my status "as someone you can trust" in Mrs. Ramirez's perspective. The student group consisted of allies, citizen students supporting immigration reform, and undocumented students. Although Mountain High is a predominantly Latino populated school with a large number of undocumented students, Mountain High DREAMers consisted of only twenty members. Close to a third of the members had older siblings who were members of the relatively new student group. Many of the members were apprehensive of me or did not know what a doctoral student was; they were much shyer than their college counterparts. Mrs. Ramirez was cognizant of their apprehension of non- staff or faculty attending their meetings. She made the effort to break the ice between the students and

¹¹ Pseudonyms were given to Sonia, Mrs. Martinez, and Mountain High School.

myself by elevating my educational credentials as someone they could come to for advice about college and I did provide that advice to members of this group. Their weekly meetings lasted a little over half an hour. The aim of their meetings was geared towards generating money for shirts and for college support. I attended their meeting for several months to provide students with help in their homework and their personal statements for college applications in order to gain their trust. My assistance proved helpful as they allowed me to be a part of their lives and provided me with their personal narratives. Establishing trust allowed me to gain access to their personal relationships and networks. This proved beneficial in accessing more respondents of different educational levels, including high school dropouts and individuals that never entered the American educational system. The composition of Mountain High DREAMers was eclectic- some were in varsity sports, student government, or highly competitive college prep courses. Their friendships were much more diverse than their high school counterparts because it connected people of varying personal interests and aspirations. During their junior and senior years, many came to recognize various friends or acquaintances were in the similar legal situation as themselves either through class presentations or their visibility during the high school's yearly student organization rush week.

Data

My data consist of field notes and transcribed in-depth interviews. Interview data consisted of semi-structured interviews collected over the course of nearly four years fall of 2012 to summer of 2016. Some respondents were interviewed several times throughout the course of their tenure of this study. They were interviewed when they first

obtained DACA, and their renewal process that occurs every two years. The logic behind multiple interviews provides a fuller picture of the long term effects of DACA on its recipients. Some were interviewed early upon their DACA approval, interviewed while they transitioned towards legal work, and some before they were approved for the program. This allowed me to understand the impact DACA has on undocumented youth. The elation of being approved and routinizing their new life under this legal status is important to understand.

It may take some time for respondents to acclimate to the various choices and freedoms afforded to them due to institutional barriers, lack of work experience, and/or time to purchase a car. The questionnaire consisted of the following themes: the experience of being undocumented vis-à-vis school, friends, family, romantic relationships, and everyday life under DACA. Of interest were also identity integration into American society, mental and psychological health, and citizenship. In addition, I interviewed individuals not eligible for DACA. This allowed me to discern the general impact of DACA as well as differences in its impacts across recipients' varying life stages. This allows us to better understand the different trajectories of formerly undocumented youth that receive DACA.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim into a Word document. Some interviews were translated when necessary. Two coding schemes were utilized to provide a holistic context. I manually coded transcripts and created conceptual labels that can be identically applied to the qualitative software Nvivo. Secondly, I employed the established conceptual labels and applied them through NVivo qualitative

software. This technique provides me with the opportunity to recognize and tabulate general themes. It allows us to understand what words are used in relation to their legal status.

Limitations and objectivity

The interconnection between my research and my activism may be seen as possible setback or problem in some academic circles where the need of distance and objectivity is required. Early in my graduate studies, I was informed of the need for objectivity to properly analyze my data in order to separate from the population at hand. In many instances in social research this protocol of dispassion from one's research can be easily conducted. In my case, it is impossible to separate the interconnection of my passion towards understanding this population, my research, and my relationship with the community. Not only has my involvement in the community allowed me unprecedented access to their lives, they made an active effort to help me to recruit informants for this study. The general themes and conclusions from my research are not influenced by my involvement in the community; they became feasible, because of the help of various respondents which would not have been gained without my active participation in several student organizations for undocumented youth and my personal advocacy for the rights of undocumented students. More importantly, my training allowed me to look at the data systematically without compromising the specific needs and circumstances that allowed me to complete this project: connection with the community, and giving back to this population that continues to struggle with living in the United States.

SUMMARY

This research project has spanned nearly four years. It afforded me with a unique time frame to witness my respondents' lives change and to evolve through important life stages. This allowed me to gain invaluable insight into how their perception and understanding changed after the initial elation of obtaining DACA. As a result, the data collected reflects how undocumented youth in Southern California understand their future, identity, and place in society under a global shift towards anti-immigrant policies. Secondly, I was able to obtain trust and establish important relationships with important community leaders, high school counselors, activists, and respondents who were vital in sharing the insights of the state of undocumented youth in Southern California. Listening and reacting to their concerns of being exploited by researchers and the role I should have in the immigrant community was vital in conducting ethical research.

My personal relationships with my informants were, at a personal level, extremely rewarding and helpful throughout my research. I made a sincere effort to display my willingness to be part of the immigrant community in various ways: I checked up with them several times a year to see how they were doing; shared information they could use; attended the events or rallies organized by PRISM and Mountain High DREAMers, and asked their advice on how to improve various aspects of my research. Respondents positively responded to being incorporated into the research process. They directed me towards specific themes that would have otherwise been left out of my interviews or study. I was able to consult with them to see if my findings represented their life experience or that of their community. The validation of my findings helped me to

continue to pursue unexpected themes, such as, policing and dreams. Most importantly, I gained reassurance that I was adequately describing such a diverse population.

I noticed that my personal and emotional commitment to my research also came with some unforeseen setbacks. Listening to people's stories is a privilege and personally rewarding. At the same time, I became aware of the emotional toll of conducting research for a prolonged period. For over a year, I failed to connect that their stories affected me both emotionally and personally. I recognized that being emotionally distant was not feasible during fieldwork, but I could remain disciplined in answering my specific research questions. Aware of this dynamic, I made a concerted effort to grasp how my research influenced my own mental state.

Overall, establishing trust with the community one is involved in enriched and facilitated various aspects of my research. The limitations of this research have already been stated, but my prolonged time in this project allowed me to provide a contemporary understanding of the experience of undocumented youth in Southern California that informs us of the political terrain they navigate each day.

CHAPTER 2: Integration, Identity, and Illegality Under Neoliberalism

INTRODUCTION

There are several explanations for the increased numbers of undocumented immigrants in the U.S and around the world. A Marxist's perspective points to the combined impact of neoliberal policies abroad, promoted by global capitalists, and uneven capitalist development, which push migrants out of poorer nations and pulls them into the U.S. They also argue that the militarization of the world borders and wave of repressive anti-immigrant state regulations maintain a super exploitable labor force for global capitalists (Robinson and Barrera 2011). Migration scholars, on the other hand, argue that the culmination of immigration policies since 1965 is the primary factor for the surge of undocumented immigrants into the U.S that resulted in the creation of strong migration networks (Massey et. al 1993; Massey and Pren 2012; Massey et al. 2004). This migration policy centered on family reunification and abolished favoritism towards Western Europeans. The end of the Bracero program in 1964 along with the establishment of a western hemisphere cap of 120,000 helped to increase the undocumented immigrants. Peters (2001) emphasizes the role of U.S. politicians and mainstream media in highlighting the need to control migration, which provided political support for militarizing the border. In the U.S, the native-born population blames their economic disillusion and frustration on undocumented immigrants, claiming that they are taking jobs away from citizens and putting downward pressure on wages. This, and racist stereotypes, has led a large segment of American society to views state repression, hyper-

surveillance, and criminalization of undocumented immigrants, particularly Latino ones, as necessary measures for the protection of American workers' lifestyle. One result is that undocumented immigrants and their families live their everyday lives in constant fear of state repression, deportation, and material hardships created by the lack of health care and other vital services.

Within the current economic and historical context, undocumented immigrants enter the U.S. and become part of a highly racialized American society. Omi and Winant (2010) argue there have been several racial projects in the United States. A racial project "is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (Omi and Winant 2015: 125). Each project is historically contingent, and those in power are able to define race, who is exploited, and control the allocation of resources. Due to the increased number and replenishment of Mexican migrants to the U.S. since the 1970's, Mexican immigrants and American citizens of Mexican cultural heritage have become targets of the new racialization process in the U.S. that has rendered them more exploitable and marginalized (Massey 2009). Law has played an integral role in the racialization of Mexicans. In the seminal case *United States v. Brignoni-Ponce* (1975), the Supreme Court effectively allowed racial profiling in law enforcement. The court allows law enforcement to use "Mexican appearance" to be one of a number of factors which can be used in making an immigration stop but it cannot be the only factor (*United States v.*

Brignioni Ponce (1975) 442 U.S. 873; Johnson 2010:1075)¹². Consequently, law enforcement was given institutional legitimacy in using Mexican appearance as a factor in “for stopping, detaining, and interrogating persons about their citizenship status” (Aguirre et. al 2011:700). The consequences of this decision are monumental: it supported the notion that American citizens with perceived Mexican features should be treated as second-class citizens (Aguirre et. al 2011); it created the public perception that utilizing racial profiling as an adequate measure to protect the U.S (Johnson 2001; Castro 2008); and criminalized all brown bodies by implying that they could be “illegal” (Aguirre and Simmers 2008; Romero and Serga 2005).¹³

Since the annexation of Southwestern states through the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), the U.S. public has feared Latinos, particularly Mexican immigrants, as a threat to workers’ interests, national culture and English language preservation, the white race, and the quality of life of most Americans (Chavez 2008; Aguirre et. al 2011). Chavez (2001,2008) analyzed national newspapers, magazine covers, news stories that focused on immigrants and how they portrayed them to the general public. Chavez (2008) argued that media promoted a fear that he labeled “the Latino threat” where immigrants from Latin America pose a threat to national security and every social and cultural aspect of American life. This type of discourse can also be found in academic circles, most notably in the scholarship of Harvard political scientist Samuel P.

¹² The following are the Court’s additional factors in the decision that expands law enforcement discretion to utilize to justify a stop: characteristics of the area in which they encounter a vehicle; proximity to the border; usual patterns of traffic on the particular road; previous experience with alien traffic; information about recent illegal border crossings in the area; driver’s behavior such as erratic driving or obvious attempts to evade officers; aspects of the vehicle such as “certain station wagons with a heavily loaded appearance; that contain large compartments for fold down seats or spare tires; an extraordinary number of passengers, or observations by the officer of someone trying to hide; characteristic appearance of someone who lived in Mexico such as dress and haircut; and the officer’s experience in detecting illegal entry and smuggling (*Brignoni-Ponce* 1975; Jonson 2010: 1005).

¹³ See Romero (2006) how racial profiling assumes Mexican features to be illegal.

Huntington (2008). He became a prominent voice forewarning the downfall of American prosperity and way of life would stem from the Latino population.¹⁴ Huntington (2008) argued that continued migration from Latin American, and Latinos' unwillingness to fully embody White Anglo-Saxon cultural values, would bifurcate the U.S. into two nations. Most importantly, broad segments of the general public have come to believe that Mexican immigrants are a real threat to their economic, political, and social lives. For example, Romero (2006) highlights how an anti-immigrant group utilizes the "Latino threat" doctrine through coded language by utilizing immigration law and discourse to argue that Mexican immigrant mothers are unfit and undeserving to receive state and federal assistance for their American born children.

The amalgamation of the current racial project, the precariousness of the American economy, the militarization of the US-Mexico border, and the fear of white Americans of the inevitable demographic shift brought about by immigrants has resulted in numerous state and federal laws targeting undocumented immigrants in two important ways. First, undocumented immigrants are subject to a hyper-surveillance police state (Inda 2006a, 2006b; Robinson and Barrera 2012; Robinson 2015). These repressive control apparatuses joined by state legislations target undocumented immigrant and their families. Most recently, Arizona's SB 1070 (2010) aimed to criminalize undocumented immigrants by allowing police officer to racially profile anyone who looked undocumented, thereby requiring everyone to carry proof of citizenship or legal presence.

¹⁴ U.S. Southern Command General John Kelly has framed migration as a "national security threat" and called it a "crime-terror convergence."(See:http://inthesetimes.com/article/16919/8_reasons_u.s._trade_and_immigration_policies_have_caused_migration_from_ce)

Authors of this bill also sought to deny medical care and social services to people unable to provide lawful documentation. Lastly, the state of Arizona passed state legislature SB 1070 that proposed to deputize teachers to compile lists of students that could possibly be undocumented for immigration officials. Although the majority of the bill was overturned by the Supreme Court¹⁵, a major component of the bill that was upheld that allows local law enforcement to use Mexican appearance as a reason to stop a person to provide valid documentation that they are legally present in the country. It resulted in increased fear of the undocumented immigrant population of deportation by law enforcement and immigration officials. The hyper-vigilance and fear of law enforcement exhibited by undocumented immigrants can be conceptualized as “the threat of deportation (Fussell 2011).”

Indeed, law plays an integral role in shaping the everyday lives of undocumented immigrants. Throughout history, law has defined race and targeted specific groups by where they live, their access to educational and social services, and their structural integration into US society (Haney-Lopez 2006). Menjivar (2012) has shown how laws specific to the legal status of immigrants permanently influence their behavior as they undergo the legalization process (Coutin 2002; Menjivar 2011a, 2011b; Menjivar and Abrego 2012; Menjivar and Lakhani 2016). Immigration policies have also shown to cause immigrants to have psychological and mental health problems (Bui et al 2010;

¹⁵ Arizona v United States , 567 U.S. (2012). Several facets of the SB 1070 preempted federal law, but the Supreme Court allowed the Arizona law enforcement officials to stop, detain, or arrest individuals if they have reasonable suspicion that they are unlawfully present in the country.

Gonzales et al 2013; Stacciarri et al 2014); and unfairly target Latino men (Romero 2005; Golash 2013).

This current racial, economic, and social atmosphere has been exacerbated by the ascendance of ultra-right wing politicians placating the disillusioned White working class and other anti-immigrant groups that express hostility towards undocumented immigrants. The popularity of these politicians that espouse racist, xenophobic, and ultra-masculine rhetoric provides a fertile ground for a new form of fascism known as “21st century fascism” (Robinson and Barrera 2011; Robinson 2015). Thus, understanding the unique historical climate that undocumented youth are exposed to is vital to understanding how DACA influences their everyday lives.

Secondly, hostile political climate has resulted in undocumented youth living without any form of legal status for many years, in some instances decades. Such youth were primarily educated in American educational institutions while simultaneously raised under the threat of deportation. In addition, immigration reform has become central in American presidential races and in general political discourse. Along with the current socioeconomic climate, undocumented youth in their everyday lives are unable to escape people, social media, or institutions deliberating and expressing their worthiness to remain in the U.S. This is the unique juncture in history in which undocumented youth are growing up and becoming adults.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical understanding that seeks to explain how DACA alters the everyday life of undocumented youth, influences how they perceive their place in society, how they choose to identify, what paths are available to

them for incorporation into California society, and the cumulative effect of living as an undocumented immigrant for a long period of time. In the first section, I will address how a dominant global political and economic philosophical perspective—neoliberalism— influences the behavior and everyday life of undocumented youth. By incorporating Foucault’s notion of governmentality and panopticism, I will show how the state and its methods of surveillance result in undocumented youth self-policing themselves. Bundled with self-policing, neoliberalism forces undocumented youth to behave as economic and self-entrepreneurial individuals in order to be deemed by American public as worthy immigrants.

The second section focuses on the modes of incorporation of undocumented youth after DACA. I utilize *segmented assimilation* theory to provide a foundation for understanding the various possibilities of social integration available to undocumented youth. State laws vary across the country in terms of how they treat undocumented immigrants. The combination of California legislative acts geared towards undocumented immigrants coupled with the implementation of DACA provide a particular structure of opportunity for undocumented youth in California that is very different from that found in other states that more restrictive and more hostile policies towards undocumented immigrants.

The third section focuses on how undocumented youth perceived their identity and place in society. I utilize the theoretical lens of “illegality” to focus on the mechanisms that create and reproduce the *illegality* that undocumented immigrants experience in their everyday life. Undocumented immigrants are subject to various

experiences before and after DACA that affects their identity. I focus on how their experience as undocumented immigrants help to shape a framework and ideology that allows them to understand their place in society after DACA. In order to enhance my understanding of how their everyday life experiences influence their identity, I borrow Menjivar and Abrego's (2013) concept of *legal violence*. For example, undocumented youth are subject to legal violence via institutions that generate feelings of anomie that become a basis for examining the place of undocumented youth in society. As a result, undocumented youth justify and explain their identity and society based on a combination of legal violence and how they perceive their integration into society.

The last section focuses on what are the cumulative impact on undocumented youth of living as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. There is very limited research literature that examines the mental and emotional consequences of being undocumented among immigrant youth. I propose that undocumented youth who are subject to traumatic experiences as a result of their "illegal" status are likely to have emotional and mental health problems. Furthermore, I argue that living as an undocumented immigrant in a highly policed and surveilled society results in dreams of undocumented youth that are exposed to traumatic experiences from living without a legal status.

CONCEPTUALIZATING NOTIONS OF PLACE AND IDENTITY

A unique feature of current immigration enforcement is in the increasing use of sophisticated surveillance technologies on the U.S-Mexico border (Inda 2006).

Surveillance practices are not confined to the U.S.-Mexico border. Aguirre et al (2008) argue that the border is internalized by the people of Mexican descent, hence as they move through social spaces, “the Mexican body is the border” (Aguirre et al 2008:103). This results in all Mexicans being perceived as “border crossers.” Similarly, Bohannan (1967) suggests that the “frontier is all around us.” Indeed, surveillance practices at the border are utilized to criminalize undocumented immigrants by imprisoning them within immigrant detention centers. Being subject to intense state surveillance practices is a unique circumstance for undocumented immigrants in the 21st century. A defining difference from earlier years is the various mechanisms at the state’s disposal to control undocumented immigrants: technological sophistication, the immigration industrial complex, and pervasive policing. As a result, undocumented immigrants are constantly aware of law enforcement and surveillance practices when they are in public spaces.

I apply Foucault’s (1991) notion of *governmentality* as a lens for understanding how tools of surveillance are used to control the undocumented immigrant population. *Governmentality* refers to relations “that regulate the conduct of subjects as population and as individuals in the interest of ensuring security and prosperity of the nation state” (Ong 1996: 738). The end result is that the state exerts its power over the undocumented immigrants by “taking control of life and the biological process ...and ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized” (Foucault 2003: 247). According to Foucault (1991), governmentality began in the mid 18th century when the capitalist economy was the central mode for exercising power over a person. Today, the state seeks out and rewards

individuals who can embody neoliberal citizenship by being entrepreneurial, self-sufficient, and minimally rely on state services. Following Berger, I define *neoliberal citizenship* as a state sponsored identity that can be conferred on “individualistic and self-reliant producers and consumers within the capitalist free market” (Berger 2009: 215).¹⁶ This informs us what the state wants and which individuals it will reward. In today’s global capitalist economy, undocumented immigrants fill specific roles as super exploitable labor in the global mode of production (Robinson 2011, 2014, 2015). Thus, neoliberal citizenship becomes the ideal in this global capitalist economy.

Deserving Versus Undeserving Immigrants

Kubal (2013) argues for the need to examine how neoliberal practices influence the everyday life of immigrants. The coupling of neoliberal practices¹⁷ with the increasing demands for low wage labor within a global capitalist economy provides a window for studying how undocumented youth understand the meaning of state sponsored citizenship. From a neoliberal perspective, *citizenship* for undocumented youth is attained if they become economically sufficient and independent (Merry 2003, Bhuyan 2008 Villalón 2010; Lakhani 2013; Nicholls 2013); of good moral character (Lapp 2012); self-reliant and entrepreneurial (Ong 1996:739); and reduce their economic burden on society by building their social capital in society via incorporation (Berger 2009:205). For example, Berger (2009) shows how the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of

¹⁶ See Hindess (2002) for an in depth analysis on the emergence of neoliberal citizenship under globalization.

¹⁷ Neoliberal practices can be seen through the state allowing for the increase of the undocumented population in order to maintain an immobile super exploitable labor pool and through state surveillance practices that ensure that undocumented immigrants acquiesce to their social position.

1994 created regulations and standards that transformed abused immigrant women into neoliberal subjects. Under the VAWA, legal advocates and victims were forced to create a narrative of “the deserving immigrant” that would be entrepreneurial and not an economic burden to the state (Berger 2009).¹⁸ Similarly, Villalon’s (2010) study of Latina immigrant domestic abuse victims illustrates how their social condition was described as meeting VAWA’s guidelines. In a different case, Coutin documented how Salvadorian immigrants attempted to redefine their legal status through their activism by defining undocumented Salvadorian and Guatemala undocumented immigrants as refugees in order to increase their legitimacy for political asylum (Coutin 1998, 2000, 2006). Menjivar and Lakhani (2016) have shown how laws influence immigrants to reify the notions of the deserving immigrant vis-à-vis the law.

Some research on undocumented youth shows how the popular media has created a narrative that depicts undocumented youth as worthy of legalization. For example, Corrunker (2010) has noted how DREAM activists have been empowered through U.S. legislative acts that promote their incorporation into society. In contrast, Central American children who migrated to the U.S. in 2015 were deemed as unworthy of legislative efforts, that seek their incorporation into U.S. society (Huber 2016). Huber (2016) shows that while the popular media positively portrays DREAMers as non-threatening and contributors to the advancement of American society, Central American children were portrayed as an economic burden and a physical threat with the possible diseases they carry from Central America to the well-being of U.S society (Huber 2016:

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis on the backlash against welfare and limiting immigrants’ access to these resources see Reese (2009) *They Say Cut Back, We Say Fight Back! Welfare Activism in an Era of Retrenchment*

27). As such, the state has created categories of “deservedness” based on whether an immigrant fits the “good” or “bad” immigrant profile that has racial and national dimensions that primarily focus on Latino immigrants.

In my dissertation, I show how undocumented immigrant youth and respondents in southern California are challenging neoliberal citizenship as desired by the state through their refusal to identify as a DREAMer. Within the immigrant rights movement, the DREAM movement emerged and gained attention after the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) failed to pass the Senate in 2001 but gained a victory at the state level with the passage California Bill AB-540 . Comprised of undocumented youth and allies, the movement highlighted anachronistic immigration policies that prevented highly educated immigrant youth from contributing to the American economy and society. An outcome of their activism was the implementation of DACA in 2012.

After 2102 how the American public viewed DREAMers changed in correspondence with changes in the social and political climate. DREAMers were now viewed as deserving immigrants in contrast to other undocumented immigrant groups. I argue in this dissertation that the DREAMer movement lost control of its own narrative when it was coopted by social media and political actors to promote their messages and images of neoliberal citizenship. For instance, Hart and Negri (2000) note how the DREAMer movement and identity was coopted by the media and politicians. In their book *Empire*, they show how acts of resistance are coopted by those in power to serve to expand and perpetuate their ideological perspective (Hart and Negri 2000). The

DREAMer movement is now used by the media and politicians to demonstrate which undocumented immigrants are deemed worthy of being part of the state because they represent the ideal neoliberal citizen—those that seek to be highly educated, to use their education and professional skills to contribute to society, be self-entrepreneurial, do not threaten the well-being of the US, and are unlikely to be an economic burden to the state since they are poised to enter the middle class. As a result, the DREAMers are depicted as deserving neoliberal citizens while the act simultaneously criminalizes their families and depicts other undocumented immigrants as undeserving of legality.¹⁹

This research demonstrates how activists and respondents in Southern California are challenging neoliberal citizenship through their critique of the DREAMer identity and the “good immigrant” narrative category that became evident after DACA.

Undocumented students attending institutions of higher education resisted identifying with the DREAMer label because it was not inclusive of all undocumented immigrant students. Secondly, activists and undocumented youth argued that Janet Napolitano University of California President, Janet Napolitano was now utilizing the term *DREAMer* in order to justify their worthiness for increased financial aid so they could complete their university education. Undocumented immigrant youth became aware that the state was attempting to categorize immigrant students based on their purported worthiness. As a result, activists challenge the state’s attempt by arguing that their parents and the entire undocumented immigrant community were just as worthy of

¹⁹ DREAMers are undocumented youth who would qualify for because they comprise individuals that fit the requirements under the DREAM ACT. Several versions of the bill have been introduced but have never passed. Over the last few years there has been an increase to term undocumented youth as DREAMers but there is not direct source which person, group, or organizations initially came up with the term.

legality.

Surveillance and Self-Policing

Incorporating Foucault's notion of *panopticism* (1980) and *governmentality*, (Lemke 1997) augments one's understanding of the influence of hyper-surveillance of undocumented youth. These concepts are complementary because they derive from neoliberalism's consistent expansion of the economic form to all social spheres that erases the difference between the economy and the social (Lemke 1997). This has resulted in the implementation of the market as the organizing principle for the state and society. A unique feature of the neoliberal form of government is its application of indirect techniques that control the individual through forms of self-regulation or "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1988). Foucault applies Bethman's panopticon prison to explain the current way in which society is disciplined. Panopticism is "to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic function of power" (Foucault 1980:281). Most importantly for a disciplinary society are authorities who make hierarchical 'normalizing' judgments of their subjects, in this case who is worthy and unworthy. The increase of surveillance technologies on the population, in particular to undocumented immigrants, creates a state of omnipresence surveillance which the "individual plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 1980:203). Those who are aware they are being watched internalize the laws and self-regulate themselves according to the desires of the state.

Undocumented youth in southern California perceive themselves to be under surveillance by the state and society. The combination of their politicized existence,

immigration surveillance technologies, and their precarious legal status results in undocumented youth policing themselves in various social spheres. The threat of deportation thus becomes an instrument for instilling fear in and controlling the lives of undocumented immigrants.

A report from the UCLA Labor Center has found that immigration policies, such as program 287(g)²⁰ and Priority Enforcement Program²¹, have created a state of hyper-awareness among the undocumented that has resulted in them constantly policing their behavior (Placencia et. al 2015). Program 287(g) was an amendment of the 1996 Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act Program 287(g). This program authorized state local law enforcement agencies, that entered into an agreement with ICE, to perform immigrant law functions. The Secure Communities Program lasted from 2008 until 2014, aimed to identify deportable immigrants under immigration law through cooperating jails that submitted the fingerprints of undocumented immigrants to an immigration database. This self-monitoring is applied in all spheres of their everyday lives: work, school, and friends. Undocumented youth evaluate people in spaces such as work or school to determine whether they should divulge their immigrant status to them. This apprehension is nested in the avoidance of persons who do not support DACA, and who could pose a threat to their immigrant status in case DACA is revoked by the state.

Their self-policing also derives from the need to perform acceptable behavior (e.g. neoliberal citizenship) that is deemed as worthy for the renewal of DACA.

²⁰The program was terminated in 2012. For an in-depth look on the negative effects of program 287(g) see: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/287g-program-flawed-and-obsolete-method-immigration-enforcement>

²¹ To see the various problems with the Secure Communities program, see: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/secure-communities-fact-sheet>

Undocumented youth view their behavior as law-abiding citizens or their educational success as demonstrating their worthiness for DACA. This is not uncommon for DACA recipients to rationalize their self-policing by stating, “as long as I behave well.” Such a statement demonstrates the power of surveillance on undocumented youth.

Undocumented youth are fully aware of this cooptation by various bureaucratic information, practice, and surveillance apparatuses, that convinces undocumented youth with DACA to employ greater caution in their behavior in order to maintain a good standing with the state.

Undocumented youths’ awareness of self-policing not only influences how they perceive their need to demonstrate good behavior, but it also allows them to understand their place in society. The self-policing practiced by undocumented youth before DACA serves to inform them of their “illegal” presence in U.S. society. However, after DACA undocumented youth perceive their status and place in society as a product of how they choose to identify and understand their integration into American society. Changes from their everyday life after DACA did not remove them from further struggles or witnessing the daily issues, usually through their family members, undocumented immigrants face every day.

ASSIMILATION

Undocumented youth’s identity is influence by how they perceived their integration and life chances. The study of assimilation has been a major topic of interest

in sociology (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918; Park 1950).²² Park's (1950) study of the integration of eastern Europeans in Chicago became a prominent theoretical understanding in the early 20th century. In 1960, Park's theory was supplanted by Gordon's (1965) theory that posited that integration follows a straight line trajectory where immigrants are fully assimilated once they adopt White-Anglo-Saxon cultural views as their own, are structurally integrated (are able to obtain upward mobility, education, and economic success), and intermarry with the dominant group. According to Gordon (1960), assimilation takes several generations where the foreign born are less social and culturally assimilated in comparison to their American born children. Lastly, the grandchildren of the foreign born are more likely to view American values as their own. Gordon's theory was geared to explain the integration of European immigrants that migrated in the early 20th century.

Theorizing about assimilation became much more complex with the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965 because it altered the migration landscape with the majority of immigrants coming from East Asia and Latin America (Massey and Duran 2002). Immigrants after 1965 entered a different economic, political, and social atmosphere than their European counterparts that made integration and prosperity much more difficult for them (Zhou 1997). This left Gordon's linear approach to assimilation limited in explaining the integration of this new wave of immigrants. As a result, current debates have centered on whether the paths of incorporation for contemporary immigrants differ from those of immigrants from the early 20th century (Waldinger and Perlmann 1998; Portes and

²² For a review on the current state on research on assimilation and theoretical debates see Waters and Jimenez (2008)

Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Kasinitz et al. 2008). Gans (1996) suggests that current immigrants face a “bumpy” path towards integration because of different obstacles faced by European immigrant cohorts. Alba and Nee (2003), however, provide an optimistic outlook by arguing that present day immigrants are following a similar trajectory of incorporation as previous immigrant cohorts. However, Fox (2012) highlights European immigrants access to different social and welfare rights than Latino immigrants. As a result, European immigrants had access to different forms of social capital that increased their chances of economic success.

Gordon’s inability to explain the various paths of incorporation that immigrants can take is a major theoretical argument of segmented assimilation. Segmented assimilation argues that immigrants after 1965 face different prospects of upward mobility than immigrants before 1965 and they provide a structural framework with various possible integration outcomes immigrants could follow (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, and Haller 2005). Segmented assimilation argues that immigrants enter class and racial stratification and their interaction within large social structures that have historically excluded people of Color (Zhou 2008). Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that the immigrants’ context of exit and reception are vital in understanding the various trajectories of incorporation after. The context of exit entail various factors that include premigration resources that immigrants bring (such as money or social capital), social class, profession, and motivation. Context of reception includes the racial stratification system of the host country, governmental policies, labor market conditions public, and the strength of the ethnic community (Portes and Zhou 1993;

Portes and Rumbaut 2005, 2007; Rumbaut 2008). Specifically, government policies and the law significantly shape immigrants' modes of incorporation and prospects of upward mobility (Portes 1989; Portes and Zhou 1993).

Specific to immigrant children, Zhou (1997) argues that current immigrant youth are expected to be successful in one generation despite being under different political and economic circumstances in contrast to European immigrants who took three generations to become fully incorporated. Rumbaut (2004) highlights the limitations of lumping immigrant youth between first and second generation to explain their prospects of educational and economic mobility. By focusing on life stages of young adults, he termed the 1.5 generation for youth that migrated to U.S. during their early childhood years that adapted to the linguistic, social, and cultural values of the U.S. (Rumbaut 2004). The 1.5 generation term can be applied to undocumented youth who migrated during their early years in their childhood.

Despite segmented assimilation's strength in explaining the various paths present day immigrants can take, they have not paid sufficient attention to the role that legal status plays in immigrant integration (Gonzales 2008; Abrego 2011). Research has shown that immigration status(undocumented, legal permanent resident, citizen) influences various aspects of an immigrant's life; specifically, employment and wages (Massey 1987; Phillips and Massey 1999; Kossoudji and Cobb-Clark 1999; Massey and Gellat 2010; Donato and Sisk 2012; Hall and Greeman 2013; Gonzalez et al. 2015), access to health care (Menjívar 2002; Hagan et. al 2003; Heyman et al. 2009; Viladitch 2012; Marrow 2012; Willen 2012), housing, neighborhood, and crowded homes (Hall and

Greeman 2013; McConnell 2015a, 2015b, 2015c), fear of going outside or in public spaces (Nunez and Heyman 2007), educational attainment and access to financial aid (Abrego 2006; Flores 2009; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Gonzales 2009, 2011, 2012; Nienhusser 2013, 2014, 2015), mental health (Suarez-Orozco 2012; Gonzales et al 2013) and even friendships and romantic relationships (Blotch et al. 2013; Sigona 2012; Pila 2015). Thus, the legal context which undocumented immigrants enter is a major factor that shapes their everyday life and incorporation (Abrego 2015; Gonzales 2008, 2011; Gonzalez and Chavez 2012; Menjivar 2002, 2006, 2011; Lee and Zhou 2015).

In order to address the limitations of segmented assimilation to explain the various paths available for DACA recipients in southern California, I will apply a perspective from geography scholars that focuses how state, and local laws are employed differently throughout the US that impact the everyday life and opportunity structures of undocumented immigrants. Scholars have highlighted the importance that geographical location (city) plays in the implementation of federal programs such as, Secure Communities, which vary within as well as across states (Wong 2012; Coleman 2013). They document how similar municipalities in the South implement contrasting policies towards undocumented immigrants (Ridgley 2008; Walker and Leitner 2011). They also show how the combination of state and federal policies in rural or urban areas expands or contracts the opportunities for undocumented youth to achieve upward mobility (Gonzales and Ruiz 2014). Lastly, undocumented youth were not living in a vacuum before DACA. They had been part of a society where they have been sorted through institutions and individuals that have promoted or denied them access to resources and

opportunities based on their race, class, neighborhood, and social capital. That has reinforced their social position in the US, which allows us to contextualize their paths of incorporation based on their specific location in the global economy.

I identify several factors that are vital in structuring the opportunity structures for undocumented youth. California has increased access and resources in higher education for undocumented immigrants through California legislation AB 130 and 131 (enacted in 2012). These bills allow undocumented students that qualified under CA AB-540 were eligible for state financial and became eligible to receive scholarships from private and public universities. The state also provides undocumented immigrants access to a California driver's license [CA AB-60] (2015) and opened access to professional associations to undocumented immigrants [CA -1159] (2015). The combination of these state laws and DACA has increased access to opportunity structures for undocumented youth in southern California. Unfortunately, not all DACA recipients have the same opportunities in the labor market or opportunity structures. The age (life stage) at which undocumented youth qualify for DACA, in conjunction with California's opportunity structures, shapes how they view their future and what is realistic in terms of their educational and economic opportunities. For example, several respondents in this dissertation with only a high school education report having a family and other financial obligations that constrain their economic and educational choices. In contrast, respondents in college or with a college education have a positive perception of their future and success in society because they are able to implement their education and utilize the social capital created in college to increase their wages and job opportunities.

Researchers have observed that DACA recipients with a college education experience higher wage increases than those without a college education (Gonzales et al 2014, 2016). High school respondents have a similar outlook as their college educated counterparts in how they perceive their future in obtaining a college degree and an eventual career. At the same time, this positive picture is not available to all DACA recipients. Undocumented youth's family class position from their country of origin can play an important role in shaping their prospects of upward mobility. Research has shown that an immigrant's social capital is reproduced in the U.S. (Lee and Zhou 2013, 2015). Social capital, employment networks and resources available in their educational institutions, has facilitated undocumented youth's ability to succeed in various aspects of American society, in particular in educational institutions. This, along with their race, informs us how they have been, and are likely to be, sorted in American society to specific positions within the global economy.

ILLEGALITY AND IDENTITY AFTER DACA

As discussed in Chapter 1, there has been a surge of research interest on undocumented youth. At the same time, there is a dearth of research, except for policy reports, that seeks to understand how DACA changes the everyday life and identity of undocumented youth. In this dissertation, I draw insights from the scholarly literature on "illegality" and "legal violence" to enhance our understanding on the everyday life of undocumented youth with DACA and how they view their place in society.

Illegality focuses on the legal status and sociopolitical condition of undocumented immigrants, it seeks to understand their everyday experience through the mechanisms

that reproduce and sustain their migrant “illegality” (Coutin 2000; De Genova 2002; Ngai 2004; Willen 2007; Abrego 2011; Gonzales 2008, 2011). This approach seeks to understand “the impact of “illegality” on migrants’ every day, embodied experiences of the being-in-the-world (Willen 2007: 10).” This shift allows us to focus on the everyday lives of undocumented immigrants through their interactions with institutions, individuals, and other social spheres. Focusing on undocumented youths’ everyday experience reveals the contradictory nature of social integration and citizenship that they encounter.

Scholars have highlighted how laws create both social inclusion and exclusion among immigrants in the U.S. (Coutin 1999, 2003; Menjivar 2000, 2006, 2011; Abrego 2015). Specifically, research on Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients has focused on understanding the influence of TPS on Central American immigrants in the U.S. It has demonstrated the limitations of a binary outlook (legal versus illegal) on immigration status through the legal gray area that TPS recipients experience (Coutin 2000a; 2000b, 2005; Menjivar 2002, 2006). Salvadorian immigrants with TPS are situated in what Coutin (2000a, 2000b) terms “legal nonexistence.” By “legal nonexistence” she refers to Salvadorians being physically present in the United States but lacking any legal recognition or status. Salvadorian TPS recipients are socially and politically active but are subject to legal nonexistence that is identical to undocumented immigrants in that they are subject to the threat of deportation, have low wage jobs, and lack of access to health care and education. Menjivar (2006) argues that Guatemalan immigrants also suffer from legal nonexistence. She combines Victor Turner’s (1966) concept of

liminality with Coutin's legal nonexistence to term the legal status of Central Americans as "liminal legality." She focuses on the gray area between being documented and undocumented. It is a status intended to be temporary, that Central Americans endure for an indefinite amount of time, but which defines their everyday existence. She examines how "the condition of uncertainty shapes the social and cultural aspects of immigrants' lives and the meaning that suspended legality has for them" (Menjívar 2006:1008). Liminal legality is neither undocumented or documented but has aspects of both and it is not always a linear trajectory towards assimilation since those with liminal legality can return to their undocumented status if their permit expires (Menjívar 2006).

My research focuses on how undocumented youth experience illegality everyday. It differs from previous research on the illegality experienced by other immigrant groups because the majority of undocumented youth are socialized in American educational institutions and have adopted American social, linguistic, and cultural customs. Undocumented youth begin to experience illegality through American rites of passage when they interact with institutions, most commonly the labor market and higher education, that inform them of their lack of legal status (Abregó 2006; Gonzales 2008, 2011; Glesson 2011; Gonzales and Chavez 2013). Through interactions with these institutions, undocumented youth learn how to be "illegal" once they become adults and adjust their lives accordingly to their place in society (Gonzales 2011). As a result, their identity as an undocumented immigrant becomes central to their everyday lives (Gonzales 2008, 2011, 2015; Gonzalez and Chavez 2013). Gonzales (2015) argues that the salience of their undocumented identity influences every aspect of their lives and thus

should be understood as a master status.

Liminal legality and illegality are important frameworks for understanding undocumented youths' transitions from undocumented to their liminal legal status under DACA. However, both perspectives have been criticized for being unable to capture the various experiences of immigrants without a legal status (Kubal 2013).²³ Kubal (2012, 2013) suggests that we should view illegality and liminal legality through her perspective of semi-legality. She claims that, "legal status should be viewed as a multidimensional space where legal status—migrants' formal relationship with the state—interacts with various forms of their agency toward the law—their behavior and attitudes" (Kubal 2012:566-567). Her argument is consistent with Coutin's observation of immigrants' experience where "illegality may be irrelevant to most of their activities, only becoming an issue in certain contexts" (Coutin 2000: 40). Semi-illegality is an attempt to "move beyond the binary categories of documented and undocumented to explore the ways in which migrants move between different statuses and the mechanisms that allow them to be regular in one sense and irregular in another" (Gonzales 2011: 605). Reliance on semi-legality provides a theoretical perspective that allow one to understand that "various forms of legality that exist concomitantly with one's immigration status and interact with it in multiple ways" (Kubal 2013: 565).

Kubal's (2013) views liminal legality and illegality as having different interpretations on the relationship between the state and the immigrant. Under liminal legality, the relationship of the state defines every aspect of immigrants' lives (Menjívar

²³ See Kubal (2013) for a complete literature review on the literature on illegality and semi-illegality.

2002, 2006; Kubal 2013). Illegality” is a “juridical status that entails a social relation to the state; as such, migrant “illegality” is a preeminently political identity (DeGenova 2002: 422). Instead, she proposes that semi-legality is better suited to explain the relationship between the immigrant and the state by pointing how neoliberalism dictates how states use of the law are “the main political and moral features distinguishing them from others, actually engage in in perpetuating the legally ambiguous modes of incorporation sui generis” (Kubal 2013: 582). Indeed, contextualizing the relationship between the immigrant and the state under the current economic paradigm, neoliberalism, under the global economy is correct.

Kubal seeks to distinguish Menjivar’s (2002, 2006) and De Genova’s (2002) understanding of the relationship between the immigrant and the state and portrays them as competing perspectives. I argue that they can instead be viewed as complementary perspectives that are useful for understanding the varying experience of particular types of immigrants, in this case undocumented youth in Southern California. Undocumented immigrants’ political identity and everyday lives are bounded by, and interacts with the U.S. state. Kubal’s (2013) insight on the neoliberal state tolerates and perpetuates various forms of illegalities is much needed. Unfortunately, her omission of the role of race under neoliberal migration regimes is confusing given the current global political climate against people of Color. In the U.S., race relations and society’s perception of people of Color has *always* been reflected in law which directly impacts the everyday life of the individual (Omi and Winant 1995; Lipshitz 2001; Haney Lopez 2003; 2015).

Lastly, incorporating the concept of *legal violence* provides a context for

understanding how law has shaped young undocumented immigrants' behavior, stunted their paths of incorporation, and caused emotional and psychological consequences. Legal violence refers to how immigration law not only obstructs or derails immigrants' path of incorporation but manifests in harmful ways in immigrants' lives (Mejivar and Abrego 2013:1313). It is rooted within a system of laws at the federal, state, and local levels that promotes a climate of insecurity and suffering among individual immigrants and their families. Menjivar and Abrego (2012) term legal violence as the fear created by law enforcement that is both real and perceived that harms immigrant incorporation in the United States. This form of violence occurs both structurally and symbolically. At the macro level, structural violence is "rooted in the uncertainty of everyday life caused by the insecurity of wages or income, a chronic deficit in food, dress, housing, and health care, and uncertainty about the future which is translated into hunger" (Menjivar and Abrego 2013-Torres-Rivas 1998: 49). The authors apply Bourdieu's (1986) concept of "symbolic violence" to explain the internalization of legal violence that eventually becomes normalized. The dominant group creates ideas and perspectives that become accepted by those being dominated who then evaluate their place in society. As a result, dominated groups think of their social position as normal, thus perpetuating unequal social structures. Lastly, legal violence is both symbolic and structural because it is "embedded in legal practices, sanctioned, actively implemented through formal procedures, and legitimated—and consequently seen as 'normal' and natural because it 'is the law'" (Menjivar and Abrego 2013: 1387).

Identity and Illegality of Undocumented Youth

Undocumented youth in southern California lived as undocumented immigrants for a long period of time, which fostered a binary framework of inclusion or exclusion through which they understood their social identity. Since undocumented youth first learned how to be “illegal” and understood their place in society based on this framework of complete exclusion—any obstacles or forms of exclusion are understood in terms of being undocumented. Based on this framework and continued obstacles to full citizenship, undocumented youth choose to continue to identify as an undocumented immigrant. They also choose to identify and understand their status as being undocumented despite having DACA because of their family’s legal status and problems, their own politicized existence, and the precarious status of DACA.

As result of the various experiences and modes of incorporation, undocumented youth in Southern California experience various forms of “illegality.” Illegality remains present in their everyday lives in similar ways to their life before DACA or in new manifestations due to the uncertainty of their status, their families’ status, new and continued obstacles, and their political existence. Since undocumented youth were previously exposed to mechanisms that produced their illegality, they utilize their binary framework of inclusion/exclusion to explain and understand their liminal status. Thus, undocumented youth perceive, experience, and understand DACA not as a liminal legal status—but as continued illegality.

Thus, legal violence leads one to understand how undocumented youth understand their incorporation and legal status. Undocumented youths’ incorporation into

the economy and various institutions signal that they are experiencing a different from of illegality. However, they continue to face similar forms of social and legal exclusion that they experienced before DACA. DACA recipients use a binary framework to understand their experiences of new legal obstacles, witnessing their families continue to live in fear, hearing ongoing political debates about whether they should remain in the U.S., and the precarious status of DACA. Despite the success stories of highly visible DACA recipients, they are unable to escape these four types of experiences that they associate with being without any form of legal status. From their perspective, illegality has not changed. Their understanding of illegality directly informs their identity and how they understand their place in society. Subject to various forms of legal violence, illegality and identity is not a personal– but a family experience. Thus, undocumented youth will view their legal status as really changing only after their entire family becomes legal permanent residents or citizens.

MENTAL HEALTH

Much of the immigrant research has focused on immigrants’ integration into, limitations within, and success within U.S. society. Less attention has been given on the lived experience and legalization process of undocumented immigrants (Menjívar and Lakhaki 2016). “As immigrants come into contact with U.S. immigration law through entering the country, applications for regularization, detentions or deportations, and the institutions and bureaucracies through which immigration policies are enacted, immigrants internalize their position vis-à-vis the law, becoming aware of who they are and who they need to become” (Menjívar and Lakhani 2016: 1819). Living and

internalizing these laws for various years demonstrates “the power of the state to exert control over individuals through law and the ability of individuals to shape how that control manifests in their lives” (Menjivar and Lakhani:1820).

The enduring effects of legal violence manifest in the mental and emotional health of undocumented youth. A report from the American Psychological Association (APA) has pointed to the need for research to understand the psychological and emotional consequences of living as an immigrant in the U.S. (Suarez-Orozco et. al 2013). Research has emerged highlighting the various emotional, mental, and psychological consequences of living as an undocumented immigrant by pointing to the various forms of stress that are associated with parental immigration status and poverty, undocumented immigrant youth face notable barriers growing up (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011); consequences of family separation (Hagan 2009;Brabeck and Hunder 2015; Dreby 2015); the bodily effects of physically demanding labor (Holmes 2007); the increased probability of day laborers to experience various illnesses (Quesada et al 2011). Legal status also influences relationships (Salcdico and Adelman 2004); affects sexual relationships (Organista et al 2011); and has shown to create disparate psychological stress based on citizenship (Gee et al 2016). Lastly, research has shown the psychological influence of racism and xenophobia on Mexican immigrant and resident mothers (Sabo et al 2015); and consequences of anti-immigrant policies on mothers in their involvement in their community and family ties (Valdez et al 2013). Specific to undocumented youth, research has shown that their exposure to stress, especially during childhood and adolescence, results in structural and functional changes in a person’s capacity to deal with and react to

stress (Plessow, Kiesel, & Kirschbaum, 2012; Spear, 2009; Gonzales et al 2014); frustration with being an undocumented immigrant (Stacianarini 2014); and impacts on their personal relationships (Sigona 20123; Pila 2015).

The cumulative effects of living without legal status during their formative years manifest in various forms of mental health issues for undocumented youth. Menjivar and Abrego (2013) attribute the multiple forms of legal violence immigrants endure as social suffering. This suffering manifests into trauma that occurs through personal experiences, family events, relationships, or living as undocumented immigrant during their early adulthood are the primary factors that lead undocumented youth to have emotional and mental health issues. They result in undocumented youth having anxiety, pain of family members being deported, panic attacks from traumatic events that resurface during unexpected times, problems in their relationships, or in some cases the need for professional health to understand how their life as an undocumented immigrant has influenced their psychological state. Undocumented youth that lived without any legal status face issues with their arrested development is a root of several mental health issues (Gonzales 2008; Gonzales et. al 2013). Obtaining DACA allows undocumented youth to play “catch up.” They perceive that their life can begin because they are able to attempt to pursue a similar way of life as their peers. At the same time, older undocumented youth negotiate the realization that their ideal life path was forever altered as a result of their legal status.

Lastly, the power of legal violence on the lived experience of undocumented youth manifests in their behavior and their dreams. As previously stated, undocumented

youth self-police themselves as a result of neoliberal citizenship and surveillance apparatuses. Self-policing is a facet of mental health due to the constant hyper-vigilance they must exercise. Undocumented youth's mental health issues, exposure to traumatic events, and hyper-vigilance manifest in their dreams. Dreams represent the pervasive influence of living as an undocumented immigrant and sheds light on how their experience manifests in every aspect of their life.

SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter was to provide a theoretical understanding of the everyday lives of undocumented youth in Southern California. Contextualizing undocumented youths' in Southern California under the current global, social, and economic perspective allows one to have a framework for understanding why and how they live under a highly policed and surveilled society. As a result of living under constant surveillance and pressured into meeting the expectations of neoliberal citizenship, undocumented youth are constantly self-monitoring their behavior in order to be viewed and deemed as a worthy immigrant.

The various modes of incorporation for undocumented youth are contingent on the interplay of state and federal policy and at what stage in their life they obtained DACA. Since undocumented youth have lived in the U.S. for numerous years before DACA, how they have been previously treated in terms of access to resources by their place in the current racial project hierarchy, the age in which they obtained DACA, and their position in the global economy are vital factors that influence their chances of accumulating social capital after they receive DACA.

After DACA, undocumented youth continue to experience new and similar forms of social and legal exclusion. Their previous orientation where they learned to be “illegal” became a binary framework of inclusion/exclusion that allowed them to understand their identity and place in society. Their integration that is marred with limitations is understood as continuing to be an undocumented immigrant. As such, undocumented youth continue to identify as an undocumented immigrant. Lastly, there are emotional and mental consequences of living as an undocumented immigrant.

The following chapters will expand on the various theoretical perspective utilized to explain the everyday experience of undocumented youth in Southern California in the 21st century. Chapter 3 documents the new educational opportunities available for undocumented youth as a result of DACA and several recently enacted California laws. Chapter 4 elaborates on undocumented youths’ framework and how it informs how they choose to identify and understand their place in society. Chapter 5 delves into the new life, economic opportunities, and limitations for undocumented youth in southern California. Chapter 6 focuses on how undocumented youth and activists respond to neoliberal citizenship through their resistance to the dominant DREAMer narrative.

Lastly, Chapter 7 explores the psychological impact of neoliberal citizenship, surveillance, and the long term consequences of living as an undocumented immigrant. It examines how both neoliberal citizenship and living in a surveillance and police state modifies undocumented youth’s behavior and their need to self-police themselves in order to remain in good standing with the state. This chapter also explores the cumulative psychological consequences of living as undocumented immigrant by highlighting the

emotional and mental health issues that stem from their experiences. Additionally, it explores how traumatic events or the pain of their experience as an undocumented immigrant manifests in their dreams. Chapter 8 will conclude with an assessment of my research and discuss directions for future research on undocumented youth identity, mental health, and new educational trajectories.

CHAPTER 3: Schools, Undocumented Students, and the Search for Identity and Belonging

INTRODUCTION

Schools play an important role in the everyday life of undocumented youth. It is vital to their development as adults and is one of the primary mechanisms in their integration into American society. Before DACA, many undocumented youth, due to their legal status, viewed the completion of school and postsecondary education as unrealistic. Many lost hope to pursue college during high school as a result of their marginalized position in American society. Not surprisingly, many dropped out of high school or did not pursue postsecondary education. The small numbers able to attend college and eventually graduate faced the reality of not being able to reap the benefit of their degree in the labor market. Several returned home to work in the secondary labor market along with their family members, earning the same low wages.

The lives of undocumented youth in Southern California changed after DACA was implemented and the CA Dream Act passed in California. Their experiences in school, expectations, and life choices after school were drastically altered. The aim of this chapter is to provide a before and after picture of the experiences and perceived and actual chances of upward mobility for undocumented youth in Southern California. Before DACA, education as an avenue for upward mobility was not accessible to undocumented youth. Coupled with the CA Dream Act, there are now legal structures that protect and aid undocumented youth completing a postsecondary education and legally entering the labor market.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN CALIFORNIA

Access to higher education for undocumented students in the United States and California has historically been described as analogous to a roller coaster ride. In fact, debates over whether they should be afforded the opportunity of a higher education are still fiercely argued today. This brief historical outline of federal and state legislation provides a picture of the obstacles, success, and setbacks that undocumented students in California have endured. It provides a context for understanding the problems undocumented students face in deciding whether to attend college or their degree, and especially how doing so, affects their opportunity for upward social mobility.

The question of whether undocumented youth are entitled to K-12 education was decided under the Supreme Court in the seminal case of *Plyer v Doe* in 1982. A Texas law was revised to withhold funds to school districts that enrolled students not legally present in the United States (Olivas, 2003, 2011). This allowed school districts to deny enrollment to children that were not able to prove their legal status in the United States or pay for their education (Olivas, 2011). In a divided 5-4 decision, the court ruled that denying children an education based on citizenship status - of which they have no control - was unconstitutional. Justice Brennan's majority opinion stated that denying undocumented children the right to an education would create a permanent and discreet underclass with "enduring instability." This historic decision provided institutional protection for children in the K-12 educational system. However, *Plyer* did not answer the question of whether undocumented youth had a right to access postsecondary

education and the court ruling denied undocumented children equal protection under the law.

Several years later, five undocumented students were admitted for the fall term at a University of California campus in 1984, but were asked to pay out-of-state tuition and fees since they were not California residents (Olivas ,1996; Rincon, 2008). Students, teachers, and allies filed a lawsuit against the University of California (UC) under the pseudonym *Leticia et al v Board of Regents of the University of California* (1985). All five students came to the United States at a young age and graduated from California high schools. The UC argued they could deny resident status based on their interpretation of California legislation that did not intend to include undocumented immigrants (Olivas,1996). In the California Supreme Court Judge Kawaichi was not swayed by this argument. Similar to Plyer, he emphasized the importance of a higher education to the state of California. In addition, he highlighted the difficulty the state would have in establishing residency by implementing immigration laws without violating principles of equal protection (Olivas 1996; 35). This ruling allowed undocumented students to establish state residency for tuition purposes for both the UC and California State University (CSU) system, as long as they proved residency in the state for a year and intended to make the state their permanent residence.²⁴

Five years later, a UCLA staffer, James Bradford, filed a successful suit against the UC by arguing that in-state tuition for undocumented students was unconstitutional

²⁴ Leticia A. v. Board of Regents, No. 588982-4 (Superior Court, County of Alameda, May 7, 1985)/

and he was forced to follow the *Leticia* order.²⁵ The victory signaled the end of undocumented students not being classified as state residents. Starting in 1992, all undocumented students were classified as out-of-state residents because they could not provide a legal form of California residency. Three years later the CSU system and California community colleges followed suit in treating undocumented students as out of state residents.

In the 1994 California gubernatorial race, incumbent Republican governor Pete Wilson supported Proposition 187, known as the (SOS) Save Our State Initiative. The referendum was geared towards denying undocumented women access to health care, barring undocumented students from attending public schools, and denying other social services to individuals unable to provide citizenship or legal permanent residence (Reese, 2005). Moreover, it required that state employees and school officials report undocumented immigrants to immigration officials. Despite passing with an overwhelming majority, by 1998 the majority of the referendum was struck down by the California District Court.²⁶ Later, Governor Wilson's appeal was struck in the 9th Circuit of Appeals.²⁷ Proposition 187 did have two lasting impacts on immigrants in California and in the US. First, it was a symbolic message to undocumented immigrants in California that they were not wanted, and should not have the right to equal access to basic human needs—even children who did not migrate of their own volition. Secondly, Proposition 187 provided the theoretical and rhetorical framework for other state or

²⁵ Regents of University of California v. Superior Court (Bradford) (1990) 225 Cal.App.3d 97.

²⁶ League of Latin American United Citizens (LULAC) v. Wilson 908 F. Supp. 775 (C.D. Cal 1995)

²⁷ League of Latin American United Citizens (LULAC) v. Wilson 997 F. Supp. 1244; 1997 U.S. District

federal laws aimed at criminalizing undocumented immigrants or denying them social services throughout the country.²⁸

In August 2001, the California State Senate introduced The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act), with later versions introduced over several years. The aim of this bill was to provide pathways towards permanent residency for individuals who migrated at a young age, graduated from high school, were in the armed forces, and/or lived in the United States for five continuous years. Although the original bill never passed, it laid a blueprint for future executive actions and subsequent attempts to pass a similar legislation in 2011. Most importantly, debates over the DREAM bill brought national attention to a population whose migration and alienage status was not of their own volition, had lived in the United States for the majority of their lives, and aspired to be part of American society. Today, they are known as DREAMers. The narrative of inspirational and aspiring professional youth unfairly has been used to argue for equitable access in resources, school related opportunities, and financial aid for undocumented immigrant to a post-secondary education.

The same year that the initial DREAM bill was introduced California Assembly Bill AB 540 passed. This bill allowed undocumented students to be eligible to pay in-state tuition and fees in California public colleges and universities, but they did not have access to any form of financial aid. Eligibility for AB 540 required students to have graduated from a California high school (or obtained a GED), have attended high school

²⁸ See Arizona Bill SB 1070 (2010), HR4437 (2005) Border Protection: Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act “Sensenbrenner Bill.” Alabama HB 56 (2011) Beason-Hammon Alabama Citizen and Citizen Protection Act. Utah HB 497 (2011), South Carolina SB 20 (2011), Georgia HB 87 (2011) “Illegal Immigration and Enforcement Act of 2011,” Indianan SB 590.

for at least three consecutive years, and signed an affidavit declaring their intent to legalize their status if possible.²⁹ Decreasing the burden of paying out of state tuition provided relief to undocumented students who had been paying exorbitant prices for their education. The ability to pay for in-state tuition but lack of any financial support made community college a logical choice for their higher education. Difficulty arose in transferring to a four-year institution where tuition and fees were higher.

The stigma of being labeled as undocumented was eased somewhat for students with the implementation of AB 540. Students were able to identify as AB 540, allowing them to feel safer due to the obscurity of the term to the layperson. Legitimacy and empowerment became latent effects of this law. Relieved of the stigma of being “illegal” and access to a socially acceptable identity had the potential to positively impact the daily lives of undocumented students (Abrego 2008). This allowed them to mobilize and become involved as agents of social change within the immigrant rights movement. Most importantly, Abrego (2008) highlights the impact this law had on the educational aspirations and outlooks of undocumented youth who now had a more positive identity and favorable outlook on higher education subsequent to passage of AB 540.

The implementation of AB 540 brought media attention and a political response from disenchanted undocumented students who were upset with the burden of having to pay out of state tuition. This battle was played out in California courts under the case

²⁹ Exemption from paying out of state tuition allows eligible for US citizens who either have parents who are undocumented or those who moved out of state after graduating from a California high school. (See: http://www.csac.ca.gov/pubs/forms/grnt_frm/C.E.C.Section68130.5.pdf)

*Martinez v The Regents of the University of California.*³⁰ The plaintiffs argued that California Educational code 1631 contradicts a federal law prohibiting states from providing state tuition to undocumented immigrants unless out of state students are given in-state rates as well. The California Supreme Court rejected this legal challenge that aimed to undermine or eradicate the little help undocumented students were afforded.

CA Dream Act & DACA

In 2011, Assembly member Gilberto Cedillo introduced assembly bills CA AB 130 & 131 that were eventually signed by Governor Jerry Brown. The passage of this state legislation came to be known as the “California Dream Act.” A prerequisite for these two bills is that undocumented students qualify as AB 540 students. AB 130, came into effect January 1, 2012, allowing undocumented students to apply for and receive scholarships from California public colleges and universities from private funds. AB 131, came into effect January 1, 2013, making undocumented students eligible to apply for and receive state financial aid at California public colleges and universities. Jerry Brown stated that, “going to college is a dream that promises intellectual excitement and creative thinking... The Dream Act benefits us all with giving top students a chance to improve their lives and the lives of all of us.”³¹ Brown’s advocacy is becoming a growing trend of political figures highlighting undocumented students as neoliberal citizens through language of the great benefit and the minimal cost to they pose to the state.

³⁰ Roberto Martinez et al vs. The Regents of the University of California, No. S167791 (Yolo County Superior Court August 18, 2011)

³¹ <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/oct/09/local/la-me-brown-dream-act-20111009>

Janet Napolitano, then-director of Homeland Security, signed the executive order titled Deferred Action for Early Childhood Arrivals (DACA) on June 12, 2012.³² This program provided eligible recipients with the opportunity to receive a two-year work permit with the possibility of renewal. Although this program is not a pathway towards citizenship, it allows undocumented youth the opportunity to formally enter the labor market for at least two years and the ability to obtain a driver's license.

Despite the advances of the CA DREAM Act, there is a financial aid gap between the financial aid provided to undocumented students and the actual cost of higher education given their need to pay out of pocket expenses. It is a gap estimated at \$5000 & \$6000 dollars at the UC and \$3000 at the CSU (UCOP 2014). Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 1120, known as the California Dream Loan Program, in April 2014. Despite the advances of the CA DREAM Act, undocumented students continue to face barriers in financing their postsecondary education due to their ineligibility for federal loans. The aim of AB 1120 is to provide undocumented students eligible for AB 540 another source of aid via loans administered by the UC and the CSU systems. Students are allowed to borrow \$4000 dollars a year, with a cumulative maximum of \$20,000 spanning their tenure as a student. UC President Napolitano acutely stated the financial burden undocumented students face in financing their education: "These students have worked hard to achieve their dream of a university education, and I believe we should work as hard to ensure they have every chance to succeed, including providing them with access

³² Besides living five continuous years in the United States, the DHS (Department of Homeland Security) established various requirements that have negatively sorted over 1.5 million possible beneficiaries. Completion of high school and no serious criminal offenses are two of the major mechanisms that render thousands of undocumented youth ineligible. For specific requirements see <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca>

to the same resources as their campus peers.”³³ Moreover, as previous research had demonstrated, lack of adequate aid is a primary reason for many undocumented students dropping out of higher education (Abrego 2006; Flores 2008, 2009, Gonzales 2010, Frum 2010). As Napolitano put it, “Unless students fill this gap by working significant additional hours for pay -to the detriment of their studies -or somehow find other outside resources, they risk having to withdraw from the university.”³⁴

State Senator Ricardo Lara introduced CA SB 1159, which passed the California legislature in April 2014. This new law requires all 40 licensing boards under the California Department of Consumer Affairs and other licensing boards to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain professional licenses. Previously, licensing boards required applicants to provide a social security number or a federal employer identification number. Under SB 1159, applicants can provide either a social security number or an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) to be issued a professional license. Practicing law, medicine, or cosmetology are a few of the various professions now open to undocumented immigrants.³⁵ This allows undocumented immigrants, most of whom lack a SSN, to apply for a professional license and increase their potential earnings.

Since the passage of CA SB1159, the feasibility of attending higher education for undocumented students has drastically changed. Eligibility for state financial aid along

³³ <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/uc-sponsors-bill-close-financial-aid-gap-undocumented-students>

³⁴ (Ibid.) Initial funding for this program is set for 9.3 million. The loans have similar interest rates, have a standard 10-year repayment plan, and interest does not accrue if they are enrolled at least halftime.

³⁵ For a full list of the professional licenses under the California Department of Consumer Affairs see: http://www.dca.ca.gov/about_dca/profession.shtml

with university grants has eased the economic burden previous generations faced. Those eligible under DACA are able to legally enter the labor force without fear of deportation—*for at least two years*. Moreover, professional career aspirations previously considered unattainable due to a person’s status, such as being a doctor, teacher, or lawyer are no longer dreams but legitimate goals for which they can strive. The future undocumented youth see as they reach adulthood is no longer a one-way street toward a life in the secondary labor market where even if they completed their education they would not be able to apply their skills. Now, a path towards reaching their goals is still difficult but is no longer insurmountable as in previous decades. Given these qualitative changes in the life chances of undocumented students in California, my dissertation research seeks to understand how these new policies have affected the experiences of undocumented students who are pursuing higher education.

LIFE OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS BEFORE DACA AND THE CA DREAM ACT

Research on undocumented youth has increased over the last several years, providing insights into the obstacles and trajectories many faced growing up “in the shadows” of the law and society.” Before AB 540, most undocumented students chose to attend community college for various reasons, but primarily because it was and continues to be the most affordable option (Abrego, 2008; Flores, 2010; Neinhusser 2014). Despite being an affordable option, undocumented students found it difficult to finance their education (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). Many students become aware of their legal status

through rites of passage of American adolescence, such as attaining a driver's license or applying to college (Gonzales 2008, 2011). Becoming aware of their exclusion and marginalization in society prompted many undocumented students to drop out of high school or not continue their education (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2011). Instead, many choose to enter the secondary labor market where they were subjected to the abusive practices of employers cognizant of their employee's vulnerability. Financial and other family obligations have forced many to not pursue higher education (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). Working a full time job to finance their education in addition to aiding their family financially was a primary mechanism that prolonged their tenure in community college beyond two years. Experiencing the barriers to a higher education associated with their legal status, many suffered depression, sadness, and anxiety as a result of a bleak future which they must constantly face, along with the threat of deportation. In the face of these obstacles, many were admitted to prestigious universities but did not attend because of their ineligibility for any form of financial aid and inability of their families to pay for tuition. In 2014, there were nearly 2,000 undergraduate undocumented students in the UC system, compared to only 400 in 2002 (UCOP, 2013).³⁶

Paying for college, making tuition payments, pursuing credentialing programs, and utilizing the various resources the university has to offer has historically been difficult for undocumented students to accomplish (Gonzales 2008). Contreras (2009) has highlighted the various obstacles faced by undocumented students during their tenure on campus. For example, they frequently face faculty and administrators who seem

³⁶ This was approximately percent of the University of California student body.

insensitive to their struggles, or who are ideologically opposed to their access for education. However, many undocumented students still attend college, which delays their entrance in the labor markets.

While college attendance is normally an avenue for social mobility, for undocumented students, completing their education did not lead towards upward mobility or the utilization of their college skills due to their legal status. Gonzales (2008, 2011) highlights the sadness of college-educated youth working labor-intensive jobs similar to family members. This dilemma is termed as “wasted talent” by Gonzales (2008) pointing out the large number of high-skilled and knowledge-based workers who are unable to formally enter the labor market where a high demand for these jobs exists.

The stigma of being undocumented was eased for students with the implementation of AB 540, allowing them to feel safer due to the obscurity of the term to the layperson (Abrego 2008). Legitimacy and empowerment became latent effects of this law (Abrego 2008). Relieved of the stigma of being “illegal” and using a socially acceptable identity positively impacted their daily lives (Abrego, 2008). This allowed students to mobilize and become involved as agents of social change within the immigrant rights movement. Most importantly, Abrego (2008) highlights the impact this law had on their educational aspirations and outlooks, as undocumented youth had a more positive outlook towards their education and identity after AB 540 passed.

PRISM-Before DACA or CA Dream Act

PRISM is the college student group I have been involved with for the last three years. They are a student group consisting of undocumented students and allies.

This organization provides emotional and financial support to undocumented students at their campus. Their goal is to educate the university and community on state and federal legislations that impact undocumented students. Established in the early 2000's, PRISM was created with the goal of providing a safe space for undocumented students on the campus. This space allowed for students not to feel alone as they confronted the economic burden of paying for college, a bleak future due to their legal status, and the associated struggles associated with being undocumented. In their early years, PRISM did not openly recruit members. Knowledge of the organization was limited to the member's personal networks. Before DACA, meetings were held in a windowless room that gave an aura of secrecy.

Before the passing of the CA Dream Act, weekly PRISM meetings were a place for students to discuss with each other the various limitations and problems they encountered on a daily basis. Three common points dominated discussion at these meetings: (1) the high number of hours working, (2) the lack of financial aid, and (3) the repercussions of paying out-of-pocket for their education. Several students discussed the possibility of taking a semester off or dropping out for financial reasons and the stress and anxiety caused by self-financing their education. Subsequently, their interaction with the rest of the student body was limited as a consequence of working long hours outside of school. Such time limitations also prevented them from fully utilizing university

programs and resources such as internships, attending office hours, tutors, and research opportunities designed to aid them.

In PRISM meetings, students without sufficient aid admitted to being exhausted from working more than 30 hours and being a full time student. Only a few students received full scholarships enabling them to have a somewhat similar college experience as their peers. In most instances, PRISM meetings were the only interaction they had with other students outside of class. The inability to obtain federal or state financial aid veered many towards paying their tuition through a payment plan. While payment plans provided a path towards paying for their tuition, they had difficulty maintaining timely payments. During PRISMS meetings, concern was expressed when a pay date was looming. For example, during a meeting in the fall of 2010, Mirma, 23, let the entire group know she was short \$500 dollars on her tuition payment. She informed the room that she was making and selling tamales to cover the difference. Producing monthly payments caused much anxiety and stress to an already complicated life. Delaying payments leads to a hold on student accounts, resulting in them not being able to enroll in proper courses, or matriculating on time.

Throughout the academic year, I came to realize that members took time off in order to save money. With varying forms of financial support, students with less aid and/or scholarships were more likely to drop out or take time off from school. For several members, there was a real pressure to do well in school so they could maintain their scholarship. Preserving their scholarship meant they could stay in school as students. In general, finding and applying for scholarships became another job for the

majority of members. Still, before the CA Dream Act all students dealt with the uncertainty of finishing the semester, year, or even graduating. The constant fear of losing a scholarship, job, or support from their parents brought much stress to members and respondents.

For example, Victoria's first three years in college were a real struggle. Despite having excellent grades, Victoria was in constant fear of not being able to attend the next academic quarter or year. Although she did not benefit from the CA Dream Act until the last half of her senior year, Victoria did not grasp the various economic and institutional struggles in college until she experienced them first hand.

They said "that is really weird." It did not really hit until my freshman year. I could not pay my tuition. Then I knew it was kinda going to be a problem. Yeah, that hit my freshman year, I was not able to do stuff my friends could... In my freshman year it started hitting me that I had to do better, I needed to get better grades so I could get scholarships. I did not get that money my senior year when I was trying to. And it hit me... I am really dramatic that scholarships are my only hope. My only hope is to get good grades. I thought in terms that my parents were making such a big sacrifice for me to go to school. I have to sacrifice my fun so I can do well. So yeah, I kinda turned into a really big nerd. I still am, but it's kinda of unhealthy. I would not do anything but work. And I think that has really shaped who I am.

As previously stated, the majority of students viewed scholarships as another job they must do to stay in school. In some instances, as in Victoria's case, the need for

scholarships to stay in school was a major mechanism for many having extremely high grades. Living a penny pinched life can also impact their social life. Older respondents spoke of having to sacrifice a social life, in addition to their legal status, in order to do well in school. Common experiences for traditional students such as going out for food or a bar once they are twenty-one, or eating on campus, are difficult economic choices they must make.

Although social events have no educational or economic value that would benefit their future- they are important for undocumented students because they are a form of acceptance and integration in society. Attending games, parties, and other events symbolize acceptance and leading a life similar to their peers. In addition, such events allow them to feel they are having a normal college experience. Other students, were forced to work while in school, and had to take breaks from school so they could save money to pay the next semester/quarter's tuition. Diana, 23, referred to her experience during the first two year of college feeling like a robot with the routine of having class and going straight to work with very little sleep. Leading a routinized life with little time to study and little interaction with her peers in college impacted Diana's life.

MOUNTAIN HIGH DREAMERS

I also spent two years with Mountain High DREAMers I started joining their meetings the summer of 2012, when DACA was approved. Mountain High DREAMers was created in the summer of 2011. The aim of this organization was to aid other undocumented high school students as they deal with the limitations they faced in and

outside of school. The dissemination of information centered on workshops for parents and students on how to attend and finance college and trips to colleges. However, throughout my time, I found that another factor leading to the creation of Mountain High DREAMers was the need for a safe space for undocumented students to talk about their issues. In this space, undocumented high school students could talk to other students in a similar situation, share ideas and resources, and confided in people that understand or are going through a similar experience. This organization proved to be extremely important because a large number of the older respondents expressed being extremely lonely during high school since they did not disclose their legal status to their peers. Coming to terms with their legal status and identity happened during college or other venues where they interacted with other undocumented youth. Therefore, Mountain High Dreamers helped in making undocumented students not feel alone, ashamed, or anxious by having other individuals with similar circumstances around each other.

Although I was not able to spend time with this group before DACA, Mrs. Martinez and the other counselors were helpful in providing a clear picture of the organization. Students came to Mrs. Martinez's office filled with anger and desperation realizing the limitations of their legal status. Mrs. Martinez's role was beyond the expectations of a traditional counselor. Throughout our various interactions she informed me of talking students out of dropping out of school, not applying for college, or not taking the SAT. Many would say to Mrs. Martinez "what is the purpose? I am not going to college anyway."

My first meeting was during the summer in a conference room at their high

school. The room was packed with students anxious and eager in grasping how the DACA program could aid them. Mrs. Martinez, the school counselor, who organized this meeting, was excited for the large turnout. This was the first time some students had “come out” as undocumented or attended any event associated with undocumented immigrants. She was excited for the possibility for her students to work, drive, and for all of them not to continue postsecondary education. In addition, she was eager for the implementation of the CA Dream Act. From her perspective, the combination of these two policies had changed the landscape for undocumented students in higher education in the state of California.

After the meeting, I talked to various students on how they felt about their life after high school. Many, for the first time, spoke of having a positive outlook towards finishing school. One student was eager to attend community college or a 4-year university. Several planned on working so they could contribute financially to their families rather than being an economic burden to their parents. Samuel, 17, believed his income would aid him in covering the cost of applying for college.

SCHOOL AFTER DACA

PRISM student, Nancy, 19, described her interaction with a graduate student with whom she confided with her financial troubles as a freshman:

I was so comfortable with her. I would just let out my stress through tears because every time I looked through my financial status, it would be [a large amount of money]... I would tell her, I cannot wait to the moment it says zero. She would

constantly keep pushing me to be hopeful. I try so hard, I could not get classes because I would not be able to pay for my tuition on time. So I would always get the classes that were [available at] the last minute because I never paid my tuition on time.

During her freshman year, Nancy continued to endure the stress and academic impact of being unable to generate timely payments. Late registration during her freshman year prevented her from enrolling in courses that would allow her to graduate in normative time. Nancy's predicament is now less common, because the CA Dream Act has alleviated the severe financial burden that deterred many students from pursuing higher education. A majority of these students' tuition is now covered, and many receive private scholarships based on financial need from the university.

This support at the collegiate level has also improved the prospects of high school students as counselors, organizations, and student groups have worked hard to disseminate information about new funding opportunities. Respondents in high school now convey a positive outlook towards continuing their education. Awareness of funding opportunities positively impacts their demeanor, outlook, and dedication to high school work. Lourdes, 17, a high school junior, is emblematic of the ideal-typical image of a DREAMER. She migrated to the US at the age of 2, she is third in her class, and will likely be attending an elite university within the next year. Before the CA Dream act, she was unsure of her prospects for attending college. Informed by her counselor of state funding, her entire outlook changed: *“Realizing more opportunities [CA Dream Act] were open: it’s opening for me. I can get scholarships. It got me saying ‘I can do this.’”*

As a result, Lourdes has been a recipient of various academic awards and internships. She views college as a natural, but still difficult, step towards being a computer programmer.

Emelia, 19, a senior in high school when the CA Dream Act passed, was also positively influenced by the news that she could attend college after high school. Now at a four-year university, she describes the impact of this legislation:

It makes me want to go to college. I get two grants from [the]UC, outside of California financial aid. This allows me to get a refund check so I can pay my rent. That makes a big difference for me. Because of those two laws (AB 130 & 131), I would not be able to go to college without them.... (only AB 540- college would be feasible). Well, maybe if I applied for a bunch of different scholarships and I really put in the work, but if I didn't receive any money, I would not have been able to go to UC.

In contrast, pre-CA Dream Act respondents whom I interviewed expressed frustration that their family members had to cover the cost of their education. They perceived themselves as economic burdens to their family, which elicited conflicting feelings: they were simultaneously grateful of their parents or family members supporting their dream of attending college but also saddened when this meant that their family members had to work longer hours or not take days off. These older respondents also spoke of taking semester or quarters off as being the norm. This is no longer the case for undocumented students after the implementation of the CA Dream Act.

Despite having increased funding, undocumented students continue to have financial problems. Contingent on the location of the university, rent can be very

expensive. In some parts of the California, such as Los Angeles or the Bay Area, the cost of living is often beyond the current financial aid that students receive. During interviews and PRISM meetings, students expressed apprehension towards obtaining a loan, but would do so in order to aid them in paying for rent and/or food.

Emelia (who is also cited above) attends a UC, is both a DACA and CA Dream act beneficiary, and continues to live on a tight budget in college. Despite the benefits of the CA Dream Act, she shared that unexpected expenses sometimes arise, allowing her to only eat one or two meals a day. In addition, her budget is often impacted by budgetary mismanagement from eating out or purchasing expensive coffee. Emilia stated, “ *I sometimes struggle with getting food. I know some days I am like, 'Shoot what am I going to eat today?' ..I don't have that problem often, but there are some days that I don't budget very well.*” Emilia will be applying for a loan in order to offset the consequence of unforeseen costs and budgetary mishaps.

Social and Campus Involvement, Healing

After the implementation of the DREAM Act and DACA, students experienced less stress as a result of decreased working hours and tuition payments. This resulted in students being able to enroll in classes needed to graduate on time, and also increased time spent on campus, which engendered school involvement. Some students reported that decreased pressures led them to examine the psychological consequences of living as an undocumented immigrant. In the case of the PRISM community, the number of students advocating for equitable educational opportunities for all undocumented students

in the university increased as a result of increasing numbers of enrollment and greater discretionary power. This was probably the result of both the expanding enrollment of undocumented students and the increase in their discretionary time due to working fewer hours that occurred under DACA and the CA Dream Act. The appointment of former Director of the Department of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, as the new UC president also motivated many students to become more active on campus and to form alliances across UC campuses, as they held her partially responsible for deporting their friends and family members.

A greater sense of security due to DACA also fostered increased activism among undocumented students. Throughout PRISM meetings and interviews, the majority (as well as respondents) indicated that DACA provided them with a sense of security. Although several members were vocal and active before DACA, many students feared repercussion from school officials, and lack of legal security prevented many from interacting with school administrators. No longer fearing deportation, respondents' felt shielded from any backlash from administrators if they disclosed their legal status or requested financial aid. Newfound confidence increased their sense of safety in attending student government meetings, requesting money for their events, and being interviewed by the local and school newspapers. Previous PRISM members asked for aid from the chancellor, but their requests were always answered with a politicized response of legally inability or insufficient funds to aid their cause.

Nearly all of the respondents, politically active or not, described renewed interest and involvement in school activities. College students with fewer economic stressors

spent more time on campus, allowing them to devote more time to study. In addition, they reported increased interaction with teaching assistants, tutors, and faculty. They are joining different student groups, benefiting from university resources tailored to help them such as study abroad program and GRE preparation courses; and attending university events. In contrast, older respondents called themselves “ghosts” in the university due to the lack of time they spent on campus.

In the fall of 2104, Mountain High DREAMers started to openly recruit new members and give presentations on the obstacles that undocumented high school students face, including in classrooms on campus. Mountain High DREAMers spoke of a number of teachers and peers expressing anti-immigrant remarks or making distasteful jokes. As a result, the number of members, both undocumented and allies, increased over time. Openly recruiting during lunch and for the first time having a table during “rush week”³⁷ demonstrates increased acceptance among peers and their increased involvement on campus.

Students reported increased involvement in other high school activities as well. Several respondents expressed their desire to play varsity sports, while others played varsity soccer and were recruited to play for junior colleges and small private colleges. They conveyed how DACA and CA Dream Act allowed them to be given scholarships or financial aid to continue competing at the collegiate level. At the same time, they expressed sadness that other friends excelled in soccer but quit playing upon recognizing that their legal status would not allow them to compete at the college and professional

³⁷ Rush week in Mountain High consist of student groups table in the school auditorium to recruit new members.

level. Additionally, attending parties, movies, school events, or other social gatherings became more common in their high school experience in contrast to older respondents. Their increase in social life is attributed towards their increase in disposable income, increase in leisure time, and the decrease in the fear of deportation.

With the relative financial freedom afforded by DACA, students have reported an increased ability to reflect on their experiences. My findings show that respondents and PRISM members are becoming aware of and analyzing the psychological trauma of living as an undocumented immigrant during their formative years. In response to this need for reflection, a healing circle was created in the Spring of 2104 for college students and members of the community to reflect and share their experiences. At the circle, a clinical psychologist is present to provide professional help in order for the group to grasp the complexity of their experiences. For many, this is their first time expressing their psychological problems to anyone. Students previously internalized their emotions since disclosing any mental health issues could result in an unfriendly professional acting unjustly. The common sources of psychological stress that students experienced is discussed more fully in Chapter 7.

DACA- New Future

Recent studies have noted the economic and social impact on DACA on recipients (Gonzales et al., 2014). My findings expand on these studies. All respondents expressed in their interviews that they no longer have a fear of driving. They all envision a future where they can be contributing members of society. They also expressed a newfound

individual freedom, and stated that they are more likely to avert the setbacks of being undocumented during seminal life stages as an adult.

The ability to drive without fear, particularly in Southern California, changed the everyday lives of undocumented youth. Driving is a necessity with Southern California's virtually non-existent public transportation system in comparison to other parts of the country. In order to save money for other school expenses, many live at home and commute to school. As a result, they have to navigate the massive highway system with hyper-awareness of police or highway patrols. The ability to obtain a CA driver's license has eliminated the daily fear of driving to work, school, or other activities requiring driving. Being stopped by the cops usually consisted of fearing their car would be impounded, requiring a large sum of money to get out from the impound, or possibly being deported.

Luz, 22, who recently graduated from a UC, expressed her delight with being able to drive legally. She also highlighted the apprehension many undocumented immigrants have in reporting crimes committed against them due to the common perception of law enforcement as an organization intended to thwart undocumented immigrants. Luz acknowledged the negative way law enforcement viewed her as an undocumented immigrant before attaining DACA, and she spoke about how her status prevented her from requesting help from law enforcement.

I can drive with a driver's license. My car got stolen last week, they [cops] don't have to ask 'where is your driver's license?' When you are victim of a crime, I don't have to worry that I am was going to be put on the spot as a criminal. When

that happened I was like, 'Oh it would have been different two years ago.' I would be like, 'Ahh, should I report it or can someone report it for me?'

DACA has opened new job opportunities and increased earnings for undocumented youth both during and after college (Gonzales et al., 2014). Working on campus is now a feasible option, one that many are now choosing. This allows them to stay on campus and avoid the hassle of spending countless hours commuting to and from work. PRISM members and respondents have expressed having a similar college experience as their documented peers as a result of staying close to campus. As discussed above, my respondents report increased interaction with peers, student organizations, and taking advantage of internship opportunities. Although DACA recipients are not allowed to work on federal grants or be eligible for work-study, they are able to gain an income through other school services. Lourdes, 16, one of the top students at her high school, has taken advantage of DACA by working during summer breaks, along with obtaining prestigious internships, that make her competitive for top tier university admission.

Before DACA, respondents over the age of 25 stated that their development as adults was stunted by their legal status not allowing them to be financially independent, live alone, or reach milestones other young adults typically experience in the US, namely, ton name a few, obtaining a drivers' license or a California ID, visiting other places in California or the rest of the country, or flying in a plane. All explicitly conveyed their happiness with becoming more financially independent by having their own source of income. By contrast, younger DACA recipients are having different experiences. Previous work on undocumented immigrants showed that reaching the age of sixteen

usually entailed experiences of being marginalized within American society (Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales & Chavez, 2013).

Respondents of all ages expressed concrete plans regarding their future. Before DACA, respondents stated they only planned three to six months in advance due to the uncertainty of living as an undocumented immigrant. In this study, respondents of all ages expressed concrete plans regarding their future. DACA along with AB 1129 seems to have altered how most undocumented students view their future. Students now speak of planning ten years ahead and express intentions to attend graduate/professional school, or own a business. Karina, 22, spoke of her degree in this way:

Well, my degree doesn't seem as useless to begin with. It kinda seemed useless two years ago or at least that was the vision that it would be useless. In the past you applied to job through your networks, of people who kinda knew what was going on and you don't have to tell them [your legal status]. So that allows [employers] to do things under the table. Now you don't have to worry about that. In the past you apply and you give a fake social, you are like, 'Oh, they are going to know.'

Lourdes, 19, a sophomore at UC shared her vision of her future after college with a different outlook than her older peers.

I have a set goal...I have the plan of potentially opening up my own business I have actual goals that I can see. They are more feasible now. They don't seem like, 'How are you going to do that?' I can see that I can figure out a way how to do so.

Miralda, 23, started off in community college and waited an extra year to transfer to benefit from the CA DREAM Act. She also expressed a change in her future with the implementation of CA legislations, DACA, and the CA Dream Act.

No, I really only thought about the period at that time. I didn't think ahead of time. As far as I thought was maybe a year in advance. That was it... Now I think ten years in advance. It's definitely increased because I've tasted what opportunities are there and I can see myself doing more of it.

Non-DACA recipients have similar hopes and aspirations of having a professional career as a result of the victory of Sergio Garcia, the first undocumented immigrant to practice law in California.³⁸ This optimism was strengthened with the first undocumented student attending UC San Francisco medical school. College respondents are aware of their geographical advantage in comparison to other undocumented youth around the country. Non-DACA respondents spoke of how fortunate they are to be living in a state that now allows them to pursue a professional career. Veronica, 19, a sophomore in college not eligible for DACA, provides her outlook on the future: *"I feel that Sergio Garcia has given us [undocumented students] hopes to keep on going and not to give up because there is always hope for our dreams to be reached."* She feels empowered to complete her engineering degree and be able to gain an engineer's license degree from the California professional board.

³⁸ California Supreme Court case no. 58 Cal.4th 440. For story see <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/02/justice/california-immigrant-lawyer/>

Empowerment

Current PRISM members cited a newfound courage DACA granted them in confronting xenophobic peers, faculty, or administration not sensitive to the circumstances undocumented students or immigrants face. Victoria, 22, who received DACA during her senior year, was a very shy person, and not politically active. However, as a highly motivated student aspiring to be a dentist, she was involved in various pre-med student groups. Before DACA, she did not disclose her legal status to any of her premed peers for fear of retaliation and stigma of being recognized as an undocumented student. She witnessed various racist and xenophobic remarks but did not reprimand the individuals because she was scared to confront anyone or be an advocate for immigrant rights. In her case, DACA allowed her to encounter situations she previously avoided. During a meeting she revealed her legal status to over fifty of her peers. To her, it was a cathartic experience that allowed her to reveal a secret.

I told them because I was DACA approved. That is another reason because it has really changed me. I feel that I have not been able to help..It is kind of one of those things I want something so bad...I have been kind of fearful to be the face of it. To support that [undocumented students], is to be an open supporter. Just because people are going to associate two and two together once I start telling them about like, 'You don't have a driver's license; you don't have financial aid.' Like in the shadows, if somebody tells me- of course I would do anything to help. Now that, I am DACA approved I want people to know that it's everywhere, it's not just someone they see on TV.

DACA also has provided a boost of confidence to various respondents. This was the case for Victoria and Arlene.

Victoria: I am still the same. I feel stronger, I feel more being able to tell people things, now that is empowering. It makes me feel more in control. I do not feel more American or anything like that. I've always been pretty Americanized. I do not know, I have always been me. It just makes me feel safer, safer, and more in control of my future. It makes me feel like I have more rights.

Arlene: It definitely made me more confident in a way. At some point I can surely say I was embarrassed to say I was undocumented before, but now I don't know. It makes me more open and willing to discuss these things with other people, even people I don't know just because, you know, I just feel a lot more confident speaking about this than I would have before. . . I think it's at the same level. I feel like now I have more of the means to do so. I have more resources to do what I want or say the things that I'm able to. It goes back to even my job, like, it's more focused on social justice, we touch on these issues. Sometimes they touch on like immigration, you know. It's nice to have that space.

Leandra, 20, president of PRISM, indicated that DACA provided a sense of worth she previously did not have. She has taken advantage of university resources and become a fierce advocate for equal educational opportunities for undocumented students. She and other members have fought for the ability to work on campus, engage in paid

research opportunities, and the creation of a food bank for all economically disadvantaged students fighting food insecurity. These activities have required Leandra to be in constant meetings with administration. For example, the Chancellor of her university held a town hall meeting to answer concerns over significant fee hikes. In reality, it was an attempt to legitimize the increase in tuition proposed by the UC Regents. During this event, a student senator confronted the Chancellor about an insensitive remark made to an undocumented student (who happened to be Leandra) during a meeting on the creation of a food bank for all students. He stated “this [the University] is not a hotel for undocumented students.”³⁹ Live, without a media consultant, the chancellor vehemently denied making such remarks. Leandra jumped out of her seat, walked towards the front of the stage, and yelled “You said that to me!” She recounted the event in front of nearly seventy-five students, faculty, and administrators. Several audience members began correcting the Chancellor and forcing him to apologize. Despite this public shaming and having sat in various meetings with her, the Chancellor sadly was unwilling to recognize Leandra by her name. At the end of the meeting, Leandra later told me that she had heard the Chancellor was walking around asking for her by saying, “Where is that undocumented student?”

Financial Obstacles in Graduate /Professional School

Legal gains in California have increased opportunities for higher education for many undocumented students. Unfortunately, however, current state laws are limited to

³⁹ <http://www.highlandernews.org/15325/wilcox-takes-heat-from-students-in-public-forum/>

providing financial aid only for undergraduate students. Doctoral programs are able to fund DACA recipients through employment as teaching assistants and research assistants. At the same time, they are still not eligible for federal grants and fellowships that provide prestige, aid, and career opportunities. Further, not all undocumented graduate students are eligible for DACA primarily due to age constraints or because they migrated after the cutoff date for eligibility. Some universities and student groups are looking for ways around this problem, including UAW 2865, the union for tutors, teaching assistants, and readers in the UC. Throughout prolonged negotiations with UC management, UAW 2865 has been able to convince the UC to recognize the need to provide equal aid and professional opportunities for all undocumented graduate students (Camacho and Elias 2014).

Financial burdens are a serious issue for students seeking professional degrees as well. The majority of PRISM members and respondents I have interviewed are not pursuing doctoral programs. Instead, they are considering terminal M.A graduate or professional credentialing programs. Despite being admitted to various schools; they are again confronted with paying for their education without adequate forms of funding. Many scholarships do not cover the full cost of attending school or related expenses. Some undocumented students attending medical or law schools have created websites for individuals to donate money so they can continue their studies. In addition, not all medical or law schools recognize or will admit undocumented students.

Students cognizant of the delay of institutions in higher education to adapt to state legislations are demanding that graduate/professional students be given equal academic

and professional opportunities in order to become competitive in the labor market. The need for institutional adaptation to undocumented students is shown with the various challenges large bureaucracies and its bureaucrats pose to prevent or stall the incorporation of DACA recipients. Students involved in the immigrant rights movement point to administrators feigning lack of knowledge of students enrolled in graduate and professional schools. By not acknowledging their existence, administrators and staff are able to argue that no institutional problems exist in terms of the need to incorporate undocumented immigrants.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlighted the ever-changing structures of opportunity for undocumented youth in California, emphasizing the important role of their legal status for their educational access and career opportunities. Although DACA is not a path towards citizenship, it altered the everyday life of undocumented youth in southern California and the United States. DACA has provided youth with empowerment, a sense of security, and more control over their futures. As a result, their high school experiences are different than their older peers. A large number of college and high school respondents expressed having similar educational experiences as their peers.

Undocumented students currently in high school express that they no longer face the devastating prospect of leading a life “in the shadows.” As Gonzales’(2011) points out, how the various rites of passage undocumented youth experience informs them of their legal identity and the contradictory nature of their membership within US society.

My findings show that these rites of passages are interactions with American institutions (education, the labor market, and state driving laws) that inform them about how to be an “illegal” immigrant continue to play an important role in their lives after DACA.

Secondly, geographic location matters in determining the structures of opportunity for undocumented youth. Currently, there are 20 states that allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition, 26 have filed a suit to challenge the executive actions ordered by President Obama, and six states⁴⁰ have allowed the police to question individuals about their legal status. California is one of the few states that allow undocumented students to apply for state financial aid.⁴¹ A series of California laws and UC and CSU administrative policies have erected structures of opportunity that not only allow for college to be completed through increased financial aid and funding- but they allow undocumented students to pursue a professional career. Being able to enter a profession allows undocumented college graduates the opportunity for wealth accumulation. This chapter has shown how the opportunities for upward mobility available for undocumented students are greater in the state of California than any other state. Gonzales (2014) was correct in pointing out the importance geography plays in the everyday experience and structured for upwards mobility for undocumented youth. As a result, experiencing illegality is not uniform through the country.

⁴⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/30/us/laws-affecting-unauthorized-immigrants.html>

⁴¹ Currently, there are four other states that provide financial aid to undocumented students: Minnesota, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington.

Chapter 4: Undocumented Students: Dreamers and DACA

Well, I cannot identify myself as being a citizen or resident, and I cannot identify myself [as someone] that gets privilege from the government, like financial aid. I don't have the right to go outside [of] the United States. I don't have the right to get a health insurance plan or a lot of benefits. So in a lot of ways, I'm still undocumented. - Susana

INTRODUCTION

Before conducting fieldwork, I assumed that the passing of DACA would impact undocumented youth in terms of their sense of national belonging and identity. This assumption rested on previous research that documented the way lack of legal status informs undocumented youths' identity and everyday life (Gonzalez 2011). Logically, though only a temporary legal status, one would assume DACA recipients that are now entering new social circles, and interacting with institutions that previously marginalized them, would experience a shift in their personal identities. This shift in their identity seemed certain now that institutional limitations are being overcome, and state, and social spheres that previously informed them of their illegality now recognize their legal existence as individuals and members of society.

This assumption proved incorrect once I began my interviews and open dialogue with PRISM members. The majority of respondents continued to identify as undocumented.⁴² Consulting with colleagues for their insight on how to understand this finding did not point me in the direction to conceptually grasp this major finding. Most colleagues agreed that it is logical that PRISM members would choose to continue to

⁴² Respondents identified as "undocumented" because they recognized their precarious position in U.S. society. In a sense, they had internalized the identity of being different.

identify as undocumented. Further conversations with PRISM members helped me to understand their justifications as to why they felt they were still undocumented, but their explanations required a political and historical context in order to fully grasp their frame of reference.

Viewing their place in society through their frame of reference led me to having to contextualize the entirety of their experience in the United States. The whole of these experiences have impacted and shaped their worldviews, bodies, and mental health. This historical frame of reference helped me to develop a deeper understanding of why they continue to identify as undocumented immigrants. And more importantly, I began to understand the processes by which the continuation of this willful choice to continue to identify as an undocumented despite having a different legal status. I understood the mechanisms that informed their continued “illegality,” but I also needed to understand how this experience affected them as individuals throughout their various years of living without any legal status.

“I AM STILL UNDOCUMENTED”

Undocumented youth can live in the United States for many years—in some instances decades—without any legal status.⁴³ This lack of legal status is a key factor in shaping their framework of inclusion or exclusion from nations. Their legal status begins to limit their options as they enter adulthood. Gonzales (2011) has pointed out that it is during this time that they learn to be illegal. These early adult years without legal status

⁴³ The legal status of undocumented immigrants is that they entered the United States without inspection or individuals who overstayed their visa. When I speak of undocumented immigrants not having any legal status, I refer to their inability to travel outside of the country and have very few basic rights, such as access to healthcare.

stunt their development as adults, limit their opportunities to enter the formal economy, and make a bleak future more likely. Interactions with major social institutions, such as higher education, state bureaucracies, and the labor market, and the need to circumvent situations where they would have to disclose their legal status or possible deportation take their toll. Their lack of legal status impacts their personal relationships, conceptualization of their future opportunities of upward mobility in the United States, self-identification, and their perception of themselves as fully functioning adults.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight how their experiences living with illegality established a clear relationship with the state and society. I will also show that these experiences establish a dichotomy of inclusion versus exclusion in the United States. For my informants, obtaining DACA status did not mean obtaining a fully legal status; because their legality was tenuous, they viewed themselves to still be in a state of illegality.

Indeed, the experiences of undocumented youth in Southern California before DACA allow them to apply a dichotomous framework of complete exclusion or complete inclusion to understand their place in society after DACA. Their lives have been shaped by state and federal policies that previously failed to recognize their existence in the United States. It delineated their roles in society but it is the primary mechanism that shaped their worldview. Learning to be illegal, for example by driving without a license, and coming to terms with their future and place in society forcibly molded their understanding of their place in society. A dichotomous understanding stems from their relationship of the state, because only complete inclusion could potentially alleviate or

abate the challenges endured. Therefore, although DACA is a legal gray area that removes various aspects of their illegality, the experiences that undocumented youth endured as well as the potential for deportation in the future lead them to identify as still being undocumented.

My research shows that as a result, their framework follows the premise that being undocumented is not solely a personal identity, but an identity that is experienced communally with family members, friends, and community. Logically, from their binary framework, they place DACA status along with family members under the camp of being undocumented because not all of them have DACA.

DACA is a similar program to Temporary Protected Status (TPS), geared for Central American war refugees in the 1980s, but the impact of the program on these two groups is very different. DACA recipients have primarily lived in the United States for most of their lives, in contrast to many TPS refugees.⁴⁴ Many DACA recipients have at least a high school education, and many more are pursuing higher education. DACA recipients also view themselves as future members of United States society despite their years of marginalization. On the other hand, most TPS recipients migrated as adults and obtained TPS relatively quickly. Menjivar (2006) and Coutin (2000) show the impact of TPS by shedding light on how it exists in a legal gray area. TPS and DACA recipients are neither undocumented immigrants nor legal permanent residents. They are both in a liminal gray area. DACA recipients continue to identify as undocumented despite their

⁴⁴ Refugees are typically granted their status when they are outside of the US. Individuals receiving asylum once they are physically present in the United States. TPS is a pseudo refugee status because it does not lead towards a path towards citizenship. See: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/overview-us-refugee-law-and-policy>

entrance into the formal labor market, attainment of higher education, having a similar life as their citizen peers, and no longer experiencing the fear of deportation.

Undocumented youth's framework is reinforced by continually experiencing illegality directly or indirectly. With DACA, experiences that establish a form of exclusion, such as being unable to travel to other nations or being ineligible for a federal job are understood as another reminder of their illegality or lack of full citizenship. If undocumented youth do not continue to experience illegality firsthand, they indirectly experience illegality through their friends, family, or community. For example, DACA recipients are exposed to the stress that their parents, romantic partners, or friends continue to face because they are undocumented immigrants. Unable to escape the trauma they endured before DACA constantly reminds them of their experience and the need to have permanent legal status.

DACA recipients' framework is revealed by four prominent justifications respondents use to explain their perceived status and identity as undocumented immigrants: recurring obstacles, family insecurity, a politicized existence, and DACA as a "two-year membership." In all four justifications, undocumented youth experience illegality directly or indirectly. The trauma and frustration that the undocumented experience during several years is constantly resurrected every day in both new and recurring forms. Thus, the positive experiences of their integration into society as DACA recipients is simultaneously contrasted and diminished by their everyday witnessing of important people in their lives continuing to endure the realities of being undocumented. Unable to completely detach from all forms of social and political invisibility, directly or

indirectly, undocumented youth are forced to understand their legal status and identity as an interlocked personal, family, and community experience that cannot be compartmentalized. Thus, they continue to be undocumented in everyday experience, especially if they are the only beneficiaries in their family, or among the few in their surrounding community, of DACA.

“Living in the shadows,” or avoiding detection by immigration officials, traumatized many respondents in various ways. Cognizant of their life experience as undocumented immigrants informs how they view their place in US society by continually policing their bodies, keeping themselves out of public view and avoiding police arrest, and dealing with various mental health issues. In regards to the latter, undocumented youth are coping with previous emotional trauma that has shaped them as individuals, and can be compounded when they face, under DACA, new events that leave a psychological imprint.

As a consequence of living without any legal status for various years, they consciously or unconsciously police their bodies. As they reached adulthood, they are informed of their place in society in various ways, and discover the specific geographical, legal, economic, and social parameters that they must navigate. Learning these parameters causes anxiety, stress, and lasting psychological problems. They become acquainted with how to lead their lives over various years to the point of acting through a perspective of common sense reasoning. Thus, after DACA, undocumented youth who are aware of the precariousness of their legal status are employing some forms of self-policing in order not to jeopardize their prospects of a future path towards citizenship. In

comparison to their previous situation, undocumented youth have a heightened awareness of being watched and have internalized the state policing apparatus in their everyday life by attempting to become exemplary, law-abiding members of society.

ONGOING WORK AND EDUCATIONAL OBSTACLES

Respondents reported being joyous and relieved upon obtaining their DACA permit in the mail. The majority of respondents were happy to be able to partake in American rites of passage to adulthood from which they previously feared exclusion. The meaning of the permit varied, depending on the age at which the recipient obtained DACA. Receiving DACA at the age of 16 allowed several respondents to participate in the usual rites of passage to adulthood that Gonzales (2011) highlighted, such as obtaining a job, a driver's license, and a legal identification to prove their existence. In contrast, receiving DACA differs with respondents who lived for a time as adult undocumented immigrants. Several were upset that it took so long for DACA to be available to them. For example, Venicio obtained DACA at the age of 25. By the spring of 2016, he was 28 years old, married, and had lost most of his hair. He expressed his frustration with the difficulties he endured before receiving DACA loudly. I asked him what DACA meant for him. Jonathan replied, "I am fucking mad, I have to pay \$465 dollars every two years for this fucking piece of shit!" At the same time, he is grateful for being able to work, drive without fear, and being able to set a career goal of becoming a teacher. The varied, complex, and highly emotional responses of initially obtaining DACA are important. This section highlights the events respondents encounter that

continue to inform them of their partial integration in the US, and that perpetuate their binary categorization of citizenship.

Before the implementation of DACA, research highlights how undocumented youth experience their marginality by the limited ways they interact with institutions, experience American rites of passage, and obtain educational opportunities (Abrego 2006, 2011; Abrego and Gonzales 2011; Gonzales 2008, 2010; Gonzales and Chavez 2012). Undocumented youth experience their social marginalization in different manners, as they become part of American society. Younger DACA recipients may not experience instances of exclusion in the same ways their predecessors did, and are sometimes shielded from various alienating circumstances. Still, DACA recipients generally perceive their continued illegality as they enter adulthood. Therefore, undocumented youth endure and share memories about similar obstacles as they enter adulthood. Their integration in society is marked by traumatic events that leave a similar imprint on their perceived place in society and that directly informs their identity.

Obstacles in the labor market

Entering the labor market is one of the major events that brings economic gains but simultaneously informs undocumented youth that they are not full members of society. For example, federal jobs with various educational requirements are available only to US citizens or legal permanent residents. Oscar, 26, only finished high school and has a family with two children, aspired to attain a stable job with benefits, so he decided to apply to become a mailman. Obtaining this federal job would provide good

benefits he has never enjoyed and economic stability for his family. He quickly learned that he could not to take the test to become a mailman because the applicant must be a citizen.

Juan, 17, is one of the top 5 students in his high school class. Juan is a tall young man, with wide shoulders, a crew cut, who stands at 6'2. He is on the wrestling team. His powerful presence is abated by his circular glasses and a shy, demure demeanor. Most of his peers in Mountain High Dreamers view Juan as a great student who will have his choice of college options. However, attending college is not his first preference. Juan's first choice was to join the United States Marines. As a high school student, the physical rigor, dedication, discipline, and camaraderie of his wrestling team appealed to Juan and allowed him to thrive as a teenager in a single parent home. Thriving under these conditions allowed Juan to view himself as a potential Marine. The monetary aspect of joining the Marines upon graduation also contributed to his career choice, as he would be able to pay for college and support his mother who works for minimum wage, in contrast to his current job at a pizzeria.

Juan has been working 15 hours a week in order to help his mother. He was sad that he couldn't join the Marines because "he didn't have papers." I consoled him by pointing out that his great academic standing would allow him to obtain several university scholarships and financial aid. He agreed while looking away and then down at the floor, and said, "yeah, but I didn't want college as my only option." His response challenged my inherent bias that all undocumented youth want to obtain a higher education. Juan allowed me to understand the various life options and choices youth

have and want. Juan got accepted to several prestigious schools and qualified for scholarships. He decided to take an extremely generous financial aid package from a school that allowed him to live within a 15-minute car ride from his mother. Currently, he is in his second year and is a computer science and chemical engineering major. I see him around Riverside once in a while. He has gained weight but maintains a muscular physique. We catch up on his experience at his school. I asked him if he was happy and if he would graduate in a couple of years.

Juan: Yeah, I guess

EE: You wish you were in the Marines?

Juan: Not anymore, but I wish I had the option of going.

His calm response still resonates with me because as an academic, I usually consider college to be the most sought after path for low-income students.

Unlike Juan who stopped working before starting his freshman year, most undocumented youth in community college or a 4-year university do not obtain generous college scholarships that allow them to focus solely on school. The state of California provides financial assistance to undocumented youth, which improves the likelihood of completing their undergraduate education. Unfortunately, this financial aid is often not sufficient to cover all of their college expenses. Undocumented youth are unable to have access to federally subsidized loans. This forces many to obtain part time jobs ranging from 10-35 hours a week. Older students tend to have more economic obligations and work longer hours. Determined to graduate and not take time off, undocumented students must cope with the challenges of being first generation students, including working hours

that could impact their grades negatively. Nevertheless, undocumented youth continue to work because they do not want to be economic burdens to their family.

As a teaching assistant for Chicano Sociology, I witnessed first-hand the daily problems that undocumented students face. The class exposed Latino students to critical research paradigms, readings, and perspectives that helped them to understand their social position in society. I interviewed Danitza, 23, two years ago when she was in community college. Danitza has been a very prominent immigrant rights activist in southern California. During a demonstration to stop the increasing incarceration of undocumented immigrants in deportation centers, Danitza gained local media attention when she, her sister, and several other activists u-locked their necks to the gates of the immigration detention center to prevent an incoming bus from dropping off undocumented immigrants. After receiving DACA, Danitza went to a local community college that allowed her to transfer to a four-year institution. She informed me that she works 30 hours a week in order to pay for her recently purchased car, clothes, and school supplies.

Aware of her circumstances and other low-income students in my class, I aspired to accommodate their busy life. Danitza is just one example of the extremely smart, diligent, and hardworking students in the class. This course is notoriously known among undergraduates as extremely difficult. It requires the student to allocate sufficient time to read and critically analyze complex ideas in dense readings. I warned Danitza of the rigors associated with this course, and she assured me that she would be fine. However, I noticed the time constraints that prevented her from completing all the readings or

catching up with work from other classes. She would read 1/3 of the required readings and would not be prepared for class. Her final grade did not reflect her potential, and is symbolic of the choices and tradeoffs that many undocumented students who work face. Danitza's case is similar to other community college respondents and older students who juggle multiple obligations and responsibilities.

In the University of California system, undocumented students with DACA can participate in a work-study program that is limited to on-campus opportunities where no federal funding is used. Several respondents have expressed frustration at having to work in the dining halls and unable to be employed in faculty research. They still volunteer without pay, but that is a reminder of their limits in society. From their perspective, not being formally employed in their field of interest could indicate to future employers or graduate schools that they are not qualified or worthy enough to become researchers. In cases where a faculty member seeks their involvement in their research, undocumented students with or without DACA must sit down and explain to faculty why they can't be employed and/or why they will only volunteer for the project. Similarly, internships, vital in today's labor market for undergraduates to increase their success in obtaining a job upon graduation, typically require the applicant to be a Legal Permanent Resident or citizen.

Obstacles to post-graduate education

Undocumented youth are graduating in large numbers from four-year institutions. Thanks to California legislation that allows undocumented immigrants to become working professionals within the state, undocumented youth are pursuing graduate and

professional schools. Several important issues remain to be solved at the undergraduate level, but media, society, and educational institutions are at least focusing on providing equitable educational opportunities at the undergraduate level. This same effort has not been directed toward graduate and professional school. The most glaring problem is the lack of adequate financial aid for undocumented students to attend and complete their training. In a knowledge-based and credentialing society, the need for post-baccalaureate education is vital to labor market success. Undocumented youth face various obstacles that are new (financial aid), and in some instances, remind them of their struggles before DACA and the CA Dream Act such as informing or retraining graduate/professional schools that have been unaware of undocumented students. Undocumented youth who seek learn about or are reminded of their legal limitations that justify their choice to identify as undocumented.

Victor, 25, was initially accepted to an Ivy League college but was several thousand dollars short of the tuition needed to attend it. He was not able to obtain a loan and decided to attend to local community college instead, where it took him 3 years to transfer to a four-year university. He graduated with a degree in Neuroscience and several academic achievements, such as Dean's List, presidents of two school organizations, and a major scholarship to complete his undergraduate training once he transferred from a prestigious organization. DACA was less than a year old at the time. Victor was preparing to take the MCAT (the standardized test required by medical schools) and was conducting preliminary research on schools that accepted DACA recipients. His cheerful demeanor became more serious when he went into detail about

his initial interaction with medical schools. As he called admissions, Victor became accustomed to explaining DACA to university officials unaware of the program for undocumented immigrants. Upon his detailed explanation of DACA, Victor received mostly cold and rude comments from people on the phone. Victor highlighted the response from an admissions employee, from a highly prestigious medical school, who said, “DACA is not a legal status, so we can’t accept you in our program.” Victor almost jumped up from where he sat and yelled, “You see Edwin!? That is why I am still undocumented.” Later in the year, he let me know that some undocumented students with DACA were accepted to a medical school, but the schools did not understand what DACA meant. One of his friends was admitted and interviewed by the Dean of the school, who—after learning he was a DACA recipient—told him he could not attend the school or be part of the program because they could not provide him any financial aid. Once again Victor said, “You see, nothing has changed.”

Victoria, 24, is in her first year of dental school. She is one of two undocumented students in her dental school. Her visibility increased when National Public Radio and several newspapers conducted profile pieces on her attending a prestigious dental school. She received DACA and benefited from the CA Dream Act during the last quarter of her senior year. She took two years off to work in a retail store before entering medical school. Victoria’s application experience covers various facets that undocumented students face in graduate and professional school.

I emailed the schools I already applied to, and like, for instance, most of the schools... I was surprised I got really negative responses. And one school... was a

very religious school so I was like maybe I don't know but they were very rude like absolutely rude when I got back and a lot of their things were based on inadequacies, like inadequate knowledge like... 'DACA is only for a year.' And I emailed them back with, 'Well it's actually for two years, you know.' But they weren't listening to me and I got kind of upset because they don't have that kind of information on their website. And so by that time I had already applied... and paid for their supplementals and I was ready to interview and they said, 'Well, you will get accepted, but you will not matriculate...' Why would you let someone go through all that? So I was kinda upset... and I ended up going to the interview just because I just wanted to see what would happen if I got accepted. I got accepted and then told them, 'Sorry, but I can't accept your offer because you guys are really mean.'

Virtually identical to Victor's experience in many ways, Victoria experienced a lack of information, rudeness, and a reminder of her lack of status and continuing limitations in American society.

However, many undocumented students are pursuing terminal degrees or credentials despite this. Many undocumented youth are pursuing teaching credentials. Jerson, who is 22 years old, worked for a year as a tutor before he was admitted into a teaching-certificate program. He spoke openly of his undergraduate experience without any financial aid and connected it to ongoing fears about financial aid in his new program:

I think those were the hardest 4 years of my life financially for my dad and my mom. We had to do crazy things. . . You know, I didn't have a car anymore because I sold it. I needed to get the tuition money. They [my parents] helped me out a lot too. I wanted to have a good job to pay them back. I hated to see my mom stress out. I hated that my dad comes home late and that way I am kind of stressing right now because the whole thing [deportation raids] could happen again.

When I asked him to elaborate on what was causing him stress, Jerson replied:

Financial aid...that financial aid...like, you know, I want to move out and... I need more money to move out. I am trying to pay for school you know, like I got everything but at the same time I don't have everything.

Jerson was a week away from starting his teaching-credential program and was having severe anxiety about how to pay for the remainder of his tuition, books, and housing costs. During our interview, Jerson expressed several times that he did not want to be an economic burden on his parents once again. He was able to obtain a school loan that allowed him to stay and complete his degree. However, several incoming students were referred by him to me so that I could help them find a source of aid to complete their teaching degree. They were unaware of their funding options and the department did not provide them with adequate information for alternative funding options. Sadly, a couple of incoming students dropped out before even starting the program because they did not have any access to loans.

Similarly, Vicente, 27, finished his M.A. in Public Health and is currently preparing for the MCAT exam. He pointed out having the same experience with lack of funding as an undergraduate, before DACA and the CA Dream Act, to seeking funding for his graduate education:

When it came down to grad school, it was the exact same narrative. Prior to starting graduate school, I went to all the individuals that I had contacts with there. I had friends. Hey Francisco, how's it going? I had known him back from the UCR days. I went to the undocumented student programs people, up to Alfred Herrera [an undocumented student friendly staff]. I talked to all the people who had power and influence at UCLA at that point. I called and told them, 'I'm in grad school.' I know I'm probably one of the few, but I want to do this collectively. How do we build on this? How do we get students to start thinking of professional schools and not just think of going to college, but also graduating and going to professional school?

Unlike Jerson, who did have DACA and the CA Dream act for his last year and a half, Vicente utilized the survival skills he learned as an undergraduate for his graduate school experience. He was aware of the dearth of students in his situation and touched bases with staff with institutional knowledge and influence who could help him navigate the intricate bureaucracy of a large public university. Vicente was also cognizant of personally treading new ground and the increasing numbers of undocumented students in graduate and professional school, and wanted to understand how to assist future students.

Jerson views himself as a burden to his parents, and is not alone. Similarly, Victoria provided a detailed explanation of the emotional rollercoaster of learning about her financial aid package for dental school, and connected it to feeling like a burden to her romantic partner:

I'm going through a lot of stress because I got my financial aid packet. The hard part was that the first time I got it [financial aid package] I was with Jenny (another undocumented who came out after Joey and I did) who was accepted [to the same program]. So there's three of us going to dental school. Yeah! We were all looking at our financial aid package and we thought that, they didn't email us. We just kinda found it and we all had it. And we were like, yeah this is our package, this is definitely our packet. And so we saw all these loans and we thought they weren't student loans. We assumed they were institutional loans and we were so happy because that means that we don't have to take out private loans. So our financial aid packet looks like everybody else's and I was so excited because that means that my parents didn't have to help me. It was like all these good things. And then I went on vacation and while I was on vacation, on a road trip, I got the email explaining everything and it said that those were not institutional loans. Those were suggested private loans. So, I was looking, I was around 33 and 36 thousand in private loans I still had to take. I think it was just going through [a] very big high of like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm so lucky. I have the best financial aid package I could've dreamed of. Like this is so good.' I had told my parents and I was like really celebrating like, 'Oh my God. Like every day, I

would be like I'm so thankful...' My financial aid is nowhere compared to my peers. Right now, I'm really stressed [be]cause I have to figure out [my financial situation]. I have to get private loans. To get private loans in the United States if you're not a resident you have to have a US citizen co-signer. And so, it's hard because my parents are both undocumented. My mom has a social security card but she's like, 'Maybe we can just see if they'll take it and think I'm a resident.' Like no, no... But it's you know... Asking somebody to take on this huge almost 36-thousand-dollar debt with you.... I asked my boyfriend and we've been dating for six years so it's like not like... like awkward to ask but at the same time he basically offered. But... well if we're going to carry on this huge debt over there, and he's like, 'Oh, how am I going to explain this to my parents?' So I was like, 'Well, wouldn't it just make sense for us to get married, since I would be saving you from this debt?' Like now you're financially invested with me and we're like 'Yeah, it does' [make sense to get married,] and so for a bit we were like considering it and then we [decided], it's just not a good time right now. Since I'm moving into school and there's just so many changes happening. I wouldn't, so this would just be one more huge change. We're not even like together on our own... so were not going to get married but he's still going to be my co-signer which I feel very bad about. But I really don't have any other option because... Who do you ask? Yeah, I think right now I'm trying to figure out my financial stuff and then I keep thinking like should I marry, should I not? Like should we just do a civil [ceremony] ...like I don't know what to do about that. I

don't think he thinks about that as much as I do but because my grandma just died recently, so that sucked...And I feel like these last couple of months like it's been so hard to be undocumented and not being able to go to Mexico and it's... so hard.

The obstacles Victoria faced had both emotional and economic consequences, and added to the general stress in her life in the US as an undocumented immigrant. These and many other respondents express a fear of becoming an economic burden to their families, and detail the pressure on relationships—be they romantic or familial or otherwise—that this engenders.

Everyday Reminders of the "Golden Cage"

Outside of major events that starkly define their exclusion, undocumented youth experience everyday reminders of their illegality. Their social security card informs them that it is “valid for work only with DHS [Department of Homeland Security] authorization.” Many view the SSN as the primary symbol of impediments to their integration to US society. Now, having an SSN continues to remind them of their peripheral existence in the United States. Their work permit is also a strong symbol that states their limited rights in the US.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The employment and authorization card are generic picture.



Their entrance in the labor market does not guarantee privileges many United States citizens take for granted like health insurance, fair wages, and qualifications for public- and private-sector jobs.

During PRISM meetings, members would joke of “undocu-moments.” These moments remind them that their liminal legal status prevents their full integration in society, and reinforce their sense of still being undocumented. These moments took place when they forgot they could not work in federal jobs, forget they have an SSN, or during interactions with institutions that still fail to recognize their existence in the United States. Miralda, 23, was asked if DACA changed her legal status, and she promptly replied, “no.” I asked she for her to elaborate on her response. Miralda response is representative of undocumented youths’ perspective:

No. No because I've said it before, yes DACA gives you benefits, but I don't think it changes the [overall] situation. You're able to drive, you're able to do these things, but it doesn't change you as a person and how you think.

From their perspective, limited privileges under DACA do not change their situation. Being undocumented means being denied full membership in society and full national citizenship. Thus, the gains and privileges under DACA do not change their continued marginalization in the United States.

Lastly, DACA recipients are only allowed to travel under specific parameters under DHS's advanced parole program.⁴⁶ Rodolfo, 27, now in law school, associated DACA with a song popularized by the Mexican band Los Bukis, "La Jaula de Oro (Golden Cage)."

Like I said, it takes away fear. It's liberating in a sense... but a lot of us like to refer to the US as a 'golden cage' because, yeah it's very pretty, but you cannot get out. So, in a sense, it's liberating. You get to do a lot of things like driving or working. It takes away fears... Well it does create the fear of them taking it away from us.

This very popular song among the immigrant community pays tribute to the struggle of undocumented immigrants who have achieved success in the United States but have no control over their life. The power of this timeless song speaks of the economic gains

⁴⁶ DACA recipients can be approved for traveling outside the country for humanitarian, educational, or employment purposes. For information see <https://www.uscis.gov/i-131>. For application materials: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-131>

undocumented immigrants have achieved in the United States and how they contrast with the prisoner-like experience of living in a golden cage because they cannot travel outside our borders. Below is an excerpt of the song:

[What use is money
if I am a prisoner
inside this large prison
I begin to cry when I remember
Even though it is a golden cage
It does not stop being a prison]

De que me sirve el dinero
si estoy como prisionero
dentro de esta gran prisión
cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro
y aunque la jaula sea de oro
no deja de ser prisión⁴⁷

From Rodolfo's perspective, he is still a prisoner in this golden cage because he maintains the perception that he is undocumented and is prisoner of the country he calls home.

Respondents echo Rodolfo's analogy to the golden cage through their interaction with friends or instances where they are reminded of their prisoner-like status as

⁴⁷ The song along with its lyrics can be seen in this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3K736IPTN_0

immigrants. After receiving DACA, undocumented youth are sometimes invited on trips outside of the country. For example, respondents have been invited to drive down to Mexico for a weekend getaway trip, family trip with their significant other, or invited to backpack throughout Western Europe or South America. They are, therefore, forced to explain the limitations of their legal status, whether they wanted to disclose their situation or not. More common are mundane moments for most members of society that undocumented youth are prompted to remember their place in society. In Leandra's case, she was asked what occurrences remind her about her situation in the US. She quickly spoke of a Christmas experience.

Everyday. I always...even little things will remind me, damn I can't do that. Every Christmas around here, in the Chicano [Student] Center, everyone talks about going to Mexico. Everyone talks about how they're going to see family and those of us that can't go, we're like that's cool. Have fun, guys. My family right now, my mom's brother was diagnosed with cancer last year, so she's struggled with that. Apart from her marriage falling apart and her brother being diagnosed with cancer, it's been a lot. And I wish I could give her the opportunity to go see him. We don't think he'll be around with us much longer. She's very worried. More than anything I wish to give that to her.

For Leandra, the yearly talk of visiting family outside the country also forces her to explain her situation to her peers. Visiting time also evokes an array of emotions associated with her status and her families. Oftentimes, undocumented youths' parents

have not returned home for several decades. They have missed weddings, births, and even the death of their parents. Her mother's pain of not being able to attend her brother's funeral is a sad reminder of their confinement within the United States.

FAMILY STATUS AND PERCEPTIONS OF DACA RECIPIENTS

As suggested above, undocumented DACA youths' binary framework about citizenship is reinforced by their parents' or siblings' lack of protection from deportation due to their undocumented status. This section explores the most common justification undocumented youth use to explain why they identify as being undocumented. Siblings and parents connect undocumented youth with the continued stress of living without legal status in the United States. DACA respondents may no longer personally experience many forms of exclusion as undocumented immigrants, but they experience exclusion through the experiences of family members, close friends or a partner, and even through the extended experiences of their communities and neighborhoods. Beyond this extended vicarious experience of illegality, these instances of communal exclusion are emotional reminders of their own limited legal status, and perpetuates the trauma they personally experience.

The majority of the respondents' parents reside in southern California. I spoke with several parents. They are generally happy and relieved to see their children leading a safer life. Indeed, DACA recipients initially feel safer from the constant threat of deportation manifested through state laws, police profiling, and enforced federal policy. This relief can be short-lived as DACA recipients continue to experience and endure

illegality. The two most common experiences of relief that respondents pointed to were driving without a license and fear of deportation. These two fears are at work simultaneously when the person drives in the complex, and time-consuming highways of southern California without a driver's license. Leandra, 19, speaks of the constant fear of deportation that her whole family feels because her dad drives with an expired license as a newspaper delivery man.

I didn't want to leave. I was happy where I was, the life that I lived here. It scared me to think that there was a very real chance that I was leaving. Um, either because of my parents because they were very seriously talking about it, trying to plan where we would live. What jobs they would have. Which family to help us out. They were seriously having this conversation. Even this fear of deportation: every night my dad delivers newspapers for a living. He'd often see cops checking people that are driving at that hour. It makes sense for safety reasons. It would scare me because he's driving with expired licenses and at one moment he'd be pulled over and the cop could be a very mean person and take that the wrong way and do something about it. And that would lead to us leaving the country... He's been working a lot more hours recently. He's been working up to 16 hours a night. When I was younger he used to leave the house at maybe two o'clock in the morning and would be back at about seven or eight. Now he leaves at ten thirty at night and is back at ten the next morning.

Despite being a DACA recipient, Leandra continues to deal with the constant fear of deportation. The daily leap of faith her dad takes each night as a driver without a license remained in Leandra's mind every day when she left for college. She could not help but worry every night that her father might be deported. This form of anxiety was very common among respondents speaking about the stress and fear that they continue to deal with after DACA. When parents failed to come home at their usual time of return, this would immediately ignite their fears of deportation. This view is a product of undocumented youth being trained and informed as young kids by their parents of what procedures to take in case they did not return home. At a young age, they only understood that going to the neighbor's house, calling their aunt, or calling a specific number was their parents' instructions. Years of being repeatedly instructed in this way led to deep-seated fears which they understood as they became older. It became a "common sense" script that allowed them to understand why their parents might be late. Coupled with their increasing fear of learning what it meant to be an undocumented immigrant, this 'common sense' safety lesson became a trigger that brought much anxiety and that never truly leaves their everyday life.

Fear of driving illegally ended with the passage of CA-AB60, which came into effect January 1, 2016. CA-AB60 allows undocumented immigrants obtain a California driver's license. This legislation has decreased the fear among undocumented families of driving every day and being stopped by the cops, and of having their car towed at minimum, or possibly being deported. Unfortunately, this legislation was unable to curtail racial profiling in law enforcement. The assumption that brown drivers are always

undocumented has become institutionalized and legally protected. This was the case for Victoria. In 2012, she spoke of the fear of her parents being deported.

Sometimes I am really scared that my parents are going to get deported, because... they drive. And I drove without a license for a long time. I disciplined myself when I did that a lot, to make sure I did not go over the speed limit, or I did a complete stop. I freaked myself out so I would not break the law so I did not get pulled over... Deportability, yeah, but afraid of having something go wrong in my family and not being able to do anything about it. I knew my parents could get deported but I feel like I have a little bit more say in it. That means a lot to me, and my future, and that means a big deal.

Victoria expressed the fear of driving without a license and her strict adherence to the law, which was a common theme of "self-policing" with other respondents (see chapter 7). Moreover, obtaining DACA did not erase the fear that she carries of her parents being deported. I conducted a follow up interview with Victoria three years later. She is happy that both of her parents are now able to drive, but her fear of law enforcement did not decrease. In fact, her fear increased.

Oh yeah, actually just the other day my dad got pulled over and it was the scariest thing in the world... Yeah, he didn't think... My dad has an expired license and he didn't think my dad's picture was him because he was so young. Because it was expired for so long he was like, "This is fake." "No it's not, no it's not," he said. "I do have a license." He did apply for the license in California but... he applied

the second week of January and right now they're processing the ones [from before then]. So he called and they're like we're on January fourth my dad's like I applied on January 8th or something this is insane. It's been months! And it's like a little bit at a time. So my dad has the paper that says that he passed the license test and that he is in the process of it, but he doesn't carry it with him and he should. And that's what the officer told him, and the officer was like, "You know I can give you a misdemeanor for this," and I was like, "Well, if my dad gets a misdemeanor he's gonna get deported..." So that was... It was mean. It was just he was so mean to us but then in the end he was like, "But I'm going to let you guys go. I'm going to cut you a break..." And it was the worst. It was the worst. So, yeah and after that I was like, "Oh my God. We have to [be] so careful." The officer let us go because he saw I had a license and I was like on the verge of tears and shaking and so he let me drive away.

The surge of applications under CA AB-60 created a significant delay for undocumented people to obtain their driver's licenses.⁴⁸ Yet, how the officer interprets the law can be subjective. In a city with a large Latino population in northern California, the officer decided to warn Victoria and her father, but this still led to fear. The threat of deportation through a misdemeanor is not protected under the CA AB-60 purview. This traumatic experience first left Victoria shaking and crying as her mind was anticipating the

⁴⁸ As of January 2016, the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) has issued over six hundred thousand driver licenses under CA-AB 60. See: https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/pubs/newsrel/newsrel16/2016_01

deportation of her father. Secondly, this chilling experience was a formidable reminder of her inability to depart from illegality through the fear instilled on both her and her father.

Interacting with a hostile police officer is common among undocumented immigrants. This also leaves undocumented immigrants with apprehension when seeking the help of law enforcement (Gina Nuñez and Heyman 2007; Coleman 2012). Victoria speaks of the aftermath of her interaction with the police officer.

Yeah, I definitely do. Specially, I think after the experience I just had with my dad recently I was like, terrified. Like absolutely terrified. And like we have a neighbor who is causing us a lot of trouble. She's a huge ... jerk and ...has been threatening to poison our dog and just like [a] terrible neighbor has like gotten inside our house like one day just like creepy and horrible one. And my mom and I went to the police but we were so nervous and it was like... you know it was totally fine. The police were really nice and like cops did anything. This lady sounds crazy you know. But I was really scared. My mom and I... my mom hates cops like she hates them. And I'm nervous around them especially. So like we are very nervous to... get support and just information [from police officers]. And we ended up working out okay and we ended up walking out of there like, "Oh okay. This wasn't so bad." One of the officers I actually had worked with ... as a banquet server so that was like really nice. She was like, "Hey!" and I was like "Hey, I worked with you!" I remember when I worked with her and I was like really good that day I mean we were a really good team so I remember being like "Oh cool." That was already like a nice welcoming thing right away.

Fortunately, this interaction with the law enforcement took place with pleasant and cooperative officers. Yet, not all families or individuals seek the help of the police after nightmarish interactions. Despite this positive experience with law enforcement, Victoria remains fearful of the police.

Another way undocumented youth continue to experience illegality is their family members' lack of access to affordable healthcare. Undocumented youth are able to obtain health benefits with their job if they have DACA. But at the same time they continue to witness family members in pain and in dire need of medical attention, who are unable to receive the medical services they need. I first interviewed Miralda when she was 19 in the winter of 2014. Back then she was disappointed that she did not qualify for DACA because she came two days after the cutoff date. Much to her surprise, half a year later she was able to obtain documentation validating her presence in the United States, ten days before the cutoff date. Miralda is a quiet and reserved young woman with a large smile. Her family lives in an affluent area in a beach town north of Los Angeles. Her father is a gardener and her mother is a cook. Although her parents work much more than 40 hours a week, they cannot afford to rent an apartment for their three children, because rent for a one-bedroom apartment in this beach town starts around \$1500 dollars per month.

Instead, Mirelda and her family share a four-bedroom home with four other families. She never had any privacy until she moved to college. Due to the overcrowded home, she and her family have dinner inside their car in order to have privacy and space.

In addition to the economic strain, Mirelda speaks with pain about observing both of her parents choosing to pay rent and feed their children instead of using their money to address their various physical ailments.

I see my dad. Every time he comes from work, he has something going on with his health and he keeps on going. I don't like the fact that he doesn't have insurance. He doesn't have money to go to the doctor. He [would] rather spend the money on rent or buying food for my brother and sister... My mom works in a restaurant and she always gets burned. And those burns are really bad. And she still has to keep on going. She has to go because there's the rent, there's the food. She doesn't go to the doctor even when she has to because she doesn't have the money. That's when I don't like them giving me money because I know they need it, but I can't do anything about it because I need it too. So our situation is really complicated and difficult.

This experience of being reminded of their family's illegality through lack of healthcare options is common for undocumented youth, especially when a family member goes through a massive surgery procedure. Magdalena, 23, connected her continued illegality to her failure to provide any help to her ailing father.

'Undocumented and unafraid' is a logo that many young, educated undocumented students use to state that they no longer live in fear [due] to their immigration status. A few days ago I stood by this logo, until my father's health was threatened. I realized the fear [of] my parents not having access to healthcare is

real. Plus, the fear of not being able to pay for medical assistance can take over someone's rationality, not allowing one to make the best decision during moments of life and death. Th[is] fear has not disappeared; it was only a mirage produce[d] by those in power to stop us from fighting for what our people deserve: rights!

Magdalena felt her life was progressing, and the problems she faced before DACA were mostly absent. She was able to transfer to one of the best public universities in the country. She is preparing for the LSAT, and is living as an independent adult. These changes in her life provided a sense of stability and perception of a normalized, life like that of her peers.

During a PRISM meeting another member echoed these concerns, stating that DACA was providing a false sense of security to all of its recipients. His perception is similar to Magdalena's analysis of DACA as a mirage created by those in power. The idea of helplessness, frustration, and anger associated with her life before DACA, re-emerged through her parents, as with other respondents.

Parents are not the only vicarious way [that] undocumented youth continue to experience illegality. The experiences of siblings with or without DACA can also be sources of much anxiety and stress. College educated respondents have been the primary beneficiaries of DACA, which has allowed them to utilize their degree and skills in the labor market. Their fluid social and economic integration exists alongside the lack of any change in their families' migratory status and social mobility.

Older respondents who are pursuing a graduate or professional degree viewed DACA differently than most respondents. For example, Daniela, 27, a Guatemalan, currently pursuing her doctoral degree in environmental engineering in one of the most prestigious programs in the country. She was able to attend and obtain funding for her studies through a supportive program and faculty. Daniela waited two years before applying for DACA. She was angry, upset, and disillusioned that her brother, whom she views as being more deserving than her in obtaining DACA, continues to face a life of struggle and would tremendously benefit from this program. From her perspective, DACA would not change her life; she was already achieving her goals. She felt guilty obtaining DACA, which would not alter her everyday life or educational opportunities while others would actually benefit.

In a different circumstance, Rodolfo worries about his sister, who is a DACA recipient. Rodolfo was speaking of his fears with DACA:

I helped my sister renew her DACA as well and she got the letter that she was approved but she hasn't gotten the card-- the work permit-- and it makes me very anxious because it's been like about a month and half. She was worr[ied] and she asked me what am I going to do Rodolfo? What if they don't give it to me? ... I don't have a driver's license. How am I going to work? How am I going to maintain my family? That for me was like an added pressure... Was it something I did in filling out her application? What is going to happen to us? Like if she doesn't get it and I have it that makes me feel guilty in a way.

Although he provided emotional support and reassured his sister that everything was going to be ok, Rodolfo could not stop thinking of his sister's situation. Unlike Rodolfo, who was selected as editor of his school's law journal, his sister does not have a college education. She has a job that pays above minimum wage to support her family. Rodolfo's helplessness is compounded by his anxiety that his sister will return to being an undocumented immigrant without any legal status. Similar to Daniela, Rodolfo speaks of his sister deserving DACA.

Now that I received [DACA], I am still afraid but you know what I think? I am more afraid for my sister. I have always been more worr[ied] about her. I don't care what happens to me. I had more nightmares of them not renewing it for her.

Rodolfo is aware that he has obtained the economic and cultural capital to succeed in the US. Moreover, Rodolfo's nightmares while sleeping are common among a significant segment of the respondents (see Chapter 7).

Respondents are often the only family member with a SSN and able to drive (especially before CA-AB 60), and so their responsibilities have increased. Respondents drive their parents around so they can conduct their errands. An increasing interaction with respondents and their parents revolves around increased financial responsibilities. Respondents are purchasing (although it they still face some obstacles) cars, homes, or other expensive items that require credit under their names. All feel happy to help their parents obtain these important, valuable possessions. At the same time, some feel a bit frustrated when their family members are pressuring them to help them purchase one of these items while they have not been able to do it for themselves. This is the case for

Nico, 30, who just graduated with a social science degree. Currently, he is a substitute teacher. We bumped into each other in a protest at a university allowing the Border Patrol to recruit on their campus. We were catching up and I asked him if he has been able to purchase a car. He smiled, and explained that his income as a substitute was not stable enough but his mom was “bugging” him to help her purchase a new car. Nico said, “I’m like damn, wait, let me get my shit in order. I don’t even have a car.” Some respondents also feel pressure to be responsible for large debts to help their parents.

The most prominent justification for identifying as undocumented is the continued threat of deportation that their family, friends, and community face. It is a source of continuing anxiety and stress for respondents who understand the risk their parents take every day to go to work in southern California. Jazmine, 23, will be graduating in June of 2016 from the University of California. Being an Indigenous woman from Oaxaca, Jazmine reports facing more racism from the Mexican immigrant community than from the dominant society. She did not know Spanish when she migrated to Los Angeles. Her father was deported in 2009, but was able to return several months later. This experience left an enduring imprint on her life. I asked her if her identity changed after DACA. She promptly replied no and provided an explanation:

Jazmine: [Be]cause I still feel undocumented.

EE: So if you still feel undocumented, what reminders do you get that you're still undocumented?

Jazmine: That they are deporting undocumented people without DACA.

EE: What else?

Jazmine: That my parents can still be deported anytime.

EE: Do you still get nervous a lot for your parents?

Jazmine: Yeah for my parents I do. I really do get nervous.

The Obama administration's decision to deport Central American refugee children in 2015 struck a chord with Jazmine. The images displayed in various media outlets continue to remind her of her father's deportation. Jazmine's story shows that the relief DACA recipients feel about no longer being deported is brief, as they remain powerless in preventing their family members from deportation. Similarly, Arlene speaks of the constant fear she has of her mother being deported.

When my aunt, she was the one that, she was caught actually crossing here when she had first gone to Mexico. There were times when we knew there was a raid (that had happened in Petaluma) and my mom was scared because she was like, 'What if they did that at my job?' And so I was scared for my mom.

Arlene's fear for her mother is an example of the various forms the threat of deportations manifests in their lives: raids, police stops, or court rulings. In some instances, worrying for siblings or parents causes more anxiety and fear than worrying about their own personal wellbeing.

DACA recipients' families' experiences of illegality reinforce recipients' own experiences of illegality. They witness the physical sacrifice and injuries their parents continue to endure without any form of adequate medical assistance. As a result, my research suggests that DACA recipients choose not to divorce their place in society from

their parents' place in society. Their dichotomous framework of inclusion versus exclusion and family experiences provide a clear perception that they are still undocumented.

POLITICIZED EXISTENCE

Undocumented youth—with or without DACA—engage with a society (other people, the media, and institutions) that struggles to decide whether or not they as undocumented people are included or rejected from the United States. Relentless self-deliberations whether to disclose their status based on the person's political perspective informed undocumented youth of their politicized presence and life in the United States. It might seem intuitive that undocumented youth would liberate themselves from a constant self-deliberation once they had gained DACA-limited rights and entered new social spheres and institutions to which they previously did not have access. To the contrary, DACA did very little to ameliorate their politicized existence before it and, in fact, new forms of self-deliberation emerged. From previous experience, undocumented youth view society's conversations about them as support for their binary framework. From their perspective, their legal status and place in society has not changed because they continue to endure the negative political views and actions of the rest of society. The aim of this section is to provide a glimpse on the various interactions undocumented youth have in society that perpetuate their politicized existence.

Politicization in Education

As previously mentioned, undocumented youths' interactions with educational institutions are a major reminder of their continued undocumented experience.

Respondents in higher education pointed to experiences with fellow classmates on campus who were unexpectedly abrasive and soundly against their benefiting from DACA. Before transferring to a prestigious public school, Magdalena was the president of the undocumented student organization in her community college. She was excited to attend school and meet other undocumented students. Visibly active on campus, she tabled and passed out flyers to disseminate information about undocumented students. Unfortunately, not all interactions with students passing by go according to plan:

I remember one time I was in school, college, and because we were doing a Coming Out of the Shadows event I gave a flyer to a guy that was an acquaintance of mine.... So I gave it to him because he was sitting with us, and he looked at me and he's like, 'You're undocumented?' And I was like, 'Yeah.' And he got off of the table and he's like, 'Well, I don't think DACA is a good system.' He said, 'My dad came from Mexico and he struggled eleven years to get his papers. Why wouldn't you go through that? Why wouldn't you wait eleven years?' And I wasn't even [going to respond, but] one of my friends, she's not even undocumented. She didn't even let him finish. She got up and she didn't even let me talk. She said: 'You know what?' She started telling him, 'You can't do that, that's disrespectful. These people are studying, these people are benefits to our economy or society, and for you to be saying that to her...' They were just

arguing, so I decided to leave, but I didn't. That day like I came back home and [realized] I hadn't felt like that in a long time, ever since I started school.

It is not uncommon for undocumented students to confront disapproval from fellow students. In this case, Magdalena was visible on campus by advocating for undocumented students. Clearly, Magdalena's acquaintance had readily accepted the narrative of “all immigrants should wait in line,” despite being Mexican-American and having a family history of immigration—a surprisingly common view.

Conversations amongst strangers in educational spaces are common and expected. They can be great experiences, in some instances sparking lasting friendships. However, for undocumented youth what starts as a friendly conversation with a stranger can result in having to listen to another harangue about the myth of undocumented immigrants as people siphoning money from Americans. The rising costs of higher education are stressful for all students. But misinformation about citizens' financial aid being siphoned to support undocumented students is rampant on college campuses. It is not uncommon, for example, for undocumented youth to enter spaces where colleagues, friends, or peers express their disapproval about undocumented immigration. Undocumented youth have expressed apprehension when they interact with strangers due to various experiences of having to hear people criminalize their existence and justify their exclusion. These interactions sometimes lead to isolation and silence in the face of biased opinions.

Politicization in the Workplace

Entering the workforce legally can be simultaneously gratifying and disappointing for undocumented youth, and for similar reasons to entering higher education. Their economic gains can sometimes be embedded in interactions with employers who share negative thoughts about undocumented immigrants. Susana, 24, lives in Santa Ana. She lived in Maryland during her early childhood, but moved to California in her late teens after being emotionally exhausted due to living in an anti-immigrant town. During our interview she spoke of hearing xenophobic remarks in her job, but she never confronted or disclosed her status to her fellow employees. In addition, she and her friends share stories of people speaking negatively of undocumented immigrants around them. Susana shared a story of a close friend who is an artist and is in high demand in Southern California.

I have a friend that does paintings and he is undocumented and he gets commission to do it, but some of his clients are like super rich and they are like “These undocumented people!” and then he says, “I am undocumented!” and they reply, “Oh well you are the exception.”

Entering new social spheres, in this case creating art for the rich, leads to interactions with groups they previously rarely interacted with. Individuals in these spaces are unaware they could be speaking to undocumented immigrants. This assumption is rooted in the idea that undocumented immigrants can only be in wealthy areas in traditional roles as maids, gardeners, or other service-sector jobs. Consequently, people with

negative views of undocumented immigrants feel safe to lift the curtain on their thoughts around people they assume cannot be undocumented.

Persia, 25, experienced a similar event as Susana. Persia is finishing the last year of her undergraduate education. Upon graduation she plans to obtain her M.A in Education and her teaching certificate. During the spring of 2016, Persia attended an educational conference in California in order to gain more insight into the teaching profession. She began to speak with three brothers, all teachers whose father is a Mexican immigrant. Persia was writing her testimonio (speech) that she was going to share to an audience in a couple of weeks. She informed them of her upcoming speech and that she is an undocumented immigrant. It prompted one of the brothers to begin speaking about Mexicans. Persia recalls her interaction with him:

The next day we started talking more into a deeper conversation about it and he was like, 'So how do you pay for school?' I replied, 'Oh well, I get funding because they help me [to] pay.' He was like, 'Whose they? So, you are saying that our government pays for you to go to school?' And I was like, 'Well, not really. It's the state who helps me.' He replied, 'So it's our state that helps you go to school?' I replied, 'Yeah pretty much.' He's like, 'So you have no loans or anything?' I was like, 'Not at this point, I don't.' He said, 'So how do you feel about the elections?' I replied that I didn't really know much. I was really not into it as much. But Trump, he is out of it, he's crazy. He said, 'Well I kind of believe what he is saying.'

The teacher began recounting his time experiences in Mexico (despite proudly showing his matricula (Mexican ID) to Persia). Paula recounts what he said to her:

'Well I was over there in Mexico and I was in jail and I saw the type of people that come to the U.S and I don't want those type of people in my country.' I was like, 'What do you mean? What are you talking about?' He said, 'These people are... When I was in Mexico, they told me how they come to the United States. They go into the stores, they steal clothing or things, they just take off the tags or whatever and then they go out and they sell it to their own people and it's stealing from us and it's selling it to their own people and then in TJ they steal and then they rape and do all these things.' So pretty much everything that Trump says on the news about Mexicans.⁴⁹

What Persia expected to be a stimulating conversation turned out to be a high school economics teacher telling her that all Mexican immigrants were criminals. When asked what she thought of the Republican Presidential candidate, Donald Trump, Persia expressed her disgust. The economic teacher began lecturing her on why Donald Trump's statements on Mexican immigrants are correct, which at the same time he is letting her know that he thinks she is a criminal.

Another common mechanism through which undocumented youth become aware of their politicized existence is through their friendships. Their anxiety in revealing their status to their friends often occurs in high school, a stage in life already filled with

⁴⁹ Although this quote sounds anti-immigrant or anti-Mexican, DACA recipients perceive either sentiment as anti-DACA.

anxiety. Undocumented youth have to deliberate carefully over whether they should let close friends know [of] their status. They fear being rejected if their friend's political view disapproves of their presence in the United States. Tanya witnessed a close friend overtly display anti-immigrant sentiments in high school that eventually ended their year-long friendship:

My high school is predominantly white, so when it came around Cinco de Mayo, actually, I did end one friendship. She had been my best friend in elementary school. We were really close and I believe it was sophomore year in my high school. For Cinco de Mayo, her and a couple of her friends wore shirts that said "Cinco de go home," and on the back it said "Go back to Mexico." Yeah, at our high school there was a bunch of guys waving their American flag in their big ol' trucks. One of the Spanish teachers had the Mexican flag hung up and even administration told her that [it] couldn't be up. So we didn't have Mexican flags at my high school campus... That girl, after that day she got suspended because of it [the t-shirt]. She had to be escorted off campus by security because people were threatening her.

Tanya proceeded to explain the aftermath of the event:

It bothers me a lot because she's half Mexican. Her dad is actually Mexican...I [said to her], "You know [this about your family]. Like, what the hell?" And she was responded, "Yeah, I was being stupid." "Yeah, you really were. You've known me since first grade, how do you think I feel about that?" And I told her, "I come from Mexico. Like, would you want me to go back to Mexico?" She's said, "No. I

know it's stupid now..." And she apologized for it, but I'm still not friends with her.

Ending friendships, similar to Tanya's experience, occurred with nearly a third of respondents' life experiences.

Furthermore, due to the expansion of their social lives through technology like Facebook, undocumented youth are unable to filter anti-immigrant sentiment in their social media. This happened to Leandra when she posted an article on immigration.

There was this one girl when SB 1070 came out. We had been really close friends, but then I saw a side of her because of it that I didn't want to see. I found out she was very conservative and she said all these things on Facebook to my posting of an article. I didn't even say I was undocumented, but [was just] posting an article about being pro-immigrant. And she said a lot of vicious things that I was just taken aback as to how someone so close to me even without realizing [was] hurting me. It brought me to the reality that this is real and people get hurt from this emotionally or through the act of being deported. It just brought me to reality. You don't experience that as a kid.

Leandra is aware of her unique experience as something most youth in the US never experienced. Her friends' "vicious" comments did not physically cause any harm, but it left a lasting impression on her. She highlights the emotional toll that ubiquitous hate speech takes on undocumented youth.

Nevertheless, DACA does provide a measure of confidence for more undocumented youth to disclose their legal status. As a form of empowerment or to combat myths associated with undocumented immigrants, respondents became more vocal in situations where they would otherwise remain silent. For example, Jerson speaks of catching up with old high school friends, where he eventually speaks out and confronts anti-immigrant remarks:

Last night I was having drinks with [a] couple of people and they were talking about the Obama administration, foreign policy, and immigration policy and they are very, very Republican. [In the past] I would just stay quiet and just kind of laugh it off but last night I was kind of like, "Hey this is my situation. You know?" And their eyes got all white like they just saw an alien. [I said], "I am still me," and they said, "Oh well." You know you are expecting [these remarks] and its weird because the things they say and how they react [when I told them I am undocumented] and you see through them you know...its weird... it felt fascist almost. It was very interesting seeing how people are so passionate about kicking people out.

Increasing media coverage of immigration over the last two years has increased undocumented youth's awareness of their politicized presence than in the past.

Experiences from romantic relationships can be instances that can also highlight the politicized presence of undocumented youth. During high school, even in their early adult years, undocumented youth are cautious about revealing their status to their significant other. Undocumented youth professed waiting for an ideal time to disclose

this major aspect of their life to their partners. From their perspective, their timing is delayed or suppressed as they begin to hear their partner and family members speak negatively of undocumented immigrants. Leo, a queer man, spoke of divulging his legal status to a significant other:

I told a friend of mine and that I was kind of emotional[ly] interested [in him].

From that day he stopped talking to me and is not like he didn't have any friends but he was kind of afraid of me riding with him [in the car]. He never said anything but when I said that [I was undocumented] he never hung out [with me] anymore.

Arizona bill SB 1070 sent a message to society that sheltering an undocumented immigrant would result in a serious crime, and the shockwave of this bill was felt all over the US. Citizens unaware of the rights of undocumented immigrants believed this lie. Leo's experience is not an isolated incident. Over one tenth (11 respondents) have waited years or have not yet disclosed their legal status to their partners and new families.

Alana, 28, who does not qualify for DACA, also shared a similar experience. She said her boyfriend did not tell her he was undocumented for two years. They met at work. He had a good job using a different SSN and did not want to jeopardize his job by the small chance that she would inform their superiors of his legal status. The most common predicament among respondents in this situation is that they have yet to let their significant other know.

In Betsy's situation, now 20, she has been dating her current boyfriend, whom she met in high school. Betsy is an undocumented Mexican national. Her boyfriend is white and lives in a very politically conservative city in southern California. As their relationship became more serious, Betsy began to notice alarming signs that kept her from confiding in her boyfriend. First, her boyfriend would pick her up while he was listening to conservative AM radio talk shows. She dismissed this sign by reasoning that he was listening to "what the other side was saying." Secondly, visiting his family resulted in his father blaming "illegals" for the bad economy, the lack of jobs, and what he perceived as the overall poor state of the country. Once she heard her boyfriend exclaiming that undocumented immigrants should not be allowed in this country, using racial epithets about Mexican nationals. She no longer felt safe, and became certain her boyfriend would not accept her legal status and would most likely end their relationship. When I asked why she is still in this relationship she responded:

I feel like I'm going to feel lesser than they are.... They've never said anything racist to me. It's just like their ideas. His dad's not racist...his dad is a business owner. He owns batting cages. He owns property. So he doesn't like how all these taxes he has to pay are going to welfare. Are going to stuff like this. So that's just his ideal. He doesn't like lazy people who suck the government. And if you watch the news or whatever, usually people who they target are like Hispanics who are taking up ... welfare [by] having so many kids. So I mean, my boyfriend's brother is a lawyer. He's also a Republican... I just let them talk. I try to not let it affect me. It's their ideas. I can't change them.

Betsy provided a picture of a politically hostile family against undocumented immigrants and Mexicans. This led me to ask her about her personal relationship:

EE: What about your boyfriend?

Betsy: Growing up in that environment, there was a time where he...we were thinking of going to the beach with some other friends. I was with some other friends. He's also Filipino. And then my boyfriend was like, I don't think it's fair how I don't get financial aid and they're going to give undocumented students financial aid. I was just like, little does he know that next to him, I'm sitting here and I'm one of those people.

In our conversation, Betsy also touched on many other issues about her politicized existence:

Eventually [my boyfriends' family is] going to find out. I want them if it does come to them finding out, kind of go back to that whole proving them wrong thing. Be like, you're really Republican. You're against this. Look where I am....

EE: So people, like maybe your future father in law, think like that. How do you fight off this criminalization image? How do you fight it off?

Betsy: I guess going back to the whole acting correctly thing. Not being that stereotype that they have. Mexicans are seen as being super ghetto or feeding off the government or not paying taxes. My boyfriend, one time he got really mad because he thinks Hispanics don't pay taxes. He said "Undocumented [people] don't pay taxes." In my head I'm like, little do you know every time we buy

something, we're paying taxes. You know what I mean? He's just listening to his dad about hating Obama, Mitt Romney, or whatever. He just took little bit parts of it and he never took the time to understand it.

***EE:** Wow. You've never been like, "Hey, they actually do." You just stay quiet?*

***Betsy:** Yeah. I've told him before. One time when he was talking about [why] I don't get financial aid. The friend who was behind us said, "I'm actually really for [undocumented students getting aid] because these people didn't have a choice. Their parents brought them here. If they're going to go to college they're doing something good. They're not like, taking from the government. I supported that, saying "Yeah, there's no reason why you should be looking down on those people. Like, they're doing good. They're going to college. It's not like they're actually going to go into the workforce." And so later on, [my boyfriend] kind of realized he didn't know what he was saying. So he doesn't care about it. Okay, he learned he was just being ignorant. Just listening to his dad... I just thought it was really funny how he's just like, oh... Little did you know, I'm sitting right next to you. I'm one of those people who's going to benefit from DACA.*

This example highlights the amount of pain and hatred for undocumented immigrants someone can withstand in an intimate relationship, despite having access to DACA and therefore some legal protections. Ten respondents also reported negative and false attitudes toward DACA, especially that it is taking up federal funding that would otherwise go to documented youth.

Sometimes, peoples' opinions can change for the better when they realize their partner is undocumented. Delina, 21, was apprehensive about divulging her legal status to her boyfriend, though she eventually did tell him. He was sympathetic and wanted to learn more about her situation. His stance on immigration changed once he recognized the false information he bought into. However, the rest of his family took longer to accept this fact. His parents slowly became accepting of undocumented immigrants even though she continues to hear xenophobic remarks at the dinner table. Surprisingly, her boyfriend's post of an article on the need for immigration reform generated a deluge of comments from his friends and fellow Christians. Delia talked about how the comments were attempts to correct her boyfriend's misguided views, because no Christian would support allowing criminals to break the law.

Anti-immigrant sentiments have also spread into religious institutions. This occurred to 5 respondents (including Delina). Susana spoke of hearing anti-immigrant remarks in a Latino church.

Let me tell you, it's funny because the church where I used to go is composed of, the majority of them are immigrants, and regardless [of whether] they already have a [legal] status or not, they're immigrants, they migrated here. The person in charge of the church has parents who are immigrants. They're so very anti-[undocumented immigrant]. I heard a lot of comments, like, "You should go back to Mexico," or things like that.

Susana disclosed her legal status to her pastor after receiving DACA. Instead of receiving a positive, welcoming reply, her pastor let her know that due to his political

views, he could not support her situation. That prompted her to leave her church and religion altogether. She was disillusioned by religious leaders supporting xenophobic political views. Yet, in retrospect she was not surprised that various congregations and church leaders are unwilling to help the poor and needy.

Enduring these many dehumanizing experiences also leaves a traumatic imprint. For example, Susana explains the fear instilled in her everyday life that prevents her speaking to others about her legal status. She assured me that “Sometimes, like if I feel threatened because I feel like someone is going to physically hurt me for being undocumented, I probably wouldn’t say I am undocumented.” This fear of physical danger might be rare, but over half of the respondents continue to undergo a variation of this fear as a result of their legal status. They fear violence potentially perpetrated on people they have relationships with, their family, or during interactions with strangers, or of dire situations that create emergencies and distraught feelings. As Magdalena expressed in the context of her father’s lack of health insurance, the “fear is real.”

TWO-YEAR MEMBERSHIP

Undocumented youth who have obtained DACA very clearly view the program's two-year provision as exclusion from mainstream society instead of an opportunity for actual integration. Their viewpoint argues that legal liminality is another form of illegality they must endure, because they would not be dealing with this issue if they and their family were categorically integrated as full citizens. Undocumented youth point to their experiences in society that reintroduce the fear that they experienced before DACA or that highlight their tenuous membership. These experiences include the politicization

of DACA through the media and their own personal experiences with renewing DACA that are reminders of their tenuous membership. I argue that their perceptions of these experiences are shaped by their own perspective on their legal status and social membership. In many cases, how they discussed their identity as DACA recipients and their dichotomous understanding of their inclusion versus exclusion during the interview were seemingly contradictory and reflected their feelings about their integration in society. The impact of their experience of being undocumented is evident with nearly a third of respondents claiming they would continue to view themselves as undocumented even after they become legal citizens.

A majority of my respondents are adult undocumented immigrants. Traumatic experiences of illegality and liminal legality are pivotal in understanding their politicized existence. Despite their general abhorrence of politics, debates about immigrant-related legislation at the state and national level—as well as negative depictions of immigrants and pro-immigrant legislation in the media—constantly remind them of who they are. Luz, 22, is a working professional. She has a well-paying job and graduated from a four-year institution. Despite her success in the labor market, Luz believes her liminal status is not sufficient for her or the immigrant community:

The way I think about it, people say, "Oh, we are not undocumented; we have DACA." I am like, "No we are undocumented. We have [a] two-year, low membership." That is what I always tell my friends: "Our two-year membership is almost over, we have to renew it." When are they going to let us get the

premium? That is how I see it. I am still undocumented, with some sort of membership.

DACA may have allowed her to successfully enter the labor market and become a model example of the impact of the program on undocumented youth, but its revocability makes the legislation a double-edged sword.

Respondents who claimed they felt integrated in the US and expressed that they no longer had any fear in their everyday lives, would often provide a much more cautious and concerned answer when it came to their place in society. Jerson exhibited this apprehension when asked about DACA. “Yeah I still know I am illegal. I feel like I do not necessarily belong [in the US] but I know my place now. I said, ‘I don’t feel invisible anymore, you know.’”

The stress associated with renewing their permit becomes a strong reminder of their liminal status. If they are fortunate, feeling fear is the worst experience they have when renewing and waiting to obtain their "two-year membership," rather than rejection from DACA. Leandra, 19, speaks of the fear she endured as she renewed her permit:

[T]he next two years I'll be living in bliss. I have a job and I'll be working. I'll be getting money. But after that I am honestly fearful for what will happen because I don't know who's coming into office... I don't know anything. It's an uncertainty. Definitely, yeah. It does put a stress on me. My girlfriend has proposed to me several times [since] we've been together, this upcoming November will be five years and we had talked about getting married, not for the green card. We do love each other. But she's more about doing it now than ever because of the green

card situation. Because we don't know where we'll be in two years. I'm putting it off because I don't want it to be because of that. I want it to be at a point where we're both financially stable [and can] do something nice with family and friends and everything. Where we don't have to do it because of that.

Leandra's fear is intertwined with the media attention that immigration reform receives during presidential elections. This fear feeds on the increasing xenophobic and fascist promises that several Presidential candidates make to their constituents regarding undocumented migration. Thus, it is not surprising that Leandra and the majority of respondents understand their membership in the US as easily revocable.

Rodolfo provides another example of this fear of DACA revocation by politicians:

The confidence boost that I first received when I got my first work authorization was affected by what has been in the news recently. I mean there has been the whole DAPA/DACA thing [that] has been held up in court. There has been strong opposition. I don't know if it is going to continue any time after Obama.

Strikingly similar to their personal interactions with individuals, the knowledge that DACA recipients' two-year membership is subject to political whims in Washington, DC reinforces the sense that they are still undocumented.

Undocumented youth who obtain DACA at the age of 16 generally avoid experiencing the traumatic events their older peers endured as they reach adulthood. Their experience is slightly different because they enter adulthood with a work permit

and resources available for them to complete their degrees. However, they also experience, albeit for a few days or weeks, fears of exclusion and deportation. Stephanie, 18, is speaking of waiting for her physical permit to come through the mail after she successfully renewed DACA:

I'm a target. A target. I was like, 'Oh my god! I'm a target, because I didn't have anything to be safe and landed.' Even when I went to put in money the bank they said, 'You know this is expired, right?' And I said, 'Does that mean I can't get my money out'" But they were really nice and they said, 'No it's okay. Just get it as soon as possible.' Each time I had to go to the bank I had to take like [a] paper that said I am [waiting for renewal]. You see, it's evidence... I really have to depend on this document to do certain stuff. It's stressing, it was really stressing, because it was a point where my parents had to do a lot. We were moving and my brother had to go to school, and nobody could take him...I didn't have a drivers' license. And then [it was] really hectic for me taking [my mom] to the doctor, [thinking] 'What if they arrest you. What's going to happen? They're going to take the car away. Are you going to go to jail?...' It was scary.

Stephanie's brief immersion in the everyday experience of the majority of undocumented immigrants is a reminder for respondents to varying degrees of the precariousness of their situation.

Respondents jokingly alluded that they were "fully" undocumented again for a couple of days during the gap between their expiration date and the arrival of new DACA

identification cards. During a tabling session, PRISM members who received DACA in high school spoke of the fear and anxiety of waiting for their new permit. Leyla, 19, said, “I don’t know how they [older students] did it.” Younger respondents’ brief moment in this limbo was a sufficient reminder of a life others seemed to cope with better than they did.

Undocumented youth also understand the social context of their status through events or interactions with institutions or law enforcement officials who make an extra effort to instill fear. This was the case for Bernardo, 19, from Santa Ana. He entered college with the help of DACA and the CA Dream Act. Although he continues to face financial struggles, he plans to graduate on time. In our interview, I asked him under what circumstances DACA would be revoked. Bernardo began talking of his experience with law enforcement:

Oh, I remember when I almost got arrested. That is when my whole status did hit me. I was scared for my life. I was almost arrested for being brown on the wrong side of the street... It was racial profiling pretty much. I was just hanging out with my friend in a bike trail. And then a cop comes and says, ‘Are you taggin’ up around here.’ I’m like, ‘No.’ ‘Are you trying to jump that guy?’ ‘No, he is my friend.’ ‘Are you making out around here?’ I’m like, ‘No!’ That is when I [had just] gotten my worker’s permit. He took it [DACA permit] away from me... He took it away with him. He is not able to take my possessions away with him. And that moment when I was thrown down at the floor without questioning...He just grabbed me and threw me down to the floor. I am like, ‘Wow, this is real. I could

get deported...’ This is stuff I never really talked about in my life. I was scared, my life could have been altered at that very moment.

Bernardo, like Leandra, was living in “bliss” before this event. Being racially profiled and attacked by a police officer was a rude awakening for him. Law enforcement officials are constitutionally protected within one hundred miles from the US/Mexico border to racially profile Latinos, or individuals perceived as Mexicans or undocumented immigrants. It is not surprising that in Santa Ana, a city with a large undocumented population, law enforcement can profile “Mexican”-appearing bodies. In Bernardo’s case, he realized the rights he obtained through DACA were not recognized or were made non-existent by the police officer. In fact, the officer denied that Bernardo had any rights as a legal resident in the United States. Bernardo’s life was altered because of his sudden awareness of his lack of a full citizenship that guarantees constitutional rights. Bernardo was able immediately afterward to tell a prominent community organizer in Santa Ana about his experience. This individual’s political capital quickly forced the officer to return his wallet. Yet the officer was able to send one last reminder to Bernardo in a disrespectful manner by dropping the wallet in the table as he passed them, without apologizing or respecting Bernardo’s constitutional rights.

Bernardo’s traumatizing encounter with law enforcement is exemplary of the ways DACA recipients are informed of their two-year “limited membership” in US society. To take another example, Sandra, 22, from Santa Ana, a student in a public university-spoke of how she perceived her integration in the US through DACA. *“It’s just*

a two-year, so... I can continue to renew, but it's not something definite that I have. Yeah, it can be revoked at any time. I guess I don't want to think about that." The combination of the negative political climate against migration, the short length of the permit, and unforeseen circumstances that might lead to its revocation, make her uneasy about her uncertain future in the US.

Nearly a third of respondents claimed they would continue viewing themselves as undocumented when they obtain their LPR (Legal Permanent Resident) status or when they obtained citizenship. All respondents regardless of age spoke of living as undocumented immigrant children and young adults, which informed the way they currently live. Respondents who obtained DACA before turning 18 made similar statements. Such a self-perception may be influenced by significant life events that left a permanent reminder of their treatment as second-class citizens. Arlene's experience echoes this emergent trend. Despite obtaining DACA and entering college with the CA Dream Act, Arlene continually endured fear and experienced an unfriendly interaction with law enforcement. Immigration raids continue to occur in the city where she and her mother have lived for the last fifteen years. As discussed above, she was scared that her mother's job could be subjected to an immigration raid, or where she worked while in high school. Moreover, Arlene detailed an interaction with a police officer—in a perceived "progressive city"—that played a major role in her understanding of the limits of her integration in society after DACA:

I feel like I'm still the same as I was before. I've always tried to not be involved with cops at all for any reason. I have had altercations, and this was before I had

DACA. There was this one time when we got pulled over and my mom's boyfriend was driving, and he only speaks Spanish. The cop was speaking to them in English and I said, "Hey, he doesn't speak English. Let me translate." And he said, "No, I can do it myself." "Sir, I'm bilingual. I can do this for you," I'm trying to be helpful. "No, just stay in the back." He tried to pull my mom's boyfriend out of the car and tried speaking to him in Spanish, but his Spanish wasn't [so good]. You couldn't understand anything. My mom's boyfriend looks back at me and asked, 'me puedes ayudar?' So I got out of the back, [and the officer] ... started yelling at me. He's said, "I don't need your translation." I asked, "How is he supposed to know what charges you give him, why you're giving him a ticket if he doesn't even know what you're saying?" So I got into an altercation about that. I don't know. Of course I was fearful of something happening to me, but I'd rather be helpful and know that I did it for a good reason.

Bad memories such as these leave a lasting impression on DACA recipients and reinforce their identity as being undocumented. Similar to Bernardo, Arlene recognized that the state—through the cop's actions— is unwilling to recognize her mother's boyfriend's humanity.

In many cases, respondents' view of DACA and whether they felt included versus excluded from US society during the interview reflected their contradictory feelings about their social and legal integration in society. It was very common for respondents to speak of their relative safety from deportation and newfound opportunities in glowing

terms, but later in the interview to discuss a “little fear” in the back of their minds about their future legal that they try not to think about.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to show how DACA recipients understand their contextualized identity and place in United States society. Undocumented youth’s dichotomy of exclusion/ inclusion contextualized the moments of successful integration they experience. The four major themes of this chapter— ongoing work and educational obstacles; family status and perceptions of DACA recipients; politicized existence, and two-year membership—enable us to understand the ways undocumented youth experience a liminal status and ultimately still feel undocumented and rejected by society despite DACA. The immediate joy, feelings of acceptance, or the perception of leading a normal life is shattered through the experiences explored above—experiences that are sometimes similar to life before DACA. Further, although many are entering different social spheres and are recognized by institutions that previously marginalized them, they experience new forms of marginalization that echo their previous experiences. For example, Vicente and Victoria are having comparable stress and anxiety issues as they figure out how to finance their professional education.

Previous research has highlighted the liminal status of immigrants. In particular, Menjivar (2006) shed light on the experience of Salvadorian immigrants through TPS. She identifies a gray area that various immigrants experience when they are neither undocumented nor full legal citizens. Similarly, undocumented youth endure the stress of renewing their work permit, the uncertainty of their legal status, and the various legal

restrictions they face as DACA recipients. At the same time, many undocumented youth are different than TPS recipients in significant ways: they tend to have more education; they tend to be involved in different social and economic spheres as youth; their family's continued undocumented status; and their years of experience as undocumented immigrants during their youth before obtaining DACA.⁵⁰ These differences are important variables in understanding how they experience and understand their liminal legal status as one of continued legal and social exclusion. Moreover, undocumented youth and their families are a politicized group who cannot escape public discussions of their worthiness to be included in the polity within a politically polarized society.

Experiences that remind them of their legal liminality, and the fact that their bodies are political entities subject to constant scrutiny, leads to a constant self-evaluation that is both detached and dehumanizing. Despite their social and economic integration into the United States, their illusion of perceived safety and acceptance with DACA is distorted when they maneuver through new institutions, interact in social spheres, and with different sectors of the population that are unaware of their reality as undocumented immigrants. Because of previous experiences of being undocumented, their framework of reference remains the same even after they receive DACA: they are still undocumented.

The experiences of undocumented youth living in the US has also resulted in unforeseen effects on their mental health (see Chapter 7). Years of exclusion, fear, and traumatic experiences not only play an important role in shaping how undocumented youth understand their inclusion and identity. The inability to escape these feelings,

⁵⁰ Central Americans applied for TPS once they were physically present in the United States.

emotions, and memories is the result of their interactions with the state, laws, media, institutions, law enforcement, and everyday life occurrences that leave an everlasting imprint. I believe this chapter provides much-needed insight on the impact of the individual under DACA, and continues the dialogue about the impact of being undocumented, a status imposed by the state on the individual.

CHAPTER 5: Coming out of the Shadows: “I Can Finally Start my Life”

It was a typical hot summer afternoon in the Inland Empire. Fermina Cuevas, 25, was speaking of the various obstacles she faced before DACA. She was thoughtful and took her time when she answered each question. Like her peers, Fermina endured similar setbacks that stunted the life path she aspired to have. However, I could see the pain through her body language and face through every word as she explained her dreams being shattered. It hurt her to remember the “lost years” she experienced. Although she graduated after 2006, despite being AB540 eligibility, she did not see college as an option. Instead she helped her mom clean houses for five years. With no stable source of income to move out, Fermina stayed with her parents while social media(Facebook, twitter, and instam)were constant reminders of her limited life through the various posts and pictures of her friends going to college, moving out, or traveling (leading a normal life). She never worked under the table (paid cash) for the fear that it could jeopardize her future prospect of obtaining residency. Fermina felt trapped and viewed her development as an adult was stunted. Her demeanor changed when we reached the part of the interview where she informed me of her current life (after DACA). She is close to completing the units required to transfer to a University of California campus. A stable job is allowing her to save money so she can live on her own when she transfers. She was continuously smiling as she spoke of the various ways she is integrated in American society. During the various “firsts” in her adult life, she said - “ I can finally start my life.”

The excerpt above is taken from my field journal after my interview with Ferminda. This interview stood out because she was one of the first respondents to openly say that her life as an adult could now begin. I remember the anguish in her face as she, very earnestly, let me into her life. This excerpt is a clear example of life before and after DACA. Various respondents used words such as “stuck,” “trapped”, or “in the shadows” to explain how they viewed their life. Previous chapters and research have documented “life in the shadows” of undocumented youth. Living years, in some cases decades, as an undocumented immigrant prevented the majority of undocumented immigrants from leading a life similar to their peers’. Driving a car, feeling safe, and working are a few of the “firsts” for many of the respondents. The aim of this chapter is to document the various ways in which DACA has impacted the lives of undocumented youth in Southern California. The chapter will also show how for undocumented youth this change to a liminal legal status alters their trajectory, self-esteem, and their own view of their place in society. Despite the social, personal, and economic gains made by DACA, undocumented youth collide, voluntarily or involuntarily, with symbolic and everyday reminders of the of their tenuous place in society.

WORKING-STUNTED GROWTH WHILE LEGALLY ENTERING THE LABOR MARKET

There is a general assumption that most youth in the U.S. obtain their first job during their teenage years. Having a job is generally viewed as the beginning of adulthood and a path to become a contributing member of society. For many teens, working provides extra income that allows them to purchase basic necessities or save

money in order to offset future college expenses. However, as research has shown, a large number of undocumented youth become aware of the limitations of their legal status as they enter the labor market (Gonzales 2008, 2011). Entering the informal labor market became a rite of passage for them. Undocumented college graduates with specialized skills worked similar jobs as their parents since they were unable to provide a SSN. Undocumented youth thus perceived their future goals and prospects of upward mobility with substantiated pessimism. Besides traditional institutions (labor and education) that informed their status - everyday interactions with friends, family, or acquaintances constantly reminded them of the limitations their legal status ensured. Logically, through their networks, undocumented youth pursued jobs that would feign obliviousness of their fake SSN or employers willing to pay them under the table.

PRISM members, individuals in social gatherings, and respondents spoke of the difficulty and stress of not being able to be economically independent. Marta Maria Cruz, 23, spoke of the stress of not being able to have a stable job and financially contribute to her family. *“It was hard. It was really hard. Between jumping from work to work. Not being able to find a steady job. And then having my dad’s plans always not being able to come through. It’s heart breaking.”* PRISM members and respondents’ frustration with their lack of economic agency/independence heightened as they realized the financial toll it took on their family members. It was common for undocumented youth to have transitioned to low-wage jobs or being let go by their employer once they became aware of their fake SSN. Several volunteered for organizations involved in immigrants or social justice organizations. Others refrained from entering the labor

market, or the informal labor market to avoid any unforeseen problems in case of immigration reform. The low probability of attaining a job that provided a living wage to become independent adults in Southern California impacted their mental health. Respondents expressed their perception of themselves as economic burdens on their family, partners, or friends because they were unable to pay for their own expenses. For example, Arlene Fuentes, 19, explained her situation when she was unable to pay for her college applications and had to rely on her mother's low income, despite her financial instability.

Yeah. I didn't have any income of my own. I was reliant on my mom. So I couldn't buy anything I needed. And it really bothered me because I didn't want my mom to pay for an eighty-dollar fee to apply for college. I mean, I was lucky enough to get fee waivers for a lot of them. Yeah, pretty much all of them. And I applied to like eleven or fifteen different schools.

Arlene's pain in viewing herself as an economic burden to her mother is a common statement among the majority of respondents. They expressed frustration, anxiety, and/or depression from their inability to become an economically functioning adult. Miralda Gomez epitomizes the prevailing desire to not be an economic burden on her parents.

Yes, because I really want to work. I really want to get the money that I need through me working and using to pay for everything. I want to help my parents. I don't think it's fair for them to be paying for books when they can't because they still have my little sister and my brother.

Unable to move out or become economically independent, or cover expenses related with events associated with transitioning into adulthood discouraged and embittered respondents. They felt an inability to take control of and responsibility for their own life as adults. PRISM members felt their life was held back before DACA, and required to play catch-up with their peers.

An inability to participate in other, seemingly mundane, bureaucratic adult requisites such as obtaining a driver's license, filing for taxes, and obtaining good credit informed undocumented youth of their legal status. Their status as undocumented youth blocked their successful participation in adult tasks like getting an identification card or a driver's license from the Department of Motor and Vehicle, filing taxes, or getting a bank account. For instance, Juan Jose Guzman, 25, graduated from a state university in 2011. Unable to utilize his degree in psychology in the labor market, Sebastian devoted two years of his life as a volunteer for various immigrant rights organizations where he eventually became a prominent activist. In one instance, he and two of his peers turned themselves in to ICE in order to enter an immigration detention facility so he could gain a first person experience on the treatment of detainees. Their experience as organizers allowed them to mobilize the inmates to cause a mass demonstration. Detention officials labeled Sebastian an instigator so they began his deportation proceedings. Another young activist, Juan Jose was allowed to stay in the country through a mass mobilization asking immigration officials to drop the charges. He was fearful the state would intervene and deny his application. Two years later, in June 2015, he was working for a major law firm where he continues to fight for undocumented immigrant rights.

During our follow up interview he expressed his difficulties moving out, filing his income tax forms, having health insurance, and other “adult” activities. Juan Jose’s experience sheds light on the challenges DACA recipients in their mid 20’s face as they gain their social and economic independence. His insight provides a glimpse on various ways DACA recipients view the need to “catch up.” Undocumented activists and organizers validated this trend by describing a decrease in membership and involvement in their organization and events. When I followed up with Sebastian and asked why this was occurring, they said, “people seem to think they don’t need to be active.” On the other hand, respondents pointed out that work, becoming an independent adult, and school were prioritized, leaving little to no time for activism.

Relationships

Respondents recalled their experiences as teenagers. Three respondents avoided interaction with their peers during high school, to avoid situations where they had to explain their legal status. Instead, they would lunch with some of their teachers who were better informed of the complexity of immigration laws, hence more understanding. Although this example is extreme, it showcases the necessity for such strategy, to sidestep social interaction to avoid stigma, rejection, and perhaps, ridicule. Within a framework of geographical location and class differences, respondents in White or in wealthier communities avoided certain social gatherings or events for the aforementioned reasons- but much more for fear of the political beliefs and reactions of their friends. Several respondents felt it was much more dangerous having their White friends know of

their migratory status than peers of their own race or ethnicity. Aware that generalizing Whites as a monolithic group is incorrect, undocumented youth link this apprehension by rationalizing Whites; in general, disapprove of their legal status. Although many had been very open about their legal status at a young age, respondents felt apprehensive in disclosing their legal status to White peers, fearing unforeseen consequences like deportation. Several respondents attributed their general fear of talking about to their legal status to their parents who stressed secrecy. Many were disciplined at a young age to avoid friends, teachers, and the neighbors in any discourse revolving immigration. In addition, living in predominantly Latino neighborhoods limited their participation to people (e.g. White people) outside their ethnic group. The only interaction they had with people outside their ethnic group came when they saw their parents' employer or translated for their parents in various social functions. In contrast, respondents' non-Latino neighborhoods were extremely cautious, in some instances they spent their entire life without telling their friends. Respondents from non-immigrants regions were exposed at young age to anti-immigrant sentiments from their city, neighborhood, classmates, and in some instances, their friends. Similarly, their families coached them to avoid talking to anyone of their legal status. There is no specific mechanism that clearly explains the varying approaches undocumented youth use to shield their legal status before DACA.

These evasive maneuvers (changing the conversation subject, avoiding spaces their legal status would be brought up, or cautiously speak of immigration to people in order to gain insight to their views towards undocumented immigrants) are also utilized in intimate relationships. During their formative years, most teenagers begin to engage in

romantic relationships. From society's perspective, there are various socializing and personal development lessons young adults learn. Undocumented youth dealt with an added layer, their legal status, in romantic partnerships that could result in complicated situations. In many cases, undocumented youth avoided intimate relationships where they felt they would be rejected for being undocumented. Navigating the complexity of a teenage romantic relationship is already difficult enough; but one's immigration status can be strenuous to both parties. For example, it is common and almost expected to go to school events, parties or vacations with a romantic partner during high school. Respondents contrived various excuses as to why they could not go. It made respondents extremely anxious to have to address their partner question them about their inability to participate in certain social activities such as going to San Diego for the weekend or boarding an airplane to join their partner's family vacation. This anxiety was shared by their parents, who worried about the emotional and physical safety of their child, asked for them to come home straight from school or not focus on having a boyfriend/partner. These requests are masked under the fear that unnecessary time outside the house increased the possibility of deportation. Consequently, many respondents, through half-hearted laughs, explained the increased vigilance and strict parenting during their teenage years.

Respondents' experiences were later supported during a meeting held weekly by an immigrant rights organization in Southern California that focuses on helping undocumented youth cope with mental health issues. Several young adults elaborated on the added stress of being undocumented during a relationship. Some viewed with

frustration that their legal status potentially jeopardized the success of their partnership. Similarly, to how they viewed themselves as an economic burden to their family, nearly a quarter of respondents felt they were a strain on their partner's life ability to pursue a social life. In contrast, others concluded that the precariousness of their legal status and the constant flux in their life occupied virtually all of their emotional and psychological strength. Coping with these issues everyday can be very taxing. Therefore, many reasoned that including an emotional relationship to their unstable lives are unwarranted additional burdens to both parties. Although this was not the case for all, more than half of the respondents commented on having to deal with relationship issues.

Work After DACA

The economic impact of the DACA program on undocumented youth is significant. The National Undocumented Research Project (NURP) conducted the first survey on the economic impacts of DACA on undocumented youth. Nearly 60% of DACA recipients have obtained a new job, 45% have increased their income earnings, and nearly 21% were able to obtain work internships (Gonzales and Bautista Chavez 2014). The increases in income earnings varies on the level of education and social capital of the individual (Gonzales et al 2014). College educated DACA recipients were the biggest beneficiaries of increased wages. Recipients attending a community college or a four-year institution were more likely to obtain a new job and increase their job earnings (Gonzales Bautista Chavez 2014). The findings from NURP point out that the improvement of human capital and income of DACA undocumented youth is contingent on educational level.

This statistical portrait may help to provide a clearer understanding of the economic benefits of DACA. This research seeks to provide an on the ground understanding of DACA recipients' perception of their job prospects. What does it mean to be able to legally work? How do DACA recipients at different stages in life understand or view their entrance in the labor market? In short, respondents from all ages viewed the ability to work in a positive manner. Even individuals rightfully not satisfied with the short-term relief under DACA felt relieved in being able to change jobs or pursue a different line of work.

For example, Victoria, 21, is currently one of the first undocumented students attending a prestigious dental school. She spoke of her outlook in the job market after she graduated. At the time we spoke, she was about to graduate from college with a major in biology. She received DACA two quarters before graduating. In a very eloquent and poignant manner she described the economic limits before DACA.

I think I don't like, I would love to know how it is not to live out of oatmeal or something like that. I would love to know how it is to go out and eat and not to make lunch all the time. That would be really cool... Like we all turned 21, and they said "let's go to Vegas." We planned this really awesome trip and I was like. I am not going to spend this money on this trip you guys, I have to save my money. They thought I was cheap because they got all of these good deals. I did not do it. I did not go. And a lot of people could not understand why I could not go. It was kind of amazing what they did. In that sense, I cannot do a lot of fun things, but I also do not have money for food a lot of times.

Victoria's difficulties dealing with social events or going out represents the challenges undocumented youth faced before DACA. After DACA, Victoria expressed the relief of being able to legally work, have options, and save money.

So, I feel less stressed out because I know that I can get the job. That is a huge deestresser because I used to think "Crap, once I graduate what am I going to do?" I worked in retail, but I do not want to work in retail all my life. You know? I love working, I knew that I would be like happy. But I worked so hard in school you know? I know my friends have not tried as hard. It's less stressful that I have a car and that I can drive with freedom. That is a huge deal not to worry when I am driving not disciplining myself. Ok it's fine if I pass this red light on time. I do not have to freak out, I'll be fine. Also, I might be able to get a job in different areas. That is how it has helped me with that stress. I have been able to subdue it. It's affected my stress that I still need to try really hard in school still. That is how it has affected me physically. I am always really tense. And uhmm. Emotionally, I have always been kinda dramatic I tend to over exaggerate and be dramatic with my emotions. But uhm...It's made it worse. Like, I am extremely anxious all the time. I think it's because I am undocumented.

Victoria touches on the anxiety of graduating and not being able to legally work before DACA and the relief on being able to legally work. She already had a job lined up working at a retail store but she felt limited by the lack of options after graduation. After

DACA, she felt she had options for the first time of where she aspired to work. Despite newfound freedom in the labor market, several respondents and community leaders highlighted that although DACA opened new job opportunities, successful employment requires the expansion and diversification their networks. Community college and working respondents explained their networks revolved around jobs where a social security was not required, that is an informal market. This networking limitation supports Gonzales et al (2014) findings indicating human capital being important in determining the job prospects of DACA recipients.

DACA recipients in college, nearing graduation, or those that have graduated have a new concern: entering a competitive global labor market. Previously, undocumented youth faced “I can’t get a job because I don’t have papers.”

Today, a new challenge undocumented youth in southern California face is “will I get a job out of college?” Before DACA, many stated they would not put their degree to use. Now, they worry about being able to use their degree in an epoch of an increasing credentialing society. In a sense, DACA does not reduce their stress in the “future” but it does in the present.

PRISM members have been able to benefit from the DACA. On campus, they through a campus initiative through a work study program they have been able to work in the food court, as a research assistant, or a student worker in the various campus departments. Luz, 22, who feels fortunate in obtaining a well-paying state job with benefits, expressed apprehension upon receiving DACA. First, because she was unable to obtain an internship or other valuable experience to make her competitive in the labor

market; secondly, she was aware of the less than stellar job prospects college graduates have today. As a result, she informs other undocumented students, who have DACA, to take advantage of internships opportunities where they can increase their human capital. For undocumented youth with a college education or from a high socioeconomic status, DACA could be a mechanism for them to take advantage of their human capital. DACA not only provides a work permit but it allows college students to take advantage of the social capital of their institution to aid them during and after college. For example, Luisa Sanchez, 24, obtained an internship in Sacramento where she was able to connect to various leaders in the immigrant rights movement. She now has a full time job as a community organizer.

Yeah. I got a really, really iffy job. I have no idea. I'm sure I would have found a way, but I can't imagine myself being in that situation. It's really hard. And I've talked to people before me. People my age that went from high school to a four-year university, they had to pay two-years tuition on their own and their other two years were covered. Actually, the last year and a half. It didn't come until the spring of 2013, I believe. Um, so they had to only a year and a half. Even then, I don't think I could have paid like two and a half years of full tuition. So I'm sure that creates a lot more stress, right? Once I saw that the California DREAM Act was passed for Cal Grants, I knew that I just needed to wait another year and everything would be paid for.

Respondents with only a high school education face different barriers and have a different outlook of the opportunities available to them in the labor market. This has been the case for the Martinez brothers who migrated from Guadalajara, Mexico to the United States. Although both were tracked into ESL courses until high school, they hoped to attend college by enlisting in the Marines. Unfortunately, they were turned down because they were not legal permanent residents. This blow altered their view on education and career paths. For them, the completion of high school was the only realistic goal along with a job as a gardener, which is in demand, in the city where they live. Sergio Martinez (Pepe), 29 (interviewed when he was 27), has been working at a tire store for over five years. His employer is aware of his legal situation. Despite having a willing employer turn a blind eye on his legal status, Sergio was unable to obtain any significant pay increases or promotions. After DACA, his employer has entrusted him with more responsibilities that are preparing him for a managerial position. Jacobo Martinez, 29, works as a handyman/personal assistant for a family where he used to be their landscaper. DACA has allowed him to perform different tasks: driving his employer's car, traveling with him to other parts of the country, or be entrusted with more responsibilities.

Increased job opportunities and earnings were in clear display by the Martinez brothers. I went to one of their Sunday league soccer matches. Besides spending time in a place where Sergio and Jacobo felt happy and in control, I entered a community of immigrants that shared a passion to play soccer but also a venue to maintain a connection with people in similar circumstances as themselves. Fights, insults, hard tackles, and

enduring rivalries coated a meeting place for immigrants to inform others of potential jobs, lawyers, and immigration information. It was common to see the local paralegal hang out and provide legal help to all members of the soccer league. I sat on the sidelines with Señor Martinez who was drinking a beer from the six-pack on his side. He offered a beer and was aware of my research. Two beers in he explained how happy he was for his sons. He was very proud in telling me the increased earnings of his sons. Furthermore, the Martinez brother became part of a traveling Norteña Band that performs throughout southern California. As I walked to my car, I saw Jacobo take out his keys to wirelessly unlock his car. I was looking throughout the parking lot to see his car. To my surprise, they began stashing their gear into the trunk of a brand new Mercedes Benz. I immediately asked why he purchased a luxury car. He replied that he was tired of driving one thousand dollar cars for the last twelve years.

Besides economic mobility in their jobs, the Martinez brothers feel they have a stable ground to invest on their future. At this stage in their life, returning to school is not a realistic option for Sergio and Jacobo. Both are not married but have economic responsibilities they can't escape: car payments, rent, and supplementing their parent's income. Instead, they will use the skills they have learned over the last ten years (and their father's 20 years) as landscapers to open their own landscaping company. They work weekends and have a steady client base. Thus, Jacobo, who aspired to attend Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to earn a landscaping architecture degree, will be taking the CA landscaping contractor exam. With higher wages and a perceived sense of security, the Martinez family is saving their money in order to provide a significant down payment to

purchase a home. Sergio and Jacobo feel they can finally join one of the most important venues for wealth creation in the United States- home ownership.⁵¹

In contrast with college students or college graduates, DACA recipients that have worked in the labor market for the majority of their adult lives take an efficient/pragmatic approach towards future job prospect and increased income. Other respondents used their sibling's networks to obtain different jobs. For example, through his friend's network Joseph Contreras, 30, was able to obtain a loan sales representative job at a national bank. Previously, he worked several jobs and kept a stable source of income but he felt his legal status prevented him from securing a stable job. Currently, his ability to speak to an increasing Spanish speaking client base and strong overall performance has garnered attention from his supervisors. They are encouraging him to study so he can take the CA mortgage broker license.

The experience of the Martinez brothers and Joseph Contreras are best-case scenarios for DACA recipients with a high school education. Despite the increase of knowledge-based jobs, older respondents did not enroll in school. Some reasons given reasons for not continuing school are having a family, some are stay-at-home mothers, or have been discouraged from their previous educational experience from considering higher education. As a result, DACA may have increased their wages, but their opportunities are lateral and bounded within their established networks. Whether Sergio, Jacobo, and Joseph are able to fulfill their goals is too early to tell. But the impact of

⁵¹ Strikingly, their attempts towards wealth creation does not result in legalizing their status. In case they remain with DACA, they could be perceived as repeating a cycle of "undocumentedness" that began with their family.

DACA on the labor market of high school educated undocumented immigrants can be beneficial for some.

Social Security- Humanizing Process

Undocumented immigrants lack a social security number that limits their opportunities in the labor market, access to a pension, health insurance, and other social benefits. Many respondents view obtaining a Social Security number as necessary for integration into American society. Lacking a SSN has made life difficult for undocumented youth to apply for any form of financial aid, college entrance exams, school employment, or internships. Leading a life in the shadows brought much anxiety, fear, stigma, and depression. This caused many to drop out of high school or not continue post-secondary education. Before DACA, a SSN was viewed a conduit to a life they hoped to have.

Many have found alternate forms of ID as a proxy for a SSN. For example, many use an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) as a form to pay their taxes and document their existence in the United States. An ITIN⁵² is a federal tax number issued by the Internal Revenue Service regardless of a person's immigration status to file their taxes. Undocumented immigrants provide an ITIN number instead of a SSN as a form of ID during college entrance exams. Despite clever ways to limit their marginality, a social security number clearly delineates who is allowed to legally work and the various rights

⁵² An ITIN number is tax processing number issued by the Internal Revenue Services. They are issued to individuals who are required to have a U.S. taxpayer identification number but are unable to obtain a SSN. An ITIN number is used to report federal taxes. For more see: [irs.gov/individuals/general-itin-information](https://www.irs.gov/individuals/general-itin-information)

afforded. To most Americans, a SSN is just a number that needs to be remembered to fill out various forms. However, not having “those 9 digits” prevents many undocumented immigrants from formally entering the labor market. Without a SSN, many have not been able to implement the skills attained in school or start the life they wanted.

DACA status helps avoid the hassle of using alternative forms of identification to as a proxy. As previously stated, research has pointed to youth seeking their first job, obtaining a driver’s license, or other instances where a SSN is required informed them of their legal standing (Gonzales 2008, 2011). DACA allows nearly 2 million undocumented youth from working in the informal economy previous cohorts experienced.

Obtaining a SSN provides access for undocumented youth into social institutions from which they are generally excluded. Various years in the shadows restricts their choices. Now, what does a SSN mean for undocumented youth? Nancy, 19, a college student, explained what it meant to her:

It feels great. It kinda feels like just a certain sequence of numbers identify you, and it’s kinda sad to think about it like that. You know I feel accepted because I always felt that I belonged. But that push of the SSN (Social Security Number) enables me to feel like not ashamed...people won’t understand, I feel like.

Various respondents viewed obtaining a SSN as a humanizing process. How they view a SSN has two intertwined facets: identity and a relation to the state. A SSN is a unique sequence of numbers that breaks undocumented youth from

their previous limitations to navigate American institutions by being recognized by the state. For example, for Emilia, 20, the digits of her SSN “...means everything. Just because without them it’s hard to just do anything. Like when I got them I felt like I could do anything now.” This state issued identity is the first and most important form of identification by which the state recognizes a person’s existence within its jurisdiction. For the experience of various DACA recipients, lacking a state identity has been a primary mechanism that has constrained their lives within the rules and jurisdiction of the state. Moreover, having a state issued identity provides legitimacy as a member of society. Martha-Maria’s view of obtaining a SSN highlights this point.

It means becoming a better member of society and contributing to the place that we live in. I know so many people, so many students who take it for granted and it’s so frustrating watching them throw their life away and not do anything. They drop out of school or go live with their parents. They don’t even do anything. They don’t work. It’s frustrating to see that happen. And for me having a social[SSN] means so many opportunities that I can have. I can actually do something with it. Other people are just letting it go to waste.

The majority of respondents are aware of the liminality of DACA and their SSN. However, as mentioned above, their integration into various institutions and social spheres has significance, and it also impacts other facets of their daily life. This was the case for Veronica Yaris, 19, a sophomore in college who was not eligible for DACA. She explains what a SSN means to her:

It means I can work. It means I can put things under my name. My parents still drive without their driver's license and it's really hard. Two months ago, my mom got a ticket and they took her car away from her. That was really bad. It was not under their name. Not under my name. It's under my tio's name from Fresno. So he had to come all the way to get it. He has other issues over there so it was really hard. It's just been so hard. Not having a social security is so hard. You can't get insurance. My parents don't have insurance. Not even from his job or nothing. My sister doesn't have insurance. My brother is the only one. Me because I'm in college. If it wasn't for that.

Two months later in a car ride to a demonstration, Martha Maria provided and update on this incident. Her uncle drove from Fresno to get the car in Southern California. His action to salvage the car resulted in his dismissal from his job. Martha Maria's family feel guilty and some strain between her parents and her uncle developed. The ability to obtain a SSN allows Southern California undocumented youth the ability to obtain a CA drivers license significantly abated the institutionalized fear from ICE or law enforcement. As mentioned in chapter 2, Luz was able to elaborate on her experience before and after DACA.

I can drive with a driver's license. My car got stolen last week, they [the cops] don't have to ask 'where is your driver's license?' When you are victim of a crime, I don't have to worry that I was going to be put on the spot as a criminal.

When that happened I was like oh it would have been different two years ago. I would be like ahh should I report it or can someone report it for me.

Their relationship with the state has changed. DACA recipients view themselves as members of society or at least individuals that are no longer in constant fear of being deported. Luz's insightful view on her relationship with the state highlights the most prominent experience of undocumented immigrants- relationship with the state and/or its law enforcement- of being perceived as criminals. Javiera Cruz, a community college student points to her relationship with the state and the relief of dealing with law enforcement: *“Well, with the social[SSN] I feel good because I'm already in the system. If for any reason I'm pulled over and I'm finger printed.”* Her quote highlights the continued fear and distrust of law, but points to a new way undocumented youth react when they encounter the state via law enforcement, bureaucracy, or government agencies. Albeit temporary, a DACA lifts many to what Luz statement referred to “being put as a criminal” through the lens of law enforcement and, to a lesser extent, other institutions.

Driving & Obtaining a Car

Driving is a necessity because of the intricate, expansive freeway system in Southern California that is also plagued with an inadequate public transportation system. Undocumented immigrants must drive in order to work, go to school, or to attend family functions. Lacking a driver's license, undocumented immigrants must still drive the

hectic, congested, and often frustrating southern California highways.⁵³ - Driving under these conditions produces a lot of fear, anxiety as they attempted to go through their daily lives. The fear of being pulled over without an adequate form of identification that is satisfactory to the police, increases fear in undocumented immigrants. Coupled with federal programs, most notably 287g or Priority Enforcement program, there was the possibility of being stopped by a law enforcement officer could result in deportation.⁵⁴

Part of a rite of passage for undocumented youth is to learn how to navigate the California highway system either by driving or using the limited public transportation system. Many must risk driving daily. Thus, developing anxiety while driving and spotting a police car became part of their daily life. Respondents expressed how good they were in following the rules and behaving “natural” once law enforcement passed next to them. To all undocumented immigrants, being stopped meant losing their car, paying a huge fine, and possible deportation. The psychological impact of this relationship with the state has been endured for years, or in some instances- decades. For example, Lourdes Franco, 26, expressed her fears of being deported everyday as she returned home from work. Besides being deported to a country she has not seen in decades, she was afraid of leaving her children behind. Similarly, her children, and all

⁵³ Undocumented immigrants from Mexico can obtain a consular issued “ Matricula” as a form of ID. Unfortunately, California did not accept a matricula as form of legal residence in order to issue a CA drivers license. Beginning Jan 15th, 2015, CA AB 60 allows undocumented immigrants to obtain a drivers license. For information on consular issued ID’s see <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/consular-id-cards-mexico-and-beyond>.

⁵⁴LA county ended its relationship with ICE, in particular: Priority Enforcement Program, which situated immigration officials in county jails, was terminated by LA County. Program 287(g) which deputized state officials as defacto ice agents. <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-ice-los-angeles-287g-20150512-story.html>.

respondents, were in constant worry if their parents were deported if they failed to come home at a usual time.

There are other consequences of driving without a license. First, the rationale for purchasing a vehicle includes unusual variables. Unable to obtain direct credit, the purchase and registration of the car will be under the legal name of a legal resident/citizen of the United States. This is an extremely intricate relationship where there must be trust between both parties: one with a party being okay with their credit and name being used, and the other trust that the money given to the person whose name is on the loan is making the monthly payments. Many avoid this complex economic relationship, instead, many opt to purchase low priced cars. The logic behind this choice is based on the assumption they will be stopped by the cops and their car will be impounded. California fines drivers without a license up to \$1000 and a possible 30-day impound of the car. With costs adding up, it is cheaper to forfeit a cheap car than losing a new car while continuing to pay it off. Lastly, lack of medical and car insurance brings much fright in any accidents they are involved in.

This was the case of Nancy Milagro, 19, speaking of her experience driving before DACA:

I got, it wasn't a car accident, but I hit this pole on a curb and so my car went phummn and it hit the pole and the first thing, I was still in the initial review [of DACA] and the first thing I thought "If a cop drives by right now." I was not going to run, I was not going to call the police, I was not going to call a tow truck. They are going to give me a ticket and I do not have a license. I did not

care if I was fined or not, I was just so worried that a cop was going to drive by and ask for my license. I didn't have a license, I still don't. It was...that accident was my feeling of an everyday drive. The first thing I always think of is getting caught by the police and getting fined and all this, and obviously the cops came but my friend lived down the street and he ran and he blamed it[took the blame], he has a license, he blamed it ...it was a constant fear that I was going to get into trouble that he blamed it on himself. He was driving. This constant fear of the police, you know not having a license, what do I do? I had to have someone else blame himself for me because it would have been worse. So, but now when I get my own license it would be my own fault and you know I would be here is my license and insurance blah, blah, blah but it would not be as bad, you know, the whole [process is] intimidating without one. I do not know if that makes sense?

DACA recipients in southern California are eligible for a California driver's license. To many, this is the first legitimate form of United States identification they have had. With increased wages or money saved, purchasing a new car is a possibility. The fear they constantly faced has decreased. In many instances, before the implementation of CA-AB 60, DACA recipients shouldered increased responsibility by driving their parents or family members to run errands. In the case of Martha Maria, there is much relief of not paying a hefty fine and impound fee.

Basically I don't have to be in fear that the only car my mom has to move around in, the one that she can drive, it's going to be taken away. We're going to have to actually spend five to six hundred dollars trying to get it out.

This relief was voiced by Victor, 25, who spoke of the trouble of having his car impounded multiple times. During college he helped his mother clean homes in southern California. His mother was driving and was stopped by a police officer. Victor was unable to dissuade the officer from towing their car. He and his mother were abandoned in an affluent area with a large amount of cleaning supplies lined up in a curb and no way of getting home. I could hear the pain in Victor's voice as he shared this story during a PRISM meeting and during his interview. Now a college graduate in neuroscience, he obtained a well-paying job in the medical industry where his income allowed him to purchase a new car. Although it was not the luxury car he aspired to purchase, he opted for a car geared to deal with the increased mileage accrued in the vast southern California freeway system.

Similar to Victor's improved economic possibilities, DACA recipients with a stable job and increased wages invest in a newer car. Before DACA, Luz Negrette, 22, had bleak prospects for a good-paying job. In college she was active on campus while maintaining exemplary grades. She received DACA during her senior year, which allowed her to work on campus. This campus job provided her with valuable skills making her more competitive in the labor market. After graduation she obtained a full time position within higher education. Her old car was slowly breaking down and with

much hesitation she purchased a used car with low miles. A major setback for various Southern California DACA recipients has been obtaining a new car when dealers understand their permit is only for two years. Similarly, due to the liminality of their legal status, purchasing a new car is still viewed as a risk due to the fear of losing DACA while obligated to continue to make monthly payments. Respondents have been able to navigate these obstacles through social media by posting which banks, credit card companies, and car dealerships are allowing them to make big purchases as a car or a home.

Safety

Besides economic benefits, another significant impact of DACA is that it reduces stress while stopped by the police while driving or interacting with them at a checkpoint. Potential psychological terror has greatly decreased, or at least, has been temporarily suspended. The individual no longer needs to perform or pretend to be “normal.” Although several continue to police themselves and their bodies in order to not break any laws, they are aware of the fear they experience. Recognition of their relationship with the state affords them legal rights they did not have before. Our current immigration system does not spend large sums of taxpayer dollars to deport all 11 million undocumented immigrants and because of their contribution as taxpayers and specific role in the American economy. The notion of deporting all undocumented immigrants is a proper response to solve our current immigration system has been successful through media and other outlets in having society perceive them as criminals. In doing so, every

interaction with police outside homes or a place of safety was avoided when possible or negotiated with much caution. Nunez (2004) highlighted how undocumented families make a concerted effort to stay indoors to avoid any suspicion or unwarranted time outside. Therefore, this new relationship with the state is completely different than their previous relationship.

Various state and federal cases have demonstrated undocumented persons have various legal protections (Hiroshima 2014). Access to this legal knowledge is minimal. In some cases, the threat of deportation trumps any legal challenges they may have. Access to a CA ID or driver's license decreases or limits law enforcement officials from asking for their citizenship status or taking further actions which could result in higher fines and/or deportations. A sense of safety permeates other facets in the daily lives of undocumented youth in Southern California. Before DACA, undocumented youth limited themselves from going to parties, school events, or other social gatherings. This was done in order to avoid situations where their stay in the United States could be jeopardized. At the same time, this self-policing of their life caused much psychological pain.

Tanya Chavez, 20, spoke of feeling safe with DACA, but her relationship with the police remains relatively the same. She shares that *“relatively, I definitely know when it comes to like police in Isla Vista] or police on campus, there's still that, oh, there's a cop, you know. In other ways I'd say I feel pretty safe. The only way I do not feel is safe is definitely when there's cops involved.”* Tanya's response shows the impact of years living in fear of the police. Her apprehensions towards law enforcement can be directly

attributed to federal laws, such as 287 (g), that deputize law enforcement officials to become de facto immigration officers. Thus, immigrant communities view law enforcement officials and immigration as the same entity. This has prevented immigrant communities from reporting crimes for fear of deportation. In Simon Candelario's case (see Chapter 4), he understands the lack of respect cops have to the community they serve. Simon's interaction with the police reminds him DACA did not change his relationship with law enforcement. Although his deportation is deferred, Simon continues to endure another form of oppression in the United States-racism.

Before DACA, their legal status is a master identity. Although undocumented youth's primary identity continues to be based on their legal status, DACA allows them to interact with new individuals and institutions where they are introduced to new and different forms of discrimination and racism. In the *United States v Brignoni Ponce* (1975), the Supreme Court permits law enforcement officials to racially profile American citizens and immigrants that have features that are perceived to be associated with undocumented immigrants. Law enforcement is allowed to conflate race and legal status. Therefore, a person with "Mexican" features can be stopped by law enforcement because of the possibility of the individual being an undocumented immigrant.

I followed up with Simon six months after and asked him about this particular experience and what he thought of it. Coming from a predominantly Mexican neighborhood and city with a large undocumented population, Simon through his own personal experience (see Chapter 4) and witness to his friends being profiled explained how law enforcement officials, regardless of legal status, consider every Latino as an

undocumented immigrant. Simon's observation allowed me to conceptualize the transition DACA recipients from Mexico and Central American experience as they integrate into American institutions and society: from being undocumented to being perceived as undocumented.

Having a Normal Life with "Undocu Moments"

Life of undocumented youth becomes extremely difficult as they reach adulthood. Lacking proper documentation has stifled their goals, educational attainment, and life as functioning members of society. Although many learn and are informed of their legal status during high school, they are structurally still following the same trajectory as their peers. They maintain a persistent hope that immigration reform could pass during their high school years that would prevent a life they inevitably dread and mentally prepare for. Difficulty ensues after high school when they enter the labor market, or college, which has caused many to endure years of depression. Unable to become legally integrated members of society has brought a lot of anxiety, stress, and psychological trauma. Socialized in American society, many clearly understand what life they should be leading in accordance to social expectations and rewards. The contrast between their conception of reality and the reality they find themselves in highlights their marginalization in society, but most importantly, it informs them of the legal barriers that are beyond their control. Unable to have complete control of their life is the primary cause of respondents feeling left out or feeling helpless in their situation. The longer undocumented immigrants live in "the shadows," the stronger their conviction is that

their legal status will never change. Despite these structural limitations they face as adults, the majority of respondents continue to pursue jobs, attend college and university, and lead a functional social lives. This section highlights how DACA impacts an individual's perception of her or his life while not fully integrated due to migratory status, and the economic and political consequences of such status. This documentation aims to provide a view of the process of coming out of the shadows as a functioning and adequately integrated member of American society.

DACA impacts two different groups of undocumented immigrants: applicants who received DACA before the age of 18 and those who obtained DACA between the ages of 18 and 31. This age difference is extremely important in the life outcomes of a DACA recipient for two reasons. First, DACA recipients under the age of 18 are able to sidestep obstacles that greatly influenced the undocumented identity formation of previous cohorts of undocumented youth before DACA. For example, older respondents who came of age before DACA joked that their transition to adulthood involved being denied a drivers' license or having to work under the table. They learned to view these experiences as a rite of passage for undocumented youth in southern California. DACA recipients under the age of 18, on the other hand, are able to work and drive legally, and obtain an ID card. Their inability to acquire these important documents is considered the most difficult stage for undocumented youth (Gonzales 2008, 2011). DACA recipients ages 16 through 18 experienced a different form of othering and marginalization in comparison to older cohorts. Previous research demonstrated how legal status prevented

undocumented youth from entering school, the labor market through their interaction with institutions (Abrego 2008, Gonzales & Gleeson 2011).

Undocumented youth under the age of 18 with DACA recognize their limitations through their parent's continued lack of documentation. Despite having a similar school life as their peers, they must wait until they reach 16 to be able to drive and have a CA ID that allows them to blend in with the rest of their peers. The major cause for the "othering" for youth under the age of 18 does not come from school- but from the worthiness of their families argued in the media. President Obama's executive order of DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans) could defer the deportation of various families. However, the current judicial chess match between xenophobic judges and the state department has stalled the implementation of DAPA. Before judicial stalling of DACA, Mountain High DREAMers were optimistic for their parents. Flyers with dates for free legal assistance for DAPA were distributed in meetings. During my interviews, youth under the age 18 before DAPA was announced did not really watch the news and were unaware of the history struggle by other undocumented immigrants, not eligible for DACA, endured for DAPA to be implemented. Activism did not increase after the postponement of DAPA, but their introduction to the precariousness of their status or "illegality" came from the increased attention from the media on undocumented immigrants.

Media saturation coupled with fascist rhetoric from xenophobic presidential hopefuls informed undocumented youth of the polarizing view society has on undocumented immigrants. Everyday reminders on experts arguing whether

undocumented immigrants should be given a pathway to citizenship or should their parents be deported reveals how large segments of the society perceive their worthiness in U.S. society. Although activism increased, in fact several respondents expressed being apolitical, after the legal stall of DAPA, all underage respondents paid significant attention to the news or social media to be informed on immigration related news. The rise of fascist presidential hopefuls campaigning for the removal of undocumented immigrants, birthright citizenship, and DACA informs through large crowds with openly racist signs jubilantly in support of this course of action is an unavoidable message and symbol all undocumented youth face. Therefore, they follow the same fears of older respondents of DACA terminated if the “wrong” president is elected.

The second category of DACA recipients is a population of different ages, hence of varying experiences who have all endured adult life as undocumented immigrants. They have lived a life of fear, marginalization, and economic exploitation for years and in some instances- over a decade. Besides structural marginalization, self-policing their bodies triggered by fear of law enforcement officials during their everyday life left much trauma. Although undocumented youth is a heterogeneous population, these two heuristic categories allow us to explore the impact of legal, social, economic, and institutional exclusion and subsequent incorporation at different life stages. They help us understand the process by which an individual living as an undocumented immigrant for years, and whose life has been stunted, is potentially able to start leading a life of her or his own making, unconstrained by structural forces beyond their control. Also, they allow us to

begin to understand the emotional and psychological impact of living as an undocumented immigrant.

Before DACA, I had difficulty evaluating the emotional state of the organization PRISM during my first few meetings. Members were happy to see each other in a safe space where attendees understood their situation. At the same time, a somber atmosphere was felt as the meetings neared a close. As I immersed myself with this student group, I came to understand why meetings followed this trajectory. A large portion of PRISM meetings provided ample time for each member to talk. Similar to an extended version of a roll call, each member, when they chose to talk, informed the audience of their status since their last previous meeting. Most updates addressed issues they all face: looming midterms, lack of sleep, and roommate problems. On the surface, one would assume PRISM members lead a traditional college life. But as members shared updates, I was able to discern their experience was different through the facial expressions of other members. They were happy to hear from them. It brought relief to several members to hear their friend/peer was still in school.

Members would worry if someone missed a couple of meetings. Absence meant the possibility that an individual dropped out of school because she or he was unable to afford to pay tuition. Although not all were close friends, there was a bond and solidarity between all members because of their legal status and struggle to finish school. Everyone was rooting for each other to graduate. A member taking time off or dropping out reminded others of the precariousness of their situation. As members became comfortable with my presence in meetings, they began to divulge the various weekly problems they

endure as they attempted to complete their degree. Several members expressed their worry as to how they were going to generate sufficient money at the end of the month to make their next tuition payment. Those graduating began contemplating life after college, which is a common dilemma for all college students, but this worry was heightened because they also worried about how to best utilize their degree without a Social Security Number. Thus, each meeting brought much relief to see their peers continue this struggle. Yet, as each meeting came to a close, PRISM members return to the reality of the uncertainty of their lives.

Members made light of their situation during these roll calls. Each had a story of being denied entrance to a bar or purchasing an item at the grocery store. Victor, 23, vividly recounted his encounter with a Mexican-American cashier. On a Friday night, Victor and several friends went to a grocery store to purchase a case of beer. As they waited in line, they overheard the cashier speak in Spanish to the customer ahead of them. Hearing a Spanish-speaking cashier or an individual that might require an ID for a transaction brings relief to any undocumented immigrant. This relief comes from the assumption that any person speaking Spanish will accept a matricula as a valid form of ID. Victor offered to pay for the beverages. The cashier asked for an ID to ensure Victor was not underage. Victor handed his Mexican matricula to prove he was over 21 years of age. The cashier meticulously examined the matricula as a foreign object seen for the first time, which necessitated the manager inspecting the validity of the ID. The manager, a white male, told Victor that his matricula was not an accepted form of identification. Victor was not surprised by the manager's response. He was disappointed with the

Mexican- American whom he assumed understood his situation and would not create such a big spectacle. Victor finished his story with a joke “this guy, who has a nopal (cactus) in his forehead is pretending that he does not know any undocumented immigrants?! Please!” The entire room erupted in laughter since many experienced a similar interaction as Victor. However, Victor never considered the cashier was following a strict protocol the cashier was buying of requiring an ID to purchase alcohol.

Besides economic gains, a large portion of college students or graduates and respondents have felt and perceived a form of acceptance through their increased freedom in American society. Increase in wages has afforded them the opportunity to become a more profitable consumer. Budgeting their income continues to be a characteristic many have adopted after DACA due to their experience of stretching their finances during school. At the same time, college students and graduates participate in social and economic activities from which they previously excluded themselves. A common pattern among this group of respondents has been the ability to eat out, a corner stone of American life. In particular, respondents with romantic partners spoke of going out more to restaurants, movies, and activities that require disposable income. Going out to bars, visiting other cities, or purchasing new shoes or clothes are the most common spending trends of my respondents. Several have purchased new cars, while others have been able to move out. Juan Jose, 25, a college graduate, felt fortunate in obtaining a well-paying job with a prestigious law firm. During our conversation he expressed apprehension about moving out. This was the first time he would be living on his own. Cognizant that his legal status delayed properly meeting adult responsibilities, Juan remained nervous of

becoming financially independent. He expressed concern about his ability to properly file his taxes, other financial knowledge he was legally allowed to participate in and not privy to that type of information.

Several PRISM members have been able to take advantage of the advanced parole exemption under DACA. Advanced parole lets DACA recipients travel outside the United States up to six months for educational or work related purposes. In college, study abroad was another reminder to undocumented students of their limitations in school and society. Previously, respondents lied to their friends why they did not travel to Mexico for Christmas. Through advanced parole, undocumented college students can now study abroad or travel to other states around. Yet, the majority are choosing institutions close to their native city so they are able to meet friends, family members. But staying close is a choice of their own rather than a migratory constraint imposed on them.

These newfound privileges have integrated undocumented youth into social spheres they were not able to participate in before. Their incorporation into institutions, social circles, and schools that previously neglected them has altered their self-perception in relation to their peers. For example, Sandra Trujillo, 19, shared the shift in how she viewed herself in comparison to her peers. *“I guess it made me feel like I could actually do stuff now. You know. Before I couldn’t. I opened a checking account. Just regular, I guess everyday things...Yeah, I do. Just like everybody else now.”* More than half of the respondents used the word “normal” to express their current situation. Although all were hesitant to use that word since it expressed there was something wrong with them before

DACA, they used this word to express a life they expected to lead. Victoria, who now is one of the first undocumented students attending a very prestigious professional school, is speaking of having a CA ID. She is speaking of having an ID and what that means to her. At the same time, she articulates the reminder of her continued limitations in society as she aids others in career and professional development.

Yeah, Uhhh...having a California ID is a big thing. It's an identification. It shows that I am a California resident. That makes me feel like normal. But, it also, does not make me feel... what was the question... but I also see my life not being normal because I am involved I a lot of health professions groups. They will make me a peer mentor for them. I am president of the future dentist. Like, I am really involved being a dentist and when I tell people about all the new opportunities I still know that I cannot do them, but I am telling them because they should know. Or whenever I hear about one, I will research about it, I will write it down for my club, it's not for me, the cooler kids get it. Like, I don't get it. So I wish that I got it.

Victoria is pointing to a continued experience of undocumented youth where increased privileges decreases integrate them to society but face new or continued obstacles that inform their relationship with the state. These events occurred multiple times to PRISM members and respondents when they first obtained their permit. I became aware of this occurring pattern in spring of 2013 as PRISM members were starting to get jobs on campus. During an April morning in 2013, I was sitting at a table with Nancy and other PRISM members. They were tabling in the middle of campus to spread information on the CA Dream Act and DACA around campus. In the Spring of

2013, many undocumented youth were unaware of the DACA or their eligibility for financial aid under the CA Dream act. They were talking about upcoming midterms and catching up on their new jobs. I asked Nancy about her new job, she just got hired to work on campus. Nancy, always smiling, was telling me the joy of applying for a job. However, in all applications she had to say she was not a citizen or legal permanent resident which she called an “undocu moment.” I feigned not understanding what she was referring to, so I asked her to explain. She said “*you know... moments that remind you that you are undocumented.*” Her experience before DACA of being treated differently by not having an ID or unable to apply for FASFA were instances of that reinforced her “illegality (Gonzales 2011).” These undocu moments are interpreted through the lens and understanding as an undocumented immigrant denied access. International students or immigrants with visas do not interpret being a citizen or a legal resident as marginalization, but as a status they do not have or aspire to attain. In contrast, any form of continued exclusion is seen as continued exclusion in which they interpret as being undocumented. During my interviews and PRISM meetings, undocu moments were very common. The following are some of the most common instances: government or federal jobs limited only to citizens, graduate/professional school where they are admitted but are not eligible for any funding, unable to travel outside the country, filling out job applications, and access to internships.

Despite new challenges, undocumented youth viewed their life in positive terms. This mirrored their new plans and playing the catch up game. Most respondents lived with their parents. Initially, only a small number, those in four-year institutions, live

outside the parental household. Their job instability and low pay made it an easy choice to stay with their parents after graduating high school. Despite the cultural acceptance of most immigrant families, many respondents expressed frustration at their inability to move out. Although respondents that lived with their parents or family members were clearly aware of the limitations their legal status placed on them and were appreciative, grateful- they were frustrated by the lack of choice if they wanted to move out. For those who compared the trajectory and “where and what they should be doing” in terms of American society felt stifled, thwarted, and stunted from leading the life they deemed appropriate.

Younger respondents are aware their experience differs from previous undocumented student cohorts. Take Leandra Martinez, she endured 3 months without DACA and 1 year without the CA Dream Act. During that time, she experienced firsthand the struggles of her older peers. Yet, at the same time, she was fully aware her experience as an undocumented 19-year-old woman was following a similar trajectory as her documented peers.

A little bit, yeah. I mean in comparison to undocumented students who had come years before me, definitely. My coming to UC was more traditional. There were still some challenges. At some point we were worried because they were about to take my financial aid away because my parents' marriage license...I put yes that they were married because they are married, but in Mexico. And UC was about to take my financial aid away and I was like, no, no, no. And my brother had that problem too. I had to go up with him to get that fixed because I'd gone through

the same process. It did have its challenges, but it was more on the documents side. I had to do more paperwork. Other than that I've had the same struggles as someone from a low income would face.

Leandra's experience an undocu moment, where later in the interview she used as an example of her continued undocumented identity, but she pointed towards another form of barrier she faces- class. Although her class position has remained the same, her legal status framed her relationship with society. Her class position was not salient due to the heightened form of exclusion in almost every aspect of her life. Financial aid continues to be an issue for undocumented students. But what Leandra along with respondents are eluding to is the manner in which their class position will impact their lives. Their legal status continued to be their primary form of limitations in society, but many are noticing the manner in which class and race in the U.S. manifests in upward mobility.

In contrast, non-DACA recipients continue to face a life of uncertainty. They are simultaneously happy for their peers but frustrated for being unable to enjoy some of the benefits of DACA. In the face of increased CA state legislations, non-DACA respondents continue to endure exclusion and stress associated with being an undocumented immigrant. Villaluz Orozco, 19, explained her current situation without DACA.

I think all the work I did being validated. I've worked my whole life for this and I'm kind of stalled. I'm at this point where I'm about to finish and nothing's going to happen after this. I think having a social [security number] would be a validation of my work. Now you work, go ahead and do this. Especially with, you

know, DACA recipients, can get their diploma and go out and work. A lot of people are currently working and stuff. At least for me, not having DACA and not having that little number is just ridiculous. I can't see what's going to happen next. It's still really dark on the other side.

It is difficult for the non-DACA respondents I interviewed to maintain an optimistic outlook on their future. Several have been unable to provide evidence they lived in the US before the cutoff date or migrated to the US a day or two after. They expressed frustration and discontent as they explained their ineligibility.

The trajectory of undocumented youth first must be understood between those eligible and ineligible for DACA. This initial categorization clearly highlights the impact of a liminal legal status has in limiting the everyday life of undocumented youth. There are disparate trajectories for undocumented youth. Several variables determine the level of integration of undocumented youth such as race, class, educational level, geographical location, and age in which they received DACA. This section attempted to provide a glimpse of how undocumented youth in southern California are experiencing DACA. However, it is not attempting to generalize such a diverse population without a representative national survey.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive snapshot on the impact of DACA on the everyday lives of undocumented youth and how they interpreted these changes. My field notes, interviews, and time with PRISM make a strong claim

suggesting that DACA has improved various facets of their everyday life. The relief of being able to endure less hassle in their everyday life is a fact any person would experience. Individuals at different life stages are impacted in differently. Respondents who were under the age of 18 have been able to sidestep previous undocumented rites of passage. Adults with a high school education are able to drive and apply for different jobs. But they are constrained by their social capital and economic networks. Along with the protection from DACA, undocumented youth speak of having confidence in being able to lead their lives with less hassle and view themselves as members of society. Their peers being the comparison group, undocumented youth compare feel they can be involved in similar forms of activities, which they were unable to partake in, as their peers.

Obtaining an identification card and a SSN prevented or halted a major venue to their previous exclusion from American society. In some instances, respondents continued to carry their Mexican passport or matricula as a primary form of identification to challenge people unwilling to recognize a non-California ID. This approach was geared to challenge the racial assumptions that all people from Mexico are illegal by showing their Mexican ID's so they could be denied access by immediately showing their CA ID or Driver's license. From their perspective, this approach was an educational tool implemented to stores, bars, law enforcement, and schools that previously denied or used racialized language.

Overall, this chapter portrays the complex existence of DACA recipients in Southern California. New doors are opened while at the same time other doors remain

closed. They face new barriers as they enter social spheres. Respondents with a high school education predominantly had little upward mobility. Instead, it was a lateral move because their job options and networks remained unchanged. This lateral move is prevalent with respondents that obtained their GED or started their own families. DACA recipients attending college or that have completed their degree are more likely to increase their social capital due to their networks along with resources available in their colleges or universities.

CHAPTER 6:
**“Don’t Label Me a DREAMER”: People and Student Activists
Distancing Themselves from the DREAMER Identity.”**

INTRODUCTION

During my field work, I came across several events that made a strong impression on me. In this case, it is the number of undocumented youth in Southern California perceiving the DREAMer identity as polemical left a strong impression. One usually associates these impressions through rallies, events, or public events in which undocumented youth come out of the shadows in public events, demonstrate in front of ICE, or engage in heated discussions with university administrators of the inequities they face. These events have left a lasting impression, such that they form the basis for Chapter 4.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the reasons why undocumented youth and college students in campus organizations are intentionally avoiding the DREAMer identity. Undocumented youth continue to identify as undocumented through a binary framework of inclusion/exclusion (see chapter 3.) For undocumented youth in college organizations and activists, how they understood their identity led them to question the social and political implications of choosing to identify as a DREAMer.

The chapter highlights how the term undocumented in being used as global term to be inclusive of the entire undocumented population instead of a group specific term. Group specific terms such as AB-540 and DREAMer mitigate stigma (Abrego 2011) and empower activism. The life expectancy for group specific terms that has no negative connotations is influenced by the altering economic, social, and political climate. In this

case, the use and acceptance of the term DREAMer by undocumented youth has changed since its inception now is becoming increasingly contested. Moreover, the legitimacy of the term is also based on whether it is coopted by social media and politicians that results in the specific group no longer controlling the narrative of the term.

The term DREAMer came to be associated with neoliberal citizenship. Undocumented youth became aware that their perceived success was used to create a hierarchy of worthiness for legalization among immigrants. In southern California, a growing number of DACA recipients refused to identify as a DREAMer or expressed concerns about the elitist connotations of this term. The DREAMer narrative suggests that highly undocumented youth are great benefits to the American economy and society. From their perspective, the change in the connotation of the term DREAMer criminalizes their families and a large portion of the undocumented immigrant population. They also expressed concerns about the loss of control of the DREAMer narrative as they saw policy makers and the media use this narrative to justify the exclusion of large portions of the undocumented immigrant community from legalization

In order to provide a life cycle of the term dreamer and how it's understood by undocumented students and activist, the first section of this chapter will provide a brief history of the term DREAMer and its role in the undocumented rights movement. The second section demonstrates the experience of undocumented students in PRISM before and after DACA. Subsequently, the third section delves into the evolution of PRISM through its activism on campus, their choice of what to name their program, and their response to the term DREAMer. Lastly, the final section elaborates how undocumented

students and activist understand the term DREAMer under the current economic and political climate.

DREAMER AND THE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The introduction of the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) bill in 2001 was designed to provide the growing number of undocumented youth a pathway to citizenship. The bill's requirements focused on undocumented youth that migrated at an early age, were educated and socialized into American society. Its failure to gain Senate majority defeated the aspirations of thousands of deserving youth ready to become members of United States society. Instead of losing the wind in their sails from not being passed, the bill generated a slowly developing hurricane of students mobilizing into activism. Undocumented youth who would have benefited from DREAM act are now known as DREAMers through self-identification or through social media coverage. My definition differs from de la Torre and German's definition of DREAMers: (2014: 450):

[as] undocumented immigrants in their teens, twenties and thirties who reveal their undocumented status in support of the DREAM Act – have become a recognizable and persuasive force in US immigration politics despite having no formal political power (de la Torre and German 2014: 450).

The authors' assumption is that only politically active individuals identify as DREAMers, but many others identify because they are aware they fit the DREAMer identity. Thousands of undocumented youth mobilized together and identified as DREAMers to highlight the current anachronistic immigration policy and the failure of society to fulfill

its promise of rewards to individuals that epitomize the American Dream. As children they were promised and believed in the bootstraps immigrant narrative that anyone that worked hard, followed the rules, and excelled in school would reap the benefits from the richest country in the world. Their activism and visibility in the immigrant rights movement gained the attention of American media and politicians. This chapter seeks to shed light on the historical, economic, social conditions that have transformed the meaning of this identity. This identity evolved from a politically strategic choice to demanding immigration reform to an increasing apprehension on their part to self-identify as a DREAMer.

According to de la Torre and Germano (2014), a major premise behind the DREAMer identity “is to invert and confound negative images of undocumented immigrants by revealing the complexity of immigrant biographies, highlighting the similarities that come with acculturation, and demonstrating immigrants’ contributions to society” (de la Torre and Germano (2014:450). The term “illegal” is associated with undocumented youth. A unifying factor for undocumented youth is the shared experience of “illegality”⁵⁵. As undocumented youth enter adulthood, American rites of passage and institutions inform them of their marginalized status in U.S. society as “illegals.” They learn through experiences and symbols of the stigma associated with the term that causes anxiety, stress, and frustration. Along with their orientation toward being “illegal,” their everyday life and experiences as undocumented immigrant generates daily fear.

⁵⁵ As undocumented youth came to learn to be “illegal” as they gained a better understanding of relationship with the state and their marginalization as they pass through American rites of passage (Gonzales 2011).

Undocumented youth active in the movement and those in the periphery used this identity to fight the stigma associated with the label illegal. Identifying as a DREAMer takes away the stigma of being an undocumented immigrant; while simultaneously empowering the individual. The effect of this identify is evident through the various news, stories, and articles speaking of their bravery and courage to disclose their identity and fight for immigration reform. Their visibility in mainstream society has resulted in widespread support from various political and interest groups.

Widespread support for the DREAM Act and immigration reform reached Congress in 2010 and the Senate in 2011.⁵⁶ Youth activists' persistence, dedication, and pressure on President Obama to fulfill his promise of tackling immigration reform resulted in DACA (Deferred Action for early Childhood Arrivals). Obama's executive order implemented through prosecutorial discretion of the DHS changed hundreds of thousands of lives.⁵⁷ DACA was exclusively tailored to help undocumented youth who fit the criteria under the DREAM Act. Unfortunately, by the time DACA was came to effect some of the original DREAMers' age made them ineligible for this program. The meaning and political message of identifying as a DREAMer had changed for those who found themselves locked out of the benefits from DACA. DACA recipients were not able to celebrate their new gained rights with some of their ineligible peers who were also DREAMers and some even family members.

⁵⁶ See chapter 3 For overview of the DREAM act and the mobilization after the failure to pass the bill.

⁵⁷ <https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/s1-exercising-prosecutorial-discretion-individuals-who-came-to-us-as-children.pdf>

This new eligible-ineligible dichotomy created by DACA requirements led activists to question the message it sent to the rest of society. Activists were no longer the only individuals identifying as DREAMers. Undocumented youth who were politically active became aware of this movement and identified through friends, teachers, and the media. Although various organizations changed the meaning of their mission, their success in gaining support from politicians, the media, and society worked extremely well in highlighting the inherent problems with current immigration policy and viewing undocumented students as worthy of their support. Unfortunately, the media and politicians latched on to this term and began associating all undocumented youth as DREAMers. The control of the image and story of DREAMers to push for the passage of the legislation was no longer in the control of activists themselves.

The public perception of the DREAMer identity changed after DACA. First, undocumented youth found the limitations associated with the term through their friends, family, and community. The image portrayed in the media of what life as a DREAMer was erroneous and did not begin to cover its complexities in a multilayered reality in public and at home. Politically active and uninvolved respondents, felt guilty of their newfound privileges while their family and community remained criminalized. As discussed in chapter 4, their transition into a new, albeit temporary, minimal legal status did not alter their everyday life and their perception of their place in society. Although their everyday life changed, their perception did not. After DACA they continued to face various challenges and experiences prior to DACA that perpetuated their stress and angst. Thus, undocumented youth choose to identify as undocumented after DACA as a result

from the combination of the temporary nature of DACA and their previous experience of living various of years. These lingering “illegal” experiences helped create a binary framework of exclusion/inclusion that informs how they self-identify. In 2012, the U.S.’s response to the dynamic, influential DREAM movement resulted in DACA. As a result, activists and undocumented youth experienced in their everyday lives the limitations of the term DREAMer as they experienced specific structural legal challenges themselves, those too old to qualify for DACA, or as they witnessed friends and family members being shut out of DACA benefits.

Secondly, the influence of the media on the term DREAMer is evident when it is negatively manipulated by controversial social-media figures, most notably the Democratic presidential candidates, to create the undocumented immigrant experience narrative. The efficacy of DREAMers in demanding immigration reform for their benefit by pointing out inherent limitations within current policy, pointing out their educational achievements and potential contributions to society who were portrayed as not responsible for their status because they migrated without their volition gained broad public support. Organizations and activists after DACA preemptively modified the meaning, mission, and message of the term DREAMer in order to avoid the creation of a hierarchy of worthiness that media, politicians, and policy makers would embrace. Unfortunately, the control over the DREAMer identity and the narrative is now beyond activists control. The media appropriated control over the message and meaning of the DREAMer movement. It is an extremely powerful tool in oppressive states, in particular the South, where the term serves as a source of empowerment for undocumented students

because of the exclusionary anti-immigrant laws. However, in states like California, the term has gained and increasingly negative connotation among undocumented youth who view the term as exclusionary. In high school, the DREAMer identity is used strategically among teachers and students in order to provide vital information on DACA and college information to other undocumented youth. Some high school students identified as a DREAMer but their perception changes through their increased life experiences as adults and/or in higher education.

THEN AND NOW: UNDOCUMENTED PRISM EXPERIENCE

PRISM began as a small group of undocumented students and allies that met once a week to provide emotional support during the difficulty of completing their high school education. Eventually, with PRISM became a student organization. The aim of this section is to provide a trajectory of this small student group into a highly visible student center in the middle of campus. Vicente is the founding member of PRISM in 2007. He has been interviewed multiple times but was excited to talk about PRISM. He described his experience as the founding member of PRISM:

You know what? One thing that I got from college is how powerful telling your story is. Being a part of PRISM and being part of the founding group. It was beautiful. I remember a lot of my colleagues changing their names when presenting [themselves to the rest of the group]. Sometimes social issues don't come easy to me. I'm a biologist. I have to think about what these constructs are. What it really means. What's being defined. What is not being explicitly said. And

it struck me once at one of the conferences. Why is this person changing their name? Why aren't they using their real name? Then I looked at them and it was a different name. Oh crap, it was a different name. That's why.

Founding PRISM members used different names to protect the stigma during group meetings. They utilized different names to avoid strangers from knowing their true identity.

Undocumented students were not recognized by the administration on campus. Vicente's experience as a student revolved on paying in state tuition, living in fear, living in his friend's couch for months at a time, and with no viable options to implement his degree upon graduation. The fear these students faced every day is seen with the need to change their names in an undocumented student organization! Rodolfo had a similar experience as Vicente. Their years in college overlapped. I would always see Rodolfo with a smile even though he was sleep deprived, with bags under his eyes. Currently, he is in law school where he was appointed as editor of the school's law journal. Rodolfo came to campus before he sat down with me. He is in disbelief of the progress PRISM has made since he left school three years ago. In disbelief he speaks on this drastic change:

***Rodolfo:** In fact, right before our meeting here I stopped by LSP [Latino Studies Program] and I discover that we now have a space. Like a legitimate office, staff, a director and it was an incredible feeling. Walking into the space and knowing that generations to come are going to have a space...where [there]is...They don't have to fear. They can go for resources, they can go for education, they can go for*

help...it's a space where they can identify...yes we did have LSP before but even then I know I was uncomfortable for saying... 'Oh well, I am undocumented and is there help for me?' ...now [it] is very out there...and is like um...the program is[an] undocumented student program.

EE: Did you ever envision this?

Rodolfo: It's incredible never in a million years [did] I think I would see a space like that at the university. I cannot thank the people to help this enough...it means so much...even as a person who already graduated and is going back. I was talking with Carola, the director, and she was telling me that the numbers [of undocumented students] are multiplying

Vicente and Rodolfo provide the drastic changes that occurred over the last few years. Their experience of living in a state of fear where their friends use pseudonyms is much different that today's students who have access to their own student center. For Vicente and Rodolfo, college without the CA Dream Act, DACA, and other legislations prevented them from envisioning any change. Devoting their time and attention to working to pay for their tuition, they did not have time to discuss the meanings of their identity. Their predecessors have a different school experience and historical context that placed the burden on choosing their identity. The political attention that has divided the country and alerted undocumented youth the political nature of their existence. Coupled with their experience (see Chapter 4), undocumented youth continue to identity as an undocumented immigrant is also a political choice.

DREAM CENTER OR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT PROGRAMS?

Each Thursday in the fall of 2013, I attended PRISM's weekly Thursday meetings. The third meeting in November I became aware of the conflict and the negotiations undocumented students engaged in with the term DREAMer after the implementation of DACA and the CA Dream Act. I was ten minutes late to their meeting because I stopped by to purchase a meal from El Pollo Loco. It was a warm November night in Southern California where a sweater was not required. This particular meeting was on my mind throughout the day for several reasons. First, the impact of DACA and the CA Dream act on their educational trajectories and opportunities was becoming evident. Secondly, PRISM members were starting to view me as part of their group or becoming accustomed to my presence. Our interactions were more uninhibited. They viewed me as an ally or member instead of an academic solely focused on research. Lastly, for several years undocumented students and PRISM incessantly set up meetings with school administrators asking for a center with resources and staff particular to the need of undocumented students. Administrators always replied there were limited resources or they could not follow through with their requests because they were legally constrained. The fall of 2013 turned out to be a seminal point for PRISM and undocumented students in their university. After many years, school officials agreed to create a center addressing their particular academic and social needs.

PRISM members were happy to finally have their demands addressed but were aware of the circumstances that allowed for the creation of their Center. Less prestigious schools were creating centers for undocumented students. A high-ranking administrator

was embarrassed the campus “was falling behind” in providing equitable resources to its growing undocumented population. Schools were getting money to undocumented students at UC and CSU levels to provide school services. Lastly, with DACA and the CA Dream Act, a growing number of students were entering higher education that forced school officials to no longer pretend it was not a problem. The convergence of these events and circumstances the administration provided PRISM the opportunity and majority control to create a mission statement outlining the goals of the undocumented center. Meetings with administrators that Fall were going surprisingly well which caught several of the older members off guard. They had grown accustomed to indifference or the usual rhetoric of the school having no legal venues to help them.

I entered a room where a student program housed its small library. Three couches were positioned similar to a horse shoe facing the door. I expected the meeting to focus on where on campus to house the center. In the middle of the room was a coffee table filled with Little Caesars Pizza and large bottles of soda. Students were discussing what to name the center. Through various years of advocacy, PRISM members were also given the privilege on naming the undocumented student resource center. Members at the meeting were energized and engaged on what to name the center but also on what it meant for the rest of the undocumented student population. DREAM Center is a common term used in other campuses. Students were aware of other campuses in California having centers for various years. They were upset about why their school, with a large and growing undocumented student population, was behind. Their frustration stemmed from the following circumstances: lack of safe space to meet with other students if similar

circumstances, a staff knowledgeable of their experience that could assist them in their academic progress. Graduating seniors were not going to benefit from this center, but were heavily invested on the mission and goal of the program.

In previous meetings, discussion topics centered on their experience as undocumented students, social events, outreach, or casual talk between members. What made this meeting between PRISM members different was the discussion of their political views or stances in this particular space. Despite being undocumented, PRISM members have varying life experiences and family backgrounds but the majority come working class background. Still several of them identified as middle class when they lived in Mexico, other members' parents were college educated or had obtained professional degrees in Mexico. Others were raised in affluent areas in California as passed to be considered "white". Indeed, these differences shaped their experience as undocumented immigrants, their chances of academic success, and how the dominant society treated them based on racial hierarchy. Class, racial, and political differences played little to no importance in PRISM meetings because any differences were supplanted by their experience as an undocumented immigrant. Not all undocumented students are politically progressive or active because they choose not to be informed about American political life and its realities. In fact, some respondents divulged their conservative inclinations, or that of their parents, although undocumented, supported the Republican party.

The discussion of the appropriate name to give the Center came from two camps: younger PRISM members that entered with the CA Dream Act and eventually obtained DACA and older PRISM members that had to take years off during school because of the

difficulty financing their education who and lived without DACA for several years as adults. Two prominent names emerged: Dream Center (younger members) or Undocumented Student Programs (older members). Older respondents did not transition to college with DACA and the CA Dream Act. They endured various struggles and years to self-finance their education through their eligibility of CA AB-540. CA- AB540 (2001) allows any student that attends a California high school for three years eligible to pay in state tuition. The bill allows undocumented youth and out of state students to pay resident tuition instead of out of state or international. Identifying as an AB-540 student relieved the stigma undocumented students in Southern California in post-secondary education (Abrego 2008, 2011). At that moment I realized the impact of only being an AB-540 student before DACA and the CA Dream Act was an experience incoming cohorts would avoid. Before DACA older respondents worked in the secondary market, drove without a CA driver's license, and the majority were forced to take semesters off to save money in order to pay for their tuition. Incoming students with DACA and the CA Dream Act are able to legally work and obtain state financial aid that covers the majority of their tuition (see chapter 3). As a result, the experience of "illegality" older, undocumented students viewed as a rite of passage was sidestepped by their younger peers. Variations of illegality were emerging before my eyes.

For example, weeks before this meeting I attended an event off campus where undocumented youth were able to vent and describe the everyday problems they face. Victor, 25 in his senior year, introduced himself to the group: "Hi, my name is Victor and I am an AB-540 student." During Victor's seven years of completing his undergraduate

degree, the only legislation available to help him was AB-540. It was the term he used to introduce himself and allowed him to explain school administrators and staff's awareness of undocumented students on their campus. When Victor finished his presentation, several members in the group looked at themselves surprised why he would identify as an AB 540 student. The individual responsible for creating this meeting replied in a condescending manner with a patronizing facial expression, "why would you call yourself that? It's an old term." Victor was initially surprised and viewed the statement as rather rude. He curtly asked what was wrong with identifying as an AB-540 student. The rest of the group discussed the term being anachronistic and not inclusive of undocumented youth not attending college. Victor nodded his head but one could see he was processing this interaction.

Proponents for the name DREAM Center spoke of the title as welcoming to all undocumented students throughout campus. Several spoke of how identifying as a DREAMER helped them come out to counselors and teachers. Others used the term to help them recruit and start the undocumented student organization in their high school. Abrego (2008) points out that stigma for undocumented students decreases when they identify as AB-540 students. In a similar fashion, when the term DREAMer became part of the mainstream vernacular, identifying as a DREAMer decreased stigma and anxiety for undocumented youth. Lastly, proponents fit the DREAMer narrative and assumed that all students on campus were in a similar situation as themselves. The DREAMer narrative is associated with high achieving and highly educated undocumented youth, that migrated to the without their consent to the US as children, that can be a social and

economic benefit to the US. Thus, PRISM decided the name of the center to expand the number of possible students it can provide help to.

When advocates of naming the center Undocumented Student Programs were given the opportunity to state their case, they contextualized the implications of the term used for a diverse undocumented student population. Transfer students, who took 3-4 years to complete their degree at a community college, elaborated how they do not identify or fit the DREAM narrative. From their perspective, a DREAMer is a highly successful student, able to attend a four-year institution right after high school. Several respondents attending community college echoed this sentiment. The president of PRISM also pointed out that the term DREAMer was not inclusive of all the undocumented students on campus because the term is specific to only the small number of high achieving undocumented youth.

First, not all students would meet the DREAM Act requirements. Older undocumented students that would not meet this requirement by aging out of eligibility after their 32nd birthday or did not attend school in the United States. Using the term would marginalize students unable to legalize their status under the DREAM Act. Second, older, married students or single parents may not feel welcome in a space geared for younger, single students. Lastly, the president of PRISM felt the term was not inclusive to the rest of the undocumented immigrant community outside of campus who could benefit from the programs resources. The majority of PRISM members obtained DACA status, which improved their lives, but they also witnessed their family, friends, and community member unable to qualify for the program and these new privileges. Despite this

discussion about the name of the center, all members in PRISM first identified as undocumented before any other identity. All members took heed when the president stated she would still identify as undocumented despite having DACA status because her mother was still undocumented. Advocates for the name DREAM Center dropped their pursuit of the terms based on the argument established by their peers.

After the meeting, older students stayed to talk to younger students. Younger PRISM members attentively listened to the reasoning of the upper classmen. I assumed it would be a heated exchange- but I was wrong. Although their explanations were further elaborations of their original argument, they offered a deep, emotional explanation of their apprehensions to use the term DREAMer. The younger students responded with various nods, then with “I understand” or “I did not know,” and, finally, “thank you.” In any other organization, these types of disagreements give way to conflicts. I was pleasantly surprised this was not the case. After that day, my field notes do not reflect PRISM members identifying as a DREAMer. In order to understand why conflict did not arise during this seminal meeting, we need to understand the role and purpose of PRISM and how it influences group dynamics.

Before the creation of the center, there was no institutional support for the well-being, academic success, and retention of undocumented students. Older PRISM members who were able to continue their education were instrumental in orienting incoming students through friendships or providing advice and mentorship during meetings. Seasoned members shared an array of knowledge and support to incoming freshmen so they could survive, succeed, and graduate. Older members were authority figures because incoming

members understood the difficulty of attending a 4-year institution and eventually graduating. Thus, younger or incoming members were guided in how to make timely payments, avoid living in the dorms, choose financial aid staff who were understanding and helpful, to save money by using the library reserve instead of purchasing books, where in town to find the cheapest rent, how to apply and be constantly seeking scholarships, and in some instances how to cook in order to save money. Veteran PRISM members provided emotional support through hard times when other members endured financial trouble, struggled with bad grades, or with family problems. Although not all incoming members sought their help, they understood and respected the knowledge of experienced members willing to help. Outside of the organization, through friendships or social gatherings, stories of the toll of self-financing their education, before DCA and the CA Dream Act,⁵⁸ along with the emotional and psychological effects it had left a strong impression on younger members. They understood their privilege in comparison to previous undocumented students. They also understood that the experiences the older students possessed and which they used to help them were a direct result of their previous status as undocumented students facing very similar challenges, but with no institutional assistance. It was in this communal support context that younger students learned to respect and understand older members' perspectives about why they opposed or were apprehensive to be associated with the DREAMER identity. Also, the argument of exclusivity resonated to younger members with family and friends who were not able to enjoy the privileges from DACA.

⁵⁸ Only private loans with exorbitant interest rates were available to undocumented who were able to find a willing cosigner that was a legal permanent resident or citizen.

A major influence on PRISM and the resolution to drop the term DREAMer was their current president Luz. At the time Luz, 22, besides being the president of PRISM, was heavily active in labor and immigrant rights organizing in Southern California. In her last year at the university she was on track to graduate in four years despite taking a couple of quarters off in order to save money to pay tuition. Luz fits the DREAMER narrative: high achieving, exemplar student, and succeeding despite the limitations of her legal status. By taking breaks from school to save money despite being an honor student, Elvia experienced first hand the difficulty of working full time, in many cases more than 40 hours a week in order to pay her tuition. Her involvement in social justice issues through activism, internships, or work along with her degree provided her with critical insight for her to understand her position in society. This insight allowed her to utilize her experience and academic training during her tenure as president during a seminal junction in the history of PRISM. In one year she helped launch the Student Center, made the struggle of undocumented students visible on campus, and fostered a culture of activism in and outside of campus.

The confluence of DACA, the attention and increase in resources from the state, university system, and their campus allocated to undocumented students in California, a strong ally, and Luz's time as president allowed the creation of the Student Center and PRISM's increased involvement in various related issues on campus. PRISM was able to have a voice on the hiring of the student coordinator, the logo on the website, the webpage name, and how to utilize funds allocated for their career and academic

development. Lastly, PRISM and undocumented student programs were vital in supporting the creation of a campus food pantry for indigent students.

Luz and PRISM were fortunate to have the ideal advocate and ally in their cause: Monique was the director of a very successful center on campus. Monique was the staff member on campus where the majority of undocumented students went to seek help. Before the center, Monique helped any student that stepped into her office find money to pay the upcoming monthly tuition payment, find classes, or provide emotional support. Her dedication to undocumented students was admirable, but she was overworked and the resources of her center were stretched thin. For several years she asked administrators for resources to assist undocumented students. Her requests were addressed in meetings with administrators only to be told there were no resources available or that could be reallocated.

Luz and the board members warned members of increased political activism on campus. Luz became involved with PRISM during her junior year. Weary of the sluggish pace of large bureaucracies, she understood the need to press the administration to recognize the unique experience of undocumented students. With Monique's institutional knowledge, Luz and Leandra (future president) relentlessly pushed administrators to hold meetings to allocate funds from the university budget system for undocumented student needs. Administrators, despite their political views and refusal to acknowledge undocumented students, eventually allocated funds and help the students. Luz is a calm, reserved, and quiet individual. However, these characteristics did not prevent her from holding administration accountable or from gaining the respect of peers. Luz's diligent

research, organized notes, and willingness to challenge school policy and administrators was extremely entertaining. During various meetings she corrected administrators of the correct school policy, highlighted the lack of adaptation and progress of the university by comparing the advancements of less prestigious schools, or by reminding administrators of promises they made six months before. Fellow members witnessed the stuttering and uneasiness of administrators who had grown accustomed to giving empty promises or provide borderline racist and/or xenophobic remarks. Luz's calm and reserve, yet well-researched retorts shocked administrators, who became extremely cautious when they spoke in front of her.

After a couple of days, I spoke with Luz about the meeting and about her conversations with younger PRISM members. She gave a short laugh and explained the talk between students and activists was on what they perceived as inherent problems with the DREAMER identity and narrative. Luz argued that the DREAM movement is important and vital to highlight the inhumane and anachronistic immigration policies and that the majority of the undocumented population does not fit the DREAMer narrative and are just as worthy of legalizing their status. Leandra, the current PRISM president, supported Luz's argument also argues that DACA was geared to help DREAMers. Leandra hoped the DREAM movement would lead to immigration reform of all undocumented immigrants, but the state chose to only help those they viewed worthy. In my two-year follow up with Nancy, who advocated for the name Dream Center, if she identified as a DREAMER. *"I am an undocumented immigrant that is a DREAMer as well."*

PRISM members pointed to the life stage, most common during high school, used of identifying as DREAMer. Leandra among many respondents identified as a DREAMER in high school. Similar to Mountain High DREAMERS, the term was safe and viewed in a positive light by a large segment of the population. As teenagers they use the term to come out with friends because it is perceived as more positive manner than “illegal” or “undocumented.” It was the only positive and empowering term they were aware of that unintentionally separated them from the rest of their peers and the larger undocumented community. Mountain High DREAMers used this term in order to recruit members in their high school. Surprisingly, they use “illegal” or “undocumented” amongst themselves. Many respondents attributed their decision to no longer identify as a DREAMer when they entered college and/or became involved in the undocumented student organization on their campus. Attending a four-year institution became a site where undocumented students were exposed to problems of using a term that allowed them to come out to their friends in high school. It is common to see a freshman in PRISM be given a history of the term, its political movement along with the political implications by fellow members wish to use undocumented.

PRISM’s choice to name the center Undocumented Student Programs proved to be a correct and successful choice. The current undocumented student coordinator pointed to the growing diversity of undocumented students entering and taking advantage of the center’s resources. On this campus, the majority of undocumented students are API (Asian Pacific Islander) not Latino. Comprised on mostly Latinos, PRISM wanted to include students from other national origins to join their organization and take advantage

of the resources created for them. They did not want to give the impression that immigration reform is a Latino-only issue or that . During the first weeks of the center, very few non-Latino students entered. It has proven to be difficult for the API center and undocumented student programs to recruit API students to attend meetings geared to help with their specific needs. Despite slow progress for API student to come to the center, there is a growing diversity of students involved, lounging, or taking advantage of the center.

Other student organizations in Southern California are in the process or strongly considering to drop the word DREAM from their name. This is becoming a growing movement in California due to the legal and structural opportunities that allow undocumented students to spend more time on campus to be involved and becoming politically active. Several students , allies and both with and without DACA, and organizations became more critical of the exclusivity and voiced the need to remove DREAMER from their organizations and from any webpages from UCOP (University of California Office of the President).

Janet Napolitano

The appointment of former Department of Homeland Security director, Janet Napolitano, as President of the University of California was a controversial hire that generated a plethora of criticisms. Alumni, faculty, students, student organizations, and immigration rights activist voiced their strong disapproval of the most controversial hires in the University of California. The spectrum of dissenters produced two highly polemical issues with her appointment: her lack of *any* of experience in higher education

and her previous job as the director of DHS (Department of Homeland Security). Her appointment forced respondents not involved in any student organizations to be critical of how they self-identify because their UC President was previously in charge of deporting their friends, people in their community, and themselves. Napolitano's impact stretches beyond the undocumented student population. Native born students whose parents were deported or in immigration centers were extremely critical of the appointment. Students associate Napolitano with her previous job as the director of DHS, not of being a governor of Arizona. Under her leadership in DHS, more immigrants were deported than in any other time in U.S. history. Correspondingly, students' frustration stemmed from her lack of experience in higher education and with her previous job separating thousands of student families. Students felt their emotional safety was not recognized or considered during the deliberation of her appointment.

Graduating undocumented seniors and allies, highlighted the emotional conflict they were dealing with, recognizing their degree would have her signature that might have signed a deportation order for a mother, father, sibling, or relative. The majority of undocumented or children of undocumented parents, are the first in their family to graduate from college. Many were aware of the financial struggles their family endured to support the completion of their degree, that caused much guilt in them. Their sense of culpability was the outcome of their parents working long hours and spending more time driving, increasing the probability of their parents being deported. For all respondents and PRISM members, their parents migrated for their children to have a better life. Part of their dream was to see their children obtain an education. Similarly, most respondents

dreamed of completing their degree but were very apprehensive of circumstances – money, grades, family obligations- that could prevent the completion of their education. Graduating and participating in commencement ceremonies signified a shared dream between parent, child, and family that eventually comes true. Subsequently, their ceremony, intended to be both symbolic and gratifying, a shared dream and struggle coming to fruition, could not be celebrated with a significant other because the signature in their diploma was the symbolic reason why their deported parent was not present.

The role and expectations of the University's President's job required ideological adjustment for Janet Napolitano. Being in charge of a massive bureaucracy is nothing new, but the shift from criminalizing and deporting undocumented immigrants to heading a university system with a growing undocumented student population is a drastic change. In response to a large, diverse opposition, Napolitano has made an effort to diminish her image as the source of grief for millions of undocumented immigrant by becoming an advocate for undocumented students in California. Administrators at various University of California campuses gave funds to provide resources to the growing, vocal undocumented student population. Napolitano herself has been vocal in highlighting the lack of funding available for undocumented students to remain in school and complete their education. Undergraduate students from various campuses have been able to sit down at the table with Napolitano to highlight the lack of equity for undocumented students and to implement new policies throughout the UC system.

Her appointment mobilized and created a network of undocumented student organizations throughout the UC system and the state to opposed her appointment.

Similarly, her words of now being an advocate for undocumented students' need for increased financial aid to help them graduate left lasting impact. Significant pressure did not result in her dismissal, leaving no choice for undocumented students pursuing equitable educational opportunities but to negotiate with Napolitano in the bargaining table. A convergence of pressure and seeking to change her image resulted in the dispersal of funds from the UC system. In 2013, Napolitano allocated 5 million dollars to be used over a three-year period (2013-2016). The funds were dispersed proportionately to all the UC campuses in order to provide greater access to resources. The majority of students qualify for the funds and have positively influenced their overall educational experience that UCOP earmarked another 8.5 million dollars over a three year period (See Chapter 3).⁵⁹ Action from both state legislation and institutions of higher education has situated California at the forefront in providing undocumented students access to higher education. Notwithstanding this institutional shift, undocumented students continued to face challenges in higher education. The growing number of students and increasing enrollment in graduate and professional school prompted UCOP (University of California Office Of the President) hosted the first national undocumented student summit (Pederson 2013). The conference included motivational speakers, scholars, and students who discussed their particular problems. Respondents who attended this conference were inspired by the number of people who attended and appeared to be invested in improving the university experience for undocumented students.

⁵⁹<http://universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/uc-president-napolitano-proposes-multi-year-support-undocumented-students>

In the first national summit of undocumented students, Napolitano gave the keynote speech addressing a room full of undocumented students, immigrant rights activists, staff throughout the UC that work with undocumented students, and prominent immigration scholars (Richman 2015). Several protests during Napolitano's speech occurred where they voiced a list of demands and concerns undocumented students face in higher education. PRISM members discussed during and after the summit the impact of Napolitano's attempt to use DREAMER in her address. Students were upset and demanded that she not utilize the term. Napolitano's attempts to use the term highlighted a major issue for PRISM members: how can she use the term DREAMer when just a couple of years ago she deported DREAMers and their families? PRISM members and respondents are aware of the privilege of living in California in comparison to the rest of their undocumented peers in other states. PRISM members and respondents were already apprehensive of using the term but still recognized the power it has to other undocumented youth that lived in hostile environments in the South.⁶⁰ Although the term is still important in highlighting anachronistic immigration policy, the significance and power of the term changed when the identity and narrative is coopted by a controversial and powerful state representative. When they returned to campus, I was able to sit down to listen to their discomfort with the term used by whom they understand to be oppressors (the state). Several were insulted and expressed the feeling of discomfort and distrust.

⁶⁰ Undocumented youth in Georgia have been very vocal in advocating for access to higher education. In Atlanta, they took the initiative in creating their own college, Freedom University, where undocumented students can attend. For more see: <http://www.freedomuniversitygeorgia.com/mission.html>

DREAMEer Resistance from Respondents and Activist

In the book *Empire*, Hart and Negri (2001) posit that social movements or creative human capacities critical of imperialism are eventually coopted by the mainstream culture. Cooptation serves very critical purposes: it takes away control of the narrative from the subject and is used as tool to silence and pacify the movement. From this viewpoint, undocumented students were correct in demanding that Napolitano refrain from using the term DREAMer in her speech. Their swift if controversial mobilizations prevented them from losing control of the term. Secondly, they prevented a symbol of their oppression from being perceived as a liberator. The great advancement through the creativity, sacrifice, and bravery of the DREAM movement would have been problematic if it was coopted by a symbol of their oppression that now demonstrates how benevolent they are to undocumented youth by granting them some rights.

After 2012, several immigrant rights organizations, like DREAM United, modified their mission statement to ask for comprehensive immigration reform for all undocumented immigrants. The failure of the DREAM Act to pass in the Senate brought frustration but shed light on their concern of potential cooptation by opportunist politicians. Advocating for a specific group within the undocumented immigrant population that was the focus of mainstream media would likely play into the hands on self-interested politicians. This move to refrain from using the term DREAMer hoped to derail future political groups aiming to use and/or incorporate the term and the movement and inevitable coopt them, and exploit their growing power of the Asian and Latino bloc for their political aspirations. Their fears of their narrative used for political interests

would result in no longer having an autonomous movement. Lack of control would deflect the power of the immigrant rights movement from their ultimate goal, immigration reform. Despite their preemptive actions through some campuses, DREAMers have been visible in the current 2016 presidential election year.

The reelection of President Obama in 2012 established two clear outcomes American political parties must adjust to: the large number of Latino voters viewed as the decisive factor in Obama's victory, and the politicians' desire to incorporate Latinos' social needs into a political platform to secure their votes. Various political pundits credit the surge of Latino voters favoring Obama as an important factor American political machineries can no longer ignore. In order to placate the growing xenophobic, zealous religious voting bloc, Mitt Romney's self-deportation immigration stance backfired in his 2012 Presidential run. His anti-immigrant rhetoric achieved great success in pushing Latinos to the voting polls. Political pundits and analysts painted the Latino vote as a major point in any strategy of the Democratic and Republican party for future elections. Immigration, as an imperative issue in the Latino community, has catapulted both political parties to devise strategies to sway Latinos to join their political party.

In the 2016 presidential primaries and election, both political parties are seeking to sway Latino voters through immigration reform. Unfortunately, each party has taken a divergent stance towards immigration. Corporate, establishment Republicans attempted to entice Latino voters through their positive view of Latino immigrants that warrants immigration reform. In one case, Jeb Bush attempted to blame Asian immigrants as the

real source of anchor babies.⁶¹ The courting of Latinos by a corporate Republican candidate unsettled its political base. Instead, the dormant nationalistic, xenophobic, populist, racist, and fascist sentiment of large segments of the American population awoke, led by fringe and unlikely candidates. Florida Senator Marco Rubio, a son of Cuban immigrant parents, once seen as the Trojan horse to lure Latino voters succumbed to the demands of its political base to promise to end DACA on his first day in the oval office.⁶²

Both Hilary Clinton and Bernie Sanders are attempting to sway the Latino vote by advocating for immigration reform. To gain legitimacy within the community Clinton and Sanders have been endorsed by several high profile DREAMers.⁶³ The multilayered perception that Latino voters view immigration reform as a personal, community-based issue that can be used as a decisive issue in electing the next president has created the strategic urgency for both democratic candidates to win the DREAMer endorsement. Gaining their endorsement is viewed as gaining the support of the Latino vote. The DREAM activists' movement is viewed as a legitimate political influence and as an increasingly decisive interest group. Endorsements signify how activists perceive the immigration policy according to their interests and goals. Some prominent DREAMers take a pragmatic approach in their decision which results in endorsing different candidates within the same political party has resulted in competition among each other. Jesús Iñiguez, an active undocumented rights activist highlights the political amnesia

⁶¹ See: <http://thinkprogress.org/immigration/2015/08/25/3694969/capac-responds-jeb-bush-babies-term/>

⁶² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2016/02/19/marco-rubios-mad-rush-to-the-right-continues/>

⁶³ <http://www.latinorebels.com/2016/02/12/latino-appointments-endorsements-and-the-changing-political-establishment/>
<http://www.buzzfeed.com/adriancarrasquillo/clinton-and-sanders-camps-battle-on-twitter-over-nevada-drea#.tcD9GbZEX>

people suffer by openly trusting Democratic candidate Barack Obama.⁶⁴ Obama promised immigration reform within a year of his election. DACA was a result of immigrant rights activist holding him accountable in his upcoming reelection. Disastrously, under President Obama there have been more deportations of undocumented immigrants than in any other time in history, and an increased funding to militarize the border.

Despite backtracking on their promise, the Democratic Party and its candidates, along with the media have benefited from a resurgence of the prominent of DREAMers in the 2016 presidential cycle. Respondents and activists jokingly speak of two types of individuals: low profile and high profile DREAMers. Low profile DREAMers are active in the community, promoting immigrant rights, but still work in low wage jobs. In contrast, high profile DREAMers with media experience, work in jobs of their choice, and receive a reasonable wage/salary. For example, Jose Antonio Vargas who commands large speaking fees. A type of self-deprecating perception of themselves among undocumented youth has emerged, good DREAMer vs. bad DREAMer. Bad DREAMers are individuals not politically active or not meeting the undocumented narrative. Overall, the rising media time of DREAMers has brought much caution of being coopted within the activist community.

Tony Choi, a prominent undocumented Korean activist, describes his aversion to be labeled a DREAMer and the differences between high profile and low profile:

For most of my career, I've been pitched as a dreamer. The problem here is that I've stopped branding myself as a dreamer circa early 2012. It was a term that I

⁶⁴ <http://dreamersadrift.com/jesus-musings/low-profile-illegal-alien-endorses-donald-trump>

was uncomfortable with, but when you're a low-profile dreamer, you don't get to define your own narrative. Most of the low-profile dreamers I know are the ones who are stuck on the bottom rungs of their organizations. They are the ones who silently lurk around the online forums and Facebook groups... When someone labels me a dreamer, they are the ones in charge of telling the story. With a soft cloth in my mouth, whatever I say will be in the frame of that problematic model minority narrative and muffled. I'm certain that if those people read this, they will most say "oh, this dreamer wrote this..." (Choi 2016),

Choi's concern is being unable to have control of his story. Not wanting to identify as a DREAMer despite society and the media is adamant in labeling him as one, is a problem Tony and other undocumented youth have with the trajectory of the DREAMer narrative. The term is being coopted by the mainstream media and applied to generalize about a diverse population. By usurping the term, major political parties and hegemonic media outlets gained control, redirecting its purpose, taking away its original, strategic, and powerful message. In general, most undocumented youth continue to face problems that are mostly out of their control. Yet, control over their identity has been the primary source of their empowerment. Autonomy over their identity is a response to the state's criminalization of their existence as illegal aliens, rather than undocumented immigrants. Cognizant that the term has different meaning and political purposes that it had ten years ago does not mean they are capitulating control of when to use it.

Moreover, undocumented queer activists also voiced their resistance to the mainstream coopted meaning of DREAMers. They have been in the forefront of the

immigrant rights movement. During their youth, undocumented queer youth faced the task of “coming out of the shadows” twice. Their experience has provided them with a unique lens to analyze the term. In this particular example, two prominent California activists criticize current allies that are attempting to correct or inform them how they should identify. They contextualize how words utilized to oppress groups have been reclaimed for empowerment:

First and foremost, we are tired of being apologetic. We are reclaiming the use of the word similarly to the LGBTQ community reclaiming “queer” and “faggot.” We know and understand the history behind the words and agree that their function has been to oppress us as people of color and as immigrants. Yet why is it socially unacceptable for us, as directly impacted individuals, to use the words as a means of identity reclamation? What do you, as an ally, have to lose by me calling myself an illegal?

Reminding allies of the power of movements in reclaiming the word from the oppressor has proven to be a powerful tool of resistance. Why can't undocumented youth have the choice to call themselves “illegal”? Why should they be corrected and informed on what they should identify? Their apprehensions of their activist tactics being coopted by the mainstream resonate their concerns with allies not fully understanding their standpoints. In this case, allies wresting control away from activists over how to identify, in the name of people they aim to advocate. Once again, part of telling their story is the personal choice of how they wish to identify:

Telling people to stop calling themselves illegal comes from a place of privilege and access to knowledge, whether academia or your politicization process. You see, we've always been illegal. Growing up, the first time we told our status, we weren't undocumented. We were fucken illegal. We've been "coming out of the shadows" to the vecinas [neighbors] and the people in our communities. This is the word that has been accessible to us. And in identifying as "brown illegal queers," we are saying fuck you to the status quo and other systems that have been used against us as individuals.

Undocumented immigrants identifying as "illegal immigrants" is growing among politically radical sects. The semantic maneuver is geared battle to the omnipresent stigma associated with the term "illegal." During their upbringing, undocumented youth have been bombarded with the term through the media and various social spheres. This has caused much emotional trauma, and apprehension of disclosing their legal status during their teenage years. Other terms that have been used to self identify AB-540, undocumented, and DREAMer have also been used to alleviate stigma. Fighting the interpretation and symbolism associated with the term is a worthwhile cause that any group should pursue. The challenge in changing the meaning of the term from derogatory to empowerment rests, in part, on whether high profile undocumented immigrants, with a significant media presence, start identifying as illegal.

In comparison to other groups, undocumented immigrants face the problem as Ngai (2001) suggests: being impossible subjects, present but not legally recognized and are part of a racialized group. Thus a population not legally recognized by the state can

change the oppressive meaning of a term. An illegal immigrant is a racially charged term associated with being Mexican or having a Mexican appearance. Immigration officials, under *Brigoni v Ponce* (1975), received constitutional approval to racially profile individuals of Mexican appearance. Mexican Americans and Latinos of other nationalities that resemble the vague definition of Mexican appearance have been stopped because they look “illegal.” Some suggest Mexican appearance is an emerging racial project that racializes a group as Latinos, with the association of Mexican identity appearance with being illegal (Chacon and Davis 2006; Chavez 2008; Massey 2009). Subsequently, the question arises if citizens of Mexican appearance would join undocumented immigrants to challenge this racial project? The unique challenges of their legal status and their racialized status will pose new questions and analysis in oppressed groups reclaiming their identity. For example, PRISM and Mexican American student activist worked together to protest ICE attend their campus job fair with their gear. Both groups saw this as a community and race issue to be interwoven in their experience as youth growing up in southern California.

From DREAMer to Undocumented

As they reach adulthood, undocumented youth learn of their limitations in society, they learn to be “illegal” (Gonzales 2011). Simultaneously, they negotiate how to self-identify as they accommodate their lives and expectations in accordance to their place in society. Not all undocumented youth come out of the shadows, but youth in this study follow a similar pattern on how they choose to identify during their teenage years and

eventual adulthood. Peers, higher education institutions, geographical location, and social circles can either create a hostile or an accepting environment that heavily influence their decisions on how they self-identify. In this study, respondents followed an emerging path of first identifying as a Dreamer, then towards identifying as an undocumented immigrant through life experiences and/or education.

High school students typically identify as a DREAMer due to the positive perception of society that alleviates stigma. This positive connotation enables youth to disclose their identity to friends, teachers, or counselors. Not all undocumented youth are aware of the term or the movement. Friends, teachers/counselors, or media have been the primary sites where they become cognizant of this term. For example, a youth, with no knowledge of other undocumented youth or the immigrant rights movement, divulge their legal status as a friend or a teacher whose response can be “oh you’re a DREAMer.” Others have been corrected or given a talk of the negative impact of identifying as “illegal” when they disclose their status by saying “I am illegal.” In other cases, they become aware through internet research, usually during their exploration of finding alternative funding sources for college. Therefore, undocumented youth learn of this term during a pivotal moment in their life that provides them with a small buffer to deflect the damaging effects of the pervasiveness of being labeled or self-identify as undocumented.

For example, I was talking with two Mountain High Dreamers outside the administration building. We were discussing their future life in college, whether they would live in campus housing or live at home, and their current social life in high school. Both were energetic in explaining their everyday life and the impact of being involved

with Mountain High Dreamers. Diego received DACA when he was 16; Marco obtained DACA at 17. Despite being involved in the same club, Diego and Marco did not share their experiences with each other. Thus, one would respond “Oh yeah! Me too!” each time one spoke of an event or of a particular experience. Eventually, Marco passingly said “I used to be illegal.” Diego emphatically responded “Me too!” I asked them to explain this issue to me. Both giggled and explained “illegal” was a negative and hurtful word, it meant they were not part of society. Nearly one third of the respondents knew of being “illegal” since they were kids. However, they did not understand the meaning of the term. It was during junior high and high school when they learned of the term’s serious impact. The exchange described is common with my high school respondents, nearly half identifying as DREAMers which was shaped by their participation in Mountain High DREAMers. Fernando’s response is emblematic of undocumented youth’s response while in high school:

I identify definitely more as a DREAMer because....the idea of undocumented immigrants has a sort of a negative connotation. It feels in a sense a little more hopeless than the term DREAMers, because DREAMers are the ones that aspire to have all of these things. To have all of their rights just as any other US citizen would have.

His response points to the negative image associated with the undocumented immigrant label and the positive connotation of being a DREAMer. Fernando is one of the top five students in his class and was accepted by one of the top national universities in the country. In addition to the psychological trauma experienced as an undocumented

immigrant as a youth, Fernando witnessed his father murder his mother. As he explained his life story, he made an extreme effort to hold back his tears. His aunt became his guardian and his younger brother's. Fernando's hard work ethic and desire to learn was not fostered or appreciated by his aunt who was a housewife and legal permanent resident with a high school education. Her frustration over her American citizen children that performed poorly academic was directed at Fernando. She prevented him from regularly attending school and attempted to discourage his dedication by emphasizing that his legal status would leave him washing dishes with the rest of the undocumented immigrants. His captivity ended when other family members recognized his aunt's heinous treatment. Indeed, his experience along with his aunt's condescending treatment played a significant role how he developed his identity. Fernando's experience of losing his parents and having a family member preventing him from attending school is not common for undocumented youth, but his negative perception of being undocumented from society, institution, media, and in some cases family members.

The desire for a positive image results from the omnipresent negativity undocumented youth face, particularly in high school, that permeates every facet of their life. Jessica, 17, is another high school student that epitomizes the DREAMer mold. At the time, she was number two in her class. She was involved in various school activities and was viewed as an exemplar student by both teacher and students. The oldest child, Jessica was entrusted with additional responsibilities. She began to cry when I asked her to explain some of these additional responsibilities. Her parents entrusted her to be the point person to all medical, school, and job matters. She was frustrated how students did

not understand why she was always on the phone in between periods or lunch breaks because she always has to reschedule medical visits for her little sister and mother. It was very common for her mother in the last minute to ask her to call to reschedule an appointment. This brought much anxiety because she constantly dealt with court secretaries, who aware of their legal status, purposefully created added barriers to reschedule. Cognizant of Jessica's role in her family for several years, secretaries retaliated against Jessica with facial expressions, rude statements, or lectured on her parent's lack of health insurance through borderline racist undertones. Fluent in English, more than half the respondents experienced similar experiences to Jessica's. Taking their parents to the emergency room or a doctor's visit are situations in which they interact outside their social world (Katz 2014), where they experience the negativity associated with being undocumented. Uninformed on how to navigate the various spheres most kids are not aware of, they ask questions on how to provide help for their family. Nurses, staff, or security are able to decipher their legal status through these questions. If they receive hostility, it comes through the person's disapproval of their legal status through rude responses that the entire room can hear, or when they overhear xenophobic remarks made by nurses.

Interactions with other students are the most common occurrences where undocumented high school students endured the stigma of being undocumented. I conducted a follow up with Jessica two years after. She spoke of her experience as an undocumented high school student in a predominantly Latino high school. Jessica, her sister, and I were alone in a basement of a trendy coffee shop with vintage tables and

sofas. She discussed how her social life changed after DACA. She spoke of the relief of no longer being teased by other students. Her sister, who was playing on her phone, immediately jumped in and said “Yes, that no longer happens!” Jessica nodded in agreement. They said peers whose parents were undocumented ridiculed them for being undocumented. They would say “I going to deport you.” They were aware their peers were not serious but were hurt that they would say such a thing. Some friends would joke of their status “Oh, Jessica can’t go there because she is illegal.” Nancy, a PRISM member, spoke of not trusting Latino teachers in a predominantly Latino high school. She recalled her Latino high school teacher making insensitive jokes about undocumented immigrants. He spoke glowingly of his brother who is an ICE agent. The multiple venues in which undocumented youth that exposed what society perceives undocumented immigrants are associate as connotatively bad. It is not surprising they begin to identify with a term associated with positive connotations.

A lot of respondents and PRISM members’ perceptions of connotations associated with DREAMers changed as they entered high school or expanded their social circle. This was the case with Fernando who was unaware the underlying assumption he was suggesting: some undocumented immigrants are more deserving than others. Why are the DREAMers the only ones who are doing good things? Why are they more deserving than others? Obviously he does not agree with preferential treatment, but his response is common among my high school respondents. I asked them how they identified and if their legal status changed after DACA? Unanimously, they said they were undocumented because they were not citizens or because their parents were still

undocumented. On the surface, identifying as a DREAMer and an undocumented immigrant may seem as contradictory. How can Fernando's statement have a negative perception of the rest of the undocumented community while at the same time identify with them? I grappled with this question for several months. It became a dominant trend in my interviews and field notes. How could I make sense of this statement?

The answer to this seemingly paradoxical situation was provided by PRISM members through various informal talks in the Undocumented Student Center. My involvement with PRISM members allowed me to establish strong relationships with several members. In many cases, I have been involved in their lives for nearly four years. A goal of my research was to demonstrate that I cared for their well-being. I was not a typical researcher that did not establish a relationship, but one who valued their input on my research. In addition, their comfort around me became apparent when they would have conversations that I was previously not privy to. This unique relationship allowed me to direct queries from research and insightful responses. Through personal, group, or after meetings, all PRISM members pointed to two decreased stigmas associated with a DREAMer: lack of political framework and historical knowledge.

Thus, undocumented youth identity begins with the concept of illegal that later changes to DREAMer, and during their adult years they choose to identify as undocumented. Leandra supported her colleagues' assertion of the life cycle the DREAMer follows by acknowledging that she used the word to come out to her friends in high school. She revealed her legal status several months before DACA was introduced. Leandra attributes her lack of political knowledge in high school to her

choice of identification. The manner in which she explained her transition to identify as an undocumented immigrant was very blasé. It implied that it was a rite of passage for undocumented students.

UNDERSTANDING THE DREAM IDENTITY AFTER DACA IN CALIFORNIA

Since 2001, the immigrant rights movement has relied heavily on the bravery, resilience, and perseverance of undocumented youth. DACA only came into effect because of their fight to hold President Obama accountable of his promises of ending raids and immigration reform. Their devotion to such a personal issue brought the need to reform immigration policies. Stories of their success despite lacking a legal status were used to highlight the wasted intellectual talent the U.S. was, effectively capturing the attention of millions of Americans that are now fervent advocates of immigration reform. Unfortunately, through no fault of their own, their message has a different meaning today. Today, undocumented youth in California and around the country find it difficult to identify as a DREAMer.⁶⁵

This section highlights how DACA impacts non- politically active undocumented youth who attended college, completed their education, or are currently enrolled in college. DACA moved millions of undocumented youth into different social circles and institutions. The changes in their life are both inclusion and continued illegality (See Chapter 3). Overall, 40 respondents questioned the inclusion of the term DREAMer

⁶⁵ Dialogue over the problems of this issue has already stated. See: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/28/dreamers-immigrant-rights_n_5227646.html and <http://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2015/01/19/dreamers-unbound-immigrant-youth-mobilizing/>

through the good undocumented immigrant narrative they fall into that brings internal conflict. Undocumented youth have three general concerns: the reproduction of the good immigrant narrative, the continued exclusion of friends or family members, and the possibility of segmenting the undocumented rights movement.

DACA allowed undocumented youth to formally enter the labor market and live without fear. As they enjoy these new benefits, they cannot escape existing immigration policies that criminalizes the existence of their families. Witnessing their parents continue to drive with fear, being deported, or have little to no rights flattens their excitement. Aware of these discrepancies forces undocumented youth to question why this program is not made available to their parents, siblings, or friends who are just as deserving, or more. DACA created a hierarchy of rights and statuses among families and the rest of the undocumented population. Victoria, now in a prestigious dental school, was not politically active during her college years. During her undergraduate years, she was very secretive of her identify; after DACA she had less apprehensions to disclose her status. Regardless of her political acumen, Victoria was hesitant to identify as a DREAMer.

DACA is great but it did separate some of us from others. I don't like that people with DACA are the only ones that are getting benefits... DREAMER, it has a connotation to it. I feel like saying DREAMER is a bit condescending.... If I say that I am undocumented I am not differentiated from my parents.

Victoria is a poster child of a high achieving student. Her worry of being separated from the rest of the undocumented population, in particular her parents, is similar to current general discourse among undocumented youth. Her suggestion of identifying as a

DREAMer having negative connotations is new. Discourse on the need to include all undocumented immigrants occurred in 2012 after Obama's executive order was implemented. Victoria's hesitation stems from the media coverage creating the DREAMer narrative as the only relevant stories of the 11 million.

The media saturation defining who is a DREAMer has generated a fictitious homogenous group. The majority of undocumented youth do not fit the ideal type seen through various mediums. For example, Leo, 27, has been in and out of community college for the last 8 years. With a five o'clock shadow, tanned skin, and pensive brow, Leo explained his dedication in helping his families fruit vending business. His father, also undocumented, was able to find a niche and buy produce at bulk and sell them throughout southern California. Despite the economic fluctuations of this enterprise, Leo and his family are considered middle class. Leo was not aware of CA AB-540 until a year after graduation. In high school, his grades were not stellar but he would have been able to attend a Cal State University campus. He enrolled in college part time but he never envisioned transferring to a four-year institution. While being a part time student, Leo focused on helping his father's business. His disillusionment, frustration, and pain was expressed when I asked if he identified as a DREAMer. With an already serious look, he sat up straight and said:

Leo: Well dreamer has a connotation of that I think the perfect student that's what I...that's what is out there more I don't think so...I guess I am undocumented student

E.E: Can you explain a bit more?

Leo: Because um...I think there is other people who say they finish high school but they didn't go to college or anything I think they should also...qualify for that and there is different avenues in society where they could good...even if they don't have a college degree I mean I have relatives that don't have a college degree and they are fairly good

A result of his class status and personal experience, Leo expressed the observation that undocumented immigrants pursuing college are the only successful and contributing members to society. Aware of obtaining a middle class life without any legal status, Leo challenged the notion that college is the only pathway for success for undocumented immigrants. Similar to Tony, he is aware of aging out of the eligibility age parameters. All respondents with a high school education did not identify as a DREAMer. When asked why? The general response was that “I am not one them” or “I am not good at school.”

Arlene, 19, a student in at a UC campus represents the growing number of undocumented youth entering higher education who are already avoiding the term. Arlene grew in in the San Francisco/Bay Area metropolitan region. Teachers and counselors provided her with a lot of help and resources for her to be prepared and attend a rigorous four-year institution. Outspoken and unafraid to disclose her status, Arlene provides the general critique of California undocumented youth in universities:

I've always had an issue with the term DREAMer or DREAM scholar, you know. It separates you from the rest of the undocumented population... It kind of

idealizes us, or [is a form of] exceptionalism]. Oh, these are good immigrants. They don't have a say in coming to this country; they didn't have a choice. They're students, they're trying to better themselves. But my mom is trying to better herself too. She's still undocumented, that doesn't mean I'm better than her... That's why I prefer the term undocumented...see, like for me, I don't want to be exceptional. I don't want to be separated from the rest of the undocumented community... Because I feel that we all come for the same reason. I just feel like it's like [making] it us versus them. No, that's my family. You can't tear me apart from the people that I came here with. And it's just like students, you can't exceptionalize someone because they had the opportunity to go to college. It's not that other people didn't want to, it's [that] they didn't have the same resources that we were allocated.

Similar to Victoria, Arlene is aware of the growing privileges among undocumented immigrants. She points to the implicit message being sent: you are worthy to be in this society but not your parents. Unlike their parents, most undocumented youth have been socialized and educated in the United States. Arlene, like other respondents, is aware of her privileged position in comparison to the rest of the undocumented population. From her perspective, identifying as a DREAMer sends the message of who is “deserving” stay in the county while simultaneously saying who is not.

Older professional students also tend to distance themselves from this identity. These respondents have excelled under extremely difficult conditions. Both Vicente and

Daniela completed their undergraduate education and their first years in graduate school without DACA. Their path to graduate/professional school was a result of luck, resilience, and pragmatism. Despite being models for the bootstraps mentality that is embedded in society, neither adhere to that belief. Moreover, Vicente is critical of the message implied:

I go with undocumented. I don't use DREAMer. It goes back to this model immigrant. You know how I said earlier when it comes to sociological events, it takes me a little longer to grasp. But it wasn't honestly until recently that I understood why DREAMer was so problematic... I just think when it comes to the youth movement it's very exclusive using that term. It creates divisions amongst us. When you think of studies... you really want to reach those individuals that are hard to reach. And using DREAMers, you're not. You're going to get the ones that are able to adopt technologies really quickly and that are able to get through the system much more quickly. That's why DREAMers is so problematic. It does not reach a lot of the youth that would say, you know what? I've given up. There's no hope for me...I think we're all going... I think the movement is going toward undocumented... there's segments of the movement that continues to use the word DREAMer. I think it's a political strategy. That's my take on it.

It took Vicente a while to recognize the limitations of this identity. Upon recognizing, he focused the implicit message created: a model immigrant. He fits the mold of the model

immigrant deemed worthy of membership, but his parents who worked 12-hour shifts are not future professionals and are not deemed worthy.

Daniela, on the other hand, is troubled with being a success story:

Daniela: On not identifying as a DREAMER- “No, that is just common sense.”

E.E: What do you mean?

Daniela: For me it was infuriating that it [DACA] was not there when I was younger. I found my way and I forced my way [to survive]. And now I am going to be counted as a success story for this program [DACA] or something? You know? It's going to end up claiming me.

Her insight points to years of marginalization without recognition from the state. Without DACA, she was able to figure out a way to attend a doctoral program. Like various undocumented immigrants around the country, apprehension and conflicting feelings arise of their stories and success counted solely on the benevolence of the state. In fact, Daniela waited for two years to apply for DACA. She felt guilty and angry that she would be given more rights than the rest of her family. From her perspective, she was living fine without DACA. She did not need it as much as others. Involved in various organizations, she speaks of interacting with younger peers:

I knew kids who used the word, but it's how they used the word that bothered me. It was always used 'through no fault of our own.' And I am like, my parent's are not at fault here. I don't regret anything that they have done. With the life our family has had, how can I say something like that?

Similar to PRISM, youth coming out of high school interact with respected members in their community or other immigrant rights activists. In this case Daniela explains her argument:

Once I state the reasons for why I don't identify as a DREAMER, other kids in the same situation who may have not thought about it. Once they hear my reasoning and they are like ' I never thought about it—Yes!' ... Once you start understanding what is being said and implied—then it's common sense.

This dialogue has occurred where undocumented youth are able to reflect and analyze. Daniela's poignant statement "*With the life our family has had, how can I say something like that?*" Her question reflects undocumented youth's problem with DACA or other programs where people are still left out.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that identities have different meanings contingent on the historical context and interests of state elites. The strength of the DREAM movement sheds light on the inherent problems of current immigration policy and demonstrates their agency in resisting cooptation and elites divide and conquer strategies.. The movement became a source of empowerment, safety, and liberation for millions of undocumented youth frustrated with the false promise of the American Dream. It must be stated, that California's legislative acts sought to alleviate some of the

inherent problems undocumented immigrants face in most U.S. states. Identifying DREAMer remains in a positive term in states where state legislations do not allow them to obtain a driver's license despite barring them from attending college or university, or are criminalizing their existence. The manner how they experience and perceive their everyday life continues to be filled with fear. Time to discuss the political implications of the only source of empowerment in a hostile territory seems futile. However, how undocumented youth lead their everyday lives is contingent on which state they reside. There is a broad spectrum where California is seen by undocumented youth and respondents as the friendliest, to Georgia or Alabama who are openly hostile to all undocumented immigrants. Other states are following California's lead by creating legislation aimed at increasing opportunities for undocumented youth and their parents and abating the fear of living as an undocumented immigrant. For example, in 2016 the state of New York passed their own version the CA Dream Act and the New York Supreme Court ruled in favor of Cesar Vargas to be practice law without a legal status (Fuchs 2016; Robbins 2015).

Undocumented youth in California, through DACA and state legislations, are afforded the opportunity, through the combination of California legislations and DACA, to time to analyze the meaning and efficacy of the DREAMer identity. Like all identities, their meaning, purpose, and effectiveness change with time and the present historical, political, economic, and social context. The meaning of this identity changed with DACA, state legislations, and media are variables that were not foreseen in 2001 when the movement first started. All undocumented youth are aware of their politicized existence. Thus, it is

not surprising that undocumented youth under a different economic and political atmosphere towards immigration are questioning how they wish the rest of society views their plight.

Lastly, living as an undocumented immigrant in a global economy under technologies of surveillance influences their behavior based on their understanding of citizenship based on what constitutes a “good immigrant.” Undocumented youth continue to monitor their behavior and actions in order to remain in good standing with the state. They perceive themselves as constantly being evaluated by society in terms of neoliberal citizenship. Neoliberal citizenship aspires to have individuals that are entrepreneurial, economically independent, and that are not a liability to society. Undocumented youth that have been successful in obtaining higher education and becoming poised for, or actually experiencing, upward mobility under DACA fit the ideal neoliberal citizen. Their success resulted in media and politicians highlighting their success as worthy immigrants. In contrast, their families were deemed unworthy of legalization since they lacked any perceived economic or cultural benefit to society.

My research findings also help us to gain a greater understanding of how neoliberal citizenship applies to DREAMers. Undocumented youth notice the effort of the media and politicians to associate DREAMers with neoliberal citizenship by valorizing immigrants that are highly educated (or likely to become so) in comparison to other immigrants. My dissertation highlights how undocumented youth respond to neoliberal citizenship by avoiding the term DREAMer. Their response highlights how identities used in social movements can change from an activist strategy for making

policy gains towards becoming a tool of the elites to create division among the movement. In this case, the narrative of the good versus bad immigrant pits educated undocumented youth against older and less educated undocumented immigrants and justifies excluding the latter from legalization.

Chapter 7: Mental Health, Dreams, and Self-Policing

For a lot of us it's been this traumatic, traumatic, thing that a lot of us had to endure. That... doesn't go away by just getting citizenship you know? - Juan Jose, 25

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to explore the various obstacles undocumented youth face, that may result into traumatic life experiences that influence their identity and mental health. The majority of undocumented youth live without a legitimate legal status and they continue to live without a permanently legitimate (or socially sanctioned) legal status after DACA. The majority of undocumented youth were exposed to various forms of fear or continue to endure the lack of legal status as teens and, for many, various years during their early adult lives. These forms of exclusion were coupled with the various stressors that all young adults experience, creating a unique experience that can leave profound effects on the individual. This chapter explores the mental health issues that result from the cumulative effects of living as an undocumented immigrant.

In the first section of this chapter I explore how the state and society create a social climate of constant surveillance that forces undocumented youth to be vigilant of their body in society. This became second nature for many undocumented youth after years, in some instances decades, of living as an undocumented immigrant. Before DACA, undocumented youth feared deportation, social rejection, and self-policed their bodies to avoid detection by public officials and society in accordance with the laws and state statutes that created a feeling of constantly being monitored. Self-policing

continues for undocumented youth after DACA. They are aware of being watched in specific spaces or circumstances that could jeopardize their good standing under DACA or possibly jeopardize their prospect of eventual legalization. This hyper awareness results in undocumented youth becoming “better citizens” by policing themselves in order to demonstrate their worthiness to society.

The second section of the chapter focuses on the cumulative impact of living as an undocumented immigrant on their emotional and mental well being. Mental and emotional health became a prominent theme that emerged in my field notes, interviews, and conversations with undocumented youth. This theme requires examination in order to understand its association with the life experiences of undocumented youth. Research on the mental health issues undocumented youth experience in their social and cultural adjustments to U.S. society is still in its infancy. Understanding their mental health issues is vital to understanding the everyday emotional experiences of immigrants, especially those without legal status. My research seeks to stimulate a much needed dialogue on the mental health challenges immigrants face as they pursue full membership, equity, and upward mobility within the United States. In doing so, I seek to understand the impact of state and society on the individual through the emotional terror inflicted through its laws, institutions, media, and the general population.

As previously stated in Chapter 1, undocumented youth are not a monolithic group. Yet, despite their diversity, living as an undocumented immigrant results in mental health issues that are shared by undocumented youth. I will focus on the following themes that emerged in my field work: family, deportation, relationships, fear of losing

DACA, personal experiences, and the “second nature” fear that becomes habitualized among undocumented youth

The last section focuses on the dreams undocumented youth. The immersion of their experience is so pervasive that it emerges in their dreams. My findings here shed light on the power of state has to create experiences that infiltrates every facet of their lives. Undocumented youths’ dreams inform us of which traumatic experiences remain years after DACA, and possibly for the rest of their lives. Their dreams reflect their everyday experiences, experiences with family members, the threat of deportation, and the fear of being unable to return to the United States. While not all respondents had dreams from their experiences as undocumented immigrants, many of them reported having dreams about their experiences, usually traumatic, as undocumented immigrants even after they received DACA.

LIVING UNDER SUREVEILLANCE: SELF-POLICING AND GOOD BEHAVIOR

Self-Policing

The years of living with an ambiguous legal status forces undocumented youth to constantly adhere to social rules in order to avoid detection by the state. For example, throughout the day undocumented youth have to drive with extreme caution, not going out unless there is a real necessity, avoiding breaking any laws that would require some form of interaction with law enforcement, and disclosing their status only to specific people they trusted. For undocumented youth, living without DACA for years after the

age of 18, this form of daily self-monitoring and policing of their bodies does not end after DACA. For some respondents, constantly policing their bodies in order to follow the rules has become “instinctual.” In accordance with their binary framework of inclusion/exclusion, the legal liminality of DACA is viewed as another version of being undocumented. Accordingly, they continue to police themselves as if they did not have a legitimate legal status. In many respects, respondents have become more cautious of not breaking any rules because of the fear of losing DACA. A few have begun to recognize how they have been policing their bodies (which they previously did not recognize). Indeed, the power of laws and law enforcement coupled with the fear of detention and deportation forces undocumented immigrants to be constantly policing every aspect of their life in order to decrease the likelihood of interacting with an agent of the state. This section explores the various ways that undocumented youth continue to police themselves and their bodies after DACA.

DACA has empowered the undocumented to share their stories; it provides a sense of freedom and normalcy they had never previously experienced. Coupled with increasing educational and professional opportunities, they are able to become members, albeit partial and temporary, of American society. These rights are unfortunately temporary under DACA. For that reason, the fear of DACA being revoked has resulted in undocumented remaining cautious in sharing their legal status. The spaces where undocumented youth are dictates whether they feel comfortable to disclose their legal status. For example, undocumented students are more inclined to disclose their legal status in educational institutions, high schools and colleges, that are supportive of

undocumented students. On the other hand, support and acceptance varies across workplaces. Some employers or fellow colleagues may not be a supportive of undocumented immigrants, and may possibly be hostile towards them. Caution in the workplace applies to both low wage and professional workplaces.

Victor, a young man with a well-paying job in health care, was concerned that human resources would reject his work permit. His friend that works in the human resources office became aware of his legal status through his background check. Similar to other respondents, Victor was worried that people, in this case his friend, would treat him differently: *“I had this weird feeling of like she knows that am not a resident, am not a citizen. Hopefully they don’t see me different you know with that so that was my thought about it.”* This fear stems from everyday experience where they are constantly subjected to the other person’s political views. Avoiding the feeling of being viewed and treated differently is compounded by the uncertainty of DACA. Victor explained his apprehension in sharing his legal status:

***Victor:** I haven’t really thought about telling so many people. If anything, I am just even more careful than I was before [DACA] to be sharing my status just because I feel like it’s so conditional and I can’t take it for granted. So I don’t want to be bragging about something that I may not have tomorrow... I haven’t really thought about telling so many people. If anything, I am just even more careful than I was before to be sharing my status just because I feel like it’s so conditional and I can’t take it for granted, so I don’t want to be bragging about something that I may not have tomorrow*

EE: Well if you had no restrictions let's say to me, or to your close friends...

Victor: Let's say if it is someone that is educated and it is knowledgeable about this program, I will tell them am a DACA recipient right and they'll know a little about my background, if they know the eligibility they'll know where I'm coming from. If they don't know, I will just try [to] avoid saying it. But if it's a close friend you know they found out through the process that I was going through that I was gonna get this so it's a difficult question when you ask that.

Like many other respondents, Victor is cautious with whom, even friends, he shared his story. In his case, the uncertainty of DACA is not worth sharing and he needs to evaluate the individual's conversations to gauge whether they are a safe person. Respondents are especially cautious of revealing their status in non-educational spaces. This follows Foucault's notion of governmentality where individuals self-police themselves. In this case, the state's deputizing of various members of society as defacto ICE agents creates a perception of constant vigilance for undocumented youth. Logically, revealing their status in a society where anyone could be an agent of the state takes time and caution.

The uncertainty of DACA forces respondents to attempt to maintain an unblemished record of being a good member of society in case a path of legalization arises. For Leandra, attending social events are instances in which she must remain cautious. Below she is speaking of employing caution in participating in social events that could jeopardize her future:

Definitely. I get invited to parties and stuff and more often than not I decide not to go because of that reason. I don't want to risk getting caught with anything, getting in any trouble with the law. And I don't want to risk it. Even now, my mom was able to get us MediCal and everything. I made sure everything was spotless. We weren't doing anything wrong because one thing she taught me is that it looks better if we kept our heads down and did what we had to do. Not take anything from the government, illegally or anything. So it looks better that way when we go and apply for residency, citizenship.

Leandra remains cautious of attending parties she feels could become rowdy and could unintentionally revoke her permit. Undocumented youths' behavior is also influenced by the ever present hope that immigration reform lurks in the near future.

Juan Jose followed a similar rationale of thinking about how his behavior could jeopardize his legal status. He entered an immigration detention center where detention center officials viewed him as the main culprit for organizing a hunger strike. Detention center officials no longer wanted him to remain in their facility. Instead they kicked him out and sent him directly to deportation proceedings where he had a memorable interaction with the immigration judge. Here Juan Jose speaks of having to police his behavior after DACA:

I just have to really think about things... I really want to do certain things, like partake in civil disobedience because when I went to court, my case is administratively closed but not administratively thrown out. So it's still within the

immigration courts. It's closed. There are no proceedings against me. The proceedings are closed but the proceedings could be reopened if I get in trouble with the law again and the judge was very clear. She was very nice but she (laughs) was like 'you know you got your DACA so we're gonna administratively close your file but Mr. Sanchez please make sure you do not get in trouble with the law or we will be seeing you back here again. Have a good life, thank you.' I was like, 'Okay.'

Juan Jose's case exemplifies undocumented youth who have dealt with law enforcement before. In many cases, law enforcement officials provide a stern warning when they let them off the hook. For Juan Jose, the immigration judge was clear that any other violation of the law would result in a different outcome. Her advice resonates in Juan Jose's mind as he deliberates whether he should be involved in acts of civil disobedience.

Juan Jose's fear of the state reprimanding undocumented activists with DACA eventually came to fruition. The state will punish anyone whose behavior is not tolerated or deemed worthy to be granted DACA. This occurred to Nadia Sol Ileri Unzueta Carrasco's as a result of her social activism. She has been an outspoken supporter for the rights of noncitizens. In 2013, she and other activists were arrested outside the Hilton in Chicago where a fundraiser was being held for President Obama. They were protesting the deportation of thousands of undocumented immigrants.⁶⁶ DHS denied her renewal because they ruled her social activism as unacceptable behavior. According to the DHS,

⁶⁶ https://www.buzzfeed.com/adolfoflores/undocumented-immigrant-accuses-feds-of-retaliation?utm_term=.loRANex1N#.pqogjxPMj

“her civil disobedience was a threat to public safety.”⁶⁷ This was a symbolic statement by the state to undocumented activists that clarified the terms of their acceptance in society. DHS’s denying Nadia the renewal of DACA established what is not acceptable behavior for undocumented youth.

Although Juan Jose’s experience is uncommon, the aversion to breaking the law to avoid a strong response by the state is common. Undocumented youth with and without DACA police themselves in accordance with the law. During interviews, respondents were asked if they would jay walk. Beatriz, not a DACA recipient but who now has a CA driver’s license, quickly replied that she would jay walk but never in front of a cop:

No! In front of a [cop], no like no... If I know there’s like a cop near me or something, I definitely don’t go if it’s like 25 miles an hour I’m going 22, 20 you know so yeah in that sense I am like extra careful just so I don’t get in trouble even though ... I have my divers license now. ...I still try to be ... good, you know.

Jazmine shares how she jokes with her friends about adhering to the law:

***Jazmine:** No cause I could lose DACA. Hell no, I joke with my friends all the time. I won’t even cross the street...I won’t jay walk because (laughs) E: See so you...and why do you do that, why do you not jay walk? V: Because like a police can stop me and get a ticket. I don’t know, I’m just like . . .*

***EE:** And you’re just fearful...*

⁶⁷ <http://immigrantjustice.org/sites/immigrantjustice.org/files/UNZUETAc COMPLAINT FINAL-20160525.pdf>

Jazmine: Breaking the law... Okay yeah, I won't break the law.

Both of these responses represent the ever-present fear among undocumented immigrants of deportation or having one's DACA revoked. A fear of violating any law is internalized in the everyday life of undocumented youth.

Respondents that obtained DACA before turning 18 are also cautious of breaking the law. Angelica, 21, recently graduated from college recalls jay walking in front of a cop. *"I saw that I crossed the street in front of a cop. I was like 'Oh my god.' I began to sweat."* She feared the cop would follow her and possibly give her a citation. Although this is a small infraction, the fear of a blemished criminal record that could jeopardize their standing in American society remains strong among undocumented youth.

Similarly, Stephanie continues to police herself to follow all laws to avoid a life without DACA: *"In a sense I do. Because now that all the things that I have achieved. I was like, 'Wow! They're going to be taken away. What am I going to do?' I was like, 'What's going to happen? Where am I going to land?'"* Similarly, Rodolfo continues to follow the laws because he now has experienced privileges and a new life he could not envision four years ago:

You got a taste of all of this and now it could be taken away. It is worst now than it was before because before I didn't know what it was like. Now I know what its like and to have the fear that it could be taken away just like that. I think [I am] a little bit more anxious than I was before. . . .

Later Rodolfo explained the importance of maintaining a disciplined approach in order to maintain an unblemished criminal record:

No, if anything I am more careful than before just because I know this [DACA] is temporary. I still don't have access or a pathway to citizenship. The confidence boost that I first received when I got my first work authorization was affected with what has been in the news recently. I mean there has been the whole DAPA, DACA thing that has been held up in court. There has been a strong opposition. I don't know if it [DACA] is going to continue any time after Obama. So I don't think I am in a position to affect or to stain my record just because I have this legal status right now.

Rodolfo and other respondents have begun to enter new phases of their lives that would be difficult to pursue without DACA. Some are prospering or in Rodolfo's case, excelling in law school where he will present a case before the 9th Circuit Court of the United States Court of Appeals later this year. The fear of losing or returning to their previous life is intensified by the increasing anti-immigrant rhetoric in the Presidential primaries.

In some cases, respondents said they would not jay walk even if the cops were not present. In their minds, breaking the law is invariably associated with being deported. The fear of deportation is omnipresent in the immigrant community. Before DACA the fear of deportation centered on interactions with law enforcement or ICE. After DACA, the threat of deportation remains and is exacerbated by the need to remain

in good standing with the US government. Being in good standing is viewed as not breaking any laws that could result in DACA being revoked or possible deportation. As a result, imprudent choices are perceived as having life altering consequences. Gonzalo, 24, discusses how the fear of deportation is always present in his everyday life after DACA:

I am policing myself. Like not jay walking or doing anything that might put me in jeopardy or getting deported or whatever. Having the constant fear, of like, if I do something wrong, I could potentially get deported.

Gonzalo's analysis caught me by surprise. As I began to probe his response, he explained that before DACA he was always monitoring his speech, movement, and body at his job and life in general. From his experience, years of hyper vigilance and self-monitoring does not end after DACA. In fact, Gonzalo feels he must be even more cautious after DACA because freedom under this program is partial and conditional. Gonzalo and other respondents that policed their bodies for years are unable to shake off a way of living that became routine. In his case, Gonzalo continues to employ similar forms of policing as he did before DACA. In accordance to their binary framework of inclusion versus exclusion, undocumented youth must be continually policing themselves in order to protect their safety and that of their families.

Gonzalo's observation follows the respondents' understanding of their liminal legal status constantly being reviewed. From their perspective, the constant surveillance and policing of undocumented immigrants has not changed. Once they enter the public

sphere, they must continue to be alert and careful not to break any laws. This phenomenon is consistent with Foucault's discussion of the power of self-surveillance. Foucault (1975) emphasizes the power of surveillance the police state expresses over the person. This power is intensified to the extent that the person internalizes the rules and policing methods. According to this perspective, the state's end goal is to control the behavior of the individual to ensure the interest and prosperity of the state (Ong 1996). For example, the implementation of cameras in major traffic intersections serves to record drivers committing traffic violations. At the same time, and just as important, drivers are aware that they are being watched. As a result, they then "police" or self-discipline their driving as if the police were present. Therefore, the state's desire to ensure that people obey their laws without the physical presence of law enforcement comes to fruition.

Foucault's (1980) concepts of governmentality and biopower are applicable to undocumented immigrants and youth. Three prominent mechanisms help us grasp the power of laws and surveillance over the immigrant community that forces many to police their bodies in the public sphere. First, several state and federal statutes have sought, and in some cases, succeeded in creating large segments of society as de facto immigration agents. State bills such as California proposition 187 in 1995 and current legislations in Southern states successfully passed to create an atmosphere of the surveillance state among undocumented immigrants. Secondly, much more effective in maintaining social control than state bills have been the conflation of law enforcement with ICE. Depending on the state, county, and or district, in many jurisdictions, law enforcement agents are

obligated to inquire as to whether a person is authorized to be in the United States. The majority of undocumented immigrants are not aware if their local police force has an agreement with ICE. Most notorious of these police agreements is an amendment of the 1996 Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, known as Program 287(g). This program authorized state local law enforcement agencies to enter into an agreement with ICE, to perform immigrant law functions. Any interaction with the police can result in deportation. Lastly, the combination of the threat of deportation impacts undocumented youths' interactions with strangers, coworkers, or friends. The fear of disclosing their legal status has decreased but undocumented youth continue to be cautious in what spaces they divulge such a personal issue. Aware that they can't be deported does not abolish their apprehensions. Due to DACA's unclear future, undocumented youth remain cautious of letting coworkers or individuals know of their work permit in case DACA is revoked. Overall, these three mechanisms create the fear of deportation that pervades every facet of their everyday life.

The intensity and extent to which undocumented youth police themselves varies. Several factors, such as geographical location; interaction with law enforcement; years living without DACA as an adult, and personal experience with a family member deported influence the individual. Notwithstanding, the majority of respondents understand that constantly being surveilled results in implementing self-policing in public spaces. During a follow up interview with Allianza, she provided a clear understanding of why constant surveillance results in undocumented youth policing their bodies. Now 21, she obtained DACA during her last year in high school. She did not experience the

previous undocumented youth rite of passage of entering the secondary labor market or lack of financial assistance in higher education. She spoke of no longer being scared in her everyday life. Moreover, she alluded that she does not think about breaking any laws. At that moment I asked her if she would jay walk if other people were watching. At that moment, Allianza took time to reflect and said “*You know, I probably won’t.*” As I probed further she provided a clear understanding of how undocumented youth view their conditional status: “*I mean, no one is breathing down my neck, but I know I am being watched.*” She is aware that her actions are being watched at all times. Echoing Allianza, Jerson speaks of why he remains cautious after DACA: “*I got to be really careful on how to approach certain things [with] certain people.*” No bad repercussions will arise as long as she does not break any law or is viewed with suspicions by strangers.

Good Behavior

As a result, policing their movement, bodies, and actions remains prevalent in the lives of many undocumented youth. Leandra stated, “*We have to watch where we take our steps because anything wrong can send us home.*” The majority of respondents agreed they had to prove their worthiness to the US in order to renew DACA and an eventual path towards legalization. From their perspective, there are two ways they can demonstrate their worth to the state: adhering to the law or obtaining an education. Both represent desirable forms of behavior that are socially valued.

Respondents with only a high school education view not breaking the law as the main way they can demonstrate that they are a good member of society. One such

respondent was Maria Celeste, 26, who obtained her GED. She worked in various factories and now has a family. From her point of view, behaving the proper way deflects any criticism from dissenters that argue for the end of DACA:

Ah si, de hecho si. Uno tiene que comportarse bien. Pero siempre. [Para] poner un ejemplo como para que la gente no diga oh se los dieron y no hicieron nada. Si no para que vean que si queremos hacer algo diferente.

Oh, yeah. We need to behave well. At all times. It provides an example for people to not say 'Oh, they gave it to them and they did not do anything.' It's for them to see that we want to do something different.

Behaving properly demonstrates to the state and society that one is a contributing member of society. At the same time, she is attempting to fight the criminality associated with undocumented immigrants. Her statement highlights her willingness to behave well in order to demonstrate that she and other immigrants are deserving of future immigration reform. Similarly, Betsy, 18, views DACA as a probationary period so that she must continue “to act right.” She said she will not have any fears as long as she behaves correctly:

Betsy: We have these benefits...we have these benefits, but we're still like another...even American citizens they have things they have to follow. So I mean, it's basically like a probation thing. Right now it's only a two-year thing. So, it's just basically you have to keep acting right so they don't take it away from you.

It's like a privilege. Um, it's just basically just going back to the whole behavior thing. If you're not behaving correctly, your license is going to be taken away. ...it applies to everyone..

Like many other respondents, for Betsy behaving properly represents her way of adhering to the terms of her to her conditional status. I asked her if she continues to have fear. She responded: *“Now? No. It's just the whole deportation thing. As long as we don't do anything that's illegal, we should be fine.”* Behaving well provides an increased sense of security from the fear of deportation. Avoiding “anything illegal” is done by policing themselves in order to not be further criminalized in the eyes of society. Fear from the police has decreased, but many respondents continue to avoid any interactions with law enforcement. In Maria's case, she will be entering a masters counseling program but she remains cautious: *“Because I still ... have DACA but I don't have papers so I feel like if I were to get pulled over they would still do mean things to me.”* Fear of being pulled over and possibly dealing with an unfriendly cop that could jeopardize their DACA status remains salient in the minds of undocumented youth.

Averting interaction with law enforcement and the instability of DACA propels undocumented youth towards strict measures of disciplining their behavior and actions. High school respondents avoided parties or questionable situations that could place their status in limbo. Most common among respondents is adherence to driving within the law. Several respondents speed over the limit or say they have no fear of law

enforcement but continue to drive with caution. For example, Stacy expresses her fear of obtaining a criminal record:

No, I am scared because what if I get a criminal record, because I know every time you apply for DACA it does ask you have you broken any laws and you have to prove documentations. Like if you [ever] went to court you know and you have to show that [documents]. And that could be something that immigration can use against you to not renew your DACA. So I am kind of like, 'No I can't [do this].' Like if we are drinking with my friends, wine you know, but I won't get drunk or if I am drinking and I have a friend that is underage I say 'I am sorry but I am not going to buy you drinks. I don't want to get in trouble.' Those little things that to somebody it won't be a big deal but for me it is.

Stacy is able to connect the various ways that she must be aware of her behavior. She must monitor herself in order to avoid doing things that citizens take for granted, or rarely think about. In her case, she connects her behavior to law violations that could get any citizen into serious trouble: buying alcohol for a minor and drunk driving. Yet, she highlights how she must command self-discipline such as not getting drunk if she is drinking with friends outside her home. It is common for respondents to not enter cars with a driver who has been drinking, especially in highly policed areas of the city.

Undocumented youth and the general undocumented immigrant population are living in a unique historical context. The increase in the state's surveillance of general population but heightened in the undocumented community. Increasing the influence on the need to police their bodies comes from the attention immigrants and immigration

reform receive during Presidential elections. My findings suggest undocumented youth with or without DACA continue to police their bodies in both familiar and unique ways. For many, increased policing of themselves is related to the notion that they are now in the system. Previously, they perceived their lack of legal status as a reason for not worrying about breaking some laws. Now, recognized as persons of the state, they consider losing their current privileges much more important and that prompts them to self-discipline themselves in various social spheres. Additionally, the fear of deportation remains with undocumented youth in averting behavior or actions that could revoke DACA or result in deportation. Their awareness of perceived “adequate” behavior is linked to their understanding that they are being monitored by society. This surveillance is heightened with the political polarization surrounding DACA and immigration reform. Hence, from their view any form of legal infraction could result in unfavorable outcomes for their status and the rest of the community. As Betsy stated, their probationary period is under constant vigilance and scrutiny from the greater society. Breaking of any laws provides evidence for opponents advocating for immigration reform.

MENTAL HEALTH

In 2012, the American Psychological Association issued a report highlighting the need for mental health professionals to understand the effect of what an immigrant endures in the United States (Suarez- Orozco 2012). This report posited that immigrants adapting to a foreign culture experience stress and other mental health issues. Not surprisingly, the lack of any legal status is another facet that effects mental health. Indeed, undocumented youth transitioning into adulthood can suffer from several mental

health issues. Research has shown undocumented youth suffer from depression, anxiety, stress, and frustration as they near adulthood (Gonzales et al. 2014). My research supports these findings. In this section, I focus on the lasting effects of living as an undocumented immigrant on mental health. The emotional and traumatic experiences of undocumented youth are not erased after DACA. In fact, many continue to have mental health issues from their experiences before DACA, and encounter new events that create similar, or in some instances much more traumatic effects on their mental health.

The state, institutions, and every day encounters continue to create a feeling of caution that influences the mental and emotional state health of undocumented youth. Understanding the relationship between the immigrant and the state provides insight on the effects of state created a feeling of constant vigilance. Living in a constant state of vigilance and fear for various years has long-term effects on the person. Not all persons suffer the same forms of mental health problems, nor do all suffer from mental health problems as a result of living as an undocumented youth. Several factors must be taken into consideration in order to understand why some individuals are susceptible to mental health issues. These factors include geographical location, everyday encounters and relationships, their place within the racial hierarchy, experience with law enforcement, and duration of living as an adult without DACA. My findings suggest that the longer a person lives without any form of legal status during their adult years, the more likely they are to experience mental health problems. Consequently, the age in which an individual receives DACA is a good indicator of whether they avoided the trauma of living as an undocumented immigrant or were subject to what Agamben calls “bare life.”

Personal Experience

A major source of stress, anxiety, and other forms of mental health issues for undocumented youth are their personal experiences that reinforce their perception that they are second class citizens. For example, respondents generally allude to not being able to drive, attend college, or work without a SSN as uncomfortable memories. At the same time, other undocumented youth experience a heightened sense of social exclusion from rejection from interpersonal relationships that causes them emotional pain. The various types of experiences that undocumented youth experience regarding their illegality can also be reasons for their mental health problems. In some instances, their experiences can inform them of their identity and resurrect emotions that may have hibernated for years. For some respondents, unforeseen emotions emerge upon recalling their experiences. During the interviews, five respondents politely asked me to avoid questions of them regarding experiences that cause them emotional pain.

Beatriz's experience of being unable to receive proper medical assistance illustrates some of the stressful hardships that undocumented youth experience. Beatriz is a 29-year-old college student who does not qualify for DACA. Her light complexion, dark hair, youthful appearance, and omnipresent smile suggests that she is a very happy, healthy person. Beatriz migrated to the U.S. at the age of 4 from Guadalajara, Mexico. After high school, she obtained a job at McDonald's and was attending the local community college. Like undocumented youth before DACA and the CA Dream Act, Beatriz was frustrated with the limited options available to her as an adult. At the age of

20 she became extremely ill. She did not seek medical attention because she did not have health insurance and feared having to pay an insurmountable medical bill. The lack of medical attention resulted in a significant weight and hair loss for Beatriz. Her mother was fearful that Beatriz might die due to her deteriorating health and appearance. She took Beatriz to the emergency room to have a doctor diagnose her daughter.

Before beginning to recount her experience in the emergency room, Beatriz informed me that it would be the first time she would be speaking to someone about her experience. Her voice began to crack as she tried to complete her sentences. After a few minutes, she looked down at the floor and began to cry. I paused the tape recording for ten minutes to allow her to regain her composure. Beatriz was surprised how much emotional pain she had suppressed as she recounted her story.

The emergency room did not want to admit her into the hospital because she did not have health insurance and her condition did not look life threatening. Despite providing a detailed account of her losing over 100 pounds and a nearly hairless scalp, the receptionist did not offer her any medical options. At that moment her mom began to cry and said “Why can’t you help my daughter? She is dying!” The only medical attention she received was limited to an examination of her vital signs by a nurse. Beatriz was scared and thought she was going to die because the hospital was unwilling to have a doctor diagnose her illness. She and her mom left the hospital in fear and were devastated that they were denied access to a doctor, at minimum, to diagnose her illness.

The following morning, her parents purchased a plane ticket to Guadalajara so she could see a doctor there. Beatriz was sad to leave but understood she required medical

attention. Upon arriving in Guadalajara, she immediately sought medical attention. Much to her surprise, within a minute of speaking with a doctor, she was diagnosed with Cushing's Syndrome. Within the hour, several tests were conducted to validate the diagnosis and to determine the proper course of treatment. Beatriz stayed in Guadalajara for three months until her hair grew back and her weight reached a healthy level.

Beatriz's departure from Mexico in 2007 is the source for her ineligibility for DACA. She provides her outlook on speaking of her experience and responds to people naively suggesting that she just "fix" her status.

I was desperate to come home you know. And I didn't go because I wanted to go I would because it was like...like I could.... think I could have died if I didn't go get checked you know and they didn't see what was going on because my body was just like giving up on me.

Numerous illnesses affected her health after returning to the US. She underwent several surgeries that stalled her life for two years. She recounted giving her mother another death scare:

I don't know what they are called, she said that they had to put those [defibrillator] and then there was a bunch of doctors and they told her to step outside and that was very dramatic....she tells me I thought 'I was going to lose you that day.' I said I don't remember much of that at all I just remember waking up in the ICU again....so anyways after that I was in the hospital for like another 3 weeks and then I finally got released and I went home and I was still very sick I didn't get up on my feet until like 6 months later yeah I was literally, I couldn't

eat anything I was like throwing up everything even water I was throwing up you know like everything, everything so my day at home was literally just staying in bed and sleeping.

Her unending health problems coupled with her legal status took their toll on Beatriz.

The second [surgery] was to install the tube and then afterwards they had another one to remove that tube...and after the 6 months you know all of that like I wanted to die honestly like I saw that my life. Living my life was pointless and I was so tired of being like that and I wanted to go back to my normal life and whatever I yeah I wanted to die... I felt very sick and I thought that my life was over, but after I was a little bit better. I didn't go out at all okay during those 6 months. I went out one time, to the bank and I had like a panic attack.

Beatriz fully recuperated from her various ailments. She is currently attending a UC campus, lives with her boyfriend, and is pursuing a professional degree. Reflecting on her odyssey to regain her health, Beatriz remains frustrated about the obstacles she experienced, is saddened of how many undocumented immigrants are denied medical assistance.

Other identify different events after DACA that remind them of their illegality. This occurred to Venicio, 28, as he recounted his experience with a reten (checkpoint) that resulted in him spending a night in the drunk tank. Venicio describes himself during his teenage years and early 20's as someone "who did not care like every kid from the

hood.” He is the only undocumented person in his family. A family emergency led his pregnant mother to migrate to Mexico where he lived the first nine months of his life.

During our interview, Venicio expressed remorse for leading a life in which he hung out with the “wrong” people. He stated that living without any legal status without DACA rarely affected his everyday life or mental health. When I asked him if he was upset when he found out that pursuing higher education would be difficult, he replied: “*I didn’t think I wanted to go to college.*” Ten minutes later he began talking in great detail of his interaction with the police during a checkpoint. Vicente was denied entrance to a bar because his matricula was not accepted as a valid form of identification. His friends decided to attend a different bar where he could partake in their festivities. Since Venicio had yet to drink a beer, he drove his friends in his red Mustang. He saw the check point and stopped and asked his friend to switch with him and drive through the checkpoint. One of the officers noticed the car stopping and drivers switching. Once they reached the checkpoint the cop took them for further inspection where his friend failed both the breathalyzer and the field sobriety tests (driving under the influence) taken on the side of the road. It resulted in his friend losing his drivers license and spending a night in jail.

From Venicio’s perspective, he was not upset in spending the night in the drunk tank. He blames himself as the reason for his friend obtaining a DUI. His lack of legal status was the reason that his friend’s license was suspended and also spent the night in jail. This event occurred six years ago, but during the interview, Venicio’s expressed sadness and remorse.

Initially, he was concerned of not qualifying for DACA because of his stint in jail. The cop that was questioning him asked for an ID, but the cop's partner chimed in to say that no form of ID was required since Venicio was not the suspect. Aware of conflicting stances, Venicio asked the officer questioning him as to which cop's orders should he be following. The cop claimed that exchange was a form of obstruction of justice that resulted in brief jail time. Fortunately, Venicio was able to obtain the police report for that night which provided evidence that Venicio's arrest was without merit. Venicio married a US citizen and, at the time of the interview, was finishing his English degree and aspired to obtain a teaching credential.

The emotional consequences of attempting to avoid a checkpoint resurfaced as he neared the Cross Border Express (CBX) in San Diego. The Tijuana Cross Border Terminal is physically located in the United States but serves the Tijuana airport. Travelers walk through a bridge that connects the US and Mexico border. Venicio and his wife were driving to the CBX to pick up his mother-in-law. As he neared the bridge, Venicio began to have a panic attack.

I had a mean anxiety attack and I started panicking. I got angry because you know it's one imaginary line that you cross and that's it, there is no going back after that and at the same time I got pissed off because I started tearing up and then when I tear up I don't like feeling like you know...I feel like in a way emasculating and so that's...I just broke down in front of my wife and she is like looking at me and did not know what to do. She didn't know what to say and then so she got off and asked the car in front of us, 'Hey is that a check point?' and

even that person was like, 'I don't even know and am not gonna go either.' And so her mom was calling [asking] 'Where are you guys at?' and she is trying to explain what is going on. So I told her, 'You know what? We'll go, but you're driving.'

It was difficult for Venicio to recount this memory. He took deep breaths, and took his time to keep his emotions in check. A long pause occurred followed by Venicio looking up and began smiling. He said, *"Shit, I see the parallel."* I probed and asked him to explain. Venicio connected his experience with the police checkpoint with his panic attack as he neared the CBX. From his perspective, the physical structure of the CBX reminded him of the DUI checkpoint. The emotions and feelings he experienced with the cops, jail, and blaming himself for his friend's DUI resurfaced as his mind began to recall his experience with a previous checkpoint.

Vicente, 27, spoke of his experience driving without a license for various years without a CA drivers license. Driving long distances and a fear of the police created a constant fear in him. Years of driving with his eyes in the back mirror, below the speed limit, and heightened awareness of police presence became second nature to him. Adding to his daily fear were his interactions with law enforcement: *"The most important thing for me, for DACA at that point, was the driver's license. Because driving without one is a financial burden. And it's a stress. To get around [Southern California] you need a license. My encounters with police officers has not led me to have a positive reaction when I see them."* Vicente lost several cars due to impounding by the police, DUI checkpoints, or unforeseen stops. Assuming he would eventually have his car taken

away, Vicente purchased cheap cars. For Vicente, having a car with a working air conditioner, power windows, and less than two hundred thousand miles is considered a luxury. Vicente recalled his heightened vigilance while driving:

In June 2012, well, I actually took a long time to apply. I applied around March 2013. I didn't get my license until July 2013. Up until that point I was very careful about how I drive. Even now once in a while because I forget that I have a license. . . . I feel the blood pressure right away. The blood pressure goes up. It spikes. And I feel it already. In public health where you have your individuals that are not privileged or go through these traumas in life aren't able to recover when it comes to their anxieties. The theory says that we deteriorate. It takes a toll on us.

Vicente obtained a Master's degree in Public Health before pursuing medical school. His training allowed him to understand how his experience as an undocumented immigrant took an emotional and psychological toll. He observed, based on his experience and that of his friends, that living as an undocumented immigrant is a form of trauma that negatively affects their physical and mental well-being. Despite an academic training that provided him with the conceptual tools to study how traumatic experiences in his life influence his mental health, Vicente is unable to stop instances, as the one mentioned above, that result in emotional distress.

Similarly, Juan Jose expressed the view that living as an undocumented immigrant is a trauma that cannot be erased from a person's identity and well being. His insights come from interactions with various undocumented immigrants in the Inland

Empire. Before working for a major civil rights organization, Juan Jose was a community organizer for several years. Juan Jose has been in contact with close friends and members of the immigrants' rights movement to help draw attention to a growing need for mental health assistance for undocumented immigrants. For example, Juan Jose is discussed the life experience of the undocumented in the United States.

Juan Jose: I mean it's just I think for a lot of us it's been this traumatic, traumatic, thing that a lot of us had to endure that's just kind of doesn't go away by just getting citizenship you know?

EE: Yeah.

Juan Jose: Like our lived experiences are lived struggles and don't just disappear because we get permanent residency. Like we will all still be immigrants. We will all still have that experience of what it was to be undocumented of having that fear of border patrol. Like these things take a lot of time to get over and I think for a lot of people that they still have that. Like my dad, he's a resident and he has no problem [with law enforcement] as long as he doesn't like commit like a serious felony and stuff you know? But there's no problem you know... He can drive safely, but he still has this very.... Like I hear reactions to the seeing the police. He still reacts like he used to.

EE: Its instinctual?

Juan Jose: Its instinctual like all these things become instinctual, so I think it's very hard for us at least the ones that are so politically active and motivated to do the work are not going to forget it. I mean it might be the different case for other

people because you saw that with the 1986 Amnesty and like people became complacent like 'I am a US citizen now. I'm not an immigrant no more.' So people started erasing their immigrant history you know? At least for my cohort, like these folks that I called friends, and DACA.... I don't think a lot of us are going to forget.

Juan Jose's views on the influence living as an undocumented immigrant has on the individual were shaped by observing his father who is now a legal permanent resident. He saw his father react to the police as if he was undocumented even after legalizing his status. Years of living as an undocumented immigrant cannot be erased or turned off like a faucet. This is the major factor Juan Jose identifies that differentiates his cohort from previous immigrants: living in a hyper policed, media saturated, xenophobic, and racially charged society as children through adulthood. I saw Juan Jose several months later after the interview. I thanked him for his insights on the mental health issues undocumented immigrants face. Later during our conversation, he informed me that he is talking to a therapist and is taking medication for depression and anxiety.

PRISM has monthly healing circle meetings for all undocumented students to come and speak of any issues they are facing. The lack of qualified professionals on campus to assist undocumented students is a major reason why the healing circle became a monthly event. Throughout the country, thousands of spaces have been created to empower and help undocumented immigrants learn how to cope with their experience.

Magdalena, 27, speaks of the importance of a space of comfort that allows her to confront some of the ramifications of her experience:

Yeah, just letting it out and after a while I wasn't crying anymore. I was able to fully tell my whole story from the beginning to the end whereas in the beginning I don't think I even [could continue] after like saying my name and saying I was undocumented. I would start to tear up. I noticed that older members were able to tell their story. But the newer members when they started to tell their story too, they also had that thing where they would start to cry or they [would] break down and all of that. So, I think its really cool that we are able to have this space for people where they can let go of all of these things. [Later] you will see them a couple of months later and they would also be able to tell their story from the beginning to the end without breaking down

Sharing her story with others allowed Magdalena to understand how her life as an undocumented woman in Maryland and later in California shaped her psychological state:

Everyone is very supportive of each other and isn't afraid to mention their status and I think is really good psychologically too because there is so much pain that also goes along with being undocumented because you have all of this dramatic experiences that happen. . . Well even just like the whole driver's license thing or like going somewhere with your friends or like not being able to go places. All of these things you really don't have anyone to talk to when they were happening.

Now we all like are comfortable sharing stories but its interesting because at first when I started to share my story, I didn't realize that there was so much pain that went along with being undocumented that when I was trying to share my story like I would just break down because it is stuff that you don't tell people. Like you don't talk to people. You don't share stories with other people. When we started to [share our stories], it is like therapeutic to be able to talk about these stories and tell each other our stories and have other people that would understand.

Magdalena's observation points to the various stages undocumented youth go through in their process of speaking about their experience. Similar to other respondents, speaking of her experience for the very first time is difficult and elicits emotions that have accrued over the years. Magdalena observes that it takes time for undocumented youth to reflect in order to process their life experiences. Due to their individual traumatic experiences, undocumented youth find it difficult to speak of their experiences. Undocumented youths' reluctance to speak directs one to various untold events, unshared experiences that left an emotional imprint on undocumented youth.

Catching Up

Gonzales (2008) and other scholars have pointed to the arrested development – such as anxiety, frustration, and depression– of undocumented youth that results from the combination of their legal status and their lack of integration into society. Not having control of their economic well-being, pursuing a career, or moving out of their parent's home are common frustrations expressed by undocumented youth. As a result,

undocumented youth are unable to share their experiences with peers. It is not surprising that some respondents perceive themselves as finally starting their life.

For the purposes of this discussion, I will refer to two groups of undocumented youth in order to explore the lasting impact of living “in the shadows.” The two groups are undocumented youth that received DACA after the age of 18 and those that received DACA before the age of 18. The former experienced adulthood without a legitimate legal status. The latter avoid the trauma associated with adult experiences of living without legal status. Catching up refers to the perception of undocumented youth of the need to learn how to be a functioning adult along with the various social and cultural norms in their age group. Undocumented youth that received DACA before the age of 18 avoid the various legal and emotional obstacles their older peers endured. They are able to obtain a driver’s license, work, and pursue a higher education with more financial and institutional support.

Before DACA, showing their passport or matricula in places, in particular bars, that asked for a form of identification were sources of rejection. They were treated differently, condescendingly, or embarrassed by individuals rejecting their form of identification. For some, it also limited their exposure to be part of events with their peers because they wanted to avoid the hassle of forcing the entire party to relocate. Victor explains his hesitation of going out with colleagues before DACA:

Friends, like close friends, some of them didn’t even know, right? And some of them... Let’s say we would go in a mixed group where some of them were close, some of them were not.... Although my close friends knew [my legal status], I

would hesitate on going because other ones would find out that. Like, 'Oh you can't have a drink because they don't approve [or] accept passports.' So it would just be [an] embarrassment or I wouldn't just get a drink. I began just to avoid that.

It is common for undocumented youth to avoid situations where they would have to explain to strangers why they are denied entrance to bars. In other instances, before DACA, undocumented youth did not have excess income or were living at home with strict house rules that conflicted with the American culture of their peers. Martha Maria, 20, spoke of the limitations she experienced that kept her from engaging in more social gatherings.

Socially, yes with my friends. Because every time they're like 'Oh, let's go out ...and do this.' Go to the movies. Go to the clubs. Because they're working, they have the money to go out and do that. Since I'm living with my parents and then [my dad's] the one. . . . If I want to go out I have to tell him and ask him, like oh, my friends want to go out. He's the one giving me money for everything. My dad.

To be financially dependent on their parents as adults was already a source of frustration. The majority of the respondents are from low-income households. Because of their family's tight economic circumstances, many avoided asking for spending money, or avoided spending their earnings in case of any unforeseen events .

Once receiving DACA, older respondents were excited and ready to obtain an independent adult life. Rodolfo, 27, did not partake in various social functions with his

peers because he was either working, did not have enough money, was studying, or avoided the hassle of explaining his matricula or Mexican passport as valid forms of identification. After DACA, Rodolfo was able to obtain a job that allowed him to stay in the city where he obtained his bachelor's degree. Now in law school, he engages in various social functions he previously avoided. Asked about catching up with his peers. Rodolfo replied:

Rodolfo: Um...yes and no. I feel like I have experience[d] a lesser amount of what they have [had] for a long time. That it leaves me with wanting to do more and it seems that they are moving on to a more, I don't know a stable-not stable, I don't want to use the word stable...

EE: Can you give me an example?

Rodolfo: Well I still wanted to go out. Let's say [for] a weekend but they're... You know what? 'Let's just stay in and sleep?' Like, 'Let's just rest for the weekend.' I was like man, I really had a lot of fun the other time. I really would like to go out. So it seems that they already got the dose of it, their fun, and now I kind of have to like stop because they stopped, not because we all got our dose.

Rodolfo is eager to experience a social life that he missed in his early twenties. Wanting to share his excitement conflicts with the current life stage of his friends. Having already experienced a social nightlife several years ago, his friends would rather relax or pursue other events. Since his entire group of friends already had fun, Rodolfo feels cheated out of the experience of having an active social life.

Older respondents (age 25 years or more) were more likely to perceive their life trajectory as being behind their peers. For several, this has resulted in anxiety and stress for several years. Frustration arises after DACA because they had to delay adulthood for several years. Sandra, 27, still lives with her mother. She cleaned houses with her for several years and rarely went out. Her primary source of frustration stems from waiting for years to “start her life” that enabled her to pay for her community college education. *“I was just frustrated just because I, you know, [lost] a lot of time. A lot of years that I could have been working towards my degree.”*

Undocumented youth that obtained a college degree but were unable to formally enter the labor market also experience a form of anxiety of catching up to their peers.

EE: Now that you have this and you get to drive and you’re working, do you feel you’re having more of a normal life as your peers?

Vicente: You know what? There’s something...I don’t know if I like that question, but I will tell you that’s something that I have observed. I’ve observed hanging out with a lot of my undocumented colleagues and friends that we feel that we’re behind.

EE: In terms of development?

Vicente: In terms of educational, professional [development]. . . We’re behind. And we’re always trying to catch up. And that anxiety is very troublesome. And it’s very debilitating. I think at the point that we get behind or we perceive we’re behind, that it’s internalized, internalized stress. We forget that because of how school is set up, K through 12. You go to college. If you’re lucky you don’t have to

go to a community college. You can go to a university. We have this notion that the educational trajectory is linear. And forget about life. We forget about life. Even ask immigrants that are documented. We think similarly about education. This anxiety, being behind. Trust me, I get it. I experience it. The people that I talk to experience it. It's very real. Nothing strange, man. I get it.

Vicente is aware of the problem of comparing his educational and professional trajectory with his peers. This comparison results in anxiety of not being where they are expected to be in life according to the traditional trajectory of a “successful” American. In Vicente’s case, he is 27 and preparing to apply for medical school. He is aware that the lack of financial assistance was a significant obstacle that created an unequal playing field in comparison to his peers. Despite his awareness of the financial restrictions he faced, Vicente, along with his undocumented peers, is unable to break from the strength of the expectations of the life stage that “successful” adults, should be by a particular age. This inability to break from a feeling of falling behind a life stage, others in the same age group have already experienced is a major source of anxiety for undocumented youth.

The majority of respondents have not been as fortunate as Vicente. They were unable to pursue a higher education or pursued completely different jobs in comparison to their professional training. Juan Jose speaks of the life alterations, education and professional careers, he and others go through. He elaborates how he negotiated his future during college as a result of his legal status:

I think a lot of us had to kind of like not exchange but negotiate with our self with what we wanted to do and our future because of certain limitations. I mean as

much as we wanted to do it like there were some things like if you don't have a social [SSN], you're not gonna be able to get your nursing license you know? So we kind of like had a lot of us had to do that balance things out, seek careers that wouldn't necessarily ask us for ... degrees that weren't gonna ask for this certain type of things. ...A lot of the people that I know that are undocumented [in] my cohort, it's like sociology, Chicano Studies, Psychology, like social science heavy and gender studies. That's usually what people get their degree [in] (laughs) cause maybe it might be those things help us....

Juan Jose highlights the educational and professional concessions that undocumented youth experience before DACA. Capitulating to a different life and career path forces undocumented youth to adjust to a life many find difficult to accept. In this case, Juan Jose and others pursued degrees to support their social activism or that would allow them to earn a decent wage in the job market and it helps undocumented youth make sense of their own life experiences and oppression. At the same time, some respondents were forced to alter their education and career path because of their lack of legal status. In these cases, educated respondents with no family obligations are more likely to return and obtain a college degree. In contrast, older respondents that receive DACA and now have a family must negotiate their career paths in accordance with the restrictions imposed by their family obligations. They are more likely to pursue a training certificate or short-term program as more realistic choices.

Regardless of educational attainment, their legal status prevented them from partaking in certain social domains associated with adulthood. The years of not participating in specific forms of adulthood are difficult to reconcile for undocumented youth who lived without DACA after the age of 18. Juan Jose speaks of some of the adjustments undocumented youth faced in their early 20s:

(giggles) Yeah well I had to, 'cause all my coworkers [are].... none of them are DACAmented, So, I was, like, I'm trying .. not [to] make myself seem as ... someone [that] doesn't know what the hell he's doing (laughs), 'cause that's the reality. It's like you gotta file ... taxes, [obtain] credit, like all this stuff that wasn't really pertaining to us because I mean we didn't have to deal with it. So we didn't have to learn it. Now I'm like 'Okay I need to work on my credit score. I gotta get a credit card... I gotta make my payments.' We all have DACA. Some of us have credit, some of us don't. How do we go about it? How do we do it and so we were like having discussions of like which bank we should probably go to... People were like, okay yeah, you should probably go to Capital One 'cause I know like a lot of nation state dreamers... they got their credit through Capital One because it has less barriers but then I was like, 'Well, actually I just got mine through Wells Fargo but that was probably because I had an account with them like a checking and savings account with them for like three years.' And so [we] were just like having this discussion of like credit that we normally wouldn't be because none of us are [documented].

In many cases, undocumented youth are the first in their family to partake in these types of institutional interactions, such as driving and filing taxes, or obtaining a credit card. Not recognized by the state, undocumented immigrants are legally prevented from engaging or obtaining this type of institutional knowledge that is acquired during early adulthood. Since their family remains without any legal status, undocumented youth must learn how to file taxes, obtain financial credit, and other forms of institutional knowledge on their own.

Family

The threat of deportation or witnessing a family member being deported leaves an everlasting memory with all immigrants. The emotional toll associated with the experience impacts individuals differently depending on their life stage and the context in which it is experienced. Respondents speak of being prepared at a young age, as early as 6 years old, by their parents of where to go and who to call in case they did not come home. At such a young age, they are not completely aware of what could occur but as they get older, they come to learn about the threat of deportation. Therefore, when their parent(s) fail to come home during their usual time, it provokes much anxiety and a multitude of scenarios in their minds. Fortunately, most respondents did not have to follow the protocol their parents created for them. Respondents that endured the trauma of their parents being deported, appear to suffer from various mental health issues.

This was the case for Jazmine who witnessed the deportation of her father. As previously stated, Jazmine is a strong Oaxacan woman who is the only member of her four siblings, who all qualified for DACA, to attend college. During the interview, she

began to cry as she recounted the deportation of her father. Her father was able to purchase a home with the help of an American citizen as co-signer during the height of the housing speculation bubble in the mid-2000's. Similar to millions of home owners, the economic recession severely impacted the value of the house which caused much emotional and financial stress on her father.

***Jazmine:** Yeah... Yes, he bought it with this guy that has like citizenship and it was just really bad times because my dad was going through like an emotional break down. Like he was losing the house, and I know we were not paying for it anymore (started crying). He was just going crazy and he even kicked my mom out of the house one time, but like he didn't [kick me out] because he was like you are a good student so you can stay with me. . . . I understand my dad and I don't judge him*

***EE:** Yeah*

***Jazmine:** And ah I even received a call one time. I don't know how they got my number but they're like we know your dad is undocumented and if you don't leave the house, I am going to call ICE on you and I just hanged up [the phone]... I don't know what I told him but I remember hanging up. And yeah, I guess I was kind of scared but not really. And so eventually my dad had a break down. I guess like the police detained him for DUI and we did not what to do and my mom was like, 'Just let him be in jail,' (laughs) because he's been in jail other times (laughs). And she was like, 'He'll get out.' Like we didn't know, I didn't know what to do but I was worried about my dad because he was in jail but my mom*

was like, 'Ya dejalo ahi (just leave him there). (laughs) He has to learn his lesson.' And I guess that's when he was deported. He was deported and we got like kicked out of the house so we didn't have a place to live, so my sister was the only one working [at] that time. And so I remember this lady from our pueblo. She was renting like a room and we all had to like live in the same room. I was never close to my dad but like I felt empty. Since then I've been scared to lose people.

Jazmine personally experienced the outcome of her father's deportation when a random stranger called and said that her family needed to vacate the house. The deportation of her father forced her entire family of 5 to live in a small room. She emphasized in the interview that losing her father was a traumatic experience that influenced other aspects of her personal life. Later in the interview she elaborates on how the fear of losing people personally affected her relationship.

***Jazmine:** No it was just really stressful and I guess now...this is really personal but like I had a boyfriend. And like it was a bad relationship, but I didn't want to lose anybody else in my life. So I couldn't let go of that person because I can't lose anyone else.*

***EE:** ...Completely understand and how old were you when this happened?*

***Jazmine:** Oh I was like 18.*

Jazmine's boyfriend drove her to visit her father and was supportive of her pursuit in attending a four-year institution. Despite these strong qualities, they were in an unhealthy relationship. The fear of losing anyone prolonged her relationship with her boyfriend. Already in an unhealthy relationship, Jazmine spoke of family members strongly suggesting they should end their relationship since both were undocumented.

My uncle always told my ex-boyfriend and I to date someone with papers to fix our status. I did not agree with my uncle because I loved my ex-boyfriend even if he did not have papers. However, my ex-boyfriend always told me that we should break up and find someone with papers. I tried to be optimistic by telling him that one day we would be able to fix our status...However, I remember that I felt worthless whenever he told me that we should get into another relationship to fix our status. I felt like I was not good enough to help the person I loved the most. It was very frustrating and that is why I never tell this to anyone... At first, I hated him so much for leaving me. However, I felt I could not live without him. It was a time that I was simply sad all the time. So I looked for help at the counseling center. It has been two years since we broke up and it still hurts but I do not let it control my life anymore.

Her fear of losing people was reinforced when her boyfriend eventually ended their relationship to seek legalization. It affected her self-esteem and caused her to question her worthiness as a person. Fortunately, she sought professional counseling to help her deal with the traumatic experience. In contrast, her father's deportation had different effects on her brother. He finished high school and entered the labor market. Through his

networks he obtained a job as dishwasher. Despite obtaining DACA, he rides the bus every day to work at a job where management treats him as an undocumented immigrant, and has no offers for job advancement. Her brother's experience with DACA can be seen as a lateral move because it did not improve his prospects of upward mobility. This lateral move and frustration is augmented by the constant racism he faces from the Mexican immigrant community. Every day at work he is subject to racist remarks such as "pinche indio" that mock and dehumanize his indigenous ancestry.

Jazmine explains the impact of their father's deportation and her brother's experience after DACA.

I think, so there is something wrong with him, Edwin... Since my dad was deported, he just stopped caring about everything and he blames my dad for being the way he is. But I don't know what's wrong with him. [He] just has no motivation what so ever to continue school. He just doesn't want to go to school. He just has no motivation what so ever.

Although both Jazmine and her brother suffered from the psychological impact of having their father deported, they also exhibit contrasting experiences. Jazmine was able to understand why she remained in unhealthy relationships and sought professional help. On the other hand, her brother has a much different experience as a low wage worker. He blames his father for his current situation, suffers from hopelessness, and has not sought any professional help. This case highlights how traumatic experiences influence a family member and how they cope with or respond to their emotional state. A possible

explanation is the different social positions of Jazmine and her brother have in life.

Jazmine is enrolled in the honors college on a UC campus. A national newspaper featured a story on her return to her hometown to highlight how undocumented students with DACA can study abroad. Furthermore, she will have various options for employment upon graduation. In contrast, her brother graduated from high school but continues to live the undocumented experience of low wage labor, exploitation, and racism.

Different perceptions of living as an undocumented immigrant, especially among siblings, are common. Leandra became comfortable with her legal status before she qualified for DACA. She was fortunate in high school to have supportive friends as she struggled to disclose her status. In contrast, her twin brother continues not to accept or disclose his legal status. For years he internalized his frustrations that he directed towards all of his family members. Leandra speaks of her brother's struggles with his legal status:

And my brother was the biggest issue because I came to terms with it [my legal status]. Whether it was through talking with my girlfriend, having it out, and ranting and crying. I had all these mental breakdowns really. I got it out of my system at some point. My brother to this day hasn't accepted the fact. He, for a very long time after we found out we were undocumented, he blamed my parents and [that] put a strain on their relationship. He was very angry and he blamed the fact that we couldn't go to college on them. And even on me. His blaming them made me feel guilty because all I did... It was my fault essentially without it being my fault and why we came here. My parents came here for medical

reasons, medical reasons for me. And so, if I didn't have the problems that I did, we wouldn't be here at all. So, I felt guilty and I felt very depressed for a while.

Her brother channels his frustration to Leandra despite being fully aware that their migration was to obtain much needed medical help for his sister. Leandra was born with a medical condition where doctors in Mexico said she would not walk. Her family members were middle class professionals in Guadalajara. They left their comfortable life and professions to obtain proper medical help in the US. Leandra suffered from stress, guilt, and depression because she felt she had forced her family to leave their comfortable lives.

In Tanya's situation, her depression and anxiety resulted from the uncertainty of her brother's health care once he turns eighteen. Similar to Leandra's family, Tanya's family migrated to the United States to give her younger brother, who suffers from osteodystrophy, to obtain proper medical help. Tanya attended an affluent high school in Southern California where she felt lonely. She could not share her experience as an undocumented immigrant with any of her friends. In community college she began to cope with the anxiety and loneliness she suffered:

Tanya: ... it did affect me like emotionally. I started getting a lot of anxiety, not out of fear, but out of being lonely all the time kind of. So for a while I did start seeing a counselor and stuff and I was on Xanax and stuff.

Her experience in high school was compounded by her figuring out the intricacies of the college application process by herself. Tanya does not qualify under the current

requirements for DACA. She migrated a year after the cutoff date. Not qualifying for DACA does create some frustration, but Tanya suffered more stress over the anxiety of her brother's uncertain health status:

Tanya: But knowing that those visas were going to expire, I started doing some research and there was a lot of fear of like my dad not coming home one day because I realized that was a very really possibility. And realizing even though we came here for like healthcare for my brother, knowing there wasn't much access to health care other than little clinics and hospitals for children who help everybody, but you have to be under eighteen. So one day I knew he was going to be over eighteen and they weren't going to... So it was like, I started seeing all the things that could possibly affect us in the future and that could affect us in the present and the future. It did create some fear for a while.

EE: Did that create a lot of stress for you?

Tanya: Oh yeah. And then the pills came and I'm alright.

Once again, Tanya was able to obtain professional assistance to help her cope with brother's uncertain future and the possibility of deportation within her family.

Several respondents highlight the stress of seeking medical help for themselves or their parents. In Tanya's case, the worry for her brother's well being increased her stress as he reached adulthood and would no longer qualify for various medical services. As an undocumented immigrant, he would not qualify for public health insurance. In a different context, Rodolfo feels guilt and pressure to complete law school as a result of his

family's financial contributions and hardships. During his undergraduate training, he did not benefit from the CA Dream Act. Rodolfo took several quarters off to work in the agricultural fields in the Central Valley to save money to pay for his tuition. His income was not sufficient to pay for rent, books, and food. His family provided significant financial support for him during law school. The financial support for undocumented students in California is limited to undergraduate education. As a result, despite a generous scholarship from the law school, it was necessary for Rodolfo to receive financial support from his family:

***Rodolfo:** We were at a point where they were about to foreclose on the house because of them helping me. I felt extremely guilty, I was actually going to stop pursuing my legal degree and search for employment so I could help them keep the house. They didn't want me to do that, they told me to keep going with my legal education. I told them that I would go part time and help them out and still they didn't want to um. I am grateful I mean without them I wouldn't be able to go and pursue my legal education but is hard on my family. I mean honestly, I think they are struggling more than I am because they have to provide for my siblings and my sisters are in high school and they have to suffer this struggle along with me and I don't think that's fair.*

***EE:** Is that a stress for you?*

***Rodolfo:** It is a constant stress on a daily basis. There is no day that I don't think about it, but at the same time is a motivational stress I guess.*

His family's willingness to sacrifice their house to support Rodolfo is an incredible burden. Despite his family's support, he feels guilty that he is jeopardizing their only source of wealth. Secondly, his goal of becoming a lawyer is currently at the cost of his younger siblings who are at an important time period in their lives. As a result, Rodolfo is constantly worrying about completing his degree and obtaining a well-paying job in order to provide financial assistance for his family. From his perspective, the sacrifice his entire family made for his legal education will not be a success if he is unable to repay his family for its financial support.

DREAMS

Dreams also shed light on the lasting impact of living as an undocumented immigrant. During my first interview, I became aware of the lasting effect of living in a society that does not legally recognize the individual, severely limits their participation in society, and polices their everyday life when Victor shared his dreams with me. My findings about dreams were validated through my conversations with community leaders, students, and PRISM members. Generally, dreams represent the internalization of the threat of deportation, traumatic events, and personal experiences that leave an emotional impact that resurface during their dream. Not all undocumented youth have been exposed to such traumatic events, but many have difficult experiences that instill fear, which manifests in their sleep. For several respondents having these dreams is a form of validation for their argument that living as an undocumented immigrant is a traumatic experience. Furthermore, their dreams provide insight on how much power the state, if it chooses to engage in various forms of marginalization, can have on the individual.

Lastly, dreams demonstrate the various challenges that permeate every facet of undocumented youth's lives. This section highlights the dreams of undocumented youth after DACA.

DACA reduces the threat of deportation. Older respondents that worked "under the table," drove without a license, or who experienced the threat of deportation (before DACA) are more likely to have dreams reenacting that threat. The travel restrictions undocumented youth and DACA recipients face emerges in their dreams when they travel outside of the U.S. In Jerson's case, he spoke of the dreams that point to the various restrictions he faced before DACA:

Dreams about actually going overseas and you know little simple things like that. Not too complex, but I would wake up and it will be a bummer like I can't do that. Like you know I felt trapped. I can go anywhere in California but at the same time, I can't.

Jerson's downplay of the "simple little things" points to the various restrictions he faced before DACA. As a young adult in his early 20's, Jerson was influenced by the importance American society places on traveling the world for personal growth. The importance of traveling symbolizes the freedom that the middle class and college students have in visiting foreign places for leisure, personal growth, or consumption. Jerson's dream indicates his desire to partake in this American cultural pattern.

At the same time, traveling signifies freedom to move between nation states without any hassle. Undocumented youth without DACA can travel out of the country

but may be unable to return. DACA recipients are able to travel only if they obtain *advance parole* from DHS for educational, humanitarian, or job related purposes. Their liminal legal status along with the lingering effect of living as undocumented immigrants results in complex dreams because they can travel – but only under specific conditions. Victor has always had nightmares as a result of his legal status, but his dreams changed after DACA:

I do have nightmares. They are different now. They consist of me going out of the country accidentally because I cannot go out of the country with DACA. And somehow I think DACA is a visa in the dream, and it's not, and I cannot come back. I wake up and I say, "I'm here" so it's a relief. So, that is really getting to me so I posted my fears on Facebook with a group of people like myself, and a lot of people started posting: "Oh me too," "Me too." I guess it's a really common phenomenon to have those types of dreams.

Mistaking DACA for a visa that allowed him to travel resulted in anxiety for Victor. During his dream he realized he was violating the conditions of DACA. Interestingly, his dream highlights the far reaching power of violating the conditions of DACA. Victor became aware of how many other undocumented youth are experiencing similar fears.

Besides the fear Victor experiences, Juan Jose's reoccurring dreams of traveling point to the depth of the fear of deportation can have on a person. To contextualize Juan Jose's dream, his activism led him to a stint in a deportation center that eventually resulted with a conflictive interaction with an immigration judge:

EE: Before DACA did you have any dreams or nightmares when you that reminded you of your situation?

Juan Jose: (quick laugh) Actually I did... and I still kinda do. I mean because you know like there's the whole issue like DACA. It's only a work permit, you kinda have to ask for parole, you can't [leave the country]. So I've had this repetitive dream where... I take a flight somewhere. Like this one particular one, I take a flight with like two of my friends. I remember being on the flight and I was like, 'Yeah, we're gonna have so much fun in the UK.' (laughs)

EE: Out of all the places?

Juan Jose: I know. I was like, 'Why the fuck would I want to go there?' And then we get there and we see like the big van and then we're like in an alley and then like I have a break down. I was like 'holy shit you guys, I'm in the UK what the fuck am I gonna do? I can't go back to the U.S?'' Then I have a break down... in this back alley in like the middle of London and I'm like 'What, what does that mean?' So I've had dreams like that where... I'm in other places and then it kinda hits me like, 'Oh shit! Like I kinda self-deported that's not even my own country.' (laughs)

EE: Yeah and what about before DACA what kind of dreams did you have?

Juan Jose: Those same one's. (laughs)

EE: The same thing really?

Juan Jose: Those haven't changed

Juan Jose's dreams directs us to the influence that the fear of deportation has on a person to the point they internalize this threat, along with the mental health problems that manifest with the nightmare. The fear of traveling without the consent of the United States resulted in a panic attack of breaking the law and the fear of being unable to return to the country. It is striking that in his dream he experienced a real life emotional reaction towards being unable to reenter the United States. Secondly, Juan Jose recognizes he is following state protocol by jokingly stating he "self-deported" himself out of the country. The fear and restrictions produced by state and federal laws become almost natural to Juan Jose. He alludes to the liminal status of DACA that only allows him to work, but restricts his travel.

Similarly, two respondents with *advanced parole* had dreams during and after their time out of the country. In Jazmine's case, she returned to Oaxaca under a study abroad program through her university. She was able to spend time with her grandparents whom she had not seen for over thirteen years. Jazmine's dream is similar to Juan Jose's upon her return to the United States.

Jazmine: You know, the only dream I've had after coming back was that I went back to Oaxaca but without permission. I just went and I was so happy when I saw my grandma. Ah, it was such a great feeling but then like I got really anxious and really scared because I was like, 'Oh my gosh. I can't go back. I can't go back.' And I freaked out.

EE: So in your dream you were freaking out?

Jazmine: Yeah, freaking out!

EE: Oh wow! And when you woke up what did you do?

Jazmine: I was like, 'Oh gosh. Where am I? ...I'm like, 'I'm here.' I'm like, 'It was just a dream.' It seemed so real Edwin. It was so real, yeah.

In the same manner, she experienced the fear of being unable to return to the country along with the fear of violating the conditions of DACA. Despite obtaining state permission to travel, Jazmine's concept of travel remains within the parameters of an undocumented immigrant. She has internalized the travel restrictions established by the state. Thus, traveling remains a far-fetched idea despite having already traveled. Similar to Juan Jose's response, Jazmine began "freaking out" in her dream because she broke the law.

Among those that obtained DACA before the age of 18, their dreams focus on the fear of deportation or living in their country of origin. I spoke to Stephanie as a senior in high school and a year after her initial interview. She obtained DACA when she was 16, which allowed her to avoid the traumas that undocumented adults previously endured. She was very active with Mountain High DREAMERS and suffered from the anxiety of not being able to attend a four-year institution. After high school, she began to work in the mayor's office. Interestingly, her first dream was reflected in a fear of returning to a foreign country, Mexico, instead of fear of traveling without permission:

[O]nce when I woke up... Like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm in Mexico.' My parents were just listening well.... I kind of envisioned that they were working and I was working with them telling them, 'Like really, really?' Working there. I was like, 'I

love Mexico.' I was born there, but I was like, 'I feel like I should be working in something else...' Yeah I was working in the fields. Which is nothing bad. I, even up to this day, I remember my dad needs help gardening, or whatever, I do it to help him. But um I just don't see myself gardening the rest of my life or landscaping or doing a clean job. Yes, I understand my parents' hard work and dedication but I would like to see myself in a better position. So I can help them.

Stephanie's dream reflects her fear of not wanting to return to Mexico where she would probably be working the fields. In addition, Stephanie speaks of her fear of working in a landscaping or cleaning job which she might have had if she did not qualify for DACA. Obtaining DACA at a young age allowed her to envision her future in the US as a professional instead of in jobs associated with undocumented immigrants.

The fear instilled by the threat of deportation also affected Stephanie. Dreams of ICE breaking into undocumented youths' homes are common (Plascencia et al. 2016). Stephanie speaks of a dream she had about ICE.

Stephanie: *Um, not recently. Like them knocking on my door.*

EE: *You have dreams of that problem?*

Stephanie: *Probably only once but I didn't dream in deepness. I just saw an officer of ICE sneaking because I moved. And now we have that like that little hole.*

EE: *Peak hole?*

Stephanie: *Yeah. And he was all looking all into it and I was like, 'Ah!'*

EE: *So you thought this was real life?*

Stephanie: No. But yeah it was just a dream... when I opened the door, I woke up.

Thank god!

Stephanie helped her family relocate by having the apartment lease signed in her name. In her dream, she saw an ICE agent preparing to break in to their home to pick up her parents. She was relieved to open the door to not see an ICE agent. In other instances, respondents reenact raids in their dreams that occurred close to their city, where their parents were picked up.

The passage of CA AB-60 provides undocumented immigrant youth access to obtain a driver's license. However, it does not prevent a fear of police checkpoints. Undocumented immigrants continue to post and receive alerts of checkpoints through various social media outlets. Several respondents spoke of having a friend's parent, with a driver's license, deported after they went through a checkpoint. In Gonzalo's case, his dream highlights the disparities between DACA recipients and their family members. Here Gonzalo speaks of a dream where he and his father were nearing a checkpoint.

I had just gotten my CA ID card and I was really excited. I had a dream I was driving with my dad somewhere. There was a riot going on, and I remember him asking, 'What is going on?' There was a riot because people were attacking [the] police because they were having a reten [checkpoint]. My dad was like, 'Turn back, turn back.' I'm like, 'Why?' He says, 'Because there is a reten. Turn back because there is a reten.' I said, 'Dad there is nothing to worry about.' My dad is like 'You need to go back.' And I'm still driving telling him 'You need to chill. I

have a license. What are you tripping about?’ And he gets out of the car and he runs and he starts participating in the riots. I remember continuing to driving to the reten and then my dream ending.

The fear of checkpoints is evident in Gonzalo’s dream. His father, afraid of stopping at the checkpoint, asked to return, fearing that their car would be revoked or possibly being deportation. Gonzalo is very social and politically active. His involvement in civil disobedience manifested in his dream with his father participating in the riot.

Indeed, dreams involving family members were mentioned by a number of respondents. Such dreams are influenced by the respondent’s relationship to their family members, the family’s legal status, and any traumatic experience involving a family member. Rodolfo helped his siblings complete their DACA renewal documents. One sister’s renewal took unusually long. Below Rodolfo speaks of having nightmares of what could possibly occur to his siblings if their DACA was revoked:

Rodolfo: *I always been more worried about her...I don’t care what happens to me...I had more nightmares of them not renewing it for her.*

EE: *Ok, so you do have nightmares not for you but for your family?*

Rodolfo: *For my family... I am really not afraid of what would happen to me per se, but... what would happen to my sister I think... I see there is a great need with this document that provides this privilege and I am afraid that it can be taken away from us... I think I am more fearful of what would happen to my family than what would happen to me.*

The fear for his family's well being has deeply affected Rodolfo. His oldest sister has a family. With DACA, she now has a decent paying job and drives her children throughout Southern California. Rodolfo worries of her future in case her DACA license is revoked.

The political attention DACA garners is a result of the polarizing views that politicians and American society have of the program. During my first interviews in 2012, Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney's immigration platform centered on terminating DACA and creating a hostile environment for all undocumented immigrants to the point that they would self deport themselves. Undocumented youth feared for their future from the precarious position of DACA. Undocumented youth continue to face the uncertainty of DACA during in the 2016 presidential election. Stacy, 21, attends a California State University campus. She speaks of the nightmares she is having after DACA:

I think the nightmares I have is somebody coming in and saying 'I don't like deferred action. I am going to take it off.' I don't know, I guess there is a lot of people that [don't like DACA]. President Obama you know approves DACA now, but what about the next President? Is he going to [ap]prove it? And that kind of scares me because he is like... So, I am still going to have a social [SSN] but its not going to be active? To me it's like, 'What am I going to do after [the end of DACA]?' Does it really mean that I need to get married now to get my residency and all of that stuff? Or..., am I going to have to go back to Mexico and try to find a job?

Her fear of the various scenarios that could occur if DACA was terminated is experienced in her dreams. Strikingly, in Stacy's dream she encounters a person, symbolizing half of the population that does not approve of DACA, as the new president of the United States who will terminate DACA. The influence of being unable to escape the anti-immigrant speeches by presidential candidates through various forms of media is replayed in her dreams. The real fear of DACA being terminated is coupled with the uncertainty of her life, work, and educational opportunities.

Undocumented immigrants are unable to escape the omnipresent speeches, rhetoric, and attention directed at undocumented immigrants during Presidential campaigns. Respondents claiming no interest in American politics are aware of any upcoming legislation or politicians that can either help or destroy their prospects to a path toward legalization. A small number of respondents spoke of having dreams or nightmares of a Presidential candidate, usually a Republican candidate, starting their term by eliminating DACA. Most of the respondents that spoke of having these dreams occurred during the 2012 Presidential campaign where Mitt Romney could possibly remove President Obama from a second term. Romney's anti-immigrant platform created such a hostile atmosphere that it resulted in undocumented immigrants self-deporting themselves. During the month of November most respondents expressed concern that Romney could win the presidency. This fear manifested in some respondents' dreams as different scenarios of what their future could be depending on which candidate was elected as president. In 2016, I would not be surprised if more undocumented youth had

nightmares of a Republican Presidential candidate entering the oval office and following through with their promise of ending DACA, deporting all undocumented immigrants, and building a Berlin like wall across the Southern border between the US and Mexico.

Lastly, personal experiences from relationships can provide both mental health outcomes and terrifying nightmares. Leandra was 19 during her first interview. As an undocumented, queer, and handicapped woman she has faced various forms of obstacles than the rest of her peers. She has been in a relationship with her partner for over six years. Her partner, Shawna has been very supportive, understanding, and has proposed marriage in order for her to obtain legal residency. Leandra has not taken her offer because she does not want to marry solely to fix her legal status. Shawna's family is politically conservative, with unfavorable views towards immigrants. As a result of their political stances, Leandra's legal status has not been shared with Shawna's family. Their concerted effort in keeping Shawna's family uninformed eventually failed. Leandra speaks of her interaction with Shawna's mother and some of the psychological consequences she experienced:

Even as I was speaking about it, I start to stutter real bad... I ring my fingers and its real...I am trying not to do it now but like that's why I have this little thing [a twitch] ...because of that incident my anxiety started to develop a lot worse with the stuttering, with the finger ringing, like ringing like a lot of different habits because of this. And like even hearing her on the phone like a couple weeks later... My partner was speaking to her on the phone and I could hear her voice that like there was an instant where it flashed back to that night and I was hearing

her voice telling me that I couldn't do anything and that you know I wasn't good for my partner and I was a terrible person and all these shitty things and I was hearing all these things and... I was sitting on my bed and I just broke down terribly and I couldn't function. No, and just like in that instance she took my one fear and essentially made it a reality because my parents have told me for so long don't tell anyone for this reason and again I did not even tell her. And she, still in a fucked up way, she guessed it right.

Shawna's mother did not know about Leandra's legal status. Upset that her daughter is in a relationship with a woman of color, she threatened to deport Leandra and her family if she remained with Shawna. For Leandra, this was the most traumatic experience of her life. She assumed that since Leandra was born in Mexico it equated with being an undocumented immigrant. Leandra says that she gets panic attacks and nightmares replaying the incident. This experience manifested in reoccurring dreams:

I had a dream...I've had recurring dreams since then which like agents would be coming into my door and like they were all her face, they were all multiples of her and like if that does not speak in volumes I don't know what does...So I had a dream where we had moved somewhere far away and somehow she found us and like in my dreams I broke down because I did not want her there and like she was threatening me again and like all these different things and so yeah that incident wasn't very good in my... 'cause at that time, I was already struggling with my mental health and with depression and anxiety and so it only worsened it...

Regarding the emotional consequences of this ordeal, Leandra said, “*I can never see that lady again. I was scared and I will probably have some sort of emotional breakdown.*” The aftermath of this event carried over to Shawna as well. “*She called me that she had a dream that ICE entered our home looking for me and all the ICE agents had her mother’s face.*” The threat of deportation was transmitted to Shawna, a white woman that could never experience Leandra’s fear as an undocumented immigrant. In relation to her peers, Leandra speaks of a recent conversation of her friends having dreams about their family and deportation:

Yes, definitely we’ve all... I think we’ve talked about how various friends...like various people that I know have experienced dreams where they like come home and their parents are gone or they get a call and they are in the middle of the night and their parents are detained and they have to go home and take care of their siblings but they don’t know what to do with their family and school and they are juggling all these different things and so it’s like all these pressures that they just have to go through everyday cause they don’t know what’s gonna happen at the end of the day.

Leandra’s social circles consist of undocumented youth in college or with a college degree. They represent the group that socially and economically could benefit from DACA. Yet, her remarks point to the continued fear of their family being deported manifesting in their dreams. The power of the threat of deportation continues to instill

fear on DACA recipients as long as their family and friends remain without any form of legal status.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to highlight how living as an undocumented immigrant can influence one's mental health and behavior. The section on policing illustrates the power and influence state policies can have on an individual and their behavior. Undocumented youths' awareness of being monitored is one of the reasons they cite for maintaining cautious behavior. This finding exposes the authority the state has in regulating the body and behavior. Many respondents claimed that living years under this form of complete domination became second nature to them. Secondly, self-policing resulting from the instability of their legal status coupled with the need to constantly adhere to all social and legal rules reveals what undocumented youth feel is required to remain in good standing with the state. They seek to prove their worth through education or through impeccable behavior. The pressure to demonstrate their worth is intensified through the heightened political attention that undocumented immigrants received during the run-up for the 2012 Presidential election. As a result, any bad behavior not only jeopardizes their legal situation but the possibility of immigration reform for others. The particular case of undocumented youth exemplify the clout of the surveillance state fused with the anti-immigrant political climate. Future research should explore how the political climate along with the surveillance state influences the behavior of other at risk groups.

Secondly, I argue that undocumented youth are subjected to various mental health problems as a result of living as undocumented immigrants during their formative and early adult years of their lives. Similar to other groups that have historically been subjected to various forms of emotional trauma as a result of their conditions, undocumented youth endure various forms of emotional and psychological trauma that require professional both attention and research. This chapter exposed the various forms which trauma could manifest in the lives of undocumented immigrants. Although not all undocumented youth suffer from mental health issues, it is prevalent enough that various organizations and activists view the need to focus on the mental well being of the undocumented population. Mental health professionals will be better able to provide adequate service to large numbers of undocumented immigrants by understanding how these various experiences result in emotional and psychological issues.

Thirdly, the exploration of dreams and nightmares among undocumented youth illustrates how deep rooted some events or experiences are in their psyche. It provides a glimpse of the ubiquitousness of the undocumented experience. The pervasiveness of the threat of deportation, driving, fear for family members, or traumatic experiences manifest in the dreams of undocumented youth. These findings provide further evidence on how the undocumented experience can affect their mental well being. In some instances, dreams and mental health are so closely associated that one cannot isolate each one independently. Analyzing dreams provides rich and vital information of how their experience as undocumented youth are influenced by the state and society in which they

reside. It sheds light on how trauma, laws, or the anti-immigrant political climate leave everlasting imprints on the individual.

All three phenomena—trauma, self-policing, and anti-immigrant climate—are emerging in importance as a result of the growing power of anti-immigrant political actors in Western Europe. Incorporating these facets in research would provide a greater understanding into the every day lives of the undocumented in Western Europe, the US, and beyond. Similar in importance, most respondents spoke of their experience as undocumented immigrants as central to their being and identity and as forever shaping every aspect of their lives. For some, they are beginning to cope with the trauma and experience of being an undocumented immigrant. Nearly half of respondents stated they will still be undocumented or some form of their undocumented identity will remain even after they obtain citizenship. These statements reveal how emotionally significant the experience of being undocumented has been, and recognizes that it has forever shaped them as individuals and its influence can never be erased from their life.

CHAPTER 8:
DACA Four Years and Counting
“Will I still be undocumented if I am citizen?”- Persia

INTRODUCTION

I have spent the last four years collecting data for this dissertation. Working on this dissertation has provided me with a longitudinal lens for evaluating the impact of DACA on undocumented youth, PRISM, and Mountain High Dreamers. In particular, I have been able to document and witness the influence of the implementation of DACA and pro-immigrant California state laws, as well as campus initiatives to assist undocumented immigrants, on PRISM and its members. For example, I have been able to see incoming undocumented freshman enter college under a more immigrant-friendly campus climate and opportunity structure than existed previously. At the same time, I saw older PRISM members graduate and begin their lives beyond college. Some are in law school, some are continuing their education, and others are working in the labor market.

Witnessing the overall growth of PRISM, in numbers and influence in Southern California, and the personal, social, and economic growth of many respondents was something I could not imagine as I began this research. A second, unexpected consequence of the research, it that it, motivated me to become more involved in social justice issues regarding access to higher education for undocumented youth in California. I became highly involved with our graduate union on campus, United Auto Workers Local 2865; is a UC-wide unit representing over thirteen thousand graduate students. A negotiation victory from our current contract created a dialogue between undocumented

students and their allies and UCOP (University of California Office of the President) about how to provide equitable resources and educational opportunities for undocumented students without DACA who do not qualify for CA-AB 540.⁶⁸ The union created a committee of union members and undocumented students to work with UCOP to create a program that would no longer allow undocumented students be treated as second class citizens in graduate school. This allowed me to notice the institutional issues of a large bureaucracy in relation to the emerging undocumented student pipeline through their apprehension, questionable language, and stall tactics. Through this involvement I was introduced to various student activists and organizations throughout the state that expanded my understanding of the experience of undocumented youth throughout California. I have been fortunate to have gained a unique perspective on the impact of DACA at the meso level and a micro perspective as a result of my involvement with UAW 2865, PRISM, and Mountain High Dreamers.

My department expressed caution to graduate students spending more than one year in the field. Their primary concern was that students graduate within normative time. Although their concerns may be warranted, spending four years in the field was important, necessary, and beneficial for my research project. It provided me with a lens, knowledge, and trust among respondents that could not be created in a single year. I felt privileged in obtaining the trust of respondents through the answers from their interviews that have helped me to strive in providing a more realistic portrait of their experience.

⁶⁸ Undocumented students that completed their education in a different state, did not at least complete three years in high school, or those who migrated as adults and did not attend a California high school do not qualify for CA-AB 540.

Subsequently, once I gained their trust and knew me better they asked that their referrals to be genuine when they were interviewed. For example, in some cases, it took me two years to interview some PRISM members. Despite my involvement in pro-immigrant student organizations, most of my respondents' apprehension focused on what my research entailed. This resulted from some students in PRISM becoming aware of my research from other members that provided one sentence explanations of my project. I addressed these concerns by detailing my research objectives with them before they consented to be interviewed.

Lastly, I was fortunate to obtain external funding to hire students to transcribe my interviews. Although I could not provide financial compensation to all PRISM members or respondents who participated, I was able to hire 6 undocumented students. With the help of the undocumented student program coordinator on campus, I hired those who were in most need of financial aid and were interested in transcribing. They were able to provide insight into instances that I might not have otherwise noticed. It became invaluable in providing the most realistic picture of their everyday life.

The later stages of this research became pivotal in answering my research questions. Conducting follow up interviews with respondents two years later along with the development of PRISM and its members afforded me with the ability to see the impact of DACA two and four years later. Halfway through my research, I reached the conclusion that the experience of undocumented youth in southern California can be very traumatic and DACA could not solve or erase many of the problems that arose from previously living as an undocumented immigrant and having undocumented relatives.

The most striking response that caught my attention was undocumented youth saying that they would still feel undocumented, or part of them would remain undocumented, after they became citizens. Persia's quote (below the chapter title) is emblematic of how undocumented youth perceive and internalize their experience as undocumented immigrants. It highlights how they are beginning to flip a negative experience into a positive one by expressing their political solidarity with the larger undocumented immigration population, how it made them better people and more driven to succeed and contribute to society. Many of my respondents were choosing to make their undocumented immigrant identity their master status.

Persia's quote foreshadows the answers to my research questions and has important implications for future research. In this chapter, I provide an overview of my research in three sections, which summarize my main conclusions to the three principal research questions of this project. I then outline the limitations of my research and its main theoretical contributions. The third section provides an overview of the kind of future research that is needed in terms of undocumented youth in higher education, identity, and on the cumulative effects

RESEARCH QUESTIONS REVISITED

The aim of this research was to answer three questions: how does DACA influence the everyday life of undocumented youth in southern California? Secondly, how has DACA impacted their chances of upward mobility and social integration? Thirdly, what are the cumulative consequences of living as an undocumented immigrant?

The three questions are interrelated and influence each other in order to provide insight on the experience of undocumented youth in the 21st century United States. For the sake of clarity, I will answer each question independently and conclude by highlighting how each question is supported by the findings.

First, how has DACA influenced the everyday life of undocumented youth?

Undocumented youth with DACA are able to legally enter the formal labor market, live with less fear of deportation, and be integrated into new social spheres. Being able to legally drive and obtain a driver's license are important experiences that previously kept them socially marginalized. In California, DACA recipients are also able to obtain increased financial aid for their undergraduate education and are to join various professional organizations such as the California Bar and Teachers' association. This change is both symbolic and extremely significant to undocumented immigrants, particularly undocumented youth. It means they are able to pursue, albeit still facing many obstacles, and actually live their career aspirations. Also, their relationship with the state changed by the simple fact that they are legally recognized by the U.S. Congress. Based on these changes, their everyday life has changed substantially

However, it is important to recognize and understand not only the formal impact of DACA but how undocumented youth perceive and choose to understand how their lives have changed after DACA. The formal impact of DACA refers to the their economic, social, and educational gains. The informal, or subjective, impact of DACA focuses on how the individual perceives, experiences, and chooses to understand this change. Undocumented youth do not live in a vacuum. Despite these new changes in

their everyday lives, undocumented youth continued live in a manner embedded within an undocumented experience or point of view. Undocumented youth continue to experience new or old reminders that their everyday life has not changed.

The subjective impact of DACA can perhaps be best understood in terms of four themes: family members' illegality, obstacles to full citizenship or social integration, their politicized existence, and the time limits on DACA membership. A large segment of undocumented youth with DACA families do not have any form of legal status. This results in their families continuing to live in fear of the threat of deportation, without access to routine healthcare, or employed in precarious working conditions. Despite the newfound privileges afforded by DACA, undocumented youth continue to face barriers and obstacles to leading the life they aspire. Specifically, lack of equal access and aid in professional and graduate training remains a major obstacle to their upward mobility. Moreover, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for federal subsidized health care (Obamacare).⁶⁹ Third, the media and political attention given to immigration reforms constantly reminds undocumented youth of their politicized, tenuous existence. Their politicized existence influences their everyday lives by shaping their relationships or interactions with individuals that have a political perspective on whether they should remain in the country. They feel unwelcome or, at minimum, disappointed that to constantly hear from others that they are unwelcome in the United States that may cause apprehension or limit their choice of friends, romantic partners, and constrain who they

⁶⁹ Undocumented immigrants and those who are currently incarcerated and the only groups ineligible for Obamacare. See: obamacarefacts.com/Obamacare-immigrants

share their information with. Lastly, DACA is viewed as temporary membership that generates stress that is further augmented by the bipolar stances society has towards undocumented immigrants. Many respondents, and some of their potential employers, fear that DACA will be terminated by Congress or that their DACA membership will not be renewed.

These experiences under DACA are understood through a binary framework of exclusion/inclusion based on years of living as an undocumented immigrant. Undocumented youth experienced inclusion for several years during important stages in their development towards adulthood. However, prior to this, they were exposed and conditioned to complete exclusion and marginalization through their interactions with institutions and social spheres that informed them how to be “illegal” (Gonzales 2011). This exposure of complete marginalization fostered the binary framework of inclusion versus exclusion that is used to understand their experience, their identity, and their place in society. Their binary framework informs them that their experiences under DACA remain as one of an undocumented immigrant. The four types of experiences discussed above remind them of their undocumented status, which is understood and reinforced through this framework to perceive their everyday life experience.

Undocumented youth notice the effort of the media and politicians to associate DREAMers with neoliberal citizenship by valorizing immigrants that are highly educated (or likely to become so) in comparison to other immigrants. My dissertation highlights how undocumented youth respond to neoliberal citizenship by avoiding the term DREAMer. Their response highlights how identities used in social movements can

change from an activist strategy for making policy gains towards becoming a tool of the elites to create division among the movement. In this case, the narrative of the good versus bad immigrant pits educated undocumented youth against older and less educated undocumented immigrants and justifies excluding the latter from legalization.

Respondents with DACA perceive their integration in US society as limited and temporary. Based on their binary framework of inclusion/exclusion, their incomplete inclusion is viewed as a result of being undocumented. Their continued experiences with exclusion are understood as those of an undocumented immigrant. As a result, they choose to identify as undocumented, as long as their experiences continue to provide a reminder that can be associated with an undocumented status.

The issue of how do undocumented youth understand their place in society and choose to identify leads us to my second research question: how has DACA impacted their integration and prospects for upward mobility for recipients? The extent to which their life has changed varies among DACA recipients. Four important points provide a map of the various life experiences that can occur. First, the state in which they reside informs them of the opportunity structures available for undocumented youth. For this research, several legislative acts in California specific to undocumented immigrants have expanded their educational and professional opportunities (CA AB 130 & 131, SB 1159) and help to ease their fear of deportation (CA AB-60). The “CA Dream Act” (CA AB 130 & 131) makes undocumented youth eligible state financial aid and scholarships from colleges. Regardless of legal status, undocumented immigrants are able to obtain professional licenses in law, medicine, social work, cosmetology, and education. CA AB

60 allows undocumented immigrants the ability to obtain a driver's license.

Undocumented youth in Los Angeles and the Inland Empire are exposed to different experiences in comparison to their peers in the Central Valley or Coachella. The local context shapes the political atmosphere towards immigrants, the presence of organizations specific to undocumented immigrants, law enforcement protocol on how to deal with undocumented immigrants, access to valuable information: such as cheap and affordable clinics, organizations providing aid specific to their problems, correct immigration information, and free legal counsel, and access to educational institutions willing to provide help and support to undocumented immigrants. Secondly, undocumented youth's social class position and social capital facilitate or hinder the ability of DACA recipients to take advantage of newly expanded opportunities for upward mobility within California. Some respondents' parents were highly educated, owned businesses, or were professionals in their country of origin. The social capital transported from their country of origin was utilized in helping undocumented youth to more likely succeed and have less problems within educational institutions than those from working class backgrounds. Thirdly, race is important in the United States. Undocumented youth's racial identity is vital to understanding their experience and how they have been sorted through institutions and society. For example, respondents with light facial features or appearances had a different experience in social spheres, institutions, and everyday life than respondents with darker features. For example, respondents who passed as native born whites were subject to less discrimination and racial profiling from the police and were less likely to be exposed to personal

discrimination in the workplace or in educational institutions. Their racial identity informs us what position American society has placed them within. Lastly, the life stage in which they obtained DACA and educational attainment structured their life chances. My own finding suggests respondents with a college education or currently in high school were more likely to have greater economic gains in comparison to respondents in their late 20's with a high school education. It shapes their how they view of their future and goals.

The third question this research sought to interrogate was the cumulative effects of living as an undocumented immigrant. As Menjivar (2016) has pointed out, attention on the consequences, emotional or overall well-being, of living as immigrants has not been given sufficient attention. This claim was validated by PRISM and respondents speaking on the need to provide self-care or cope from the pain and trauma of their experiences. Undocumented youths' exposure to legal violence (Menjivar and Abrego 2012) throughout their everyday lives does have several long term consequences. I observed three distinct patterns that may help us understand which undocumented youth are likely to suffer from emotional and psychological trauma. These patterns are: (1) exposure to traumatic psychological events; (2) living without a legal status during their adulthood; and (3) playing "catch up" with their peers. Undocumented youth are exposed to traumatic events that range from having family members deported, personal events that result from their legal status, or personal relationships where their legal status is problematized or not accepted. The psychological consequences include anxiety, panic attacks, ticks, depression, and low self-esteem. Undocumented youth that obtained

DACA during their 20's are more likely to suffer from emotional and psychological issues. This results from years of living without any legal status and perceiving their development as adults as stunted. Once they obtained DACA, they perceive they have to play "catch up" in terms of what their progress should be at their specific age. The legal violence and trauma endured manifest in some undocumented youth experiencing dreams that reenact their traumatic experiences or fears.

Lastly, living as an undocumented immigrant in a global economy under technologies of surveillance influences their behavior based on their understanding of citizenship based on what constitutes a "good immigrant." Undocumented youth continue to monitor their behavior and actions in order to remain in good standing with the state. They perceive themselves as constantly being evaluated by society in terms of neoliberal citizenship. Neoliberal citizenship aspires to have individuals that are entrepreneurial, economically independent, and that are not a liability to society. Undocumented youth that have been successful in obtaining higher education and becoming poised for, or actually experiencing, upward mobility under DACA fit the ideal neoliberal citizen. Their success resulted in media and politicians highlighting their success as worthy immigrants. In contrast, their families were deemed unworthy of legalization since they lacked any perceived economic or cultural benefit to society.

The term DREAMer came to be associated with neoliberal citizenship. Undocumented youth became aware that their perceived success was used to create a hierarchy of worthiness for legalization among immigrants. In southern California, a growing number of DACA recipients refused to identify as a DREAMer or expressed

concerns about the elitist connotations of this term. The DREAMer narrative suggests that highly undocumented youth are great benefits to the American economy and society. From their perspective, the change in the connotation of the term DREAMer criminalizes their families and a large portion of the undocumented immigrant population. They also expressed concerns about the loss of control of the DREAMer narrative as they saw policy makers and the media use this narrative to justify the exclusion of large portions of the undocumented immigrant community from legalization.

In sum, the impact of DACA in Southern California reveals a contradictory experience for undocumented youth as they experience both inclusion and exclusion. Their families remain living in fear; and there are unable to escape the politicized nature of their existence. They understand their place in society based on the legal violence they endured for years, which encourages many of them to identify as undocumented immigrants. Simultaneously, they continue to experience a hyper-vigilant status where they must constantly demonstrate impeccable behavior, while they are becoming aware of the emotional and psychological consequences of their experience. Thus, Persia's quote answers what is the experience of undocumented youth and the research questions this research aimed to answer.

LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Limitations

As stated in Chapter 1, there are limitations to this research. First, this study was based in California and the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other locales.

Although California has the largest immigrant population in the U.S., its state laws make the experience of undocumented immigrants different from those in other states.

Undocumented immigrants' lives have changed for the better through laws that increased access to higher education, provided their family members drivers licenses, and are able to gain professional licenses from the various professional boards in California. Other states are following California's lead, but undocumented youth in California are probably in one of the most progressive states in the country in terms of immigrants' rights.

Consequently, a comparative case study of undocumented youth's experience and identity within a state with fewer immigrant rights would be beneficial to put my findings into context. It is feasible to conduct a comparative case study through my involvement with NURP (National UnDACAmented Research Project). I have access to interviews and survey data from Arizona and Georgia. The study focuses on their educational attainment and aspirations, family related issues, and labor market outcome are a few of the topic covered in their survey and in-depth interviews.

Secondly, while I strived to obtain a representative sample of undocumented youth within Southern California, access to marginalized populations and convenience sampling may have decreased my ability to have a representative sample. Speaking with agricultural workers with DACA, for example, was difficult based on their apprehension with researchers and the lack of economic incentive to take a couple of hours off from work. My involvement with PRISM, Mountain High DREAMers, and the UC graduate union UAW 2865 could may have also biased some interviews in the sense that these

individuals were willing to speak with me and may have led me to an over-sampling of politically active students.

These limitations do not decrease the significance of the findings of this dissertation. Undocumented youth throughout the United States differ mainly in the extent to which they and their family members experience the threat of deportation and legal violence in their everyday lives, not whether or not they have had such experiences.

Contributions

This dissertation utilized various theoretical perspectives to analyze the life and everyday experiences of undocumented youth. First, my findings show that local and state policies influence the everyday life of undocumented immigrants (Coleman 2012; Gonzales and Ruiz 2014). I stress the importance that a combination of state and federal policies have had in opening access to opportunity structures for economic and social integration (Gonzales and Ruiz 2014). Combining this perspective with segmented assimilation increased the capacity to structurally explain the various paths (labor market prospects, educational access) available to undocumented immigrants. Secondly, respondents' race and the age at which they obtained DACA are important factors that shape their chances for upward mobility. Segmented assimilation provided a structural explanation of the divergent incorporation paths immigrants may take based where they enter in the U.S stratification structure. Although segmented assimilation includes racial context in its typology, it does not have the theoretical capacity to explain variation among and within undocumented youth and it does not pay attention to lack of legal

status. Highlighting the importance of the economic, social, and political spheres influence this current racial projects is required in understanding assimilation in the United States is touched upon by segmented assimilation. However, my research demonstrates how and immigrants' legal status and race interplay within the larger social structures that influences their job prospects, access to education, and labor market outcomes.

Scholarship focusing on the mechanisms that produce and reproduce illegality greatly influenced my theoretical orientation. Kubal (2013) provided a foundation to understand the various illegalities experienced by immigrants throughout the world. My findings highlight the spectrum of experiences of DACA recipients in southern California that lead to variations in illegality based on race, class position, education, and geographical location. At the same time, much research has explained how illegality is to be understood and analyzed. My dissertation's contribution in this field comes primarily from highlighting how undocumented youth experience and choose to understand illegality. In this case, DACA can be understood as what Menjivar (2006) terms "liminal legality." However, the language undocumented youth use to explain liminal legality is based on the choice of undocumented youth to understand and justify their place and legal status.

"Legal violence" (Menjivar and Abrego 2012) became an important analytical tool that opened doors to understanding why and how undocumented youth choose to identify, experience, and find their place in society. Moreover, legal violence became a helpful lens in exploring the mental and emotional health consequences of living as an

undocumented immigrant for several years. Among the various emotional and mental health outcomes, respondents with reoccurring dreams and nightmares contribute to social science literature by pointing to the deep psychological impacts that legal violence can have on the individual. My findings regarding respondents' anxiety attacks, self-policing themselves, fear of breaking laws, and reenacting traumatic events in their dreams reveals how the state can significantly shape mental health outcomes. Lastly, my findings on self-policing and neoliberal citizens among undocumented youth contribute to a growing body of scholarship that stresses the influence of the state in controlling a population and subsequently modifying their behavior (Inda 2006; Menjivar and Lakhani 2016).

My research findings also help us to gain a greater understanding of how neoliberal citizenship applies to DREAMers. Undocumented youth notice the effort of the media and politicians to associate DREAMers with neoliberal citizenship by valorizing immigrants that are highly educated (or likely to become so) in comparison to other immigrants. My dissertation highlights how undocumented youth respond to neoliberal citizenship by avoiding the term DREAMer. Their response highlights how identities used in social movements can change from an activist strategy for making policy gains towards becoming a tool of the elites to create division among the movement. In this case, the narrative of the good versus bad immigrant pits educated undocumented youth against older and less educated undocumented immigrants and justifies excluding the latter from legalization.

FUTURE RESEARCH

I have been fortunate to have sufficient data from my interviews and four years of field work for future study. The direction for future research will be augmented through my access to the NURP's national database. NURP has conducted surveys and in depth interviews with undocumented immigrants in six states: California, Arizona, Georgia, South Carolina, Illinois, and New York. As a result, I am uniquely positioned to utilize data collected from my dissertation research, combined with the national qualitative data from the (NURP), to further examine the everyday experience, educational trajectories, and emotional and mental health consequences of living as an undocumented youth within the United States. Such research has important academic and policy implications.

Chapters 3 and 5 argued that other variables, besides DACA, must be considered to understand the educational and economic trajectory of undocumented students. Previous research, and my findings, point to the importance that the age at which youth migrate plays an important role in social and economic assimilation. Abrego (2011) argues that the time and age of migration is vital in determining the likelihood of undocumented youth completing K-12 education and pursuing higher education. However, up to this point there has not been any research that has been able to see if the age at which undocumented youth change their status has an impact on their educational and economic opportunities. Media reports typically provide portraits of young children migrating as infants with no recollection of their country of origin, but this narrative does not encapsulate all undocumented youth. Many migrate between the ages of six and eleven and have primarily been educated and socialized in American institutions of

education, while others migrate in their early or late teens. Within this group, some have been able to pursue higher education, but many have either dropped out of high school or never entered an educational institution.

Today, the experience of undocumented youth is contingent on the combination of DACA and state policies. Thus, I seek to understand if the age at which undocumented youth obtain DACA along with the state in which they reside has an influence on how they perceive their educational and economic opportunities. This is important because research on undocumented youth before DACA demonstrated that their educational goals and aspirations hinge on how they view their place in society as a result of the educational and structural opportunities available.

My findings on college and high school students in Southern California suggest that the time in which they access the benefits of DACA and state policies significantly impacts their educational aspirations. For example, state laws that provide an easier path to enter and complete a bachelors' degree have created a qualitatively different experience of undocumented high school students obtaining DACA. Current high school and college students view having a professional career as a difficult but realistic goal, whereas previous cohorts viewed attending a four-year institution as extremely complicated and economically unfeasible. This shift in attitude is in large part the product of several California laws aimed at alleviating undergraduate financial burdens and opening up opportunities for entering professional organizations and practice their professions. In collaboration with NURP, I will be able to broaden my research beyond California, obtaining interviews from undocumented youth throughout the country,

especially those who reside in states with policies that limit or prevent their participation in higher education. This will allow me to more definitively show how the age at which youth obtain DACA and other legal rights impacts their educational goals and career choices.

The second project focuses on undocumented youth pursuing graduate and professional training. Academic institutions recognize that undocumented students are attending their graduate/professional programs but do not provide adequate funding for this training. I seek to understand the institutional, legal, and financial barriers undocumented students face within graduate and professional schools. What challenges do students face in obtaining their degrees and when they enter the labor market? Several respondents in my dissertation research have compared their current challenges as being similar to undergraduate experiences before DACA and the California Dream Act such in being ineligible for various form of financial aid, as well as the constant fear of being unable to finance their education causing much anxiety, stress, and frustration. Further, understanding these barriers is a first step in policy changes that might eliminate them.

The third major aim of my research was to uncover the mental health and psychological consequences of undocumented youth from living without an ambiguous and indeterminate legal status. The need to understand the mental health outcomes of this experience is supported by the American Psychological Association, which acknowledged that they had little if any understanding of the trauma an immigrant, especially an much less an undocumented immigrant, endures as they attempt to integrate into the United States (APA 2012). Research focusing on the everyday experience of

undocumented immigrants' interaction in social spheres and institutions, known as "illegality," informs how they understand their identity and place in relation to how the law enacted by the state influence their everyday lives. As they reach adulthood, they transition to a life of limited opportunities for upward mobility. Some of the mental health effects of this experience include anxiety, depression, and frustration. Older undocumented students have lived, or continue to live with no legal recognition or protection, for several years, and in some instances over a decade. In comparison, current high school and an increasing number of college students have been fortunate to sidestep or mitigate this trauma as they enter adulthood—a change that has not been sufficiently studied.

Findings from my dissertation point to a relationship where the number of late childhood and adult years living without any legal protection correlates positively with mental health and psychological issues. A couple of prominent research themes have emerged that provide a starting point in uncovering these consequences. Undocumented youth ages 25-32 have expressed in my interviews that a major source for depression and anxiety is their stunted development as adults who have been forced to delay their formal entrance into the labor market. Others have reported self-policing their bodies and actions as a result of years of constantly living in fear. Still others pointed to unconscious habitualized actions from years of being vigilant by either driving without a license or living in constant fear of detection. For example, older respondents expressed becoming extremely tense and anxious while driving because they forgot they had DACA.

I have also observed a bifurcation of experiences between undocumented youth who experience living as an undocumented immigrant with no legal protections for several years, versus those growing up with DACA by obtaining it before the age of 18. However, this bifurcation is not total as many DACA recipients still view themselves as undocumented, and still carry trauma in ways similar to previous cohorts. For example, nearly one fourth of respondents, the majority of whom did not grow up with DACA, spoke of having dreams or nightmares both before and after DACA. The majority of their dreams focused on being deported despite having DACA, reconstructing the experience of witnessing a family member being arrested or deported, and of a newly-elected president elected eliminating DACA. Papers stemming from this project will be part of an emerging discourse aimed at understanding the effects of living in the United States as an undocumented youth.

Chapter 6 & 7 highlight the impact of neoliberal citizenship and legal violence has on undocumented youth's behavior, identity, and everyday life. My findings on undocumented youths' resistance to the DREAMer identity to fight the imposition of neoliberal citizenship, how they perceive and understand their place in society, and their perception of being watched provide a good foundation to pursue several academic papers. Combining political economy and interest convergence,⁷⁰ from critical race theory, allows me to answer and explain why DREAMers are now ideal candidates for neoliberal citizenship and why they resist this form of citizenship. Findings on their

⁷⁰ Interest convergence argues that change occurs when those in power see it is in their benefit to agree with the demands to those who are oppressed. For example, Bell (1973) demonstrated that *Brown v. Board Education* (1954) passed due to the pressure from the civil rights movement and the need for the U.S. to demonstrate equality in their own country in order to be establish legitimacy after WW II.

everyday life and continued experiences of illegality allow me to contribute to research stressing the variations of illegality experience through the world. Lastly, I provide empirical evidence on the psychological impacts that living in a surveillance state has on undocumented immigrants. Primarily, my findings on self-policing or employing caution in social spheres they feel could result in unfavorable interactions or possible deportation.

Lastly, I have established a long term project focusing on the life cycle of the legalization process, from being undocumented to becoming a full citizen. Twenty respondents, from various educational levels and life stages, have expressed their desire to be part of this long term project. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted every year to assess and document the experience of undocumented youth until they become American citizens. Respondents will be asked on how they perceive their place in society, how they self-identify, what new obstacles or opportunities they face, how has living as an undocumented immigrant influenced their behavior and mental health, and has their lack of legal status early in their life stalled or prevented their development. Besides documenting the life cycle on the legalization process and how it influences their life and integrations, this project will provide evidence in answering some of the questions that arose from the findings of this research: what is the impact of living as an undocumented immigrant on their mental and emotional health? Has the legalization process altered their behavior? Is being undocumented a master status? Two respondents have become legal permanent residents and they continue to choose to be an undocumented immigrant.

CONCLUSION

I was fortunate that my dissertation research occurred at a time when major changes were taking place regarding the rights of undocumented youth in U.S society. The combination of the current demographic shift, growing economic inequality, the economic frustration by the privilege white working class, the need for the global economy to have a super exploitable labor pool, and the political attention given to immigration reform situates undocumented youth of this era to a distinct experience. What is occurring in the United States is also occurring throughout highly developed nations, in particular Western Europe. The findings from my dissertation can be used as a comparative tool for study in other countries to understand the undocumented migrant experience within other wealthy democracies. Furthermore, I have strived to show how race plays a central role in the immigrant experience; this insight is vital and important to research on undocumented immigrants. The importance of racism to politics within Western Europe is evidenced by England's choice to exit the European Union to decrease the influx of non-white immigrants and the increase of anti-Islam stances by politicians within Western European countries that seek to deter migration. The polemic that immigration poses during an unstable time in the global economy will not cease. If the rise of right wing governments and growth of hate speech towards immigrants continues, the hostile social climate that undocumented immigrants experience will increase. My research has allowed me the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with other scholars in understanding the undocumented immigrant experience in the United States under such conditions.

From a personal standpoint, this has been a rewarding experience. I was able to establish long-term relationships with organizations, activists, families, and students. It made me appreciate, enjoy, and continue my research and it directly involved my activism for social justice. My relationships and interactions with undocumented youth helped me to grow as a person and provided important insights. Additionally, it allowed me to speak to prominent scholars and be part of research projects that I could not have envisioned previously. Overall, I have been fortunate to have personally grown while conducting my research. It has inspired me to continue to pursue my research in understanding the experience of undocumented youth during this historical juncture.

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