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**“Silence isn’t helping and we need to put our stories into action:” The
role of narratives for the Dreamers**

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**“Silence isn’t helping and we need to put our stories into action:” The
role of narratives for the Dreamers**

by

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Dedication

To all the Dreamers who have dedicated their lives to the Dream movement and whose courage to come out as Undocumented and Unafraid will remain a timeless inspiration to both immigrants and citizens alike. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to march alongside you and participate in the movement.

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I am in deep gratitude to the wonderful mentors that have guided my knowledge of the experiences of the Dreamers. I would like to thank Dr. Harriett Romo from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) for introducing me to the world of sociology, and specifically for incorporating my research under an over-arching investigation on the Dreamers conducted by the Mexico Center at UTSA. I cannot adequately describe in words the tremendous influence that her mentorship had on my development as a researcher. Memories of Dr. Romo sitting by my side as we conducted one-on-one interviews with participants will always stay with me, as will the lessons that she taught me on writing, presenting research at conferences, and engaging fully with investigations at hand. As a law student who had never before conducted formal sociological research, I found in Dr. Romo an amazing teacher and friend who showed me how sociology could illuminate the impact that laws and policies have on the experiences of immigrants. I would also like to thank the Mexico Center at UTSA for inviting me with open arms to its institution. In the Mexico Center I met friends and mentors who enriched my study and continue to inspire me.

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My clinical partner Melva Perez and I were assigned to the case of a Dreamer, and ever since I have been fascinated and compelled by the experiences of undocumented youth. The clinic taught me the laws and policies that determined whether an immigrant client was eligible for relief. Just as importantly, it instilled in me an appreciation of clients' stories and an understanding of how to explain the merits of these life narratives using the tools of immigration law. The act of piecing together a client's narrative within the framework of immigration law proved to me that clients are active participants in their quest to legally belong. While our role of student attorneys entailed explaining to clients how their stories fit into the law, they taught us the way that immigration law and enforcement fit into their lives, affecting their daily existence. As a result, I learned to acknowledge immigrants' agency and to see the humanity and stories underlying immigration law. This important lesson has remained with me in my research with the Dreamers.

I am also indebted to my supervisor Professor Bryan Roberts at the University of Texas Sociology Department. He diligently helped me work through several drafts of my chapters, teaching me how to effectively articulate and organize my research through the lens of sociology. I am grateful for the detailed attention that he gave my writing, and for always being accessible for any questions that I had. Many thanks for the opportunity to work at a graduate desk in the Sociology Department. I am happy to have been included in the cheerful and enlightening atmosphere of the department.

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Abstract

“Silence isn’t helping and we need to put our stories into action:” The role of narratives for the Dreamers

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My thesis analyzes the role of narratives in the consolidation of a Dreamer identity and movement for undocumented youth. The Dream movement, which initially pushed for the DREAM Act, a bill that would grant undocumented youth a pathway to residency and citizenship, has evolved into a collective effort to protect and fight for rights-enabling legislation for the entire undocumented population. This investigation uses narratives to promote an understanding of the Dream movement, taking into account a long-standing strategy of Dreamers: Stories of self lead to a collective story of us that celebrates individual experiences of a common struggle to belong in spite of a lack of papers. This story of us, in turn, leads to a story of now, a narrative of mobilization and advocacy that speaks to Dreamers’ public quest for legal recognition. The articulation of narratives allows for a sense of belonging among Dreamers who, because they are not conferred citizenship, have struggled to find acceptance and recognition as members of the United States. In spite of not having citizenship, Dreamers have been conferred benefits, such as the right to a free K-12 public school education under the 1982 Supreme

Court *Plyler v. Doe* decision and the right to work and remain in the country for a renewable two years under President Obama's 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) directive. These benefits, utilized by Dreamers to show that they are important members of the national polity, are important elements of their narrative. By adopting a Dreamer identity, undocumented youth have realized that lack of papers is not an impediment to civic and political engagement, even if they are not given the right to vote. Dreamers, in mobilizing and advocating, exercise rights such as the ability to testify and lobby that oftentimes the average citizen does not utilize. By becoming so engaged, undocumented youth have made an important claim to citizenship that has given them a newfound visibility and recognition as rights-bearing individuals.

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Figure 2: Immigration march and rally outside of Texas Capitol, February 2013



Chapter 1

Introduction

On a sun-filled Saturday morning in February 2012, close to one hundred students from the Texas Dream Alliance (TDA), a statewide network of immigrant youth rights groups, marched across Guadalupe Street in Austin, Texas toward a university plaza. The University Leadership Initiative (ULI), an immigrant youth rights group established in 2005, was hosting this particular summit. Holding bright colored posters spelling out, “Unauthorized and Unafraid” and “Education Not Deportation,” these young men and women walked together, unbothered by the cold, wintery breeze. As they marched, they raised their arms in unison to the clouds, yelling, “Up, Up for Education,” only to sway their arms to the ground, chanting, “Down, Down for deportation.” These students, smiling and laughing, augmented their voices, imbuing their laughter with an unbending determination and seriousness each time a new chant began. It was as if, through these chants, they were letting the world hear their stories of searching for jobs they could not obtain; of a loved *tío* or *primo* who had gotten deported; of a lingering, heavy thought that that they too would be sent back to their countries of birth. As shown by their loud chants and smiles, there was no inkling of fear among this group of students. Throughout, one or two leaders would shout, “Dreamers, what do we want?” to which others would clap and yell, “The DREAM Act!” The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, a bi-partisan bill first introduced in the United States Congress in

2001 that has continuously failed to pass, would grant qualifying undocumented youth a direct pathway to legal residency and citizenship. Onlookers watched, sometimes clapping and cheering them on. Once at the plaza, these students huddled on the steps, waiting for cues from their leaders. Like echoes, shouts of “Undocumented and Unafraid” grew stronger as students raised their signs in solidarity. By showing that they were “Undocumented and Unafraid,” they were lifting a veil; it was a veil that, for a majority of them, had kept their undocumented state “in the shadows” for many years. In uniting, they “lifted” this veil and proved that they too had a voice. In spite of the ever-present worry that they could be deported, that they could be apprehended by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), they were “coming out.” They were stepping out of the shadows, dancing in a newfound visibility.

Only a few months after the TDA’s February march, undocumented youth across the nation learned that their visibility could influence immigration policy. Moreover, they realized that their activism could make them both witnesses and participants of change. On June 15, 2012, the Obama administration announced that it would stop deporting undocumented youth who had grown up in the United States and grant these youth work authorization. Called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), this directive is estimated to benefit 1.8 million undocumented immigrants who have arrived to the United States under the age of sixteen, are not above the age of 30, have lived in the United States for at least 5 years before the date of the memorandum and were present on this date, are in school or have graduated (GED included), and have not committed

serious crimes (Immigration Policy Center 2012, Napolitano 2012). 1.7 million of these undocumented immigrants are young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 (Pérez 2012:6). While not written into law, DACA allows qualifying youth to remain in the United States for a renewable two years with work authorization.

June 15, 2012 was emblematic of the struggles that undocumented youth have encountered growing up without papers. Not only was it the date on which immigrant youth were recognized as deserving relief, albeit temporary, but it also marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's 1982 decision *Plyler v. Doe*, in which the Court ruled that undocumented children must be provided access to a free K-12 public school education. See *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 230 (1982). As a result of *Plyler*, each year approximately 65,000 undocumented youth who have lived in the United States for five years or longer walk across their graduation stages clad in cap and gown to receive their high school diplomas (Pérez 2012:6). Upon graduating, close to 26 percent of these youth enroll in college (Pérez 2012). Twelve states, including Texas, provide in-state tuition to unauthorized students (National Conference of State Legislatures 2012). Yet, before the implementation of DACA, undocumented youth lived with the anxiety of not knowing whether they would be able to put their degrees to good use, as they were legally barred from working. In spite of their educations that, for some, constituted degrees from prestigious universities and graduate schools, undocumented youth were left in a legal "limbo" (Gonzales 2011) that at times made professional careers seem like an unreachable ideal. Still, as evidenced by the Dream movement, a youth-led

mobilization that developed in support of the DREAM Act, undocumented youth, or Dreamers as they call themselves, have demonstrated an unyielding determination to fight for their right to work and remain in the country. DACA, because it does not confer residency or citizenship, is not perfect, yet it stands as a step forward in Dreamers' quest to full inclusion in the United States as citizens.

In January 2013, President Obama announced his plans to implement comprehensive immigration reform. Speaking of the “patches” his administration tried to fix in the immigration system, he stated:

We took up the cause of the Dreamers—the young people who were brought to this country as children, young people who have grown up here, built their lives here, have futures here. We said that if you're able to meet some basic criteria like pursuing an education, then we'll consider offering you the chance to come out of the shadows so that you can live here and work legally, so that you can finally have the dignity of knowing you belong. But because this change isn't permanent, we need Congress to act—and not just on the DREAM Act. We need Congress to act on a comprehensive approach that finally deals with the 11 million unauthorized immigrants who are in the country right now. That's what we need (Obama Speech 2013).

The fact that unauthorized immigrant youth have come to provide an important face for immigration reform reveals how far they have come. Where once they worried about what they would do upon graduating from school, they have an open door to work opportunities. While before they were nervous about escaping the purview of ICE, they can affirmatively apply for DACA. Although unauthorized youth once struggled to “come out of the shadows” as undocumented, they now come together as Dreamers dressed in cap and gown, arms holding up signs spelling in big, bright letters, “Undocumented and Unafraid.” Dreamers initially concentrated their efforts on

procurement of the DREAM Act, but now unite in their fight to secure comprehensive immigration reform as a way to protect the rights of their families. If the mobilization and collective identity of undocumented youth as Dreamers teaches us anything, it is that their civic and political engagement has provided the tools to demonstrate that they and their families are rights-bearing individuals. Moreover, it has provided the tools to articulate the immigrant experience through personal stories of a common struggle to belong as Americans.

Research Questions and Purposes of this Study

In this thesis, I suggest that the collectivity and social movement of Dreamers should be understood in light of the narratives that propel their mobilization. This focus on the role of stories is inspired by Dreamers' reflection on the importance of narrative as a tactic in building a social movement. As I show in the following chapters, the articulation of stories unites undocumented youth, allowing them to relate to and identify with one another. In this way, undocumented youth produce a collective identity as Dreamers, a story of us that brings together diverse experiences of a common struggle of growing up undocumented. Stories of self, like links in a chain, connect undocumented students to one another, as each student is invited to share his or her narrative, and eventually comes to see elements of him or herself in each story. At the statewide and national level, undocumented youth identify with stories of other undocumented youth that are presented in the media. Theirs is a movement that is propelled by stories, and is

thus best understood through the framework of collective identity and narrative.

Dreamers' collective account produces a story of now, a narrative that Dreamers characterize as encapsulating their public advocacy and mobilization in their quest for change.

Rather than focus on the limits that undocumented youth have endured growing up, or solely emphasize the successes that these youth hold in contrast to other immigrant populations, I concentrate on the narratives on which Dreamers' collective identity is built. I describe the external narratives of *illegality* and *criminality* effectuated by immigration cases, jurisprudence, and anti-immigrant sentiment that have been challenged by Dreamers' stories. I show how Dreamers, in using individual stories to create a collective identity, have not only countered pejorative stereotypes such as *alien*, *illegal*, and *criminal*, but have also found a sense of empowerment and acceptance in spite of their lack of U.S. citizenship. I also speak to the transportation of stories from personal and informal settings like campus meetings to more public realms such as marches and visits to state legislatures and Washington D.C. Through the power of narrative, Dreamers have found the space to become civically and politically engaged, participating in activities such as testifying and lobbying that are often attributed to citizenship. In so doing, they challenge the contours of citizenship, showing that, even with a lack of papers, involvement in civic and political realms can be achieved. This observation does not undermine the reality that civic and political engagement have been carried out with the desire of gaining a pathway to citizenship. Rather, it illustrates the

degree to which Dreamers have exercised their human rights as students and members of the American polity to carve out a sense of legal belonging in the United States.

Methodology

In keeping with my focus on the role of narratives, I collected a series of individual stories through semi-structured one-on-one interviews. As part of an overarching research project at the University of Texas at San Antonio's (UTSA) Mexico Center under Dr. Harriett Romo aimed at understanding the civic and political engagement of undocumented youth, my research team and I conducted a total of 33 interviews with young adults aged 18 or above who were either undocumented or Dream allies. Through these interviews, conducted in private rooms at the University of Texas School of Law and the Mexico Center at UTSA, I asked about factors, such as the role of mentoring, civic and political engagement, access to higher education, articulation of stories of self, revelation of an undocumented status, ties to country of origin, feelings toward the United States, and students' perception of their power to effect change. I used these factors to assess why and how undocumented youth come together as Dreamers both on college campuses and as part of state and national networks. Through these interviews, I realized the large role that articulating stories had in shaping the collective identity of Dreamers. In addition to narratives obtained through one-on-one interviews, I collected stories from newspaper articles, YouTube videos, as well as personal stories shared by Dreamers in weekly held University Leadership Initiative (ULI) meetings. I

specifically looked to media accounts in regard to events that occurred before the start of my research in the fall of 2011. I also used media accounts to gather stories of Dreamers across the nation and to elaborate upon narratives of participants who I had interviewed and who had publicly shared their stories. In becoming a member of the ULI, an Austin-based immigrant youth rights organization, and conducting participant observation at the group's meetings and demonstrations, I was able to see firsthand how students presented their personal narratives to one another. I was also able to learn about the group's organization, its media and legislative trainings, and its ability to network and organize marches and rallies throughout the Austin area.

While I interviewed one student from Pakistan, the majority of my participants are Latin Americans by birth. I considered both students who overstayed visas and who entered without inspection. While most of my participants were undocumented, several had received a form of relief as a result of placement in deportation proceedings. Several participants have applied for visas. Likewise, I invited citizen allies to also speak about their involvement in the DREAM movement. I used the ULI as a case study, but also interviewed students from similar organizations in San Antonio. Between the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2013, I attended ULI meetings and participated in their Austin events, including marches, fundraisers, educational forums, a meeting with a legislative staffer in the fall of 2010, a Texas Dream Alliance (TDA) workshop in January 2012, and a march for comprehensive immigration reform in February 2013. Likewise, I participated in a rally in the summer of 2012 conducted by immigrant youth rights groups in San Antonio.

In addition to these organized demonstrations, I also participated in several of the ULI's social events, including a picnic in 2011. I chose Texas as a research site not only because I am based out of Austin and San Antonio, but also because Texas is one of the few (12 total) that offer in-state tuition to undocumented students. It also confers state financial aid, thereby allowing undocumented students to attend Texas public universities. Furthermore, because Austin is the Texas capital, students residing in both Austin and San Antonio have become deeply involved in contacting state legislators and conducting demonstrations in front of the state Capitol building. By conducting research in this area, I was at a vantage point because I was able to directly see the degree of engagement and empowerment that undocumented youth exercised in their interaction with policy makers.

I used a non-probability snowball sampling strategy with students involved in the ULI and in similar groups in San Antonio. Qualitative data obtained through individual interviews with undocumented youth was used to determine how individual and external factors determine undocumented students' sense of incorporation and desire to engage in immigrant youth rights movements. Data from the semi-structured interviews was used to address the question of what factors motivate students to identify as Dreamers and become involved in the movement. I also analyzed the mechanisms by which this collective identity was influenced by incorporation patterns in schools and communities and strengthened across state and national networks of undocumented youth.

Literature Review

Since the Dream movement forms part of a long-standing legacy of mobilizations in the United States, any understanding of its dimensions is best accounted for by social movement theory. Academic interest in identity politics has increased with the rise of social movements throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Sociologists have realized that movements cannot be reduced to bound, unified subjects and categories such as class location or gender (Somers 1994; Melucci 1989). To prevent such a reduction of social movements to a “unified datum,” Alberto Melucci (1989:25) posits a focus on the “plurality of perspectives, meanings, and relationships which crystallize in any given collective action” (1989:25). As Melucci (1989:28) further states, “A social movement is not a unified ‘subject’ but always a composite action system, in which widely differing means, ends and forms of solidarity and organization converge in a more or less stable manner.” Unity, while manifested through collective action, cannot be considered a “starting point” of such action but rather a result (Melucci 1989:26). To consider otherwise would be to ignore the nuances and differences that comprise collective action. To appreciate the “heterogeneity” underlying social movements, Melucci proposes studying group identity through an analysis of the “intermediate level of collective action” (1989:30). This intermediate level “comprises the processes through which individuals recognize that they share certain orientations in common and on that basis decide to act together” (Melucci 1989:30). Melucci adopts three dimensions that scholars

such as Bert Klandermans (1986) have incorporated in studies of collective action: mobilization potential, recruitment networks, and motivation to participate (1989:30). Melucci effectively defines these dimensions: *Mobilization potential* “refers to that sector of the population which identifies with a movement, or to some of the issues it raises” (1989:30). *Recruitment networks* refer to the “existing networks of social relationships” that “facilitate the processes of involvement and decrease the costs of individuals’ investment in collective action” (1989:31). *Motivation to participate* refers to those “incentives to act” that are largely “constructed and developed through interaction” within networks (1989:31-32).

In the course of constructing a collective identity, social movements have used narrative as a tool in motivating and recruiting participants (Somers 1994). “Narratives,” as Margaret J. Somers (1994:616) explains, “are constellations of *relationships* (connected parts) embedded in *time* and *space*, constituted by *causal emplotment*.” Only by using narrative, can we understand how different parts of social action are connected. These parts are not linked by chronological order, but rather by emplotment (Somers 1994:616). “Emplotment,” as Somers (1994:616) elucidates, “is an accounting of why a narrative has the story line that it does.” Narrative is significant as a tool in analyzing social movements because “social life itself is storied” and “narrative is an ontological condition of social life” (Somers 1994:616). Narratives of collective identity not only help direct people’s actions, but are also articulated at both the individual and collective levels (Polletta 1998:140-141). Stories account for self-definitions within the context of

an “unfolding life story” (Polletta 1998:140), and as such illuminate how these definitions differ from person to person and collectivity to collectivity. Narratives, as Poletta (1998:140-141) explains, underscore the role of identity for both collectivities and individuals: “In telling the story of our becoming—as an individual, a nation, a people—we establish who we are. Narratives may be employed strategically to strengthen a collective identity but they also precede and make possible the development of a coherent community, or nation, or collective actor.” By “retaining continuity” and using transitions to sustain both the individual self and collectivity, narratives “explain what is going on in a way that makes an evolving identity part of the explanation” (Polletta 1998:141). Likewise, narratives direct the process by which individuals and collectivities answer the following questions: “who we are (consciousness), how we define others (boundaries), the source of our problems, and how we can make the world better (politics)” (Moon 2012:1340, Taylor and Whittier 1992). Stories “told in and about movements,” found in such things as field reports, speeches, presentations, and manifestos, “illuminate” aspects of the “emergence, trajectories, and consequences of movements” that are often difficult to pinpoint (Polletta 1998:419).

Somers (1994:617) offers the following four dimensions of narrative: ontological, public, metanarrativity, and conceptual. Ontological narratives are the “stories” that social actors use to make sense of their lives and more specifically their actions (Somers 1994:618). These are stories that are used to “define who *we are*,” a self-definition that then becomes a “precondition” for “knowing what to *do*” (Somers 1994:618). The act of

doing, in turn, produces new narratives and actions, hence making “identity” and the “self” something that “one *becomes*” (Somers 1994:618). As Somers (1998:618-619) suggests, narratives are “sustained” and “transformed” over time through public and collective narratives. Indeed, we need to consider public narratives to understand how members of collective identities “adjust” stories to “fit their own identities,” and similarly to comprehend how reality is “tailored” to “fit” a story (Somers 1994:618). Public stories are “those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand” (Somers 1994:618). These accounts encapsulate entities ranging from families to workplaces, governments, and nations (Somers 1994:618). Metanarrativity “refers to the ‘masternarratives’ in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history and as social scientists” (Somers 1994:618). In the case of undocumented immigrants, an example of a masternarrative is *Illegality vs. Personhood*, as activists have increasingly challenged stereotypes of *illegal*, *alien* and *criminal* in the public realm through marches and rallies (Beltrán 2009:595). Finally, conceptual narrativity constitutes “the concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers” (Somers 1994:620). Conceptual narrativity calls for “social analytic vocabulary” that can “accommodate” the construction of social life, social action, and social identities through both ontological and public narratives (Somers 1994:620).

In analyzing the role of narratives in the collective identity of undocumented youth as Dreamers, I adopt the premise that diverse individual stories of self lead to a

group narrative that accounts for and celebrates this plurality. A collective narrative, in turn, produces a public story of action, incorporating demonstrations and actions like mobilizing, rallying, lobbying, and testifying. Individual stories are produced through experiences of growing up undocumented, of living in an “in-between” state (Menjívar 2006) between visibility and invisibility, legality and illegality, and inclusion and exclusion that becomes accentuated as undocumented youth grow up. Roberto Gonzales (2011) labels this experience as *learning to be illegal*. Before the implementation of DACA, undocumented youth learned to be illegal when, for instance, they realized they could not drive, get a social security, or in some states, attend a college or university (Gonzales 2011). These experiences have often produced an internal struggle for undocumented youth in the sense that they have to reconcile feeling American and being undocumented. This common paradoxical reality is articulated when undocumented youth share their experiences with each other, often in the space of immigrant youth rights groups on college campuses. The creation of these organizations is largely due to in-state tuition policies that allow for both undocumented students’ presence at universities and their obtainment of important human capital in the form of supportive peers and professors (Abrego 2008, Gonzales 2008). Immigrant youth rights groups carve out spaces for undocumented young adults to become civically and politically engaged (Abrego 2008, Gonzales 2008). While their engagement is influenced by their early life and high school educations (Gonzales 2009), it is in college where these youth unite and mobilize for immigrant rights. In so doing, they have created a collective identity and

narrative as Dreamers, which celebrates their individual stories. By adopting a Dreamer identity, hence creating a community where they find belonging, undocumented youth have gained the resources to “go public” (Beltrán 2009). By taking their stories to a public realm, as Gonzales (2008), claims, Dreamers have proven that, while they have been “left out” of citizenship, they have not been “shut down.” In fact, they have made their presence in important political spaces such as legislatures and Washington D.C., “claiming” an important “space” for a visibility that oftentimes was not available to them before (Beltrán 2009:597).

Chapter 2

“Just because I have a degree, and just because I speak English, doesn’t make me any less undocumented than the person who works alongside my dad building homes or washing dishes or picking up trash. We’re still the same.”

This chapter paints a picture of the stereotypes of illegality and criminality that have imbued the lives of undocumented students. In this way, it illuminates the fact that immigration cases and jurisprudence are not neutral, but rather reflective of socially accepted characterizations of unauthorized immigrants. Just as law is influenced by such constructions as *aliens*, *criminals*, and *illegals*, legislation also reinforces anti-immigrant sectors’ emphasis on the illegality and criminality of undocumented immigrants. My aim in this chapter is to provide a framework of the externally imposed identity and narrative of illegality and criminality that undocumented youth have had to confront. In later chapters, I demonstrate how these youth, in mobilizing through personal and collective narratives, have produced an identity as Dreamers that challenges this construct of illegality and criminality.

To comprehend the saliency of an undocumented status in one’s life, it is necessary to consider the laws and jurisprudence that have molded and constructed illegality and criminality. Indeed, immigrant youth rights groups like the University Leadership Initiative (ULI) often challenge these external, state-produced identities. Yet, these characterizations, because they are written into law and have been reiterated by

anti-immigrant sectors from the 1980s to the present, have affected the trajectories of these students' lives. Undocumented students have grown up in an age of increased arrests and deportations of their communities and heightened immigration enforcement. In particular, the 2008 implementation of Secure Communities, a program in which participating jurisdictions submit arrestees' fingerprints to both criminal and immigration databases (Waslin 2011:3), has contributed to this increase in arrests and deportations. This measure, moreover, has been established in the midst of growing perceptions of Latin American immigrants as a "threat" to the nation (Chavez 2008:2). Coupled with these facts is the failure of the DREAM Act to pass.

For undocumented students who have been placed in removal proceedings, in which an immigration judge decides whether or not to deport them, the weight of illegality is especially felt; it is a weight that often makes them realize that, while they are privileged by their education and length of residence, they are no less undocumented. No longer are they simply living under the radar, but instead they have to navigate the system of immigration law in order to prove that they deserve to remain in the United States. In spite of living a life that seems "so normal," going to school and engaging with their peers, undocumented youth are deemed *illegal* by the law. As a result, they are forced to learn how to reconcile a motivated, academic self with stereotypes of *alien*, *illegal* and *criminal* externally imposed by the law and anti-immigrant sectors. They develop a legal consciousness (Abrego 2008) that influences their identification as students and immigrants as well as their desire to mobilize (2008:712-713). In analyzing this issue, I

seek to add credibility to a notion adopted by socio-legal scholars and effectively summarized by Jan Hoffman French (2009:11) in her book *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast*. “Legal systems are seen as contested sites of meaning where not only rights and obligations, but also identities, are constantly under negotiation, always within the context of historical processes.” I conclude that, while undocumented students have had to contend with an *illegal* identity imposed by both legal paradigms and socially accepted stereotypes, they are also rights-bearing individuals, as evidenced by their right to a free public school education, to work authorization, and in those states with in-state tuition policies, to higher education. These rights, as I show in later chapters, have allowed for their mobilization and activism as Dreamers.

“I was no longer a person but an alien number:” The rise of crimmigration

In 1926, United States judge Learned Hand decided *Klonis v. Davis*, in which he acknowledged that deportation, while not formally criminal punishment, was nonetheless a “dreadful punishment” for those who had already made the United States their home. See *Klonis v. Davis*, 13 F.2w 630 (2d. Circuit 1926). This case, in many respects, reflects the situation of undocumented immigrant youth brought to the United States at a young age, as evidenced by the following facts: The plaintiff, born in Poland and brought by his parents to the United States at ten years old, had lived in the United States continuously, could read and write English, and had aspirations to be a carpenter. In spite of having

grown up in the United States, he was placed in removal proceedings. The judge who sentenced Klonis for the second time made a judicial recommendation that he not be deported (Sklansky 2012). While a warrant of deportation was still given on the ground that the recommendation was untimely, Judge Hand in this decision acknowledges the punitive nature of deportation:

At any rate we think it not implorable to say that deportation under the circumstances would be deplorable. Whether the relator came here in arms or at the age of ten, he is as much our product as though his mother had borne him on American soil. He knows no other language, no other people, no other habits, than ours. He will be as much a stranger in Poland as any one born of ancestors who immigrated in the seventeenth century. However heinous his crimes, deportation is to him exile, a dreadful punishment, abandoned by the common consent of all civilized peoples. Such, indeed, it would be to anyone, but to one already proved to be incapable of honest living, a helpless waif in a strange land, it will be utter destruction. That our reasonable efforts to rid ourselves of unassimilable immigrants should in execution be attended by such a cruel and barbarous result would be a national reproach. See *Klonis v. Davis*, 13 F.2d 630 (2d. Circuit 1926).

The notion that deportation was “deplorable” and a “dreadful punishment” for those immigrants who had grown up in the United States soon diminished with the passage of quota laws and the growing scope of criminal offenses leading to removal. From the 1920s on, deportation, considered separate from criminal punishment, became central to immigration law. See *Mahler v. Eby*, 264 U.S. 32 (1924). Because it was considered a civil sanction, deportation, while “deplorable,” was not painted as such under the law, and was thus easily implemented against unauthorized immigrants. In 1929, legislation increased the grounds of criminal offenses resulting in deportation and instituted criminal sanctions for unlawful entry violations (Stumpf 2009:1716-1717). During the 1930s, a deportation drive was instituted against Mexican nationals resulting

in an exodus in southern California of between 50,000 and 75,000 people during 1931 (Hoffman 1973:219). Unlawful entry became a misdemeanor, and unlawful re-entry a felony (Stumpf 2006). From the 1930s to the 1960s, grounds for removal expanded, and deportation became required of all aliens who entered the United States without inspection (Stumpf 2009:1718).

By the 1980s, deportation was further strengthened as the central sanction of immigration law. Before the mid-1980s, removal of noncitizens for criminal offenses was largely limited to convictions for serious crimes of moral turpitude, drug trafficking, and certain weapons offenses (Stumpf 2009:13). In 1988, Congress created the category “aggravated felonies” (Stumpf 2009:13). While this category initially encompassed only murder, as well as drugs and firearms trafficking, it has expanded through subsequent litigation and the establishment of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996 to include less serious crimes including misdemeanors (Stumpf 2009:13). Undocumented youth picked up by police are usually not deemed aggravated felons, having committed minor infractions such as driving without a license or with a broken taillight (Harmon 2012). Yet, the increasing scope of immigrants deemed aggravated felons has only exacerbated the widespread perception that all unauthorized immigrants are criminals. Criminality has become equated with illegality, and for this reason, it has become easy to envelope all unauthorized immigrants under this association. One good example of the ease with which unauthorized immigrants have been deemed to be criminals was the passage of the Border Protection,

Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act, or H.R. 4437, in the House of Representatives in December 2005. While it eventually did not become law, it would have made residing in the United States without proper documentation a deportable felony (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:6, Johnson and Ong Hing 2007:100).

For undocumented youth, heightened enforcement and expanded criminal definitions have facilitated their entanglement in removal proceedings, leaving them in a system whereby they are forced to confront characterizations such as *aliens*, *illegals*, and *criminals*. While undocumented youth who are placed in removal proceedings are often not *criminals*, having committed only minor infractions (Harmon 2012), they are deemed to be so because, according to the law, they are *alien* and *illegal*. These terms emphasize the notion of living outside the law and therefore not abiding by it. Enforcement of immigration law at the state level has fostered this notion, insofar as increasing numbers of state and local legislation are designed to “regulate” non-citizens (Stumpf 2008:1559). In Arizona, for instance, the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012 upheld the most controversial part of the state’s anti-immigrant law, SB 1070, requiring police to interrogate about the immigration status of someone arrested or detained when there is “reasonable suspicion” that he or she is present in the United States illegally (American Civil Liberties Union 2012:1). Still, the largest example of heightened enforcement is the establishment of partnerships between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and state and local law enforcement agencies (Kalhan 2010:57). Secure Communities, created in in 2008, is the most widespread of such partnerships. This program has encouraged the

characterization of undocumented youth as *aliens*, *illegals*, and *criminals* in that it has enabled their increased placement in removal proceedings. Under Secure Communities, participating jurisdictions submit arrestees' fingerprints not only to criminal databases, but to immigration databases as well (Waslin 2011:3). Although state and local law-enforcement officers are not directly enforcing federal immigration law or making arrests for immigration violations under this program, the sharing of fingerprints allows ICE access to information about detainees (Waslin 2011:3). With this information, ICE then makes determinations about enforcement action (Waslin 2011:3). In the majority of cases where enforcement action is taken, ICE issues a detainer against the jailed individual (Waslin 2011:4). A detainer is a request from ICE that the arresting agency notify ICE before it releases the noncitizen so that ICE has the opportunity to decide whether or not the individual should be transferred to ICE custody (Waslin 2011:4). Once in ICE custody, a large majority (83%) of people arrested through Secure Communities are placed in ICE detention (Kohli, Markowitz and Chavez 2011:2).

While Secure Communities has been advertised as a device to target “the most dangerous and violent offenders” (Harmon 2012:1) in the nation’s jails and prisons, there is evidence that, for example, in Travis County, Texas twice as many people have been deported after a misdemeanor arrest in recent years than have been deported after a felony arrest (Harmon 2012:1). While this program has led ICE agents “to flag people charged with murder and other violent crimes for deportation,” (Harmon 2012:1) agents have also flagged many people such as undocumented students who commit

misdemeanors and minor crimes. In 2010, Jessica Colotl, a 21-year-old undocumented college student in Georgia, was arrested for driving without a license. Subsequently, a sheriff filed a felony charge against her for providing a false address to the police (Brown 2010:1). After being placed in removal proceedings, she publicly stated, “I never thought that I’d be caught up in this messed up system. I was treated like a criminal, like a threat to the nation (Brown 2010:1).” Likewise, Uriel Alberto, a 24-year-old undocumented activist in North Carolina, was arrested in 2011 for disorderly conduct and not released from a county jail due to a criminal record composed of traffic violations and a DWI charge (Hing 2012). In 2009, university campus police stopped 22-year-old undocumented student Ramiro for a broken taillight. He was taken to a county jail after officers realized he had an arrest warrant for failing to pay a previous ticket for running a stop sign (Harmon 2012:1). He was subsequently transferred to a detention facility where he stayed for approximately a week (Pagan 2011:1). These are but a few examples of the ways that enhanced state and local law enforcement have entangled undocumented youth in removal proceedings with minor infractions. Their arrest and placement in removal proceedings is troublesome because they are not violent and dangerous criminals.

Measures such as the enhanced scope of deportable crimes and increased state and local regulation of immigration are evidence that we live in an age of the “criminalization of immigration law” (Miller 2003:2), also termed “crimmigration” (Stumpf 2006). The merger between immigration and criminal law is evidenced by the “importation of criminal categories, processes and techniques” into immigration law (Miller 2003:4).

Legislation legitimates the heightened union of immigration and criminal law, and has consequently led to a socially accepted view that unauthorized immigrants are *illegals* and *criminals*. In the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), unauthorized immigrants are statutorily termed “aliens,” a word that connotes foreignness and intrusion (Johnson 1996). This term, because it is pejorative, has influenced the view that being unauthorized constitutes criminality. See Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101, 101(3). In light of the merger between immigration and criminal law, it is clear that a process of “governance through crime” is at play in the regulation of immigration (Miller 2003:4). Coined by Simon (2004) and adopted by Miller (2003) in her study on immigration law, “governance through crime” characterizes the process by which “crime and punishment have become the occasions and institutional contexts for shaping the conduct of others” (Miller 2003:4). Only by taking governance through crime into account, can we understand the narrative of illegality and criminality that has colored the lives of undocumented youth.

Prosecutorial Discretion: Is being DACAmented enough?

In response to growing national pressure to diminish deportations of low priority cases, such as cases of young students, military service members, and close family of American citizens (Preston 2011), Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) commenced a publicity campaign in 2011 focused on prosecutorial discretion (Immigration Policy Center 2011). Prosecutorial discretion is the authority of an agency

or officer to decide what charges to bring and how to pursue each case (Immigration Policy Center 2011). When a case against an immigrant has been terminated, prosecutorial discretion has been favorably exercised (Immigration Policy Center 2011). In an ICE memorandum dated March 02, 2011, ICE director John Morton listed enforcement priorities in the following order: “Aliens who pose a threat to national security or a risk to public safety;” “recent illegal entrants;” and “aliens who are fugitives or otherwise obstruct immigration controls” (Morton 2011). This memorandum ensured that undocumented youth with no criminal convictions were not an enforcement priority. In memoranda dated June 17, 2011, Morton outlined ICE’s enforcement priorities and specifically delineated the protection of undocumented youth, noting among other factors that special consideration should be given to a “person’s pursuit of education in the United States, with particular consideration given to those who have graduated from a U.S. high school or have successfully pursued or are pursuing a college or advanced degrees at a legitimate institution of higher education in the United States” (Morton 2011). In August 2011, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) secretary Janet Napolitano “declined to grant deferral of removal to DREAM Act eligible students across the board, but indicated a willingness to re-examine individual cases” (Immigration Policy Center 2011). Napolitano’s statement was made as part of the Obama administration’s announcement that it would suspend deportation proceedings against undocumented immigrants “who pose no threat to national security or public safety” (Pear 2011:1). While termination of removal effectively takes cases out of removal

proceedings, administrative closure places cases on hold without final resolution, but does allow individuals to remain in the country (TRAC Immigration Report 2012).

It was hoped that, through such actions as administrative closure, intended beneficiaries of the stalled DREAM Act would be helped (Immigration Policy Center 2011). The DREAM Act was introduced into Congress in 2001, but has continuously failed to pass. In December 2010, the DREAM Act fell five votes short of passing in the U.S. Senate. On May 11, 2011 Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Representative Howard Berman (D-CA) re-introduced the DREAM Act. If approved in the form introduced in 2011, the bill would benefit undocumented students who meet the following requirements: entry into the United States at age 15 or younger, aged 35 years old or younger on the date of the bill's enactment, continuous presence in the United States for 5 years prior to the bill's enactment, receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent (i.e., a GED), and demonstration of good moral character (DREAM Act Bill 2011). It would enable undocumented students to apply for conditional status, which would allow them up to 6 years of legal presence. During this 6-year period, students would be required to either attend college and graduate, or serve in the U.S. military for at least 2 years. Students who meet these requirements would be granted permanent residency at the termination of the 6-year period (Pérez 2012:8).

Morton's memos, because they listed education, arrival at a young age, and continuous presence as factors to be considered in the exercise of prosecutorial discretion (Morton 2011), were largely designed to protect Dream eligible youth. Yet, despite the

publicity surrounding the memos, a study conducted by the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) found that these memos were followed imperfectly (AILA 2011:4). In the majority of ICE offices, ICE agents, trial attorneys, and supervisors admitted that they had not implemented the memoranda and there had been no change in policy or practice (AILA 2011:4). Furthermore, several said that they “had no intention of complying and indicated that their jobs are to arrest and deport people” (AILA 2011:4). A few ICE attorneys were concerned about changing current practice “for fear that it would negatively impact their careers” (AILA 2011:4). Such responses are proof that prosecutorial discretion enforcement priorities, while seemingly a step in the right direction toward protecting low-priority cases, have not been readily implemented. Equally unsettling is the fact that ICE’s public statistics on the removal of “criminal aliens” for fiscal year 2011 did not distinguish “between people convicted of petty misdemeanors and violent felons” (AILA 2011:4). Furthermore, Immigration Impact, a website on immigration policy launched by the American Immigration Council (AIC), reports that the number of cases that DHS has chosen to suspend is “relatively low” and the percentage of cases granted administrative closure has actually grown smaller after Obama’s prosecutorial discretion initiative (Winograd 2012:1). Even when prosecutorial discretion has been exercised, as Professors Barbara Hines and Denise Gilman from the University of Texas Law Immigration clinic explained to me, it is often issued late into the removal process: after a detainer has been issued, when removal proceedings have already been initiated, and after spending time in detention centers. This fact was made

clear in an interview I conducted with Paloma, an undocumented young woman and activist whose story I detail in the last section of this chapter. She expressed that she was forced to go to a detention center for several days after being arrested for jay walking. Paloma was not given prosecutorial discretion until months after she had been arrested. Briana, another undocumented young woman whose story I also include, likewise had to go through multiple stints in court until she was given prosecutorial discretion years later (Costantini 2011:1).

The DHS initiative to administratively close cases of low priority, while a positive measure, was a double-edged sword. It became increasingly harder for undocumented students placed in removal to obtain deferred action status, as Professors Hines and Gilman also shared with me. This deferred action status, beyond protecting them from removal, would also grant them work authorization. With administrative closure, students were protected in that their cases were suspended. Yet they remained vulnerable as their cases could potentially be re-opened. Without work authorization, they were left in legal limbo (Gonzales 2011), since they could not fully immerse themselves in society. Thus, administrative closure was at best a bandage, a partial protection against deportation; it was in no way an open door to any kind of legal status. Interestingly, the only way that a student could obtain such partial protection was through having removal proceedings commenced against them, as students outside of removal could not affirmatively apply for such discretion.

On June 15, 2012, the limits of administrative closure were overcome by President Obama's announcement that qualifying young immigrants would be able to apply for deferred action status (Immigration Policy Center 2012). While the DACA program does not offer qualifying immigrants a pathway to residency or citizenship, it allows them to apply for work authorization, obtain a social security number, and to stay in the United States without fear of deportation for two years. After two years have passed, qualifying immigrants can re-apply and renew their deferred action status (Immigration Policy Center 2012). Because of the sense of legitimacy (Abrego 2008) that DACA has conferred upon undocumented youth, many have begun to call themselves "DACAmended." This measure, while not written into law, has surely corrected pitfalls in the realm of prosecutorial discretion, as it allows students not in removal proceedings to apply. Before DACA, immigrant youth who lived in the shadows had no way of seeking discretionary relief. Furthermore, the program allows qualifying individuals in removal to apply at any stage of proceedings for deferred action status. Indeed, the importance of DACA is demonstrated by the limits of such measures as administrative closure, in the sense that now qualifying students can apply for work authorization and need not worry about deportation as an immediate threat. Moreover, it is likely that DACA will lessen the impact of Secure Communities on qualifying undocumented youth in that they have been given a temporary right to remain in the country. With DACA, in the opinion of Professor Barbara Hines, beneficiaries of the measure are expected to be spared detention and removal proceedings.

However, because DACA does not provide a pathway to residency or citizenship, qualifying immigrants are still left in a legal limbo (Gonzales 2011) in the sense that they cannot obtain a permanent status. Even though they are DACAmented they are not fully and legally included in the national polity. This sense of not totally belonging is evident in marches and rallies for comprehensive immigration reform in which people have chanted, “Is DACA enough?” and the crowds have shouted “No!” Likewise, David, a member of the ULI, expressed that DACA confers a “fake sense of belonging,” since it does not confer citizenship. As I show in the following chapters, immigrant youth are increasingly mobilizing alongside their family members for comprehensive immigration reform in the hope that they and their loved ones can one day ascend to U.S. citizenship. DACA, because it merely confers a limited sense of belonging, leaves undocumented youth in an “in-between state,” or “liminal legality” (Menjívar 2006, Abrego 2008, Gonzales 2011, Gonzales and Chavez 2012) whereby they are allowed to work and contribute to their communities but cannot claim residency or citizenship. This in-between state is accentuated when undocumented youth are forced to confront pejorative stereotypes such as *alien*, *illegal* and *criminal*.

*“I didn’t know that you could label a person as being
undocumented.” The power of language*

The characterization of undocumented immigrants as *illegals* is a product of what Juliet Stumpf (2006:377) coins “membership theory.” At the heart of this theory is the

ability of the sovereign state to make distinctions between groups of people. A “social contract between the government and the people” defines who is included in the social contract or excluded from it (Stumpf 2006:377). Membership theory expounds that because “citizenship matters” (Stumpf 2006:377), undocumented immigrants are given an “outsider status” as *aliens* (Bosniak 2006:9). As Leisy Abrego (2008:713) explains, “Although immigration law is commonly portrayed as necessary to curtail undocumented immigration, undocumented immigrants are actually produced through the laws that criminalize their presence in the United States.” *Aliens*, in other words, are marginalized because they stand counter to citizens in the law (Johnson 1996:270-272). According to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), the term “alien” means any person not a citizen of the United States. *Aliens* are defined in the negative as “not citizens,” and therefore not full members of society (Johnson 1996:270-272). See Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101, 101(3). Membership in immigration law, as Stumpf (2006:398) explains, is characterized as acceding to permanent residence and U.S. citizenship; these are statuses wholly determined by criteria reflecting “acceptance and invitation by established members of the nation,” such as family members and employers (2006:398). Contrary to “acceptance” and “invitation,” the word “alien” brings forth imagery that facilitates the marginalization of immigrants (Johnson 1996:270-272). Public notions of an *alien* often evoke an image of “space invaders,” of outsiders (Johnson 1996:272); it is an image that surely has influenced anti-immigrant sectors of society to pejoratively characterize undocumented immigrants as “strangers” and

“intruders” (Johnson 1996:272). In addition, as law professor Keith Cunningham-Parmeter (2011:1569) explains, the term *alien* has also been equated with nonhumans, illegal border-crossers, and Mexicans. In spite of the term’s seeming “benign appearance” in the statutes, *alien* has become “the central metaphor of immigration law,” conveying dehumanizing associations between illegality and immigration (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1569-1570).

In both immigration and criminal law, the identity of undocumented immigrants as *aliens* is translated into policies aimed to “stem” the “flood” and curb the “invasion” (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1562). The sovereign power of the state is used to punish and socially condemn the individual offender (Johnson 1996). In the case of immigration, exclusion is manifested in deportation. When an immigrant violates rules, either by being present unlawfully and/or violating criminal laws, membership in the nation-state is “revoked” through the threat of removal (Stumpf 2006:399). By defining *aliens* as distinct from citizens, the INA has set the foundation for excluding undocumented persons from legal recognition and belonging (Johnson 1996). Using the example of undocumented students, this marginalization was demonstrated by their inability to obtain work authorization and to get a social security before the implementation of DACA. Moreover, exclusion was displayed in states like Georgia where undocumented students have been banned from attending the top 5 state colleges (Biggers 2012:1). As anthropologist Leo Chavez (2008:25) demonstrates, “Being an unauthorized migrant, ‘an

illegal,' is a status conferred by the state, and it then becomes written upon the bodies of the migrants themselves because illegality is both produced and experienced.”

The process of “writing” illegality upon migrants, as law professor Cunningham-Parmeter suggests (2011:1549), is a product of the utilization of metaphor and narrative: “Law is told through stories, and stories are told through metaphors” (2011:1549). His analysis of metaphor in important Supreme Court decisions on immigration provides an important framework to understand how case law that confers benefits can also sustain widely held anti-immigrant stereotypes. Supreme Court immigration decisions, Cunningham-Parmeter (2011:1549) explains, are ripe with pejorative metaphors associating undocumented immigrants with “aliens,” “floods,” and “invasions.” Decided in 1982 by the Supreme Court and written by Justice Brennan, *Plyler v. Doe* recognized the constitutional protection and personhood of immigrant children. Yet, in spite of its beneficial impact on immigrant children, the decision “referred to a ‘*shadow population*’ of millions of ‘*illegal aliens*’ that constituted an ‘ever-increasing *flood*’ (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1549). See *Plyer v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982). The Court in a 5-to-4 majority used equal protection grounds to invalidate a Texas statute denying undocumented children a free public school education from K-12 (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1561). Even a case that, on its face, has conferred important constitutional benefits upon undocumented youth has framed unauthorized immigrants in critical and derogatory terms (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011). While granting undocumented children an education, the decision simultaneously paints the undocumented population as a threat in

that it reiterates images of a *flood* and a *shadow population*. This depiction is repetitive, as the word “influx,” symbolizing the “flood” of immigrants, appears six times in the decision (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1562). Solutions offered in the decision, as revealed by Cunningham-Parmeter’s following analysis of the language in *Plyler*, correlate with such metaphors:

The majority described the need to “*control the influx of illegal entrants into the State,*” while the dissenting Justices proposed “*sealing our vast borders.*” According to *Plyler*, however, these efforts will ultimately prove unsuccessful given the overwhelming strength of the immigrant wave. Bodies of water are difficult to hold back. Thus, notwithstanding “the serious national problems caused by the *influx of uncountable millions* of illegal aliens across our borders,” the alien inundation remains “virtually uncontrollable” (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1563).

The association of immigration with *floods* and *influxes* aided in a derogatory and inaccurate construction of immigrant identity, emphasizing unauthorized immigrants’ “illegality” while obscuring their “personhood,” “diversity,” and “belonging” (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1548). The fact that such metaphors obfuscated the reality of immigration statistics at the time the opinion was decided demonstrates the extent to which immigrant identity was “distorted” by language (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1563). When the decision was published, immigrant children from Mexico accounted for less than two percent of the student population in Texas schools (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1563). Furthermore, approximately two million unauthorized immigrants lived in the United States in the early 1980s and accounted for less than fifteen percent of the foreign-born population (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1563). “Immigrants,” as Cunningham-Parmeter (2011:1563) further explains,

“were not an advancing body of water, but an identifiable group of people that represented a relatively small proportion of non-citizens in the United States.” If we extend this analysis to the situation of undocumented students in the twenty-first century, it is clear that they, as the beneficiaries of *Plyler*, are not an “influx” or “flood,” but rather an identifiable group who have grown up in the United States and whose personhood and belonging are American. As President Obama has expressed in his January 2013 speech on upcoming immigration reform, undocumented students are American except on paper (Obama Speech 2013).

Using Cunningham-Parmeter’s analysis of metaphor and immigration law is useful in assessing the utilization of pejorative language in law and policy, but also in understanding how undocumented youth have personally confronted and internalized such language. For instance, the production and internalization of illegality is reflected by the following anecdote provided by undocumented student José: “I didn’t know that you could label a person as being undocumented. I thought, ‘Oh, I came here so I have a right to be here.’ I didn’t know that technically I wasn’t allowed to stay in this country.” As established by law, undocumented students who have either overstayed visas or who have entered without inspection are unlawfully present and thereby “illegal.” See Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182, 212(a)(6)(A)(i) and 212(a)(9)(B)(ii). Yet going beyond the statute, students have internalized this classification, as shown by the reality that they do not have the same opportunities as their citizen peers. For example, another undocumented student, Guillermo, described how, even when he risked everything to go

on a field trip to New York City, he felt different from his peers since he did not have documents and ran the danger of being caught and detained: “They happen to be privileged because they have documents. They are going to be able to go and come back and, me, I don’t know if I’ll be able to go and come back.”

Undocumented students, as a result of having grown up in this era, have been forced to navigate their lives around the stereotypes of illegality and criminality. In having “broken the law” by being here unlawfully, they have been increasingly enveloped under the pejorative term *illegal aliens*. Too often this term obfuscates the achievements and ties that these students have accomplished. Undocumented students make an interesting case because the majority of them had no say in their parents’ decisions to immigrate. Yet, ironically the very country they call home is also the country that has criminalized their presence (Annand 2008). Moreover, the fact that the majority of undocumented youth present in the United States are Mexican, and if not from Mexico, largely from other Latin American countries, has also made them targets of the perception that Mexicans are illegals (Chavez 2008). The reason that Mexican immigrants are largely discriminated against is public acceptance of what Chavez (2008) coins the Latino Threat Narrative: a perception that Latinos will not “integrate” into the American polity but are instead “invading” it (2008:2). Mexicans are the “focus” of this public narrative, yet also incorporates Latin American immigrants generally and U.S. citizens with Latin American roots (Chavez 2008:2). Chavez (2008:16) explains that the “social identity” of Mexicans has been “plagued by the mark of illegality, which in much

public discourse means that they are criminals and thus illegitimate members of society undeserving of social benefits, including citizenship.” Because people whose origins lie south of the U.S.-Mexico border are often stereotyped as *illegal*, to be both Latino and undocumented, as many immigrant youth are, produces a heightened vulnerability to anti-immigrant sentiment (Chavez 2008).

Arguments against the DREAM Act propagate the image of immigrant youth as having grown up in the shadows of illegality. For example, education for undocumented immigrants is often equated with “rewarding the illegal behavior of aliens who have no right to be here” (Tashman 2011:1). One of the contentions against the DREAM Act is that it fulfills parents’ reasons for breaking the law in the first place (Mehlman 2011:1). While such an argument does not directly point the finger at immigrant youth, instead blaming their parents, the correlation between undocumented presence and breaking the law adds to the image of these students as *illegals*:

Admittedly, children who were brought here illegally by their parents are in a difficult situation not of their own making. However much we might empathize with their circumstances, it was the conscious decision of their parents to violate the law which put them there. In this respect, they are no different than countless other children who suffer the consequences of bad decisions and illegal acts committed by their parents. We should not ask law-abiding Americans to bear the costs or sacrifice educational and job opportunities in order to rectify problems that were created by the decisions of people who broke our laws (Stein 2011:1).

While this message directly blames parents, the usage of illegal alien terminology demonstrates the subtleness with which undocumented youth are categorized as law-breakers by association. While the notion of “empathizing with [children’s] circumstances” might humanize the plight of these children, the message raises

apprehension by establishing a causal relation between their situation and the “bad decisions” and “illegal acts” committed by their parents. By emphasizing the culpability and illegality of parents, this message portrays them as criminals, ignoring any discussion of the sacrifices, such as long work hours, to better the lives of their children. By contrasting “law-breakers” with “law-abiding Americans,” who supposedly fall victim to the loss of educational and job opportunities as a result of immigration, this message conflates unauthorized immigrants with criminals who harm Americans. Within this narrative, undocumented immigrant youth are represented as products of bad decisions and violations of the law, and consequently as a threat to “law-abiding Americans” (Stein 2011:1). Immigrant parents, in turn, are painted as “criminals.” This representation, while acknowledging the innocence of immigrant children, nevertheless reinforces the idea that unauthorized immigrants are *aliens*, *illegals*, and *criminals*. In framing the issue as a product of “bad decisions” and “illegal acts,” this message overlooks an important narrative voiced by many students: the story of parents whose sacrifices and hard work allowed their immigrant children the opportunity to go to school and become aspiring professionals.

The notion that unauthorized youth are lawbreakers by association is most apparent in the argument that students should take responsibility for their presence and undocumented status once they turn 18 (Maki 2005). This claim holds that undocumented students should be required to correct their illegal status before a state institution such as a university recognizes their right to receive benefits accorded to U.S. citizens and visa-

holding students in the United States (Maki 2005:1345). These notions are problematic because the unlawful presence of undocumented youth is not only seen as a direct result of their parents' law-breaking, but also as a culpable status they are responsible for once they become adults. Blame placed on parents, then, has eventually shifted to undocumented students themselves.

The United States Supreme Court, while recognizing the problems with shifting blame to undocumented youth, also directly holds parents culpable for breaking the law (Annand 2008, Cunningham-Parmeter 2011). While Cunningham-Parmeter (2011) has effectively demonstrated the problem inherent in the Court's use of pejorative metaphors such as "floods" and "tides" of immigrants, both his and Annand's (2008) independent analyses of *Plyler v. Doe* are equally useful in painting another side of the picture: the Court's emphasis on the innocence of children. Annand (2008:691) uses the following passage from *Plyler v. Doe* to show how the Court used language such as "innocent" to emphasize undocumented children's lack of culpability:

If the State is to deny a discrete group of innocent children the free public education that it offers to other children residing within its borders, that denial must be justified by a showing that it furthers some substantial state interest. No such showing was made here (Annand 2008:691, quoting *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 230 (1982)).

The Court, as Annand (2008:691) also demonstrates, further emphasized that undocumented children are not responsible for their presence in the United States by holding, "The Texas statute imposes a lifetime hardship on a discrete class of children not accountable for their disabling status." See *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 230 (1982). The

Court specifically said that adult immigrants who violate immigration laws should be held accountable for such violations (Annand 2008:691). As Cunningham-Parmeter (2011:1562) recognizes, *Plyler* “castigated” parents who voluntarily reside unauthorized in the United States. By equating an undocumented status with criminality and illegality, *Plyler* framed the following metaphors: “bad aliens” as “criminal adults” and “good aliens” as “infantilized immigrants” (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011:1562). Legal responses, Cunningham-Parmeter (2011:1562) demonstrates, are easily evoked from these frames, in that there is a presumption that “good” immigrants merit an education and that “bad aliens” deserve deportation. Annand (2008:691) uses the following passage from *Plyler* to show how the Court stipulated that children “comparably situated” to adult aliens should not be held responsible for the same violations:

At least those who elect to enter our territory by stealth and in violation of our law should be prepared to bear the consequences, including, but not limited to, deportation. But the children of those illegal entrants are not comparably situated. Their “parents have the ability to conform their conduct to societal norms,” and presumably the ability to remove themselves from the State’s jurisdiction; but the children who are plaintiffs in these cases “can affect neither their parents’ conduct nor their own status” (Annand 2008:691, quoting *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982).

While the Court in *Plyler* does not address access to higher education, it is nonetheless useful as a lens to see how undocumented children are framed as innocent in regard to their parents’ decisions to immigrate. One could argue that critics’ arguments against the DREAM Act are articulated similarly in the sense that they also blamed parents. Yet, *Plyler* and critics of the DREAM Act paint innocence of immigrant youth in differing lights. While critics’ arguments against the DREAM Act hold that granting

education to undocumented children constitutes rewarding their parents' illegal behavior, the holding in *Plyler* differs, insofar as it does not shift blame to the children themselves but simply holds parents accountable for breaking the law. *Plyler* does not paint access to K-12 public school education as rewarding illegality. As Annand (2008:692) shows, the majority acknowledges that children are not culpable and should be allowed to contribute to the communities in which they live: "By denying these children a basic education, we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation." See *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 230 (1982). In this way, the Court's majority ensures and foresees undocumented children's coming of age within the nation's communities. As evidenced by undocumented youth's civic and political engagement in their mobilization for the DREAM Act, an activism largely spurred by their presence on school campuses (Gonzales 2008, Abrego 2008), it is certainly true that these students have "come of age" and participated in the nation's communities. *Plyler* set the foundation to begin acknowledging undocumented youth's inclusion in society, even if it did not grant these youth access to higher education. While *Plyler* is beneficial in portraying immigrant children in a positive light, it is limited in that it depicts children's lives as independent from their parents. In this way, it reinforces negative stereotypes of immigrants and blames parents. By depicting parents as culpable, the case fails to consider the ways in which children's lives are often intertwined with that of their

parents, specifically the ways that “living in the shadows” and witnessing their parents grapple with an undocumented status psychologically and socially affects them.

Moving beyond the argument that immigrant children should not be held accountable for parents’ decisions, it is ironic that the Supreme Court has sometimes “manipulated” alien and crime terminology to speak of such children (Johnson 1996:279). In this way, the Court, while reiterating the innocence of immigrant children, has subtly used pejorative language to describe them, even when such language is presumably neutral and objective. The example that Kevin Johnson (1996) offers to show such influence is the Supreme Court’s 1993 *Reno v. Flores* decision. In this 7-to-2 decision, the majority used alien and crime terminology in its decision to hold constitutional an INS statute allowing the detention of unaccompanied minors pending deportation hearings when parents and legal guardians were not available (Johnson 1996:279). The Court set standards for detaining minors in “the least restrictive setting appropriate” for age and special needs (Georgopoulos 2005:125).

Justice Scalia, as part of the majority, refers to undocumented children as “alien juveniles,” stating, “Respondents, a class of alien juveniles so arrested and held in INS custody pending their deportation hearings, contend that the Constitution and immigration laws require them to be released into the custody of ‘responsible adults’” (Johnson 1996:296, quoting *Reno v. Flores*, 507 U.S. 292, 294 (1993)). By “responsible adults,” he meant parents, legal guardians, and specific third party adults (Johnson 1996:279, Gorman 1993). If such adults were not available or willing to take these

children, then they could be held in detention (Johnson 1996:279). By framing immigrant youth as “alien juveniles,” a term that, in the public eye denotes juvenile delinquency (Johnson 1996:280), the majority reiterated long-standing stereotypes of immigrants as criminals. In contrast, Justice Stevens in the dissent considered the impact of detention on children, phraseology that humanized undocumented youth (Johnson 1996:280). He questioned how “commingling harmless children” with adults in detention centers, fenced in by barbed wire, could possibly be in their “best interests” (Johnson 1996:280, quoting *Reno v. Flores*, 507 U.S. 292, 294 (1993)). In this way, he suggested that the act of detaining children also criminalized them.

The problem with dehumanizing and pejorative language such as “alien juveniles,” as Johnson (1996) illustrates, is that it stigmatizes undocumented children as *illegals* and *criminals*. Moreover, it demonstrates that oftentimes policy and court decisions reflect long-held negative stereotypes. The use of terms like *aliens*, *illegals* and *criminals*, as Johnson (1996:281) suggests, allows for a justification of detaining unauthorized immigrants: “Detention of aliens, adults and children, evidently is much easier to justify than detention of citizens or persons.” While the care of unaccompanied children was later transferred from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to the Division of Unaccompanied Children’s Services (DUCS) in March 2003 under the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR 2012), the language used in *Reno* is evidence of the ways that undocumented youth have been stereotyped by anti-immigrant sectors, as demonstrated by critics’ arguments against the DREAM Act. To be sure, the *Reno* case is

not directly tied to the issue of undocumented youth who entered the United States with their parents. Nevertheless, any understanding of why undocumented students are sometimes considered “criminals” within the anti-immigrant backlash is incomplete without an understanding of how undocumented children, “the most sympathetic group of noncitizens” (Johnson 1996:279), have historically been described in both the social and legal realms. The acceptance of immigrant youth as “alien juveniles” has been reflected in the subjection of immigrant youth with minor infractions to Secure Communities and their subsequent placement in detention centers.

Extending this analysis to arguments in favor of higher education for immigrant youth, it is interesting to note that even the pro-immigrant community has adopted crime terminology. As Rincon (2008:206) shows in her study of higher education for immigrant youth, in-state tuition for undocumented youth has been advocated as a “form of crime prevention.” This argument “promotes the shocking proposition that it is cheaper to educate undocumented youth than it is to incarcerate them” (Rincon 2008:206). Such emphasis on crime prevention is villainizing and should therefore be a “last resort” reason for supporting in-state tuition (Rincon 2008:206). By framing the argument in criminality, the public eye automatically assumes that without education, students will likely become criminals. In other words, they are “criminals-to-be, unless educated” (Rincon 2008:206). Again, this is a notion that goes back to the widely held assumption that illegal immigrants are necessarily criminals. Even *Plyler*, as Rincon (2008:206) further shows, indirectly reiterated this assumption, holding that not educating

undocumented children would encourage “the creation and perpetuation of a subclass of illiterates within our boundaries, surely adding to the problems and costs of unemployment, welfare, and crime.” See *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982). Similarly, a memorandum that was distributed during the initial hearing of the Texas in-state tuition policy stipulated that banning undocumented students from college equated to “creating a second class of citizens who would be a burden on our social services and criminal justice systems” (Rincon 2008:206, quoting Garcia 2001:1). These notions, while supporting the education of undocumented students, nonetheless feed into the fear of undocumented immigrants as a criminal class (Rincon 2008:206). If such constructs show us anything, it is that we need to be careful with the terminology that we use to frame arguments in support of undocumented students. To frame education as crime prevention further stigmatizes undocumented students as a sub-class.

The mobilization and activism of undocumented youth, as I show in subsequent chapters, have proven that such stereotypes as *aliens*, *illegals*, and *criminals* can be countered by students’ adoption of a Dreamer identity. This identity has allowed undocumented youth to collectivize and create a public narrative emphasizing that they do exist, and that they are more than “just undocumented,” as they are students with dreams to remain in the United States and work. Their legal consciousness (Abrego 2008) as Dreamers lies in recognizing that they will fight against such pejorative stereotypes by sharing their stories and demonstrating that “no human being is illegal.” The voices of undocumented youth, as a 2012 informal survey conducted by ABC and Univision

shows, increasingly make known that they oppose the terms *alien* and *illegal* (Hesson 2012:1). Emiliana, a student in the University Leadership Initiative (ULI), participated in this survey and reflected her disapproval of these labels:

Every time we have media to come to events held by our organization...they refer to us as 'illegal aliens' or 'illegals,' which I find very offensive. First, because we are human beings, students and families with dreams and aspirations. We do not want to be referred to as 'illegal alien' because we are human, not aliens. Also, many students came to the U.S. at a young age and did not decide to come here 'illegally' (Hesson 2012:1).

With the implementation of DACA, it is probable that pejorative stereotypes of undocumented students will diminish, as President Obama has publicly acknowledged that undocumented youth are not responsible for their unlawful presence (Obama's Speech on Immigration Policy 2012). Opponents of DACA have called the program a "back door amnesty" and chastise President Obama for unitarily passing this program through executive action (FAIR Legislative Update 2012). Yet, DREAM activists have continued to show DACA as a first step in a quest for U.S. residency and citizenship, and have testified in public that their efforts have finally resulted in recognition that they are important contributors to American society. Although stereotypes of *alien*, *illegal* and *criminal* will not be erased completely, as immigration restrictionists and anti-immigrant sectors remain active, DACA stands as an acknowledgment of the importance of including immigrant youth in American society. Moreover, it stands as an acknowledgment of the importance of letting these youth give back to their communities through the ability to work.

Undocumented Students' Narratives of Placement in Removal Proceedings

The following narratives of students placed in removal proceedings illustrate how the law has reconfigured their sense of belonging and normalcy in the United States. These narratives demonstrate the power of law to force students to reconcile their academic and youthful identities with an imposed identity of illegality and criminality. These stories also show the power of students to navigate these identities, and to acquire agency and autonomy, even in spite of the threat of removal. I choose to incorporate the stories of students placed in removal proceedings because they have confronted illegality firsthand, developing a legal consciousness (Abrego 2008) that makes them acutely aware of how they are regarded by the law. In trying to reconcile their identities as students who have grown up in the United States with an illegal identity imposed by the law, they have entered a realm, removal proceedings, whereby their identities are “constantly under negotiation” (Hoffman French 2009:11). Their identities are negotiated in the sense that removal proceedings have required that they contest their illegality, using their characteristics as students with strong ties to the United States to prove that they merit remaining in the country. While removal proceedings have exacerbated undocumented students’ sense of living in an in-between state, or “liminal legality” (Menjívar 2006; Abrego 2008; Gonzales 2012), they have nonetheless found the strength to share their stories in their quest to prove their personhood as students and Dreamers. In so doing, they have acquired a “legitimate space” (Abrego 2008) whereby they can

connect with other unauthorized immigrants and youth. Being placed in removal has motivated these students to become more involved in the DREAM movement and to share their stories. In each narrative, the students express that removal proceedings motivated their willingness to share their experiences with others both in private and public forums. The self-realization of students that they are no less undocumented than recently arrived unauthorized immigrants is at the heart of each narrative. At the same time, the self-awareness that they are at a privilege compared to other immigrants, in terms of their education and length of residence in the United States, is just as prevalent in their individual stories.

Briana

Briana, now in her mid-twenties, came to the United States when she was eight years old. When she arrived to the United States, she and her family came with tourist visas, with the goal of staying in the country for a year. Her parents, who wanted Briana and her two brothers to learn English and take advantage of the American schooling system, prolonged going back to Mexico until the United States became “home.” “Somewhere in the middle of those eighteen years, Briana expressed, “we sort of resigned ourselves and realized that this was our new home.” Briana excelled in academics and became valedictorian of her high school when she was 16, allowing her to obtain a full scholarship to a private university in Texas where she graduated with a double major. While she received a full scholarship to an Ivy League university, she chose this private university instead because she was scared as a result of her young age

and undocumented status. Still, during her time at the private university, she “thoroughly enjoyed” her years there. During this time, she never told anybody that she was undocumented because she wanted so “badly” to “fit in.” Only when she had to turn down a summer internship, did she open up to her friends, as they could not understand why she would not take it.

In 2009, Briana was placed in removal proceedings. She was pulled over by local police for running a stop sign and subsequently apprehended by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE). She had always been aware of her undocumented status, and even remembers her parents fearing that park rangers were immigration officers when taking her to the park as a little girl. Yet, it had never “dawned” on her that removal proceedings would be imposed upon someone like her who “looks so American” and “had been here for so long.” At the time of the interview, she had been in removal proceedings for three years, something that was “really challenging,” but that did not seem congruent with her normal life:

It’s a really challenging reality to have to deal with. And sometimes I forget. My life is so normal that I forget I’m in removal. My life is so normal that I forget that I could be deported. My life is so normal, that I’ll get an email from my attorney saying, “I heard back from the judge and this is what’s happening.” And then I’ll remember and kind of shift back to that reality that, as normal as things are, they aren’t, as great as things are, as blessed as I am, I’m still dealing with this reality and, just because I have a degree, and just because I speak English, doesn’t make me any less undocumented than the person who works alongside my dad building homes or washing dishes or picking up trash. We’re still the same.

Such “shifts” in reality forced Briana to accept that, as “normal” as her life seemed, an undocumented reality, an illegal identity imposed by the law, would affect

and weigh upon her identity as a student and aspiring professional. It was a reality that, when articulated to a New York Times reporter, brought up earlier memories of difficulties her undocumented status brought upon her as a child and adolescent:

As I began to speak to [the reporter], I began to think about all of the things that happened, and it was really overwhelming. And I began to cry. And I felt so bad that I was crying because we were over the phone and it was kind of hard to understand me. But it really began to dawn on me that this had been a struggle for 16 years at that time, and it had been really hard. I think I forgot how hard it was, because I usually try to stay focused on the good things because there's a lot of good things, there's a lot of positive things. And so I usually try to focus on the good things. But in doing that, I forgot how hard it was. I forgot how much I cried in high school because I wanted so badly to fit in. I forgot how much I cried thinking that I wouldn't be able to go to college. I remember how difficult it was to stay up all night to study, because I thought, 'If I don't get a 100 on this, I'm not going to be able to get an education.'

For Briana, sharing her story with a reporter, while difficult personally, allowed her to open up about the challenges she faced as an undocumented child and adolescent. The act of sharing her story was a tactic suggested by her immigration attorney to bring attention to her case. In adopting this tactic, Briana was able to connect with other undocumented youth who, even if not in removal, shared similar life stories. While at first she feared “backlash” from the community, that people would say, “Well, you deserve to be deported” and “You’re illegal, you’re not here properly,” another student Julia, president of the University Leadership Initiative (ULI), reassured her that nothing would happen to her by sharing her story. In speaking at DREAM advocacy events, Briana came to empathize with other students’ stories: “Sometimes, it’s not even in me sharing. Sometimes, it’s in listening to people who come up to me afterward and share their story with me and it really breaks my heart. It really breaks my heart to know that

people have given up on their dreams, that people have forfeited their lives because of their status.” Given this sense of empathy, Briana has given a positive value to her education, demonstrating that even if forced into a low-wage job, her schooling would remain integral to her life, something that not even deportation could take away. She elaborated:

Your education is your education. No one is ever going to take that away from you. It does not matter if you are cutting *menudo* meat, and it’s in the middle of the night and your arm really hurts. You feel like, “Why did I waste my time getting my degree?” It wasn’t a waste of time because no one is ever going to take that knowledge away from you, ever. And if in any way, it can help you be a better *menudo* cutter...the fact that you know the Pythagorean theorem, use it! Do it! Incorporate it into what you do. You’ll see a world of difference. You’ll see that you’ll begin to look at things through a different perspective. It will completely change your world. It will completely revolutionize what you do.

Briana eventually had her case dropped through prosecutorial discretion five months after ICE Director John Morton issued his memo on prosecutorial discretion (Buch 2011:1). The act of sharing her story, and coming out to others about her experience in removal, made her a DREAM activist, thereby allowing her to turn a negative experience of being placed in removal into a positive tool to teach others. On September 06, 2012, Briana became the first undocumented immigrant to speak at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) (Ayala 2013:1), where she applauded President Obama for supporting the Dreamers and giving them the opportunity to work and “pursue the American Dream” (2012 DNC video). Eventually in 2013, as San Antonio Express News reporter Elaine Ayala (2013:1) wrote, Briana got married to a U.S. citizen who could file a petition for a permanent visa on her behalf. For Briana, an “ironic twist of

fate” was evident in her wedding, as the police officer who had provided security for the reception was also the officer who had arrested her four years prior. Interestingly, her wedding party was just “one block away” from where she had been stopped for driving without a license (Ayala 2013:1).

Amanda

Amanda was two years old when she came to the United States. While she came primarily to seek treatment for leukemia, her family was also fleeing religious persecution from a Middle Eastern country. Amanda, like Briana, excelled in elementary and high school, even obtaining the opportunity to visit the United Nations for a winning policy paper that she wrote. While she and her family had applications for a VISA pending, these applications got swallowed in the backlog after the events of September 11, 2001. Ultimately, these applications were rejected and her family decided to apply for another form of relief. As a result of missing a deadline for a timely appeal, ICE apprehended her family by going to their home:

It was extremely shocking. I woke up to a phone call at six in the morning from my sister...and she was just screaming and she said they took our parents, and I, I had just never expected something like that in my entire life. I knew that my family is having some kind of an immigration problem, but no one, no one really expected that...and [it was] definitely unexpected that they would remove a family that has been here for so long.

Even if we were here on some kind of temporary status, we lived here for seventeen years. We didn't have a criminal record or anything, and they didn't even send us a letter-like sometimes they send you a letter and they say, 'We're putting you in removal proceedings.' They, they just raided my parents' house and put them in immigration jail.

When Amanda's parents got out of the detention center, her perception that they had been "jailed" and "criminalized" was augmented by the fact that they were forced to wear ankle bracelets upon release. By equating the detention center with an "immigration jail," Amanda has internalized the notion that unauthorized immigrants are perceived and treated as criminals. Not only did her parents endure this experience of being criminalized, but so did she and her older sister. ICE tracked her sister and her, even after her parents had been released. She remembered agents at the ICE office stating that her family's name had come up in a database that targets "high level criminals." She expressed that this was "really strange," as her family does not even have overdue parking tickets. As evidenced by this experience, Amanda went from being a "normal" student to a person whose life became colored by removal proceedings and the apprehension that she too would be taken into ICE custody:

It was really surreal. I couldn't understand it. It's just that, I was a student here and I was trying to live my own life, and graduate and try to be normal. And then I would be hanging out with my friends and I would get a phone call, and I'd have to take it, and if you don't answer the phone call in like three rings, they send an alert or something to ICE...so that was always scary. And I developed a pretty bad anxiety problem because of that. I would think every knock on the door or whatever was someone trying to take me or my sister or my parents. So, it was really difficult. Like even if it was just a phone call or a check in. It was really difficult dealing with that while also trying to be a normal student trying to go to class, trying to get my work done, and all that kind of stuff.

No one has...what I've really learned from this experience, especially by being at [this university] is that no one really knows how to deal with the situation, not even the school administrators, not even a lot of the lawyers, and the people who are trying to help you. For example, when my family first got detained, I had to go and live with my aunt for a few weeks, because they were telling my parents while they were in jail that they were sending ICE agents after me. So, you know, my aunt was keeping me...and so I had to miss class and a professor actually failed me, one of my first semesters here for missing that class for a few weeks. And even after I prepared this

whole review and I petitioned to get the class dropped, and the administrators called me in and told me basically that what I was doing was illegal, I shouldn't have been hiding anywhere, and if they dropped the class for me, it would signify that they were abiding a criminal. So it was really strange to hear that, and no one had a consistent answer but no one really wanted to help.

Every time there was a knock on the door...[my aunt and uncle] would tell me to go, go upstairs and "Go sit in the bedroom and don't come down until we tell you." And of course, it was never anyone from ICE or the police, but they also experienced that danger.

Amanda tried explaining to university administrators that she "didn't know what happened," that she perceived a threat to her safety, and thus had to "leave and not come to class for a few weeks." She remembers these administrators as saying, "Well basically...if ICE was after you, you were doing something wrong, and if you were staying with your aunt then you were probably hiding from them and that's not something we're going to weigh in on anyway." In this way, Amanda's life as a student, in which she had tried her best to live a "normal" life and enjoy her friends, was impinged by a characterization of illegality imposed by the law. As such, she had to contend with this classification as *illegal* that even university administrators associated with criminality. Forced to hide, she did confide in several professors and found support in a law school's immigration clinic. As a result of hiding and feeling anxious, Amanda's grades suffered: "If it wasn't for that experience, I would probably be an honors student...not having to deal with all the baggage of the years of dwelling on the stuff that went on."

Amanda became involved in the ULI during this difficult time and found that its members were "very sympathetic." For Amanda, the ULI became a space where she

made “life-long friends” who “understand that experience and that pain and also how you have to work to overcome all that.” The ULI gave Amanda “a way to deal with what was going on,” as the organization introduced her to other students who have had to deal with a similar situation, and who have had to ask, “How do I live a normal life despite the limitations that I experience?” In connecting with students from the ULI, she found that she could turn a “really bad situation” into “something good” and “become an advocate for the community.” While the majority of the students in the ULI were Latinos, Amanda’s membership allowed her to understand that one’s identity was not only based on ethnicity, race or national lines. She found that she could identify with these students through a similar experience of being undocumented, and thus relate to the plight of Latino immigrants:

It definitely helped me to connect to their experiences, because while there’s a lot of different things going on between different racial groups, at the end of the day I also know what it’s like to be persecuted like that, to deal with that police silence, to deal with that sense of insecurity, and I know that there are millions of Latinos in this country that have to deal with that everyday- so yeah, it definitely helped me.

In becoming involved in the ULI, Amanda realized that she and other members are “extremely privileged.” When asked about her thoughts on undocumented youth who do not get involved in the movement, she expressed that her position as a student at a major university had given her the tools to become active in the DREAM movement. She has applied to DACA and hopes to obtain it so that she can work and live without the fear of removal. Through her membership in the ULI, she has spoken up about the need for comprehensive immigration reform.

Paloma

Paloma was nine years old when she came to the United States. She expressed that her parents were always honest with her, and she knew from the time that she and her family moved to the United States that she would not have the same privileges that they would have had if they were lawful permanent residents. She knew that she “was going to be able to do things, but that these were going to be done differently,” and that “it was going to be more difficult to do them.” For Paloma, such a “thing” was college, as she expressed that higher education and finding funds to pay as an undocumented student are “very difficult.” A few years into her college career, Paloma was arrested for the minor infraction of blocking a road during a music festival and put in removal proceedings (Ludwig 2010). She was placed in detention for several days, only to subsequently be placed in ICE’s Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP). This program is an Alternative to Detention Program whereby participants are highly monitored through such measures as weekly schedules, electronic bracelet monitoring, home visits, and court reports (ICE Memo 2005). As a result, Paloma was forced to comply with heightened restrictions that got in the way of her schooling, such as unannounced home visits, bi-monthly reporting, and random phone calls from ICE. In this way, she became restrained by the weight of removal proceedings, fenced in by constant reminders that she was at risk for deportation. Taken from her published story of self for Grassroots

Leadership, a team that helps human rights organizations mobilize, the following passages constitute Paloma's reflections about being placed in removal proceedings:

It wasn't until March 18, 2010 all my fears became reality, and I had to face them. I was wrongfully arrested in the streets the day before I was supposed to head to Washington D.C. for the largest immigration rally of 2010. One minute I was speaking up against police brutality then I blinked and a policeman shouted, "That's enough of you," dragged me off the sidewalk and shoved me into a paddy wagon. That's when I knew my life was about to change completely.

All the times mi mamá reminded me I was not like a normal teenager, a normal college student, because of my immigration status, came flooding back to drown my mind.

When I saw the uniform of the ICE officer approach me and utter my name, I knew my incarceration was truly about to begin. He had a clipboard with all my information already filled out. I knew my secret was no longer a secret. After that, I had the loneliest days of my life. I was being held because of my immigration status, something that hadn't changed since I was nine years old when I first moved to the United States. I was now a statistic of Secure Communities. I was jailed for two days, without any rights, in a cell specifically assigned to people with my status. When the guard shifts occurred, they would still know that whoever was in that cell was there because of their immigration status. I felt what it was to not exist in people's eyes and hearts.

It was not until I was moved to Don Hutto Detention Center, one of the most infamous immigration detention centers in Texas, that I understood how broken our immigration system is. I was now at a modern concentration camp in the land of the free. I was no longer a person but rather an alien number. I was living everything that I had been trying to avoid since I was nine years old, but now I was a scared 21-year old. I stayed at the detention center for four days before my friends and family were able to help me.

While I was detained I met so many amazing women who were just like my mother, my sister, my undocumented friends, and me. Though we were all in the detention center at the same time, life had dealt me a different hand because I was a student, because I had a home and family in the U.S.—a support system that was able to get me legal aid—and because somewhere along the cracks of the system I had been lucky. I was lucky because I had entered this country with a visa and I was a student. My case was given prosecutorial discretion—something most other immigrants never get, and I was allowed to stay in the U.S. That's why I will fight for justice for all (Grassroots Leadership 2013).

As expressed in a one-on-one interview with me, Paloma felt that hers was a different story than those of the other women in the detention center:

I wanted to talk to all the people in my pod and listen to their stories. It made me realize that, even though we were both undocumented, that my story is different because I'm able to go to school and because I came here at such a young age. It was sort of a reality check that, yeah, I'm undocumented but I'm very fortunate. That was the most important thing that I gained from being at the detention facility. That yeah, I'm undocumented but I am very lucky. That kept the motivation going, to try to make things turn out differently for everyone.

In speaking to the other women in her pod, Paloma was able to identify with them through narratives. At the same time, she realized that she was at an advantage because she had been schooled in the United States and had grown up in the country. This revelation inspired her to become active on behalf of immigrant rights; it was an activism that could only be obtained if she shared her story with others, and if she let go of the fear of keeping her story to herself. Her parents had been active in the 1968 student movement in Mexico City, and she recognized that activism and mobilization were an important part of her identity. Ironically, as she shared with me, her parents, who had been so vocal back in the 1960s, were hesitant about Paloma and her sister speaking out about their immigration status. Still, Paloma knew that she could not afford to stay quiet any longer about her own personal story of growing up undocumented:

I think that after being detained that I was truly no longer going to try to please my parents by not speaking up and staying silent regarding this topic. Even before we moved here, we were told not to discuss our immigration status. And it was after Department of Homeland Security knew my status, that I decided to tell everyone who would listen about what it was to be an undocumented student or what an undocumented student meant. Because I didn't see the point of remaining silent anymore.

As Paloma expressed in her story shared on Grassroots Leadership, her activism led to the development of an immigrant youth rights organization. Moreover, she found a sense of liberation in lifting a veil of silence and voicing her narrative to the public:

After my arrest, I saw no point in hiding my story from anyone anymore. I began sharing and speaking to my community about the reality that undocumented students face everyday. This evolved into creating an organization for undocumented students by undocumented students and its allies: DREAM ACT NOW, now named the Immigrant Youth Movement. I no longer had any fear. I was facing deportation and if I was going to get deported I was going to make sure I was heard.

It was at this point that I no longer could pretend and continue the rehearsed lines of someone I was not. Coming out as undocumented was liberating. I no longer had to make excuses. I had witnessed the voice of immigrant youth on the frontlines partaking in the current civil rights issue that this nation faces. It was their strength and courage that fed mine.

A willingness to move beyond illegality

As demonstrated by the above narratives, Briana, Paloma, and Amanda were forced to undergo an experience that both evoked memories of how difficult it was to grow up undocumented, and that brought to light the extent to which their identities were deemed illegal and criminal. Legally they are defined as *aliens*, yet in their life stories, they self identify as aspiring students and young professionals with unique narratives who take value in their educations. To be sure, they do not characterize themselves by illegality. Yet in having gone through removal proceedings, they have had to confront the imposition of such a construct, trying to negotiate a lack of status with life stories that highlight their sense of achievements, education, and sense of belonging in the United States. High-achieving and academic identities, while making them eligible for prosecutorial discretion, did not protect Briana from multiple stints in court, Paloma from

ISAP restrictions, or Amanda from ICE phone calls during the day. Rather, an undocumented status that, for years had been kept quiet, was brought to the forefront, overriding the identities that they had led in school and in their communities. Indeed, Briana and Paloma benefitted from prosecutorial discretion, of which length of residence and education were important factors for consideration, yet this measure was not provided to them until well into their removal proceedings. Furthermore, they were not provided any type of legal status. Amanda, while in the process of applying for DACA, must still confront the legal quagmire in which her immediate family has been placed.

While the case of undocumented youth is unique, in that they are not legally recognized as residents or citizens, they are still able to exercise rights and mobilize for a pathway to U.S. citizenship. In spite of a state-imposed illegality, they have nonetheless accrued important rights conferred to them by their educations and DACA. In light of these benefits, it is evident that the United States has recognized their personhood, even if it has not conferred citizenship upon them. Such recognition, in large part, was due to immigrant youth's mobilization and activism, as evidenced by the years long struggle on the part of undocumented youth for the DREAM Act. While the DREAM Act was not passed, the implementation of DACA was proof that the United States recognized that undocumented youth deserved to remain in the country and contribute to society. Undocumented students consider rights to an education and DACA as "not enough" because they are not given a pathway to citizenship. Nonetheless, these rights-enabling measures give them a sense of legitimacy (Abrego 2008) that helps foster their civic and

political engagement (Gonzales 2008, Abrego 2008). Such engagement, as I show in the following chapters, is largely driven by both personal stories of growing up undocumented and collective stories of Dreamers coming together and mobilizing.

Undocumented students, even when forced to confront an illegal identity head-on, exhibit the agency to move beyond this imposed identity and share their stories with others. They have the resiliency to find motivation and inspiration even in the direst of situations, such as removal proceedings. The historical development of immigration law, sanctioning deportation as a way to control unauthorized immigrants, has informed the way these students' identities have been illegalized. Undocumented students' willingness to challenge illegality through their stories and mobilization is evident in their fight to obtain rights from the United States government and their acknowledgement that they exist as students, activists, and rights-bearing individuals. They recognize how illegality has impacted their lives, yet rather than succumb to the constraints of "living outside the law," they use their experiences to share their stories of self and advocate for immigrant rights.

Chapter 3

“As a narrative, I embrace my undocumented status and I don’t regret being undocumented and I don’t feel ashamed:” Creating a Dreamer identity through story

This chapter speaks to the ways that undocumented youth, in having had to contend with an externally imposed identity of illegality and criminality, produce a narrative of belonging by coming together as Dreamers. In sharing stories of self with one another, they come to identify with each other, producing a collective story of “us” that celebrates their identity as Dreamers. For the University Leadership Initiative (ULI), “coming out of the shadows” has become routine. At each weekly gathering, an undocumented student is invited to “come out” and share his or her story of growing up without a legal status. This tradition of sharing one’s story of self is embedded within a long-standing strategy of the Dream movement, which encapsulates the increasing mobilization and activism of undocumented youth: Stories of self lead to the story of us, which in turn leads to the story of now. In this way, these youth, or Dreamers as they identify themselves, connect with other Dreamers who have also had to contend with being undocumented. They collectivize, using their diverse stories of self to unite in a common narrative of growing up undocumented that is subsequently used to illustrate their story of now: an account of advocacy and mobilization that propels a quest for immigrant rights and U.S. citizenship. In adopting this strategy of narrative, undocumented youth have been able to ameliorate the struggle, or tension, between

growing up American and being undocumented, between growing up in the United States and not fully belonging to the nation state. As such, undocumented youth have come to embrace their undocumented identity. They acknowledge that, while this undocumented identity does not entirely define who they are, it is an important element of their selves; it has colored their life narrative and influenced their outlooks and aspirations.

By “coming out,” undocumented students find an alternative space and family to which they can belong. Where once many felt that they were not part of any nation or homeland, they can now unite through their common experience of living out the “struggle” that comes with being undocumented. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these youth live in what Cecilia Menjivar (2006) calls an “in-between state” (2006:1002). This state refers to the experiences of bearing rights but not fully belonging to the nation-state. It reflects the process of blurring the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion, “creating gray areas of incertitude with the potential to affect broader issues of citizenship and belonging” (Menjivar 2006:1002, Gonzales 2011). Before DACA, this in-between state left undocumented youth trying to reconcile a sense of acceptance inherent in their educations and professional development with a feeling of denial produced by their inability to participate in important rites of passage. As Roberto Gonzales (2011:602) explains, they had to “learn to be illegal” as they grew up, accepting the reality that they could not drive, find legal employment, and in the majority of states, obtain a higher education. With DACA, undocumented youth have likewise had to accept that, yes, they

are allowed to work, obtain a social security, and remain in the United States for a renewable two years, but will not be granted citizenship through this measure.

While much scholarship outlines the processes by which an in-between state affects students' aspirations (Abrego 2008, Gonzales 2008, Torres and Wicks-Asbun 2013), this chapter uses Benedict Anderson's (2006) conception of a nation to demonstrate how undocumented youth can transcend such a state by uniting with one another on university campuses. Anderson defines "nation" as an "imagined community" in that it constitutes an "imagined political community" (2006:6). It is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 2006:6). While a communal identity is not strictly tied to nationhood, the way that undocumented youth have united as family on college campuses has fostered a sense of belonging as Dreamers. Indeed, the articulation and manifestation of a common struggle against exclusion and invisibility can actually produce a heightened sense of inclusion and visibility. Unity, evidenced by the coming together of students in the ULI, is produced and strengthened by a plurality of stories of self that encapsulate a common experience of living within an in-between state. This unity, in turn, leads to a heightened awareness that "*I am because we are,*" as participant Catalina expressed to me. It is an awareness that, rather than leaving undocumented students stuck in a contradictory in-between state produces a collective identity that allows them to embrace the experience of growing up undocumented. No longer is an undocumented

status a source of shame or fear, but rather a source of power manifested in the collectivity of Dreamers, in a story of us that is propelled by a common struggle to belong.

Understanding the privileged position of my participants as university students and graduates, I use individual stories to highlight the processes by which a university led group has produced a story of us. In taking account of the relationship between identity and narrative, I illustrate how individual identities are re-configured through the collective identity of Dreamers. While the first part of the chapter highlights conflicting and contradictory messages undocumented students have faced in their individual life stories, the second part demonstrates how these students come to use these personal struggles to produce a story of us. In this way, I aim to show how being undocumented, for these students, has not weakened them, but rather given them the tools to come together as Dreamers and take pride in their individual struggles. By using this chapter to show how students relate to one another in the ULI, I hope to paint a picture of how such a group, while organized to fight for immigrant rights, also becomes an invaluable family for these students. This notion of family is a central element of undocumented students' narratives, and is thus repeated throughout this chapter. The ULI, while giving students the organizing tools to speak to the media and to lobby, also allows the private space for simply *being*, for engaging with one another as close friends who unite through a common experience. Like other college students, undocumented youth in the ULI engage in social events together, demonstrating that they are more than *just* undocumented; they

are young adults who have dreams and aspirations, and who enjoy each other's friendship.

Oftentimes, when we think of the Dreamers, we think of their image in the media: students who, dressed in cap and gown, rally through the streets with large posters stating, "Undocumented and Unafraid." This image is significant, as it demonstrates the Dreamers' story of now, a public narrative that, as explained above, is manifested in students' public mobilization and advocacy. Yet, the emphasis of this chapter is not these youth's public identity, but rather the multiple and individual stories that comprise a collective identity at an intra-group level. I use the space of the following chapter to discuss the nuances of a public identity and a collective story of now. Only by first understanding the intertwinement of stories of self within a story of us, can we comprehend and appreciate how public identities are produced.

The story of the University Leadership Initiative

Growing up, Julia Gomez did not openly speak about her undocumented status, confiding only in a few individuals like her English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. As a teenager, she believed that her status was akin to race, something that she could not change. Julia arrived to the United States when she was twelve years old, and remembers the way other students would call her "Wetback" in the seventh grade. Yet, at that time, she did not understand what that pejorative term meant. In fact, she grew up loving school, doing "everything else" that her peers did, like cross-country and track and field.

She did not realize just *how much* her status would affect her until her senior year in high school when she got a recruitment letter from Yale and her high school counselor told her, “You know what, you can’t go.” Julia graduated from high school in 1998 before passage of Texas’ in-state tuition law, and thought that her only option was to return to Mexico. For this reason, she returned to Mexico to try attending a university there. Upon arriving to her country of birth, she felt that she was “not Mexican enough” to live there: “I had become so Americanized...too Americanized to try to live over there.” After coming to terms with the fact that her Spanish was not “up to par” at the university level and feeling “out of place,” Julia decided to come back to the United States in 2000.

In 2001, in-state tuition in Texas was passed as House Bill 1403 and Senate Bill 1528 (Rincon 2008), and Julia was able to benefit from this legislation and attend college. Her older sister Maria found out about the DREAM Act bill in December 2004 through an article about a Dreamer, and was further familiarized with the bill when she met author Alejandra Rincon at a conference. Alejandra Rincon is author of *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Sí Se Puede!*. Rincon encouraged Maria to start a group advocating for immigrant rights. Taking this to heart, Maria later told Julia, “We could do this.” From that point on, they started taking action, even getting Spanish-speaking radio stations to talk about the DREAM Act. Julia, while having earlier considered as “taboo” the act of talking about her status, wrote a letter “coming out,” acknowledging that she was undocumented and needed the DREAM Act. Yet, as she explained, back then the act of sharing one’s story was not equated with “coming out;” it

was a phrase that would be adopted later on. Julia sent this letter through online mailing lists, or listservs, at her university. While sharing her story was “very scary,” since the threat of deportation had always been in the back of Julia’s mind, the following reflection kept her motivated: “People need to know my story. I can’t be a non-existent person. People need to hear that I’m here.” Julia wanted to pull herself out of a sense of invisibility, showing that she had a story that needed to be told.

Julia and Maria began to hold their meetings in 2005. At the beginning, there were about twenty people, students they did not know closely. No one ever asked each other, “Okay, are you a Dreamer or not?” It was not until months later that one girl in the group acknowledged that she was a Dreamer. While now people openly come out with their stories as undocumented youth, back then most people did not because of fear. Julia remembers how their meeting room had doors on two sides, and she would see students peering in, hesitating somewhat before walking in for fear that they would encounter ICE: “I would see people walk, walk once or twice, and then come inside, and there were a lot [of them] looking through the door.... But I think it was just a lot of fear, like ‘What does it mean? Who are they? Do they really want to do something good?’ For Julia, it became less scary to come out about her status at the meetings after she participated in the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the biggest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States (NCLR website). She met people who would later become part of United We Dream (UWD), a national network of youth-led immigrant organizations around the country (UWD website). In meeting other undocumented youth

who were conducting a presentation about the DREAM Act, Julia realized that her struggle growing up undocumented was not just a “Texas issue,” but also an issue that affected “a lot of people” across the nation. In this way, she realized that her story of self did not stand alone, but was embedded in a collective struggle of growing up undocumented. She realized that the activist movement channeled through the ULI is a “different kind of movement” after speaking with one immigrant student in the group. He told her, “You now, I really love being part of the ULI because it makes me feel like I’m part of a family. I know that you guys have my back and that we know each other, we know what we’re going through.” In hearing this, Julia realized that the ULI had also become a *family* for her, that it was not “just another organization” that she chose to join.

In the years after its inception, the ULI has grown as a major political organization on the UT campus. Winning “Best political organization on campus” for two years, the organization prides itself on the following objectives: continuous commitment and support to immigrant youth; collaboration with the national movement to support the DREAM Act; partnerships with local, state, and national organizations; communication and collaboration with Texas legislators and members of Congress; and promotion of civic participation among youth (ULI website). Activities that the ULI has pursued include conducting educational forums at local high schools to educate students and parents about applying to college. For Julia, the act of empowering youth through the ULI has always been an important aim of the group. Through ULI educational forums, she has found excitement in seeing students’ faces when they are told that they can go to

college. Other activities have included testifying and lobbying in Congress and organizing DACA clinics to help youth with their applications. The ULI has received training from political consultants on how to communicate and lobby effectively. Moreover, members of the group have attended national conferences where they have met allies, such as students, teachers, religious groups, business leaders, activists, and politicians (ULI website). At a more personal level, the ULI has organized picnics and other social outings for members, as a way for these members to unite as friends and family. By creating such an important personal space for students, the ULI has facilitated a solidarity that has positively shaped members' college experiences and collective identity as Dreamers.

“We can’t offer you transportation because that is breaking the law:” Living in an in-between state

Undocumented youth inhabit in-between spaces in that they grow up in the United States, and yet must confront the paradox of growing up American but being undocumented (Gonzales 2008, 2011). Throughout their lives, undocumented youth have to cope with and reconcile numerous and contradictory messages. The rights to a free public school education and to remain in this country and work under DACA have provided youth with a sense of acceptance. While DACA does not confer residency or citizenship, it has given undocumented youth a partial sense of documentation, in that it confers a work permit and a social security number. Before the implementation of

DACA, the lack of a social security number had been the cause of much strife, having added a heightened feeling of invisibility and exclusion. A social security number and work authorization have given undocumented youth a sense of membership, of legitimacy (Abrego 2008), that was not available to them before. Furthermore, for those students who live in a state like Texas where in-state tuition is conferred, this policy produces a “socially acceptable identity” (Abrego 2008) that diminishes the stigma of being undocumented. And yet, even with these positive steps forward, students are forced to reconcile this sense of acceptance with the reality that they do not have a direct pathway to residency or citizenship. Paradoxically undocumented youth are incorporated in the American educational system, and can now work and remain in the country for a renewable two years, but cannot become citizens.

For Julia, as a founder of the ULI, an in-between state is felt when she remembers the DREAM Act bill being put up for a vote in December 2010 with an age cap at 30 years or younger. She realized that she, as a 31-year-old woman, would age out from a bill that she had worked countless hours to pass. In June 2012, she also realized that she would age out of DACA. She had become so enmeshed in the Dream movement, empowering undocumented youth to drop a veil of fear and mobilize, only to be told at the end of the day that she would not legally belong in the United States even if the bill passed. She had benefitted from *Plyler v. Doe*, attending U.S. public schools throughout her life, but would not receive work authorization through DACA. Reflecting on her feelings about aging out of the 2010 version of the DREAM Act bill, she said, “It was

very challenging to figure out what I wanted to do because I had been working on this for so long.” In spite of the sadness that came with knowing that she would age out, Julia knew that if this was the version that would be put up for a vote, she would keep pushing for it: “If it’s meant to happen, I prefer that some of us benefit rather than stay in the same boat forever.” In an interview conducted the morning that she found out about the age cap, she publicly expressed that she would support the bill as it stood. Julia believed that she and other supporters would figure out something for undocumented adults above the age of 30, acknowledging, “If that’s all we’re getting right now let’s get it.” When the DREAM Act, even with a lowered age cap, did not pass, Julia recounted that it was frustrating to know that *they*, the Dreamers, had come so close. The in-between state experienced by Julia is constituted by an awareness that one both belongs and does not belong. Changing legal paradigms continuously produce this awareness, as specific incidents such as the DREAM Act’s failure to pass and the implementation of DACA highlight both students’ sense of exclusion and inclusion, respectively.

In-between states are not only produced by changing legal paradigms, but also through what we would normally consider ordinary rights of passage: admissions to college, obtaining a driver’s license, graduations, awards, even transportation. For example, Lauro, a student who graduated in May 2012, expressed that his college graduation was not a sweet and joyous moment, but instead one that produced much anxiety. He said that, as opposed to his high school graduation in which he could look forward to college, here he did not know what would come next: “It almost felt like the

end.” An event that should have been positive and reflective of his achievements became a moment of uncertainty; it was an in-between state marking the intersection of ambition and disappointment. For Horacio, a similar in-between state was experienced when a border patrol gave him a high school award in Laredo, Texas for “Best of the Class.” He said that, upon receiving it, he was terrified since border patrols had the power to deport him. He described this experience as “ironic,” since here he had been, an undocumented person who the border patrol could apprehend, yet he had not been recognized for his status but rather for his merit as a student. This incident, while indeed a positive and happy one, heightened Horacio’s perception of living in an in-between state because of the irony inherent in a border patrol giving him an award. The award was for his leadership and accomplishments in a country where, legally speaking, he does not fully belong. When I interviewed Horacio, it had been almost two years since he had seen his family, as he could not afford to risk crossing the checkpoint between Laredo and San Antonio, Texas again. The same government entity that had given him an award had the power to arrest him should he be caught crossing the checkpoint without authorization.

Ernesto also experienced a similar in-between state when he started applying for colleges and had trouble finding transportation to visit a state university. He was forced to turn down a college. When he asked, “Why?” the recruiters replied, “You’re an illegal alien. We can’t offer you transportation because that is breaking the law.” When speaking of this incident, he reflected, “Before I even go to their college, I’m already turned down. I’m already facing an obstacle to go to their college, then obviously that’s not the place

for me.” Ernesto had to reconcile two conflicting messages conveyed by this university: In the first message, he was accepted by a premier Texas university and offered a substantial scholarship, yet in the second message, recruiters from the same university refused to transport him there because he had been classified as an *illegal alien*. Each message delineated an element of Ernesto’s personal struggle as an undocumented student. The first message demonstrated his inclusion in society as a result of his education and good grades while the second illustrated the ability of university recruiters to exclude him as an *illegal alien*. These frames were contradictory and conflicting in that the same university both accepted and denied him. He went from being considered a student equal to his American peers in terms of academic merit to being differentiated as an *illegal alien*. Thus, to be considered both a meritorious student and an *illegal alien* produced a personal struggle, an in-between state that forced Ernesto to withdraw his application from that university.

*“Thank you so much for being here and not having a problem with who I am:” From
silence to story telling in a safe space*

Throughout my interviews and participant observations, *family* was a central theme that recurred often. Considering the fact that the ULI was comprised of students who were undergoing a similar struggle to cope with in-between states, the emphasis on family was not surprising. To unite as Dreamers, as undocumented youth in the ULI have done, is significant not only because of their mobilization, but because of the tight-knit

family they have created. For Horacio, who when interviewed had not seen his biological family in close to two years, the ULI was a crucial support system. His involvement in the group was not solely based on his belief in the ULI's cause and objectives, but was also based on his need for a family on campus. He recounted that he did not have a family in the city, and for this reason, he was attracted to the ULI. Through this organization, Horacio found close friends with whom he could do his homework, watch movies, go on camping trips, and most importantly share his story. "Part of my story," he said, "was that it was great for me to find a group where they know what I go through, and they know my suffering, and that I don't feel alone because I don't know when I'm going to see my parents again."

In the same way, Guillermo, who survived a car accident with other members of the ULI, found an unparalleled closeness with this group. His survival, as he reflected, was a "miracle;" he had been in a coma and doctors believed that he would not survive. Guillermo remembers his friends from the ULI coming to visit him at the hospital. In particular, he has a memory of his friends explaining what happened to him and of a friend, Katalina, who played recordings of classical music for him at the hospital. An avid musician who plays the viola, he reveled in these recordings, even dreaming that he was seeing an orchestra on stage. His parents, once hesitant about his involvement in the ULI out of fear that he was not spending enough time studying, were moved by the familial support that the ULI provided him in this most difficult of times. He recalls his parents telling him, "Whenever we saw everyone, the next morning after the accident, we

were really shocked that everyone was there, like a family. It was just really impacting to see everyone. To be honest, we were always wondering why you were so involved with the organization... We really wanted you to quit ULI. We really wanted you to focus on school and leave the activism to the side. But when we saw everyone that day at the hospital, we knew why you were working with them. Because they were like a family, everyone at the hospital.” William acknowledged that his parents became happy about his involvement, as “they got a different view of the movement whenever they saw my friends at the hospital.” This personal side of the movement was certainly an important element in William’s recovery. In the space of the hospital, his biological family witnessed firsthand how the ULI, as a second family to William, provided him the support that he needed to recover.

In the fall of 2011, during my first few weeks of participant observation with the ULI, I began to see this familial dimension of the group. Several undocumented youth separately reflected to me about a picnic in which they all sat in a circle and shared stories with one another. I had attended the first few hours of the picnic, and it seemed as normal as any other youth-organized social event. Students sifted through plastic bags, looking for potato chips, dips, white bread, ham, and cheese, ready to enjoy the sunny day and eat sandwiches together. Julia and Katalina brought their puppies and were busy playing catch with them. On this day, I thought, I would not position myself as a researcher, poring for details about students’ lives as undocumented, but instead engage with them as a friend. I wanted to appreciate how these students, in coming together for

socials, could put aside their activism for a few hours and relate to one another as family. Still, as students would later express to me, I left the picnic too early, for I missed something special and personal. During this casual event, members of the ULI united and took turns sharing their stories. For many, as Lauro told me, it was their first time “coming out.” Indeed, the storytelling was so personal and new for some members that they asked a young woman, Sophie, who was there filming the picnic for a documentary to turn off her camera. Describing how the absence of a camera affected the picnic setting, Lauro said, “The atmosphere and setting is completely different because you feel like you are in a safe place—whereas if you have a camera in front of you, you are afraid of saying something that could be used against you. When we’re in front of a camera you have this list of things that we have to say and we have to stick to that.” This picnic, in contrast, was a time where members of the ULI could speak without inhibition and simply *be* without fear of being judged. No cameras were on. No media skills were needed.

Jose’s story

“Right when the guy to my left was telling his story, and before he was about done,” José recalled in his description of the picnic, “I was like, ‘Phew how do I put this together?’ Like many students at that picnic, José had never shared his story to a big group before. He said that the ULI knew he was undocumented, but that this marked the first time he articulated his story. He came to the United States from Peru at the age of eight, and as a child did not fully understand what “undocumented” meant. As mentioned

in Chapter 2, he said, “I was completely confused because I didn’t know you could label a person as being undocumented.” He thought that, regardless of the manner of arrival, he was “here” so he had a “legal right” to be in the United States. As José grew older, he worried that people would see him as a “bad person” because of his undocumented status, and for this reason kept it to himself. With the hope that his undocumented status would “go away,” that it would be fixed through a visa renewal, he excelled in school. In applying to college, José began to understand the implications of not having a social security number. Yet, he felt that he “could not come out” about his status: “I had to portray myself as something that I’m not.” He elaborated that before college he “had no control” over his status because his high school did not expose him to an organization that would have helped him cope with being undocumented. His high school, he recounted, was full of racism and he often confronted stereotypes of “Wetback” because of his presumed Mexican identity. He grew up thinking that he could not come out, and that he had to “play off as a documented person.” Jose expressed, “I had to make up excuses for why I couldn’t get a driver’s license. I would tell them, ‘I’m getting the driver’s license eventually. I have to pay for my own car so I don’t have enough money yet...I had to tell all these lies and I don’t like to.’” Friends asked him about which college scholarships he received, to which José replied that he did not obtain any because he had not applied yet. For José to try and fit in despite the racism, to feel included with his peers as “documented,” he felt that he needed to keep his personal struggle to himself.

Other than his past girlfriend, he did not speak of his status to people until he reached college.

José distinctly remembers receiving an email via the international office at his university inviting him to the ULI meetings. These emails, addressed to students listed as HB 1403 students, are the avenue by which many students find out about the ULI. Rather than label students as “undocumented,” HB 1403, referring to the House Bill for in-state tuition, is a “neutral” label (Abrego 2008) that allows students and administrators to avoid directly characterizing students as undocumented. According to Abrego (2008:723), author of a paper on the effects of California’s in-state tuition law AB 540 on undocumented youth, AB 540 both recognizes their merit as students and grants them a “legitimate space” in colleges and universities “where, as students, they are valued and legitimate members of society.” Moreover, AB 540 provides a “new, neutral, and more socially acceptable label that subsequently changes their social identity and their potential for collective organization and further claims-making” (2008:723). In much the same way, undocumented students in Texas have been able to use the HB 1403 characterization to recruit one another to the ULI, but also to demonstrate that they are legitimate members of their universities. Members of the ULI often choose to identify as Dreamers as opposed to HB 1403 students. Nevertheless, HB 1403, in allowing these youth access to higher education, has certainly carved out a legitimate space (Abrego 2008) for them to come together as Dreamers.

In his first year at a university, José was not conscious of the fact that HB 1403 would allow him to the opportunity to “come out” as undocumented and share his story. Like so many other undocumented youth who grow up hiding their status, he was skeptical about the idea that the ULI might know his status: “I thought it was a little sketchy at first because it’s not everyday that somebody knows a secret that nobody else knows.” While apprehensive, José decided to go to his first meeting, making sure to sit next to the door “just in case anything bad happened.” Watching Lauro give a presentation at the meeting, José became more confident about becoming a ULI member and decided that he wanted to get more involved. His participation in the group grew, and like other ULI members, he came to see this organization as more than just a *group*; it was his *family*.

José’s willingness to share his story was likely motivated by the sense that he was with family. He had developed a feeling of closeness with the group that was not available to him growing up. Where once he had to deal with his problems on his own, he now had a family who understood his struggle and who had also lived it. His relations with his own mother and father, while very close, had been impacted by the long hours that his parents had to work: “I missed my parents a lot. And it was hard, it was really hard, because I wish I could have seen them more but the majority of the time I had to spend by myself watching TV or computer or just like walking around the house, trying but failing to make friends outside of the apartment where I lived.” With the ULI, he had a safe space, a family with whom he could divulge a story he had kept invisible his entire

life. When sharing his personal life narrative with other undocumented youth and allies at the picnic, emotions swam through his mind when speaking of his parents:

I just started from the beginning, telling everything that had happened to me...It hit me at first when I started talking about my parents, because that's the hardest to me. The story of what my parents have gone through for me is what hits me the most, without a doubt. So it was a little hard for me to say that, but once I finished everything I just smiled, and I told them, "Thank you so much for being here and not having a single problem with who I am."

In coming out to the group, José's ideas of achievement and accomplishment have changed. Beyond good grades, success for him has become "that instance when you know that you can finally come out of the shadows and say, 'I am undocumented. But so what? I'm still a human being.'" He realized that being undocumented, while having shaped his experiences growing up, did not make him any less "human" than anyone else. The fact that he was undocumented was important, as it influenced his life story, informing the experiences and ambitions that brought him to the ULI. José got involved in a movement that, in allowing him the space to "come out," helped him to make sense of the racism he encountered in his early schooling; the long hours his parents had to work; and the privileged position that he now held as a university student. "This is an organization," José recounted, "where people meet each other and do something. Actually do something, not just to socialize, but...to work hard together." The idea that he could help effect change was significant to him because he did not just want to "watch the news" and "wait for something to happen." He wanted to "make it happen." In becoming more involved, he began to identify himself as a Dreamer. José recalled, "It's more of just like a name, just like a way of being. We have our own little culture right

there at every single meeting. It's really interesting to see all these different people from different backgrounds with different stories that might have come from the same country but somehow met in the same room and are working for the same cause." By equating the collective identity of Dreamers with a culture that celebrates multiple and diverse stories, José shows that this identity has become a way for undocumented students to collectively make sense of their distinct experiences.

"It's our movement:" From an in-between state to a collective community of Dreamers

As shown by Jose's story, Dreamers have found an experience – growing up undocumented in the United States—that links and celebrates the different backgrounds and stories comprising their movement. They embrace the plurality of their stories of self as a way to create both an identity and collectivity as Dreamers. An undocumented student's story, as part of a collectivity of narratives, shows the world that he or she exists. To state their stories, undocumented students must accept their undocumented status, and more specifically their struggles trying to reconcile inclusion and exclusion, visibility and invisibility, and growing up American and being undocumented. Only in this way, can they reveal how much they have worked to get to where they are today. Only in this way, can undocumented students gain the tools to make claims for visibility and recognition, showing that they, with their diplomas and ties to the United States, exist beyond an in-between state. The beauty of individual stories, for the Dreamers, is that these diverse and plural experiences allow them to consolidate a unifying and visible

identity. They find belonging and unity in diversity. As such, theirs is an identity that is at once plural and essentializing. Not fully belonging to any nation or homeland, they have reconciled this loss by coming together under a Dreamer identity. This collectivity, more than offering students a community to which they can belong, has also provided them a safe space where they can come out and share their stories. The adoption of the Dreamer identity is a way of both acknowledging and accepting an undocumented status and making claims to inclusion in the United States. Briana, whose narrative I share in Chapter 2, elaborated on the sense of belonging that being a Dreamer has given her:

I love the term Dreamer for DREAM Act eligible students because it gives us an identity. A lot of times being undocumented makes you feel like you don't quite belong anywhere. You don't have a sense of identity and so the term Dreamer coins an identity for you, which is, "You're a person who is American but who isn't American on paper." The term Dreamer to me is someone who is working and being educated and who is pursuing a future in America and who is pursuing their dreams in America, and who even though doesn't have their citizenship today, will eventually be an American citizen and be on paper a part of America.

The creation of a collective identity of Dreamers is best explained in light of Benedict Anderson's (2006) theory of "imagined communities." While Anderson (2006) defines a nation as an "imagined community," for the Dreamers a sense of *family* has fostered such a community. National belonging, for the Dreamers, has been replaced by a sense of belonging to a family. They use this alternative sense of belonging to fight for U.S. citizenship, but precisely because they are excluded from such formal inclusion, they have looked to a community of Dreamers for acceptance. While the Dreamer collectivity is not based on national origin, undocumented youth have created an identity whereby they can unite based on a common struggle and desire to find acceptance as

Americans. In the process of uniting as Dreamers, undocumented youth produce a story of us, a collective narrative of the Dreamers, that celebrates individual stories of self. Organizations like the ULI have given students the sense that they belong to a community and a family. By networking both statewide and nationally through umbrella organizations like United We Dream (UWD), and by sharing their stories in the media, Dreamers have been able to extend this sense of acceptance beyond the space of campuses. They have created a story of us that encourages belonging and recognition as Dreamers.

In creating this imagined community of Dreamers and constructing a story of us, undocumented youth have surpassed characterizations like *illegal* and *criminal*, showing that they, like their American peers, have dreams to receive an education and contribute to their communities. In this way, they have gained an understanding that their undocumented status, while an important part of their experiences, does not totally define *who* they are. As Amanda expressed, “We relate to each other not only because we’re undocumented, but because we’re college students and we have the same struggles like tests and wanting to graduate.” At the same time, many undocumented youth, in identifying as Dreamers, come to embrace and accept their immigrant identity. As Catalina shared, “We embrace our undocumented status. As a narrative, I embrace my undocumented status and I don’t regret being undocumented and I don’t feel ashamed. I’m unafraid...I am an undocumented American, and I think when we get a pathway to residency or citizenship, hopefully both, I will still embrace my undocumented status.”

Amanda likewise recounted that her “immigrant-ness” is “still a very important part” of how she chooses to identify herself. If Catalina and Amanda’s reflections share anything in common, it is that these students recognize that an immigrant identity, even an *undocumented* immigrant identity, must be acknowledged as an integral part of their life stories and movement. Such an identity, independently of possible immigration reform, will remain; it will not persist as a marker of exclusion, but rather a marker of an important life struggle of growing up undocumented that has guided their ambitions and aspirations as students and activists. To accept one’s status is integral to coming out. Only in coming out with one’s story, can one do away with the fear and the shame inherent in keeping silent about one’s status.

The power of “coming out” in personal and informal settings

Undocumented youth do not view “coming out” with their stories as an easy or comfortable process. Even after multiple times of sharing one’s personal life narrative, it is often an emotional process. Coming out, for undocumented youth, is a catharsis of fear and hiding; it is a way for them to say, “Look at me. I am unafraid and undocumented. I too have ambitions and dreams.” At the same time, as I learned in conducting one-on-one interviews, coming out has allowed students to expose their innermost struggles without fear of judgment. Often, as I also learned through students’ reflections about the picnic, coming out can be far more emotional when done in a personal and informal setting as opposed to a formal interview for the media. In settings such as weekly ULI meetings and

social events, where students can be themselves with one another, there is no added pressure of needing to perform, nor a certain worry of saying something incorrect or inappropriate. What is more, a story of self, even if repeated many times before, can evoke the same emotions each time it is shared. In the context of my interviews, I have seen firsthand how storytelling is, for these students, a therapeutic venue in which they can freely cry and laugh. In truth, I first learned about the evocative power of sharing stories with the media when Briana described the emotions that came upon her when speaking with a New York Times reporter. Yet, it was not until I began to attend ULI meetings and conduct more one-on-one interviews that I realized the significance and uniqueness of sharing one's story in a personal and informal setting.

It was there, in the private space of an interview room, that participants wholeheartedly offered me their stories, which encapsulated struggles, ambitions, and an uncertainty and hope about the future. The presence of an audio recorder never became an issue, and participants were aware that anonymity and confidentiality were being protected through the use of pseudonyms. When I spoke to Lauro, I realized how personal and informal settings, such as a picnic or an interview with me, could allow for the free, uninhibited expression of stories. As an active member of the ULI, he had stood up and presented his story in front of countless groups before. Yet, as Lauro told me, the act of sharing his story in a circle of friends at the picnic was especially "memorable" and "special." It was the first time that he spoke about his graduation, and in particular the worries he had about the future. Lauro lay bare a struggle that had been in his mind for

much time; it was a struggle that had left him confused: “I told them that when I graduated I didn’t understand, I didn’t really know...yeah I didn’t understand what was going through my mind at that point in time and this is the first time in which I blurted it out loud, everything that I was going through.” When I asked him to describe this particular experience to me, he paused and took a few deep breaths, holding back tears. He reflected, “It’s my graduation and I’m supposed to be happy but I’m really not...It almost felt like the end, like you’ve done so much.” A slight quiver in his throat, Lauro wondered aloud why this private interview with me, as opposed to an interview with the young woman filming the documentary at the picnic, was making him cry: “It’s so funny because Sophie, she was trying to get this on camera [for] the documentary—the people who were filming a documentary and I couldn’t get any tears out, she couldn’t get any tears out of me, and now it’s just...whoa.” It was at this point in the interview that Lauro began to cry more freely, becoming more emotional when he described the pride that his mother had for him when he graduated. What struck me about this interview was not the fact that he cried, as crying is the most natural response to speaking about difficult situations. Rather, I was moved by the fact that, in recounting just *how* special sharing his story at the picnic had been, Lauro brought to life the emotions that come with divulging one’s innermost struggles in a personal and informal setting. Elements of his narrative that he could not freely express to a reporter or in front of a camera—or that, if shared in a newspaper or television interview, were articulated using skills he learned in media

training—could now be articulated in a more personal and emotional way without inhibition.

The articulation of stories of self in personal and informal spaces fosters the creation of a collective identity as Dreamers. As shown by the examples above, undocumented youth find a family in immigrant youth rights organizations on campuses, using stories of self to unite and relate to one another. By creating a story of us that brings together these narratives, immigrant youth and allies adopt and foster a community and an identity as Dreamers. The willingness to speak out with a story of now, to act and mobilize, is founded on the ease with which students connect with one another as a family on campuses. Sharing one's story in such social events like picnics is the impetus that encourages immigrant youth to mobilize together as Dreamers. In reflecting on the ways that story-telling has allowed for the embracement of an undocumented status, David, a member of the ULI, said, "It's our movement. Our stories drive this movement. There's no turning back. There's no fear. There's no shame. We're undocumented and we come to accept our status. I always accepted my status, and I've always been pushing for that and thank goodness ULI has accepted that." In consolidating a story of us that unites individual narratives, immigrant youth transcend a fear and shame that often come with staying silent; the acceptance of an immigrant, undocumented status allows for this transcendence.

Together, as I show in the following chapter, Dreamers develop the bravery and willingness to construct a story of now, mobilizing and advocating to gain and protect

rights for the undocumented population. They, like undocumented journalist and filmmaker Jose Antonio Vargas describes himself, have become a “walking conversation” (Vargas 2012:1-2) about the implications of being undocumented. For the Dreamers, to be a part of this conversation is liberating, legitimating even, because they find an acceptance among themselves and pro-immigrant sectors. By creating a dialogue about immigrant rights through their narratives, they foster and enlarge the Dream movement, an imagined community that unites undocumented youth across the nation. For those sectors that are unfamiliar or “uncomfortable” (Vargas 2012:1-2) with discussions on immigration, undocumented youth’s “coming out” with their stories allows for a growing recognition of the importance of these conversations (Vargas 2012:1). Vargas, who has written for the *New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *Washington Post*, winning a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting during the Virginia Tech massacre (Time 2012:1) and writing a story “coming out” as gay and undocumented for the *New York Times Magazine* in 2011, knows firsthand the power of narrative. He realizes that, because he has lived out the struggle of an undocumented status, he cannot speak of immigration from a neutral, objective standpoint; he is a “conversation” that must be voiced and included as part of the Dream movement (Vargas 2012:1). The following elaboration of Vargas on the significance of story can be extended to Dreamers as a collectivity, as it demonstrates the inability to speak of being undocumented objectively when one’s life is so colored by the lack of a legal status. In the same way, it speaks to

the acceptance of living amidst contradictions, within in-between states and acknowledging these as important elements of one's story:

I am not without contradictions...I am 31 and have been a working journalist for a decade. I know I can no longer claim to be a detached, objective reporter, at least in the traditional sense. I am part of this evolving story and growing movement. It is personal. Though I have worked hard to approach this issue like any other, I've also found myself drawn to the activists, driven to help tell their story (Vargas 2012:3).

Becoming part of an "evolving story" as Dreamers

To be part of the "evolving story and growing movement," as Vargas alludes to, motivates undocumented youth to collectivize as Dreamers. To the extent that undocumented students in the ULI have used stories of self to make sense of the in-between states they have navigated growing up, it is not surprising that they have constructed a family with one another. By finding this family of undocumented youth and allies on campus, ULI members not only find a personal space where they can unite for a cause, to fight for the rights of the undocumented, but also where they can simply *be* with one another and share their stories uninhibited. This sense of family, in turn, has provided them with the energy to become part of and strengthen the imagined community of Dreamers that has spread across the country. Since the ULI's inception, stories of self have been important building blocks, as demonstrated by Julia's willingness to share her story across list-serves to motivate people to attend meetings. While members' bravery to come out with their stories did not develop overnight, gradually they came to drop veils of silence, realizing that their stories were not an individual struggle but rather a collective one. They realized that they did not need to remain at the intersection of

exclusion and inclusion, but could transcend it through story. To be sure, the personal narratives of undocumented youth are diverse, each a thread that pulls together unique experiences of navigating in-between states. Their identity as Dreamers is consolidated through this hybridity of stories. Only by interweaving different threads, or narratives, can students produce an over-arching story as Dreamers who find a common struggle in growing up undocumented.

In this chapter, I have painted a picture of the relationship between stories of self and a collective story of us. Only by understanding details about the way that Dreamers such as members of the ULI come together on a college campus, can we begin to comprehend their story of now: a public narrative that, to borrow from Vargas (2012), motivates students to become “walking conversations” through their advocacy and mobilization. A public story of now, as I demonstrate in the following chapter, is significant because it marks the point when undocumented youth, as part of an imagined community of Dreamers, use their stories to not only push for recognition and rights-enabling legislation, but also to fight against draconian bills like those aimed at doing away with in-state tuition. Because the impetus to come out publicly is cultivated by families in the form of youth immigrant rights groups on college and university settings, this chapter has provided the foundation for understanding a more public narrative of Dreamers’ mobilization and advocacy. The following chapter is a tribute to the way that stories of us become a story of now.

Chapter 4

“We’re not going to let advocates speak for us. We’re going to speak for ourselves.”

This chapter illustrates the story of now that undocumented students have constructed as Dreamers. This story, as my participants have articulated to me, encompasses Dreamers’ mobilization and advocacy; it is a narrative that incorporates and is driven by stories of self and us. In the previous chapter, I described the way that students’ stories of self become a story of us, analyzing how a collective identity that has created a sense of family embraces a plurality of individual stories. I showed how students, in coming together on a college campus, identify with each other as family, developing the courage and willingness to “come out” as undocumented in a personal and informal setting. Such a family as the ULI, because it networks statewide and nationally, has led to the construction of an imagined community (Anderson 2006) of Dreamers. As defined in Chapter 3, this imagined community, borrowed from Benedict Anderson’s (2006) conception of a nation, characterizes the construction of a collective identity of Dreamers across the United States. Because undocumented youth do not fully belong to any nation or homeland, they find acceptance and belonging by identifying and constructing a collectivity as Dreamers. My aim in this chapter is to extend the analysis of community to Dreamers’ public narrative of mobilization and advocacy. This narrative, the Dreamers’ story of now, has propelled the movement’s fight for important

legal rights, such as the right to in-state tuition, the DREAM Act, and comprehensive immigration reform. By using the 2006 immigrant marches as a framework by which to understand the Dream movement, I demonstrate that the movement was not born from one day to the next, but, as several participants have explained to me in interviews, forms part of a history of social movements and of immigrant mobilization. During the 2006 marches, immigrant youth developed agency and confidence in their own cause as they rallied alongside their parents and other family members. While the 2006 immigrant marches dissipated, the Dream movement has held strong, energized by its ability to fortify national networks through the media and mass mobilizations. Where once the Dream movement focused its efforts on passage of the Dream Act and passage and sustainment of in-state tuition laws, now the movement fights for the rights of the entire undocumented immigrant population. Family, for the Dreamers, is more than finding others with a common experience; it is also remembering those parents, siblings, uncles, and aunts whose hard work and sacrifices cannot remain in the shadows any longer. Family, moreover, is about recognizing that all undocumented immigrants, approximately 11.1 million people in the United States (Passel and Cohn 2011:1), are the “original” dreamers, as ULI member Mauricio shared with me. The Dreamers use their movement to mobilize and advocate on behalf of unauthorized immigrants’ 11.1 million dreams.

By chronicling important elements of undocumented youth’s story of now, I use this chapter to illustrate how Dreamers use an imagined community to produce a larger narrative that transcends college campuses. This community, in turn, allows for the

participation of Dreamers in important realms that are often associated with U.S. citizenship, such as lobbying, testifying, and appearing as members of the nation in the media. I want to elucidate the ways that participating in these realms has allowed Dreamers the tools with which to become visible to the American public and important representatives of the national polity. This visibility is important, as it empowers Dreamers in their quest for U.S. citizenship. I also highlight the ramifications of “coming out” to the public, looking at undocumented youth’s assessment of the risks and benefits of exposing one’s face and story in a realm that goes beyond the intimacy of a college setting. In particular, I extend my discussion of the importance of narrative, demonstrating how the articulation of a story of now in a public setting is key to Dreamers’ fight for formal and legal belonging. This story of now has become the channel by which narratives of self and us are given legitimacy and articulated to the public at large. Indeed, a story of now, as my participants’ reflections demonstrate, does not stand independently from stories of self or us, but is rather an extension of these narratives; it is a public narrative that allows for a more wide-scale conception of family that incorporates Dreamers across the country.

Undocumented and Unafraid: The Dream movement’s place in history

On February 22, 2013, ULI members and allies marched alongside community organizations and immigrant families down Congress Street to the Texas Capitol building, where important leaders and youth would provide their voices and stories of

self. Once at the Capitol building, the marchers, comprised of several hundred immigrants and allies across a diverse spectrum of ages, races, and social classes sang the national anthem (Roebuck 2013:1). Presenters proclaimed “Enough!” and its Spanish translation, “¡Ya Basta!,” a phrase that echoed through the multitude. This chant, borrowed from the farm worker and Chicano civil rights movements, spoke to the frustration that undocumented immigrants and allies felt in response to draconian immigration laws and the inability of many to adjust their status. The march was organized to voice the needs for comprehensive immigration reform. Many marchers, adults and youth alike, travelled long distances to come to Austin, several having slept in over-night buses to make it from the far corners of Texas, like El Paso and the valley. Some even made the long trek from New Mexico. ULI members sported t-shirts and posters that spelled out “Undocumented and Unafraid,” “We Want Citizenship,” “Enough, Ya Basta,” and “Born in Mexico, Raised in Texas.” All around, marchers voiced an array of chants. Within the group of ULI members and other student groups, chants of “Motivated, Dedicated, Downright Educated” and “Up, Up for Education, Down, Down for Deportation” were yelled with the same vigor as when these were used in marches for the DREAM Act. A small girl, her hair hidden underneath a winter hat, stood next to her mother, raising a sign decorated in colored stars that read, “Born in the U.S.A. Don’t take my Mommy and Daddy away” (Roebuck 2013:1). One immigrant mother, having come from Houston, held the tail end of a fluffy cord that connected to

her daughter's puppy-shaped backpack, so as not to lose her pink-clad three-year old in the crowds.

On this day, immigration was a family matter that, rather than be left to the voices of a sub-sect of immigrants, would be voiced loudly by fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons. As Jeremy Roebuck (2013:1) from the San Antonio Express News noted, marchers “came armed with megaphones and signs clutched in tightly gripped hands, all to proclaim themselves or their family members undocumented but no longer afraid.” ULI members acknowledged their existence as Dreamers and students, as evidenced by their chants and posters about education. Yet, they did not do so to exemplify their unique position among the undocumented population generally, but to show that they were Dreamers among many other dreamers who were also “undocumented and unafraid.” By marching side by side with adults and children alike, ULI members became members of a larger, over-arching immigrant family that together walked and chanted for visibility. It was a visibility that, while in previous years was exemplified by the public image of immigrant students dressed in cap and gown, was now extended to family members who had often lived in the shadows for much of their time in the United States. It was a visibility, moreover, that brought back to life the large-scale momentum of the 2006 immigrant marches.

The year 2006, marked by an unparalleled number of protestors who rallied in the streets (Gonzales 2008:220, Wang and Winn 2006:2, Johnson and Ong Hing 2007:99), brought tremendous attention to the undocumented population. In only twelve weeks

between February and May 2006, an estimated 3.7 to 5 million people took to the streets in a quest for immigrant rights in over 160 cities across the United States (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:3). Rapidly, demonstrations were organized throughout the United States, growing at a “furious pace” (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:7) and “spreading like wildfire” (Johnson and Ong Hing 2007:100). For those who protested and came out of the shadows as undocumented, much was at stake and they had “everything to lose” (Bloemraad, Voss and Lee 2011:5), as they ran the risk of being deported and separated from their families and communities (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:6). The reason, or “catalyst” (Wang and Winn 2006:2), that moved immigrants to risk everything and mobilize was the passage of United States House of Representatives’ Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act, or H.R. 4437, on December 16, 2005 (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:6). The bill was also known as the Sensenbrenner Bill after Representative F. James Sensenbrenner who first introduced the bill on December 6, 2005 (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:6). H.R. 4437 made residing in the United States without proper documentation a felony resulting in deportation, as first mentioned in Chapter 2 (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:6, Johnson and Ong Hing 2007:100).

The 2006 immigrant marches are an important framework for understanding the DREAM movement because immigrant youth became strong activists during these marches. Their mobilization and activism, as I show in the following sections, carried over into the DREAM movement. Children and teenagers constituted close to one million marchers across the nation, a quarter of all the protestors who came out and walked in

2006 (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:7). The presence of youth sheds light on the intergenerational nature of the marches (Bloemraad and Voss 2011, Rincon 2010, Gonzales 2008), as the young people demonstrated an agency that made them “both subjects and active participants in political organizing” (Gonzales 2008:220). Not only did they help conduct demonstrations, but also participated by walking out of their classrooms and taking to the streets (Rincon 2010:29).

Moreover, the emphasis that Dreamers now place on family in regard to comprehensive immigration reform reflects the focus placed on the preservation of families during the 2006 marches (Pallares and Flores-Gonzales 2011:170). Indeed, a central reason why youth became involved in the marches was their tie to family (Pallares and Flores-Gonzales 2011). The marches were especially salient and personal for Latino/a youth, as many came from mixed status families (Vélez, Huber, Benavides Lopez, de la Luz, and Solórzano 2008). For these young people, immigrant rights were directly tied to family in two regards: in their relationship to their personal, biological family as well as in their relationship to a “broader community” that they conceive of as “their people” or “collective family” (Pallares and Flores 2011:171).

Schools largely aided in mobilizing youth to participate in the 2006 immigrant marches (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:7, Rincon 2008:29, Gonzales 2008:220, Johnson and Ong Hing 2007:103). As Johnson and Ong Hing (2007:103) explain, the 2006 marches were similar to the civil rights movement in the 1960s in that high school, college, and university students “energized the protests, demonstrating a commitment and

enthusiasm not seen on campuses for more than a generation.” Students, citizens and non-citizens alike, participated nationwide in cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Denver, and Chicago (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:7). In April 2006, students in Austin walked out of a high school and marched 15 miles on a county highway into the city to rally with other students from a dozen more schools outside the Capitol building (Mass 2006:1).

In the midst of the 2006 marches, immigrant students mobilized in support of in-state tuition and the DREAM Act, calling for equal and just educational opportunities (Rincon 2008:29). To be sure, coalitions focused on educational access had been established since the 1980s (Rincon 2010:182, Gonzales 2008:232) and advocacy groups had developed around the DREAM Act since its introduction in 2001. Since the DREAM Act was introduced in 2001, undocumented students have become leaders and organizers, planning sit-ins, hunger strikes, marches, and rallies (Ross 2012:1). In addition, they have lobbied and testified in legislatures to promote the DREAM Act, in-state tuition, and more broadly immigrant rights. Indeed, an important mechanism by which undocumented students have coped with the plight of their status has been through their civic and political engagement (Galindo 2012, Gonzales 2008). While immigrant students had begun to mobilize prior to 2006, the marches that spring provided students with the energy to come out in greater numbers. At the same time, they motivated students who had not been politically involved before to participate (Gonzales 2008:223). In campaigning with established immigrant rights groups in 2006, immigrant youth came to

see the power they could have in taking up their own cause, even if at the time the specific issues of undocumented students were not at the forefront (Gonzales 2008:232).

“Now we are the ones who are leading the movement and it’s our voices that are being heard”

Having developed organizational skills and gained experience from participation in the 2006 immigrant rights movement, students gained the confidence to mobilize on behalf of their own cause (Gonzales 2008:233). The agency that many Dreamers gained through their participation in the 2006 marches was directly related to the civic and political engagement that they have cultivated as students. As result of their presence on high school and university campuses, undocumented youth have long been exposed to civic and political engagement, gaining the tools to mobilize (Gonzales 2008, Abrego 2008). Since the mid-1980s, as Gonzales (2008:232) further illustrates, officials in colleges and university counseling centers and admissions offices began to bring immigrant students together as a way to create support networks for them. In this way, college and university settings provided an ideal environment for the development of coalitions and organizations calling for policies such as in-state tuition. Among these organizations were campus support groups organized by students themselves (Gonzales 2008:233). Initially, however, officials and adults took it upon themselves to advocate on behalf of students, as they believed that undocumented youth should not be exposed to the perils of publicly “speaking out” (Gonzales 2008:233). Over the years, students began

to take action themselves, uniting in their fight for equitable education access and increasingly coming together on campuses (Rincon 2008, Gonzales 2008). They found power in numbers and began to act on their own behalf. An important part of Dreamers' empowerment and agency, as Catalina shared with me, is the acknowledgement that they should not be recognized as victims but rather as fighters and active participants in their movement. She elaborates that, in order for Dreamers to be fighters, they cannot be pitied but instead recognized for what they have contributed to society:

Saying you're a Dreamer means that you are a fighter. To be in the movement you have to fight, and when you're a fighter you decide to be so strong. You can't believe how much strength you have at moments—like [when] you're marching, going in front of the center to protest. The media sees us with sadness and compassion and I don't like that. Because I understand that you kind of know my story. But I'd rather you value me for what I have done for this society rather than for what my story has been. I'd rather you value that I helped your student with the geometry class, or that I helped your daughter or son go to college and apply because they didn't know how to, than to value my story because it has been hard. I've been successful. I'd rather you value what I have done for your society, what I as a person have done. That's the perception I want to give everyone. I not only have to fight for my own people but for American citizens too.

An important element of being fighters, then, is the ability of Dreamers to use their stories to show their agency, empowerment, and contributions to society rather than to seek pity. For example, Catalina further stated that, in working with Dreamers, she sees a "lot of pain," but also an "empowering voice" that has led these youth into the streets and onto national news. When I interviewed Paloma, she noted the transformation in the agency of youth, showing that the impact of the Dream movement is due in large part to the ability of students to advocate for themselves. She explained:

I think the fact that [Dreamers] are advocating for their own cause is definitely affecting the outcome of the situation. Whenever the first DREAM Act was introduced, it wasn't the students, it wasn't the Dreamers, ushering their stories and speaking to the politicians. It was the main organizations. So I think it has definitely affected the outcome because now these students are the ones who are leading the movement and it's our voices that are being heard.

The ability of students to mobilize for themselves became especially apparent after the dissipation of the 2006 marches. While the marches had been successful in defeating H.R. 4437, no rights-enabling legislation for immigrants was passed in the marches' aftermath (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:8, Johnson and Ong Hing 2007:100-101). Instead, harsher enforcement was implemented, with the passage of legislation sanctioning the extension of a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border (Johnson and Ong Hing 2007:100-101,104). The marchers made some headway, as evidenced by the fact that on May 26, 2006, the U.S. Senate passed S. 2611, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act, which would have allowed undocumented immigrants to legalize their status (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:8). However, the bill died, as did similar bills in the summers of 2006 and 2007 (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:8). In spite of this fact, as Johnson and Ong Hing (2007:104) predicted, neither the "power, emotion, and sheer size" of the marches nor the "firestorm of anger, controversy, and resistance" produced by H.R. 4437 would be forgotten. In the aftermath of the 2006 immigrant marches scholars such as Johnson and Ong Hing (2007:104) wondered if these marches marked the birth of a "broad-based civil rights movement" or were simply a "one time phenomenon." A few years later, in the months preceding the December 2010

congressional vote on the DREAM Act, it became apparent that immigrant mobilization was not a one time event, but instead a movement that would be in large part taken up by immigrant youth, the Dreamers. Drawing inspiration from the civil rights movement and the gay rights movement, mobilization of the Dreamers would awake the same passions that marked the 2006 marches, but would succeed in inciting passions across the span of many years.

“Silencing isn’t helping and we need to put our stories into action”

Activism, for the Dreamers, has consisted of a range of activities that directly put them in contact with the immigrant and Hispanic communities, legislators, and other youth, specifically in high schools. For the ULI and immigrant youth rights groups in San Antonio, activism has included conducting educational forums whereby Dreamers go to local high schools and help younger students with college applications. They also participate in lobbying, marches, rallies, press conferences, and the organization of Dream Summits. In this way, they have participated both civically and politically in ways that are often attributed to U.S. citizenship. Dreamers prove that, while citizenship confers important benefits such as the right to vote, non-citizens, even if undocumented, can contribute to and impact important social and political processes. To be true, their objective is to obtain U.S. citizenship, yet, in mobilizing and advocating, they challenge the exclusivity of citizenship. In testifying in legislatures and lobbying, for instance, Dreamers demonstrate that they can transcend the limits of not having a legal status and

participate in the national polity at a higher level than most citizens. Claiming, “No human is illegal,” Dreamers have constructed a collective story of now that allows for such participation. The newfound understanding proclaims that undocumented students are not solely characterized by their immigration status. These students can achieve a sense of acceptance through their civic and political engagement as Dreamers, which is central to this narrative. Undocumented students use their identity as Dreamers to make a claim to American citizenship in that they show themselves to the public as students whose dreams and aspirations entail giving back to the United States, the country they call home.

The success of Dreamers’ mobilization across the country is due in large part to social media and emergent forms of technology, such as smart phones. As explained by Seif (2011:60), undocumented youth are “one of the first demographics to take advantage of new information technologies such as texting, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to mobilize a political movement.” While speaking in front of a camera or interviewing with a journalist often require formal training, social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter provide undocumented students the space to share their stories openly without any training. Paloma elaborated on the importance of social media: “I think that technology has allowed Dreamers to have a voice where they don’t have to be censored, a voice where they can truly express who they are in the world, as well as allowing connections to start for a new generation, allowing communication to other students in other states and in other parts of the world.”

The “connections” that Paloma speaks of are best accounted for by the imagined community of Dreamers that undocumented youth have constructed. This imagined community, beyond organizations on campus, allows for the exercise of rights in the sense that Dreamers are increasingly participating in actions, such as testifying and lobbying, that are usually attributed to citizenship. The Dreamer collectivity, by fostering civic and political engagement, allows undocumented youth to use their rights as students, human beings, and members of the American polity to push for their right to U.S. citizenship. The media re-creates images of the Dreamer as a student, dressed in cap and gown, sharing a story of self that echoes and reflects the lived experiences of other undocumented youth. These images have allowed this community to flourish.

Certainly, for those students who participate in campus organizations that serve their local communities, the Dreamer collectivity is real and tangible, exemplified by meetings and events with other Dreamers. Yet, it is through the media, as well as statewide and national summits, that this collectivity has become an imagined community that has attracted undocumented youth across the country. In light of Anderson’s idea that “members of even the smallest nation” will sustain an “image of their communion” in spite of not knowing or hearing of their fellow members (2006:6), Dreamers do not know all of the members of their nationwide, or even statewide, movements. Furthermore, for those Dreamers who live on the border, once hindered from travelling by the checkpoints, the only way that they could identify with other Dreamers northward of their cities before the implementation of DACA in 2012 was through the media, social networks, and online

Skype calls. Using this technology, Dreamers have indeed constructed a collectivity that goes beyond their local, campus-run organizations.

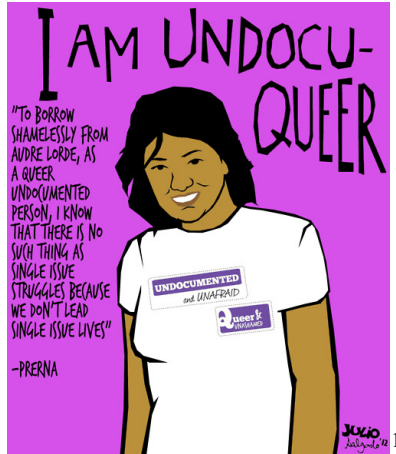
Realizing the need for Dreamers to remain at the forefront of their movement, they have also encouraged younger immigrants in the high schools to get involved in their mobilization and advocacy. As Paloma stated, “We’re trying to reach out to high school students as well because we realize that they are the seeds of the movement...reaching out in order to keep it going.” By motivating high school students, Dreamers on college and university campuses are broadening the imagined community, the family, of Dreamers, thereby ensuring that the movement will continue to be driven by immigrant youth.

Dreamers have obtained support from professors, community leaders, and religious officials, gaining entry into significant spaces where they take on leadership roles and make their stories known. As Catalina shared, the Dreamers have obtained much backing from churches, as evidenced by an Episcopal church that provided its resources and the space for Dreamers to hold summits. Likewise, a religious institution at a university campus allowed the ULI to hold its state Texas Dream Alliance (TDA) summit at its building in February 2012. Furthermore, as Catalina also shared, Dreamers have obtained support from important organizations like the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The year 2010 was important for the Dreamers nationwide, as students came together and mobilized for the DREAM Act. Hunger strikes, sit-ins at legislators' offices, and mass rallies were among the demonstrations that Dreamers conducted in the months preceding the December vote on the DREAM Act. Their mobilization showed that the immigrant marches of 2006 were not just a "one time" event, but instead a phenomenon that would be carried over by immigrant youth using their own agency and initiative. The Dream movement, in much the same way as the 2006 marches, has been regarded as a new civil rights movement (Pérez 2012:85).

Dreamers themselves have recognized that their movement draws parallels from the gay rights and civil rights movements. For example, the gay rights movement largely espoused and utilized the power of coming out of the shadows. Paloma recounted that the first people she spoke to about her status were her gay friends, as they knew firsthand what it is like to grow up hiding an important part of one's identity and to come out of the shadows. Beyond coming out to gay friends at an individual level, undocumented students have recently begun to recognize that much of their population is gay. For instance, gay undocumented students have increasingly adopted the identity "UndocuQueer" as a way to juggle these two aspects of their identities. Several projects and organizations have been established in order to shed light on the experiences of "UndocuQueers." An art project entitled *I am UndocuQueer* has been created as a way to give gay undocumented youth the space to make their stories known through images. A good illustration of one such image is the following art project that aims to show that

marginalized groups, such as undocumented students, must also grapple with and accept other issues like homosexuality:



Additionally, Dreamers have gained much inspiration from knowing that the civil rights movement was a product of a struggle that lasted decades. Catalina reflected this admiration, sharing, “We represent a movement that’s been as big and could get as big as the civil rights movement.” Knowing that African Americans had struggled many years to obtain civil rights inspired Catalina, as she knew that change, even if it took a long time, would happen. The power of the Dream movement, as well as the motivation it draws from other social movements, is evidenced in the Trail of Dreams campaign that was carried out by four undocumented students between December 2009 and May 2010. These students travelled from Miami to Washington D.C., to fight for the Dream Act (Pérez 2012:86). Because February is nationally recognized as “African American History Month” (Pérez 2012:86), Dreamers began a monthly campaign in February 2010

¹ <http://www.undocuqueerbook.com>

to continue advocating for the Dream Act and to emphasize the similarities between their movement and that of the civil rights movement (Pérez 2012:86).

That the DREAM Act fell just 5 votes from passing in the U.S. Senate is testament to the advancements the Dreamers made. While many felt disillusioned after it failed to pass, many also found inspiration in just how close they had come. For this reason, the movement has lived on, gaining momentum through the years. Just as the 2006 immigrant marchers braved deportation in proclaiming their rights, the Dreamers have risked everything in coming out publicly. As Briana shared with a San Antonio Express News reporter, the risks, for Dreamers, are outweighed by the need to cultivate positive change for immigrant rights: “There has been an ideological shift. It used to be hush-hush just be normal and go to class. Now, it’s like let’s come out and be done with it. Life without papers is not life anyway. The American Dream is worth risking everything” (Ludwig 2010:1). Similarly, José, whose story I share in Chapter 3, expressed, “I don’t want to just watch the news and wait for something to happen. I want to make it happen. Even if I have to make a small impact I want to do whatever I can.”

Dreamers highlight the roles of narrative in providing the impetus for action. By providing a human face to their movement, they have created a story of now. That narrative comprised of individual experiences shows that Dreamers in fact exist and will not remain in the shadows. As Mauricio, a student leader in the ULI reflected, story-telling is significant because it will inform the way that the Dreamers and their movement are remembered: “Something that I always look forward to, is not only how history is

going to look at us, but the things we have given, or the things we have come up with. What's special about us is our story of self." For Mauricio, as for so many other Dreamers, the act of publicly sharing their stories constitutes a way by which they will be accounted for in history: "We're in a sense not written into history because we're undocumented so we haven't been able to be written down into history legitimately. But we've still been able to keep ourselves in history by telling our story of self." The act of speaking out in public, whether begun with an individual or collective narrative, is always brought back to the "bigger picture," as Mauricio said. The following examples largely taken from interviews, observations, and media accounts reveal the contours of this bigger picture, a story of now that speaks to the impact and agency of the Dreamers.

"We are going on a hunger strike as long as it takes"

On a November day in 2010, Paloma stood on the steps of a plaza at her university in San Antonio, her purple graduation cap an emblem of her identity as a Dreamer, and told the crowd of students, professors and community leaders that "she was undocumented and no longer afraid." She cried when giving her story of self, explaining that she was brought to the United States as a young child. She powerfully tied this personal narrative to the bigger picture, the hunger strike that she and her fellow San Antonio Dreamers were organizing:

We are going on a hunger strike. We are going to be on a hunger strike as long as it takes so that you all will stop and listen, for you all to become involved with your students and your community. All it takes is a phone call, a petition, and you will be changing the future of 2 million undocumented students who have been hurting every

single day, when they are afraid to go out of their house because they might get arrested, they might get detained, because they are no longer able to get a job after they graduate from college, and they become another undocumented immigrant rather than an undocumented student. We are trying to stop this. We are trying to get a piece of legislation passed that will benefit undocumented students who came here against their will, who had no say, and who grew up as Americans and are Americans, who want to serve in the military, who want to continue their educations. ²

Dreamers and allies sitting and standing at Paloma's side also wore purple graduation caps, holding up signs stating, "Day 1," as a way to mark the first day of a month-long hunger strike. Some even held up red Cesar Chavez flags, as ways to carry on the legacy of Cesar Chavez's spiritual fasts that helped obtain workplace safety protections for older generations of farm workers (Biggers 2010:1). Organized as a way to push Texas Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison to vote for the Dream Act, the hunger strike would test just how much participating Dreamers would sacrifice to fight for something they truly believed in. Participants acknowledged that they would fast until Hutchison voted in favor and until the DREAM Act was passed. Although based in San Antonio, the strike gained followers and participants throughout the state and nation (Biggers 2010:1). In this way, the strike helped foster the imagined community of Dreamers as they united through narratives of action. In fact, during the same time as the San Antonio rally, students organized additional hunger strikes, rallies, marches, and candlelight vigils across Texas universities as part of a national action week (Ludwig 2010:1). The hunger strike, as Paloma stated in an interview with me, was a "Texas narrative" that became proof of the power of Dreamer's words and stories. While

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZgG8d8a25k>

physically “debilitating” and exhausting (Biggers 2010:1), the fast, for many of those participating, was spiritually invigorating, as revealed by one of the participants who shared, “We’re completely exhausted, but our spirit is stronger than ever. When we launched this hunger strike, we had no idea we would receive such wide support” (Biggers 2010:1). Local, state, and nation-wide attention was indeed prevalent, as shown by the fact that important officials, including President Obama and San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro, came out in support of the Dream Act (Ludwig 2010:1).

That exhaustion and debilitation would not impinge upon the spirit of the Dreamers was evident in their unbending determination to continue. To be sure, the health of the activists worried even the most open supporters of the Dreamers’ cause. In early December 2010, for instance, Mayor Julian Castro asked a group of Dream activists to stop the hunger strike (Ludwig 2010:1). He is quoted by the San Antonio Express News as saying, “Everyone gets the point they have made, but we are concerned about their health” (Ludwig 2010:1). At that point, seven hunger strikers in San Antonio were on their 27th day of consuming solely liquids (Ludwig 2010:1). For the Dreamers participating in the hunger strike, not only were they risking deportation, “permanent and definitive exclusion” (Bloemraad, Voss and Lee 2011:5) from the only country they knew as home, but they were also risking their lives in sustaining a fast that, for some participants, lasted longer than a month. For Dreamers, the American Dream, as Briana expressed, was “worth risking everything” (Ludwig 2010:1).

If a hunger strike would bring adequate attention to the plight that undocumented youth experienced, then participants would do it wholeheartedly. Tired of being silenced, they were ready to act even if it meant putting their lives at risk. From the Dreamers' perspective, as shown by the following quote of hunger strike leader and Dreamer Lucy Martinez, they had already exhausted every other tactic and resource: "We have tried everything else. We have done lobbying, legislative visits, marches, sit-ins. We are tired of it" (Wessler 2010:1). In an interview after 17 days of fasting, she smilingly said, "We're going to keep going because this is the right fight to be in. Nobody else is going to do this for us."³ In the same interview, hunger striker Claudia Sanchez similarly said, "When you really believe in something with all of your heart, you are willing to sacrifice yourself. This would benefit 2.1 million students. This is the future of the United States." Paloma, in an interview for Latino USA, likewise expressed:

It's gotten to the point that I, as a Dreamer, I've seen the struggle for the past ten years and I've actually become involved in it myself just recently and it just got to the point of, "What's going to happen?" "What is going to be that final point that's going to get people to actually listen to these Dreamers?" We've done everything we possibly could have done in these past ten years" (We are America 2011).⁴

As physically weak as the Hunger Strikers became, they were strengthened by their drive and spirit, as demonstrated by their 15-mile march on the fourth day of their liquid-only fast from a San Antonio university to a cathedral in the city's downtown. As Paloma shared, the response was "very supportive" from community leaders, and even

³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RJNH2KEJ5s>

⁴ <http://weareamericastories.org/audio/pamela-resendiz-texas-student-on-hunger-strike-for-a-dream/>

from tourists who, upon asking what the Dream Act was, joined the march.⁵ For Paloma, seeing the support of “strangers, tourists, leaders, and professors” was proof that the Dreamers were not marching alone in their quest for the Dream Act. The 15-mile march, as Paloma expressed to me, was organized as “a way of honoring the Trail of Dreams by the Dreamers who marched from Florida to Washington and the journey that people take to come to the United States in order to try to better their lives.” The march, as Paloma further elaborated, was a way for the hunger strikers to continue to challenge themselves, a test to see how much they could achieve for a dream that they believed in.

Several weeks later, several Dream Act advocates were arrested for conducting a sit-in at a legislator’s office, but this did not hinder the hunger strike. As San Antonio Express News reporter Ludwig (2010:1), stated, “Fifteen college students and activists, including former City Councilwoman Maria Berriozabal and a Methodist minister, were arrested on criminal trespass charges.” As they chanted, “We shall not be moved,” they remained outside of the legislator’s office for nine hours (Ludwig 2010:1). Among those arrested were several citizen allies who wore their graduation caps when they were handcuffed (Ludwig 2010:1); it was their way of supporting the Dreamers who, because of their undocumented status, risked deportation if taken into custody. Maria, a citizen ally I interviewed, expressed that she was willing to get arrested because the Dreamers could not. The hunger strikers, she reflected, had no energy, and thus she felt compelled to get arrested for them. Just the same, My Le, a Vietnamese student who had just

⁵ Id.

received her citizenship (Ludwig 2010:1), also got arrested and expressed the following in a media interview:

I remember sitting in the police car with Reverend Lorenza, who in solidarity, chose to get arrested with us and join the hunger strike with us in solidarity. So, I mean, I was sitting there and I turned to her, and my hands were on my back and I told her, “You know, sitting behind this cop car I do not regret a single thing and I would not take back anything. I mean, it just feels so right, sitting behind this car. I’d rather be sitting here for this purpose than for other reasons.”⁶

“It was a sense that we knew we had lost, but it was a sense that we were all together.”

While immigrant youth and allies in San Antonio continued their hunger strike, members of the ULI and other immigrant youth rights groups travelled to Washington D.C. during the lame-duck session in December 2010 to persuade legislators to vote for the DREAM Act. In fact, several youth who participated in the hunger strike also ventured to D.C. One young woman, as Catalina shared with me, had gone more than a month without eating and yet flew from Texas to D.C. She became so weak that she had to move around in a wheelchair. Julia, as founder of the ULI, also travelled to D.C. to make the plight of the Dreamers visible, to demonstrate the story of now evident in their unyielding spirit in their quest for change. The spirit manifested by Dreamers and allies present in D.C. was a carry-over of the energy inherent in the hunger strike; it imbued a collective narrative about how far activists would go in order to create change. Unwilling to wait any longer for the DREAM Act, Julia confidently took her cap and gown, along with her diplomas to D.C. Julia dropped these off at Senator Hutchison’s office. Julia told

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ea586YeMrkY>

a staffer to give these to the senator, saying that she wanted these back only when the Senator voted for the Dream Act.

As Julia reflected on this incident, she came to see that legislators are human, and “that no matter what, they will learn to see undocumented students’ faces.” She did not like that certain legislators kept on referring to undocumented students as *illegal aliens*. Julia had dropped off her diplomas at Hutchison’s office to show the Senator the stories of the Dreamers, their faces and their struggles. Only by doing so, could she hope to counter the stereotyping and marginalization of undocumented students. It was her way of transporting Dreamers’ struggles to the nation’s leaders, representatives whose power influenced the policies coloring undocumented youth’s everyday lives. She says that, in leaving her diplomas at Senator Hutchison’s office, she attempted to show that, “It’s not just 2.1 million students. These are our diplomas. We exist.” By using her diplomas to prove Dreamers’ visibility and existence, she brought the struggles of growing up undocumented to a legislator who, with her vote, could help determine the outcome of these students’ aspirations and lives.

Julia’s story of now entailed articulating the individual narratives of 2.1 million Dreamers, symbolized by the act of leaving her diplomas at Senator Hutchison’s office. Indeed, it was her way of proving the legitimacy of Dreamers’ imagined community, a collectivity of undocumented youth across the United States whose existence needed to be recognized. Unwilling to give up on persuading Hutchison, Julia and her fellow Dreamers continuously showed up at the Senator’s Tuesday and Thursday coffee sessions

dressed in cap and gown and entering through back doors. Days before the vote, she and the other Dreamers had not succeeded in changing the Senator's stance on the DREAM Act. In spite of this, as Julia reflected, the active participation of Dreamers dressed in cap and gown greatly impacted the way that legislators and the public came to view them:

During the lame-duck session we were there every day singing carols with our cap and gown. And I think they really got to know, "These are the Dreamers." And every office knew, "Oh the Dreamers are here"...I think that the legislators have begun to know that we're not going to let advocates speak for us. We're going to speak for ourselves. We want you to hear our story and we're going to be upfront about it. We're going to be in your face.

The power that Dreamers conveyed in their collective narrative became even more apparent when the DREAM Act failed to pass on December 18, 2010. Julia distinctly remembered waiting to hear the results of the vote and hearing officials behind her discussing the fate of the bill. Upon hearing that it did not pass, she held onto the Dreamers sitting next to her. While the DREAM Act had passed the House, it lost by 5 votes in the Senate. Together, Julia and the other Dreamers at her side realized that they needed to get up and tell the truth to others who believed that there was a recount. "I remember going down the stairs," Julia reflected, "and everybody was just crying, everybody was just in shock." All the Dreamers came together in a circle, crying and hugging each other. Julia described the emotions inherent in this moment of loss and closeness: "It was a sense of we knew we had lost, but it was a sense that we were all together—like it's okay. I remember we were just all in shock, and it was frustrating to know that we were so close. This could have been it."

This sense of togetherness, of family, in the midst of loss was a reflection of the community that Dreamers constructed through their story of now. Not only was unity apparent in D.C., but it also spread throughout the country, as undocumented youth came together as Dreamers to watch the news reports on the bill. The power of narrative was evident in the multitude of undocumented youth and allies who united and produced a story of activism and change. Briana, who became a strong DREAM advocate as a result of being placed in deportation proceedings, spoke to this power of community, and the encouragement found in having come so close—just five votes short—of the Dream Act:

It was encouraging to me. I think about ten years ago when the DREAM Act was just initially introduced, and I think about now. How many more people are active, how many more people are involved. Ten years ago, we would never have thought about having a DREAM watching party and yet we did it this past time. And so for me, it's encouraging because it seems that every year we're just getting closer and closer.

On December 22, 2010, a few days after the DREAM Act failed to pass, hunger strikers in San Antonio broke a fast that, for some lasted up to 40 days (Weinstein 2010:1). Just as in Washington, Dreamers in San Antonio united, inviting community members who had supported the hunger strike to break the fast with them. In spite of the bill's failure to pass, students' mobilization, as shown by the hunger strike and the long travels that many took to Washington D.C., demonstrated the power of Dreamers' actions and the impact that they could have as articulators, organizers, and participants of their story of now. A sense of sadness produced by the DREAM Act's failure to pass was overcome by a sense that the Dreamers had come so close and had succeeded in establishing a community, a family that would continue to sustain itself.

In contrast to the dissipation of the 2006 immigrant marches, the Dream movement would not dissipate, but rather would gain strength even in the midst of loss. In truth, many people, as Catalina shared, left the movement, discouraged by the reality that the DREAM Act did not pass. Most of those who did leave, as she further expressed, were citizen allies who grew frustrated with a sense of loss. Still, many Dreamers chose to remain with the movement. The strength of the Dream movement arose from the sheer numbers of undocumented youth who became involved in the collectivity both before and after the DREAM Act failed to pass. Evidently the collectivity of Dreamers and their story of now proved stronger than the DREAM Act's failure to pass. A bill that they had worked so many hours to pass lost, and a senator that they tried to budge did not sway. Yet, activists knew it was "okay," as many participants reflected to me, because their collective narrative as Dreamers gave them a sense of legitimacy and closure. The American public as well as legislators realized that the Dreamers were active participants in their fight for change. They were witnesses to the power that young people with everything to lose had; it was a power that, over the years, would survive through increased civic and political engagement of the Dreamers.

Sustaining the Dream

In the aftermath of the DREAM Act's failure to pass, the Dream movement did not dissipate but in fact in fact became stronger. National networks like United We Dream (UWD) and state networks such as the Texas Dream Alliance (TDA) grew in size.

Campus organizations like the ULI began to transition from a more national focus to a state and local focus. The ULI stepped up efforts to ensure that in-state tuition would not be taken away. Also, the group mobilized to fight state-level enforcement mechanisms, such as Secure Communities and SB 1070 in Arizona, and advocated on behalf of immigrants placed in deportation proceedings. Campaigns have gone beyond the DREAM Act, including the END (Education not Deportation) campaign, in which Dreamers and allies mobilize to end deportations on a case by case basis, and the Right to Dream campaign, in which they have sought relief for both themselves and their communities (Kahn 2012:1). In fact, DACA, because it followed the implementation of the Right to Dream campaign, can be said to have been a product of the mobilization and activism around this campaign.

ULI members continue to meet weekly, organizing, among other things, educational forums, Dream summits, DACA workshops, citizenship drives, media and legislative trainings, as well as weeks of action in which Dreamers conduct demonstrations and press conferences. As part of United We Dream (UWD) and Texas Dream Alliance (TDA), the ULI continues to appoint members as UWD and TDA liaisons and actively participates in their congresses. University graduates who were once leaders of youth immigrant rights groups, such as Julia and Catalina, have even gone on to work for the UWD.

Because the ULI is based out of Austin, members continue to lobby at the Texas Capitol and often testify against anti-immigrant bills using their stories of self. Within the

context of weekly meetings, the presentation of stories of self is maintained as a tradition, thus helping to foster the story of “us” and story of now that has become integral to undocumented youth’s identity as Dreamers. In order to present their stories in Congress, ULI members are required to attend trainings. Mauricio, when asked whether there is a distinction between sharing stories of self within an intimate, personal setting like the ULI weekly meetings and in Congress, said that, for him, it is “yes” and “no.” There is “one angle,” he said, that constitutes the way he has lived his life. This angle, he expressed, will be present in stories of self, regardless of where these are shared. There is always a timeline, but when he is talking to legislators he chooses which “bits and pieces” he is going to share from his narrative. For Mauricio, there is no need to “change my words” in any setting. He has attended trainings, and these have been helpful in giving him an “overall timeline.” Yet, as he says, “It’s up to me to fill out that outline.” The difference, then, lies in the fact that, when he’s talking to legislators, he might choose parts he is going to share, alter the timing, and decide to take out certain details, depending on how strategic these details prove. If, for instance, legislators want to hear an economic perspective, then he will express his personal narrative from this stance, but he will not change his story. Sharing his story in ULI meetings, rather than requiring him to choose “bits and pieces,” is a matter of simply showing himself: “It is me, this is who I am, this is my experience.”

The ability to take individual stories and present these in Congress for certain political imperatives forms part of Dreamers’ story of now. It is a way of transporting

stories of self and us from an intimate and informal setting to a formal and political setting. Such stories are among the means by which Dreamers confront and negotiate with the state, in the form of legislators, and show the humanity of their plight. Their testimonies have gone beyond activism for the DREAM Act as they are used to challenge draconian bills that could, among other things, take away in-state tuition or give police officers enhanced immigration enforcement powers. Likewise, testimonies have been used to fight for rights-enabling legislation at the state level. For example, Mauricio chooses to describe his father's experience in construction work whenever he testifies his story of self, as part of his efforts to fight for bills that would increase protection and prevent wage theft for undocumented immigrants in construction.

By continuing their story of now through their mobilization and participation in lobbying and testifying, Dreamers have sustained their dream, maintaining an unbending determination in their quest for citizenship. In 2010, they learned that they had the power to act and move their stories out of the shadows, realizing that lack of citizenship was not a detriment to their civic and political engagement. In the ensuing years, they have taken these lessons to heart, continuing to fight for immigrant rights. In this way, ULI members and Dreamers across the country have shown that, in spite of not having citizenship, they can still exercise human rights, such as the right to mobilize and voice an opinion, that make them important members of the political process and the community, even if they cannot vote. Moreover, they can call upon their rights to an education and DACA as proof and recognition that they are members of the United States.

As shown by their willingness to testify and lobby, Dreamers have engaged civically and politically in ways that the average citizen does not. If the mobilization and advocacy of the Dreamers proves anything, it is that they challenge the contours of citizenship, showing that they, though undocumented, can still participate in the national polity in much the same way as citizens. Civic and political engagement are due in large part to Dreamers' collective mobilization; it is a movement that, more than channeling their concerns, has become an avenue by which Dreamers have exercised rights that are normally attributed to citizenship. In this way, Dreamers have made a strategic claim for legal belonging.

DACA, while not citizenship, is an example of a step forward that Dreamers have gained as a result of their civic and political engagement. For the Dreamers, passage of DACA was not an instant whim of President Obama, but was a result of their mobilization and visibility. Moreover, DACA served as proof that they could use their education, civic and political engagement, and identity and solidarity as Dreamers to push for comprehensive immigration reform.

Given the unifying identity and movement of the Dreamers, it is not surprising that immigrant youth who are given alternative forms of relief feel guilty at not benefitting directly from legislation for which the movement has fought. For example, Paloma, upon receiving deferred action, realized that she was benefitting from this measure before the hunger strike for the DREAM Act even began. This fact, she reflected, "motivated" her to become "more open" about her status and her story. Paloma

feared that giving deferred action to some and not others would divide the Dream movement, creating a lack of unity: “It motivated me to become more involved, because even though I was fortunate, I felt that it was unfair.” Similarly, Guillermo spoke to this sense of unfairness when reflecting upon his realization that he could qualify for a visa. After the car accident that he survived, his parents told him that he would have the opportunity to apply for a visa, and would even be able to benefit the Dream movement more as a result. Guillermo responded, “No, I don’t want the visa. I want to benefit from the DREAM Act.” In transitioning from *undocumented* to *documented* as a result of a visa application, he has questioned why he, and not others who have become much more involved in the Dream movement, has been given the privilege of documentation. As shown by the examples of Paloma and Guillermo, the unity and collectivity of Dreamers goes beyond merely mobilizing together. It is manifested also in their desire to benefit from legislation that they have pushed so hard to pass. To benefit from alternative forms of relief, while certainly a positive step, produces a sense that there is a division, a break, in Dreamers’ collective narrative.

From 2.1 million dreams to 11.1 million dreams

With the implementation of DACA and President Obama’s promise of comprehensive immigration reform, Dreamers have shifted their focus from the DREAM Act to this reform. In this way, they have brought families back into the picture, in much the same way as the immigrant marches of 2006 did. The Right to Dream campaign has

shifted to the 11 Million Dreams campaign. The “original dreamers,” as Mauricio described the generation of his immigrant parents, are being accounted for through increased efforts to fight for all undocumented immigrants’ dreams. Stories of self, us, and now are increasingly emphasizing the need to include families in the movement. A Dreamer at the February 2013 march in Austin, for example, centered his presentation on family, stating the following:

Our families need to be incorporated into this movement. That is why we need comprehensive immigration reform. Our families have struggled, my mom—your mom—has struggled, your dad has worked hard to be here. We didn’t come here alone. We came here with our parents. And this is the right thing to do, to include them and have a pathway to citizenship for them. Our parents, what they have done, the sacrifices they made for us, it’s what we are today. And because of that, that’s what I want for my parents and that’s what I want for your parents.

The collective identity of Dreamers is a strong one, and continues to be fostered by the unity and activism of undocumented youth. The image of Dreamers dressed in cap and gown and marching through the streets remains strong; it is an image that, as shown by students’ presence in marches for immigration reform, is still sustained. In this sense, the imagined community of Dreamers is still highly visible, strengthened by the consolidation of national networks like United We Dream (UWD) and state networks like the Texas Dream Alliance (TDA), the increased use of technology such as social media, and the heightened coverage Dreamers have received on television and in newspapers. For this reason, it has been easy for Dreamers across the country to identify with one another and join the movement. So long as immigrant youth and allies continue to unite, this collective identity will not change. Still, it is important to note that narratives, in the

form of stories of self, us, and now, are shifting, incorporating families within these stories' outlines and timelines.

Furthermore, there are increased efforts to paint family members, in particular parents, as dreamers also. Mauricio reflected that while undocumented youth will always be portrayed as Dreamers with a capital “D,” it is important to not forget the “original dreamers,” the parents who sacrificed much to provide their children with a good life in the United States. One example of an effort to recognize parents as dreamers was a proposed idea in a ULI meeting for a town hall that the organization was planning. Town halls, as Mauricio explained to me, are informal meetings where ULI members have been able to “voice our concerns and opinions about particular issues.” In this particular context, the ULI was planning a town hall for the elected representatives so they could hear their perspectives on immigration issues. The purpose of this specific town hall would be to show representatives that Dreamers were “very present” on these issues and that their positions mattered to them. One ULI member proposed having parents come along dressed in cap and gown. This proposition can be viewed as symbolic of Dreamers' determination to bring their parents, as well as other undocumented family members, out of the shadows and to recognize their dreams.

Utilizing narratives to call for a pathway to citizenship

Undocumented youth, through their mobilization and activism, have created a story of now that is founded on both their individual experiences and collectivity as

Dreamers. Theirs is not a movement that was born from one day to the next, but rather forms part of a legacy of immigrant mobilization. While mobilization around the DREAM Act and in-state tuition policies began years before the 2006 immigrant marches, that year gave many university and high school immigrant youth the impetus to be advocates of their *own* cause, to fight on their own behalf. With increasing numbers of campus-based immigrant youth rights organizations, undocumented youth came together as Dreamers, realizing that they could transport their stories of self and us to a more public realm; it was a realm where they could produce a large-scale community and family of Dreamers, along with a collective narrative that accounted for *why* they needed to act now. This story of now has, in turn, allowed Dreamers to show that, in spite of not having a legal status, they can still exercise and call upon rights that allow them to participate civically and politically in much the same way as citizens, often more than the average citizen. In so doing, they have been able to lead a movement calling for a pathway to citizenship.

Dreamers' story of now is also significant insofar as it has allowed them the tools to gain such rights-enabling measures like DACA. This measure, as I will show in the conclusion of this thesis, has given more Dreamers the confidence to share their stories and publicly mobilize for comprehensive immigration reform. Furthermore, it has allowed them to carve out new spaces for their immigrant families and other undocumented youth to come out of the shadows in much the same way as families did back in 2006. History, as Mauricio reflected in the beginning of this chapter, will

remember the Dream movement for their utilization of stories in mobilizing. DACA, as a product of Dreamers' mobilization, is a testament to the power of Dreamers' narratives.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

“I want to continue to fight for the people that are being excluded. This is something that I’m ready to live for. I embrace the struggles. Without it, I would not have been an organizer. I would not have been here right now:” Life after DACA

Catalina, a Dreamer I interviewed in the summer of 2011 and whose insights I have included in this thesis, arrived at a university classroom on March 21, 2013 to give a workshop on END (Education not Deportation). As explained in Chapter 4, United We Dream directs this campaign, which aids non-citizens placed in removal proceedings. Catalina’s black Nike running capris and sneakers were testaments to the around-the-clock hustle and drive that her new job as an END coordinator entailed. For Catalina, calls about upcoming deportation hearings in less than 24 hours are crises that she is prepared to handle. Laughingly, she told me that she was working on 137 deportation cases at the time. At one point, she was among the crowd who mobilized to stop a bus from taking another Dreamer’s mother to the border to deport her. At another time, she was among the multitude who helped stop a plane from taking off with a deportee headed to his country of origin. Based out of Phoenix, Arizona, she knows firsthand what it is to see undocumented populations mobilize against anti-immigrant legislation.

The END campaign, Catalina explained, began in 2009 with a mock graduation. This mock graduation, conducted outside of the White House, was a “coming out” action designed to inspire people to come out of the shadows. Dreamers who were also in

deportation proceedings were wearing chains, a symbol of the way they had been criminalized and left stuck in a system that left little room for relief. Approximately 60 to 80 people participated in the mock graduation. One student from Florida acknowledged that he only had nine days left in the United States until his deportation. During the nine days until his departure date, he was taken to see Senator Richard Durbin, who had helped draft the DREAMAct in 2001. He told his story. Petitions were signed. A Facebook page was made for him. He eventually had his case administratively closed. This case gave rise to the END campaign, in which youth and allies work around the clock to campaign against deportations. Where once this campaign was focused on Dreamers alone, a congress organized by United We Dream decided that families needed to be protected as well, thus giving rise to campaigns on behalf of mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, and siblings.

Catalina, in participating in the END campaign and serving as a national coordinator, has helped propel the collective narrative of the Dreamers forward. After the passage of DACA, as she shared with me, she struggled to choose between accepting a stable job at home and continuing her involvement with the Dream movement. “My heart right now,” she said, “is with this movement.” She said it was rather strange, having all these dreams come back as a result of DACA: ambitions of getting a job, obtaining a social security number, and driving. Reflecting on the impact that DACA has had on her life, Catalina shared that before DACA, “You had sort of accustomed yourself to a way of thinking that you might not be able to work in your field.” As she described, learning

to embrace dreams that, for a long time, had been unavailable is a “transitional” process. Used to living out the implications of not having a legal status, Catalina memorized her social security number, which she could not claim growing up. She can now open up a bank account, and hopes to get a driver’s license. Even with the implementation of DACA, she still considers herself to be undocumented: “I am an undocumented person with DACA.” In this way, Catalina shows that an undocumented status, while having made her life harder, has nonetheless made her stronger and is an important part of her life narrative. As she reflected, she would not have become an END coordinator had it not been for her experiences growing up undocumented.

The decision to be a UWD national coordinator rather than accept a stable job, while difficult to make, made Catalina realize the impact that she could have in the movement: “All the people that I’m meeting with right now, all the people that I’ve been able to change through story of self, it has been very powerful.” In choosing to take a leadership role in the Dream movement, Catalina symbolized the emerging consensus among Dreamers that the movement must continue, even when undocumented youth are garnering more rights through DACA. This temporary status, as I have shown in this thesis, is not deemed enough. With the promise of immigration reform, Dreamers have realized that they must continue in their fight for immigrant rights on behalf of their families, the original dreamers. Being *DACAmented* has conferred a sense of documentation that, while not conferring citizenship, has given Dreamers rights that are now invoked to keep pushing immigration reform forward. With DACA, as Mauricio

shared with me, more students are getting involved because no longer is deportation a constant threat. In mobilizing around reform, Dreamers have indeed brought back the mass visibility of immigrant families that was apparent in the 2006 immigrant marches. Helping to broaden their movement to include 11.1 million dreams rather than merely their own 2.1 million, Dreamers have expanded the contours of their narrative, their collectivity, incorporating the individual stories of the entire undocumented population.

While immigration law is always in flux, I hope that this thesis brings to light the power of narrative in the Dream movement. This power is not limited to one point in history, but instead has continued, strengthened both through loss, as demonstrated by students' unity when the DREAM Act failed to pass, and the promise of gain, as evidenced by mobilization behind comprehensive immigration reform. My thesis, rather than simply reiterate the fact that undocumented youth have grown up trying to navigate both a sense of visibility and invisibility, inclusion and exclusion, legality and illegality, speaks to the way that story allows for the transcendence of an in-between state. Moreover, it speaks to the way that undocumented youth have created a public narrative, a story of now, through their civic and political engagement. Testifying and lobbying, Dreamers have entered a public realm where laws determining their inclusion and exclusion are made and negotiated. They have invoked a visibility and voice that proves their empowerment as rights-bearing individuals who can mobilize in much the same way as citizens. Engaging with the community through educational forums, DACA workshops, and citizenship drives, Dreamers have shown that a lack of legal status is not

an impediment to helping others. By demonstrating that they can be active members of the United States, Dreamers have proven that they indeed deserve U.S. citizenship.

In doing this research, I thought of ideas for further investigations. I realize that I chose participants from a select area, San Antonio and Austin, where immigrant youth are admirably active and have easy access to legislators and support from the Hispanic community. More research is needed in areas where, for instance, undocumented youth do not have access to in-state tuition and are not involved in immigrant youth rights organizations. As shown in Chapter 3, I interviewed one student from the border area who, because of the checkpoints, was barred from seeing his parents once he went northward to college. Further investigations are needed to assess the impact that DACA has had on undocumented youth from the border. Where once many undocumented youth on the border never left their cities and towns and put away their dreams of attending college northward, they can now visit and live in inner state metropolitan areas for the first time, meet Dreamers of other areas, and attend state universities and colleges without fearing that they will never see their families again. Research needs to be done on how, before DACA, Dreamers in areas like Austin and San Antonio who could not risk crossing the checkpoint still networked with border youth using such technology as Skype and social media like Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube. Likewise, more research needs to be done on the role that undocumented youth should continue to have in the Dream movement, especially now that comprehensive immigration reform is at the forefront of Dreamers' mobilization. Questions that should be assessed include: How

involved should Dreamers continue to be in the movement if comprehensive immigration reform does pass? How involved should Dreamers continue to be if reform excludes certain sectors from a pathway to residency and citizenship or if it does not pass at all? Furthermore, investigations are needed to determine what could happen if DACA is not continued under future presidential administrations. Similarly, studies should be done on the employment prospects of DACA recipients, asking the following research question: Will Dreamers who graduate from universities be able to use their degrees to pursue their dream careers or will employers be hesitant to hire them because of the tenuousness of their employment authorization? Finally, research should be conducted on those students who do not qualify for DACA, looking at their ambitions and outlooks when they are not afforded this temporary status.

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Statutes

8 C.F.R. 274a.12(c)(14)

Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1182, (212)(a)(9)(B)(i)(I)

Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1182, (212)(a)(9)(B)(i)(II)

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Videos

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZgG8d8a25k>

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Images

<http://www.undocuqueerbook.com>