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**“Renewed Optimism and Spatial Mobility: Legal Consciousness of Latino DACA
Recipients and Their Families in Los Angeles”**

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Abstract

In 2012, President Obama signed Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive action that provided deportation relief, a temporary work permit, and driver licenses for almost 800,000 undocumented immigrants who grew up in the US. Drawing on 100 in-depth interviews in Los Angeles, this article documents DACA’s consequences for the legal consciousness of DACA recipients and their families in the period of 2013-2016. Although the Trump Administration chose to phase out the program in 2017, evidence shows that DACA temporarily benefited families in seemingly mundane but cumulative and powerful ways. State-issued IDs and work permits led to many more opportunities to achieve their goals, experience spatial mobility, and establish greater family independence through interdependence. Together, and even though DACA targeted only single members of families, these experiences shifted entire families’ legal consciousness toward a stronger sense of pride and belonging in the United States.

Introduction

In 2010, when immigrant rights activists had to decide whether to pool their resources to fight for the passage of the broader, but politically unlikely Comprehensive Immigration Reform or the more exclusive, but politically plausible DREAM Act (Nicholls, 2013; Unzueta Carrasco and Seif, 2014), many young people felt torn. Multiple conversations I witnessed and had with undocumented 1.5 generation immigrants centered on the antagonism they received from fellow activists when they chose to support the campaign for the DREAM Act. Senior members of the immigrant rights movement accused them of being selfish and naïve. In those organizing spaces in 2009 and 2010, young activists sometimes cried in frustration as they explained that even if they won legalization only for themselves, they would continue to fight for legalization for everyone because, as they argued compellingly, “I don’t live my life as an individual. Whatever happens to me also affects my family” (Author field notes, November 2010).

The last time the DREAM Act came up for a vote in Congress in December 2010, it failed by a small margin. Initially devastated, young activists retooled and refocused on other piecemeal approaches to change. With ramped up activism, including notable acts of civil disobedience, their biggest victory came in June 2012 when President Obama signed the Executive Action, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Although it did not change existing law or provide a pathway to legalization, DACA temporarily counteracted some of the more punitive consequences of the immigration regime. In this article, I take seriously the claim of the young organizers to explore how policies affected not only targeted individuals, but also their families. While much of the current research on DACA proves unequivocally that it was an economic and educational success, in this piece, I explore the changes in legal consciousness—the common sense understandings of the law (Merry, 1990)—for DACA recipients and their

families. I argue that even relatively minor policies can produce far-reaching changes in legal consciousness, in this case, both for recipients of DACA and their relatives.

Immigration Laws, Legal Consciousness, and Mixed Status Families

Laws are exceptionally consequential in the lives of undocumented or legally precarious immigrants, as they regulate even their very presence in the country. Immigration laws determine who can legally be present in the country, what protections they are entitled to, and what resources they can access. There are over 16 million people in the United States living in mixed status families made up of members with different juridical categories, including citizens, Legal Permanent Residents, Temporary Protected Status, and undocumented members, among others, constitute them. Illegality—or the socially, politically, and legally produced condition of being deportable (Ngai, 2004; De Genova, 2002)—spills over to also affect the lives of documented and US citizen members of mixed status families. Without legalization of all their members, they are blocked from key mechanisms that have historically ensured stability: jobs, education, and social services (Menjívar et al., 2016). Growing up with undocumented parents, for example, means that children are more likely to live in poverty and experience developmental delays due to parents' lack of access to resources available to US citizen parents (Yoshikawa, 2011).

Likewise, US citizen partners avoid social services to prevent unwanted attention from immigration authorities that may harm the undocumented partner (Abrego and Menjívar, 2011).

In the contemporary context of punitive immigration laws and their unprecedented implementation, undocumented status is particularly far-reaching for families, even in mixed-status families when not all of their members are undocumented (Abrego, 2016). Undocumented status and the punitive immigration policies targeting undocumented immigrants affect not only targeted immigrants' material experiences, but also their sense of self and of belonging in their

adopted country. In a historical moment marked by an expanding system of immigrant detention centers and record deportations, for example, the harsh yet uneven implementation of immigration policies produce legal consciousness based in insecurity, fear, and stigma among immigrants and their families (Abrego, 2011; 2013). With as many as half a million parents deported during Obama's presidency (Capps et al., 2015), and more expected under Trump, children of undocumented parents are growing up in fear of a parent's deportation and subsequent family separation (Dreby, 2015).

Laws intersect with various social forces to affect how people interpret and apply them (Ewick and Silbey, 1998). Individual immigrants targeted by changes in law have drawn on lived experiences and popular discourse, including the myth of meritocracy and gender expectations, to make sense of the law and their own juridical categories (Abrego, 2008; 2011). Indeed, changes in policy provide generative moments in which to understand the myriad consequences of law (Abrego, 2015). This study seeks to go beyond the individual consequences of changes in law to examine changes in legal consciousness of entire families. Families are uniquely vulnerable to changes in policies because they rely on stable jobs, access to schooling, health care, and social services for the social reproduction of all their members (Menjívar et al., 2016). Changes in policy, therefore, can mean not only changes in access to resources, but also changes in family experiences, behavior, and outlook on life in the US. Given the ways that illegality spills over to affect all members of mixed-status families, how might policy *protections* play out for the legal consciousness of both DACA recipients and their families?

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

Obama's objective was for DACA to provide "a degree of relief and hope"¹ to young people who would have qualified for the DREAM Act. Specifically, DACA provided recipients

with temporary but renewable protection from deportation, a work permit, and a driver's license. As the activists involved in the campaign to pass the DREAM Act understood, however, policy changes for one member of an immigrant family would also affect the rest of the family. Although DACA was not a stable legal status, it provided temporary legal presence and limited but significant access to rights that created distinctions between family members, thereby qualifying recipients and their kin as mixed status families.

By the time President Trump declared the end of the DACA program on September 5, 2017, almost 800,000 people had benefitted.² By all accounts, this executive action was beneficial for recipients. DACA provided beneficiaries with better economic opportunities through formal employment and access to bank accounts and credit cards (Gonzales et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2013). It also led to greater chances of obtaining higher education, signing up for health insurance, and getting civically involved in local communities (Wong and Valdivia, 2014; Hooker et al., 2015). Those with greater networks and higher levels of education were particularly likely to benefit (Teranishi et al., 2015).

Providing temporary, renewable relief from deportation, DACA was the closest to a legalization program since the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Like legalization (Vallejo, 2012), in-state tuition (Abrego, 2008), and other policies targeting immigrants, the changes ushered in by DACA revealed how even small improvements in immigration practices could improve the well-being of mixed-status families in the United States. National surveys reveal that DACA recipients who experienced an increase in wages were able to help families financially (Teranishi et al., 2015; Wong and Valdivia, 2014; Gonzales et al., 2014). Despite the benefits, though, DACA recipients expressed continued fear of family and friends being detained and deported (Teranishi et al., 2015). And while they experienced a greater sense of security for

themselves, they continued to stress about their relatives' well-being. Beyond the figures of how many qualified, how much they earned, what percentage acquired a new job, or how much they contributed to the economy, this study examines the ways DACA recipients' sense of self and of belonging shifted and, in turn, how access to benefits for one member of the family helped shift the sense of belonging of other members of their mixed status families.

Data and Methods

This article draws on in-depth interviews with DACA recipients and their relatives in the greater Los Angeles area. Between July 2013 and July 2015, two research assistants and I conducted interviews with a total of 100 members of mixed-status families that include at least one DACA recipient. In each family, we aimed to speak with two or three members, sometimes all together in a single conversation, sometimes in two or three separate interviews.

In each case, I began by recruiting a DACA recipient that we located through multiple networks. From there, we used snowball sampling to reach DACA recipients not already associated with immigrant rights groups and organizations. This allowed us to include DACA recipients with varying levels of political activism and community ties. For each family, we asked that one or two relatives, whoever was available to do an interview, also sit down to talk through these matters with us.

Participants included 43 DACA recipients, all of who had DACA for between three months or up to two years at the time of the interview. We also interviewed 57 relatives with different statuses, including: US-born citizen siblings (usually younger), undocumented parents, Legal Permanent Resident parents, siblings with DACA, and undocumented older siblings who were not eligible for DACA. All interviewees reside in greater Los Angeles, including San Bernardino and Orange Counties. All interviewees were 18 years or older at the time of the

interview. They are of Guatemalan, Mexican, or Salvadoran descent. Following the lead of interviewees, conversations took place in English, Spanish, and Spanglish.

Renewed Optimism and Perception of Greater Opportunities

Interviewees confirm what young activists claimed early on, that policy changes aimed at them have multiple small and large consequences for their families, as well. At the individual level, DACA recipients positioned within institutions of higher education or with extensive professional networks felt highly encouraged to aim for higher goals or to follow through with more vigor on achieving their dreams. The knowledge that they could now work legally in jobs commensurate with their level of education, or in positions with clear pathways to upward mobility inspired them to reevaluate, upgrade, and expand their goals.

Prior to DACA, the 1.5 generation undocumented immigrants who lived in dire poverty and lacked extensive social networks felt unmotivated to excel in school knowing that their status would likely prevent them from accessing financial aid and professional jobs (Abrego, 2006). In these cases, once they were married or had children of their own, DACA did not encourage them to pursue higher education, but it allowed them to pursue more secure jobs with higher pay to meet their family's financial needs. Twenty-seven-year-old Corina, for example, was married with no children. Prior to receiving DACA, she worked as a nanny. With her work permit, she planned to find a job in retail, hopefully at a store at the local mall where she could begin to develop the skills to eventually be qualified enough to apply to a job at Costco. As she described, "Costco pays \$16 an hour and you have insurance. That's all I really need." Her 31-year-old sister Catalina, on the other hand, was married with three children. She had been working as a nanny for a single wealthy family for over a decade. They already paid her \$16 per hour and because she did not have to pay taxes on her wages, she brought home more money

monthly than she would make in an entry-level position in retail. Catalina's experience suggests that DACA's consequences were less transformative for recipients without a college education and lacking professional networks.

In other cases, however, younger DACA recipients felt encouraged to keep pursuing educational and occupational goals. Eighteen-year-old David, for example, was at a crucial stage in his life. He had stopped attending school early in his junior year because without support from his teachers, he felt schoolwork was too difficult. Despite his mother's pleas to stay and finish high school, he got a job at a warehouse, moving packaged seafood eight hours per day, six days per week, making only \$8 an hour. He hated his mind-numbing job and his mother was always upset at him for not returning to school. When his cousin shared the news with him about the possibility of applying for DACA, his family took him to meet with a lawyer at a community organization. The lawyer informed him that to qualify for DACA he had to return to school, so he re-enrolled. At the time of the interview, David was one semester away from finishing high school.

When asked about DACA's consequences in his life, David said, "I could probably look for a decent job and then my education. Now it motivated me to really start that again because I was really giving up on my classes and everything... [DACA] made me go back to school and finish what I had to do." David also reflected on the consequences he saw for his family life. His mother was immensely proud of him for returning to school and looked for opportunities to support him. He felt the entire process had brought them closer together, as she accompanied him to the DMV, the lawyer, and the school to help him maximize his new benefits.

For some, DACA provided a new source of motivation because they felt less constricted by the limitations associated with undocumented status. DACA recipients who had graduated

from high school now felt motivated to go to community college; or if they had stopped out of a four-year-institution, they felt encouraged to begin the process for re-admission. Whether because they could not afford it previously, or because they had lost motivation at the thought of not being able to acquire professional jobs, DACA recipients now wanted to give themselves a chance to more securely pursue their dreams. In this process, parents got to witness their children thrive in new ways. Like David's mother who showed her support by accompanying him to all his appointments, other parents in the study expressed their pride at seeing their children set and accomplish new and higher goals.

Thirty-nine-year-old Fara, for example, is the undocumented mother of two DACA recipients: Flor and Fabiola. While the sisters were undocumented, they only felt safe applying to jobs at the local swap meet. During the many months they worked there, they were paid \$45 in cash for 9 or 10-hour days. On most days, they got only one 15-minute break that they had to forgo if customers happened to have questions about the merchandise at that time. Worst of all, their employer was verbally abusive. Both tried to apply to other jobs and even though they would interview well and were offered jobs, they were never hired because they lacked a valid social security number. When DACA passed, they continued to work under such exploitative conditions just long enough to save the \$465 application fee. At the time of the interview after receiving DACA, both sisters had acquired office jobs that paid them well above minimum wage. Along with the economic mobility their higher wages represented, Fara was especially grateful for DACA's other consequences on the family. With great pride, she expressed:

Thank God, my kids had the opportunity to qualify for Deferred Action. That has helped us so much—they as much as me. I am proud of them because now they can go to an office and get an easier job, because they have had to struggle so much to find work.

The social security number that her children received through DACA allowed them to avoid the most exploitative forms of work available to undocumented immigrants, thereby improving their lives financially. Beyond that, Fara was grateful for the opportunity to see her children enjoying less physically draining work.

Notably, Fara's pride in her daughters' office work resonates with many Latino immigrant parents who toil in difficult manual labor, but who dream of less laborious and more prestigious work experiences for their children. Working class immigrant parents with little formal education may not be familiar with the specific requirements for college admission (Louie, 2012); they may also not understand what is involved in doing various kinds of professional work. Their migration goals, however, often center upon their children's increased educational and occupational opportunities in this country. Even though in some cases office work may be exploitative and pay less than a living wage, these parents compare it to working outdoors or in stressful factory conditions, and perceive it as evidence of the entire family's immigration success. In this way, DACA provides not only economic benefits, but also increased opportunities for parents to witness the fulfillment of their visions for their children. And like David, immigrant children were given the chance to come closer to fulfilling their parents' dreams for them. Witnessing and attaining these accomplishments, in turn, gave family members more opportunities to express pride and solidarity with one another. These new experiences of family success inspired a legal consciousness based on a greater sense of belonging in the US for DACA recipients and their relatives.

Spatial Mobility

Besides offering renewed optimism through educational and occupational opportunities, DACA also provided recipients with spatial mobility (Guarneros, 2017). Because Los Angeles is

a large, sprawling city with a public transportation system that is only slowly being developed to meet residents' needs, driving is typically the most efficient method of transportation. Driving without a license, however, is stressful, as there are many and frequent sobriety checkpoints that mainly serve to identify, criminalize, and tax unlicensed (and likely undocumented) Latino immigrants (Carpio et al., 2011). Even though immigrants are well aware of the dangers, driving is most convenient to cover the long distances between home and work.

Twenty-four-year-old Eva is a graduate of the University of California. She described the stress her undocumented father experienced behind the wheel:

My dad has been stopped twice and both times they have taken his car. I know he has a lot of trauma because of that... He just doesn't say it but I know he is very scared of police. He just had an accident last month and he was in a really bad accident, like the car is just gone. When I got there, the first thing he told me was, 'the police is going to come and I don't know what they are going to say.' I was crying. I was like, 'are you ok?'... you feel so powerless... You just had this huge accident. It could've been worse and the first thing he was thinking was, they are going to ask me for my license.

In such a fear-inducing context, that DACA provided the opportunity to get a driver's license is notably consequential. As Eva described to me, 'the driver's license is the biggest thing' that DACA brought her. She, too, had been driving without a license for over five years, since high school. Now, however, despite her official driver's license, she was taking some time to get used to her new driving reality:

...like you see a cone up ahead like, hey, what's that? Let me turn here. You see a light ahead and all these things that you automatically switch on when you are driving without a license and I still do it. Like this month, I was still doing it and [my partner] was like,

‘Hey, you have a license now. Relax.’ I would be like, ‘What’s that cone over there? Do you see a retén [sobriety checkpoint]?... because you have internalized it for so many years.

Having to avoid sobriety checkpoints and police officers for years as an unlicensed driver commuting between school, work, and home, Eva had internalized the fear. Months after getting her license, she was still always on the lookout for signs of potential checkpoints, taking less direct routes to her destination to avoid areas with many police officers.

Despite the continued anxiety associated with driving, many DACA recipients began to move around the city, the state, and beyond without the fear of being stopped by police and possibly deported, as so many undocumented immigrants had been in the last decade. Even 31-year-old Catalina who did not find an upwardly socioeconomic path through DACA did benefit from the new stress-free driving. Like Catalina, several people who participated in the study excitedly shared stories of being able to drive parents and siblings around, thereby decreasing their own and their entire family’s anxiety levels. Hector, a 23-year-old DACA recipient who did not pursue higher education said, “It makes me do more things, just go out there and do more things. Back then I was like in a little bubble in San Fernando Valley that I couldn’t leave from it and now I went to San Francisco. I’ve gone to different places, to Bakersfield.”³ In this sense, DACA’s protections granted recipients the security to move around and explore, making them feel free, and able to live life on a grander scale (see also Guarneros, 2017).

This new spatial mobility also allowed DACA recipients to create and sustain stronger ties with extended relatives in other states. As they got used to driving, they were more willing to drive longer distances from home. Moreover, their new official state ID allowed them to safely rely on air travel to visit relatives in other parts of the country. Through these DACA-facilitated

visits, recipients were able to help their families maintain important links, strengthening their kinship bonds and their social networks in different parts of the country.

Many DACA recipients also obtained Advanced Parole – permission to travel outside of the country for family emergencies, work, or educational purposes (Mena Robles and Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). International travel gave DACA recipients the chance to visit family they had not seen since early childhood. In summer 2015, I traveled with a group of DACA recipients from around the United States. Several of them published narratives about their experiences. With Advanced Parole, Elizabeth Cervantes returned to her native Mexico after 22 years: “Returning to my home state, Michoacán, and meeting the family I left when I was four years old, and realizing I am so much like my grandmother, gave me a place in the world” (Cervantes, 2015: 17). After being away for 14 years, DACA recipient, Edna Monroy, attained Advanced Parole to participate in an educational program and visit family in Mexico. Although she was the only member of her immediate family to go, she understood her role as their representative: “I was living my parents’ dream, the dream of many undocumented sisters and brothers that will never have the opportunity to return” (Monroy, 2015: 14). Indeed, the long-term cutting of physical ties between families is a painful aspect of migration. DACA facilitated recipients’ mobility across borders to reinstate meaningful ties that helped extended families feel better connected.

Beyond the family, the newfound mobility associated with DACA also had consequences for political activism. Those who were already involved in the immigrant rights movement found that their parents, who now understood DACA as a win for their children’s activism, were more supportive. Simultaneously, having protection from deportation and a valid driver’s license put parents at ease. As Morelia, a 21-year-old UC student explained, “for my parents, it’s more of security purposes for them. Like now they know if I’m out doing a rally, ... if I get arrested I

won't be deported just because I am, you know, DACAmented." DACA recipients, therefore, felt more secure attending regional and national gatherings to strategize about their various campaigns to push for more expansive executive actions, to end immigrant detention, and to stop deportations. While many were previously effective activists at the local level and online (Zimmerman, 2012), their new spatial mobility allowed them to meet their peers from across the country and to remain committed to a growing immigrant rights movement. The various forms of spatial mobility, in turn, allowed DACA recipients and their families to connect with people and places more directly and meaningfully, helping to establish a greater sense of belonging in new spaces within the United States and beyond.

Family Independence and Interdependence

Along with renewed optimism and spatial mobility, DACA recipients also experienced new interconnected ways of meeting their families' needs without relying on others with documents. Throughout the interviews, parents and adult children discussed the various ways that they uncomfortably had to ask others for favors to meet basic family obligations. They had to ask relatives, neighbors, and co-workers for assistance any time they were required to show official identification. This was the case for a wide range of situations, including dealing with retail stores' return policies and paying for car insurance. DACA recipients and their relatives' narratives reveal a great sense of relief that the family could now independently achieve many more tasks necessary for their family well-being.

Nancy, a 21-year-old DACA recipient, for example, discussed how one of the important things that had changed with DACA was that she was now the one person in her family with state ID. This came in very handy for her parents who collected and sold bags of aluminum cans at the local recycling center weekly to complement their incomes from low-wage work. As

Nancy explained, “Some places are really picky about their IDs so that has made a difference even for selling botes [cans]. I remember [my parents] would ask my uncle to come and sell the aluminum stuff because they required state ID. Now we don’t need to ask anyone else.” As the official family representative whenever ID was required, Nancy allowed her parents to avoid being in the vulnerable position of having to ask extended family for favors. In this way, the family escaped social isolation and conditions of vulnerability and dependency that suggest a family legal consciousness based in infantilizing experiences.

Likewise, Fara, an undocumented mother of two DACA recipients, said she appreciated that her daughters now had state ID:

There are stores that require California ID to return something you bought and don’t want. Even for that I used to struggle, because I’d go to the store and [they would say] “show me” and I would say, “let me show you my consular ID,” and “oh, no, we don’t accept that, we need California ID or a license.” So even with that, [DACA] even benefits me, because it makes even going to the store easier.

Even though many establishments accept Mexican consular IDs as sufficient for doing business (Varsanyi, 2007), immigrants always run the risk of being turned away without US state-issued identification.

Although it may seem, at a quick glance, that these details are small, they add up in ways that matter greatly for families. Many parents and adult children explained how awkward they felt to have to ask others for help in navigating their needs. As Eva explained about her father’s hesitation:

I feel like that gives him a sense of relief like, ‘if we need something we don’t need to call x and y people. We could just call our daughters.’... So I think that has changed for

them, the fact that they feel like they could have someone to kind of rely on for little simple things. Like, he works in construction so he has to return things to Home Depot. They ask him for an ID and he hasn't been able to do it because he doesn't want to ask people and now that we have our license he has been asking my sister.

Similarly, 23-year-old Susana described how DACA made her and her family more independent:

We have been able to get our own insurance, move the cars to our name, and not have to rely on our aunts for their legal status... It feels good to not have to rely on others or have to even lie about our identities that we are them or whatever. I don't want to do that. I want to be able to put things under my name and be held accountable for them.

Having to rely on others to handle their family and work business makes undocumented immigrants feel inadequate and vulnerable. Being undocumented can be an infantilizing experience when adults cannot independently carry out their own and their families' basic needs. Having adult children with DACA, then, removed the need to ask for assistance from others. Based on greater interdependence within the nuclear mixed status family, DACA allowed recipients and their families to attain a level of independence that had previously been out of reach.

In all of these ways, the benefits of DACA extended quite meaningfully to the day-to-day lives of families. Being able to act independently while avoiding the vulnerability and dependency of having to constantly ask others for favors helped families feel better about navigating their various family needs. Together, these experiences reveal that DACA affected the family legal consciousness when it made family survival easier while instilling greater collective confidence in meeting family goals.

Challenges and Limitations of DACA

While there were clearly many benefits stemming from DACA for individual recipients, families, and communities, there were also important limitations. Several DACA recipients who participated in this study discussed the challenges of integrating in new ways to society after having had to “hustle” and follow a different set of rules when being fully undocumented. From navigating financial aid applications to formal job applications, DACA recipients had to learn to work within systems in ways that other people their age had been doing all along.

Camilo, a 24-year-old alum of the University of California, discussed his process of having to negotiate a new identity and legal consciousness with a social security number and a formal identification card:

It was difficult to adapt to like being part of the system again. I only knew how to survive by begging and being likeable and it's like, Ok, that's not going to be enough anymore. I had to transition to adulthood more. It's like my growth has been postponed since when I was little. When I was a young teen I couldn't have crushes because I was gay and then as a young adult I couldn't be responsible for my own living or my own expenses because I didn't have the means to do it. I mean all that growth has been done on the spot. And it's hard, it's really, really hard to catch up on years and years of maturity.

The undocumented 1.5 generation that grew up in the United States with legal access to schooling faced a difficult transition to adulthood after high school (Gonzales, 2016). These young people had to work hard to create social networks and tell their story to benefit from the kindness and solidarity of allies in institutional and other spaces just to make it through college. Those who did not have access to financial aid faced great barriers to completing school, and even when they were able to graduate from college, they faced legal barriers to employment in their fields. To overcome these challenges, they adapted by sometimes aiming low in their goals,

or by working hard to build networks, to tell their stories, and to garner financial and other forms of support. As Camilo described, DACA now required recipients to work within more traditional, institutional pathways that were new even to the highly accomplished. In the process, while they gained family independence, they and their families also navigated challenges to new forms of adaptation.

Importantly, even though they appreciated their new benefits, most DACA recipients also expressed a sense of unease with the knowledge that they now had greater protections than their undocumented relatives. Twenty-eight-year-old UC student, Peter, explained the difficulty of facing the continued inequalities that stratified his own family's experiences, even after he received DACA:

even though I have DACA already, I always hear my mom: "oh my tooth hurts" for the past two years and she doesn't have health insurance and I'm bummed that I can't help her... And my mom is not getting younger... And even though I might have DACA, my family still doesn't. And I think that I still feel so undocumented because the struggles that I had before, my family is still having it.

Alongside the new legal consciousness based on family independence, DACA recipients often also experienced a sense of guilt for their new individual access to resources. As evident in the previous sections, DACA recipients were happy to help their families financially and through their use of driver licenses, but there were many moments when they could not share their temporary individual benefits.

Study participants were also dissatisfied with DACA's limited reach among other immigrants. Twenty-three-year-old Martín who stopped out of the UC had been using DACA to work at a non-profit organization with LGBT youth. As he explained, DACA left out some of the

most vulnerable undocumented young people who especially needed these benefits:

I have a friend... He was a homeless youth and his parents kicked him out... so he doesn't have a lot of the documentation that is needed like the bank statement, cell phone bills, so he has had to go through a lot of hurdles... It's like you kind of have to have the whole Dreamer narrative, like you are a straight A student, you are the valedictorian like you are all this high achieving student ...It's for that population... and it excludes people that have had a rougher time especially when it comes to being homeless.

Indeed, LGBTQ youth are especially vulnerable to being kicked out of their homes when parents learn of their sexuality (Terriquez, 2015). Without parental support or a fixed mailing address, potential DACA applicants could not easily prove their eligibility or afford the application fee. Those who lived in extreme poverty or who were homeless, then, were especially likely to be excluded.

As much as DACA benefited recipients and their families and shifted their family legal consciousness, it also brought new challenges. Most importantly, DACA excluded many of the most vulnerable 1.5 generation immigrants and failed to undo all of the consequences of illegality while stratifying families from within.

Conclusion and Discussion

This article demonstrates that DACA's policy changes were informing immigrants' shifting perspectives and spatial mobility. But beyond that, the new opportunities were also significant in the lives of recipients' families. Just like the consequences of illegality spill over to affect documented members of mixed status families (Menjívar et al., 2016), new protections, even if targeting only a single member of a family, have notable consequences for families' collective legal consciousness.

DACA gave recipients and their families renewed optimism about their place in US society. New opportunities to continue their education or access office jobs were motivating for recipients and filled parents with pride. Witnessing their children's perceived upward mobility helped parents feel justified in their migration journey and turned their legal consciousness toward a greater sense of belonging. Driver licenses also gave DACA recipients security while driving, allowing them to explore beyond their neighborhoods, to travel longer distances, including to other states to visit and maintain ties with extended relatives. With Advanced Parole, moreover, travel to home countries served to anchor them in their family history and culture.

DACA benefited families in mundane but cumulative ways. Even seemingly minimal changes like driver licenses and access to spaces and services that require state ID made life notably easier for Latino young adults and their families in Los Angeles. From recycling aluminum cans, to putting legal documents under their own name, families could rely on their own immediate relatives to handle family business. This allowed families to move away from a family legal consciousness based on infantilizing experiences when they had to rely on favors from others to meet basic family needs, to a legal consciousness of family independence through interdependence on DACA recipients. These changes helped determine not only Latino youth and their families' socioeconomic outcomes, but also increased family solidarity with one another. Feeling more accomplished, knowing that individual and family goals were attainable, and increasing opportunities for pride in themselves and each other were integral to a legal consciousness based on a stronger sense of belonging in the United States.

Despite its many positive consequences, DACA also had significant limitations. Having access to new resources and possibilities emphasized for recipients the family's internal

stratification as some members still lacked protections. Finally, one of DACA's greatest limitations was that it required applicants to have a sufficiently stable family life to accumulate proof of eligibility and the resources to pay a steep fee. This left out the most vulnerable potential applicants—those living in deep poverty, LGBTQ, and homeless youth— who did not have the financial or familial resources to apply. As has become especially prominent in the Trump era, DACA's greatest limitation was its temporariness. At the time of this writing, recipients and their families await the end of the executive action and greater uncertainty that will clearly continue to affect them all.

Interviews with DACA recipients, particularly those who were politically active prior to its passage, confirm that immigration policies affect families beyond the law's targets. The activists, while grateful for the improvements they were living, were therefore intent on continuing to fight for more expansive policy changes, to include those most vulnerable among them. In the face of great political uncertainty and likely setbacks, DACA's consequences serve as a reminder that even small positive changes have the potential to vastly improve immigrants' lives. The taste of greater stability and security is likely to motivate immigrant rights activists to keep fighting for social justice for all immigrants.

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¹ President Obama made these remarks when he announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals on June 15, 2012. See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-pressoffice/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration>

² See

https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/daca_performancedata_fy2017_qtr3.pdf

(Accessed November 4, 2017)

³ Note that most interviews took place in 2013 and 2014, prior to the implementation of Assembly Bill 60 that allows undocumented immigrants who can provide proof of residency to apply for a driver's license.