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Expanded Notions of Latinx/Chicanx Activism and the Undocumented Immigrant Youth and  
Young Adult Movement

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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx young adults living in North County, a region in San Diego County California, who are directly involved and/or support the Undocumented Youth and Young Adult Movement (UYIAM) and immigrant rights more broadly. I interviewed six young adults of various legal status (Undocumented, DACAmented, U.S. resident, and U.S. Citizen). A Latinx Critical Race perspective guided the current study. The young people in this study are keenly attuned to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere under the Trump administration. However, they pointed out the anti-immigrant rhetoric, sentiment, and actions is not new phenomena. It was happening under the previous administration and at some level led them to become politically conscious and involved. Participants embraced an activist identity and both challenged and expanded notions of what that means. They also displayed contrasting views of national and local level organizations. Lastly, participants spoke of personal responsibility such as working as a barrier to their participation on school campus and out in the community.

Key Words: Undocumented Youth and Young Adult Movement, Dream Act, DACA, Comprehensive Immigration Reform, Latinx/Chicanx Activists.

## DEDICATION

*¡Mama, te dedico este trabajo! Gracias por tomar la decisión de emigrar a los Estados Unidos de América. Quien pensaría que llegaríamos tan lejos. Todavía recuerdo las dos opciones que me dabas cuando era niño: “Estudiar o Trabajar?” Tuve que hacer las dos cosas para superarme!*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the six-participants who took time out of their busy schedules to talk with me. Thank you! I am grateful to you all for letting me capture a piece of our collective story. I promise to use your shared knowledge wisely.

*Carlos. Sin darme chance de dormir en tu sofá por muchos años y después en el laundry room, no podría ahorrar para el tuition. Gracias por todas las veces que pagaste la comida. Que paro tan grande me has hecho. ¡Serio!*

*Daniel. Sin los días de pesca este proceso viera sido deberás mente stressful. A ver cuando nos damos una vuelta al pier.*

To Franky, Rosa, and Alondra. I wish I could spend more time with you all. It has been a privilege seeing you all grow up. What else can I say, except for, keep moving forward.

To Christopher. My sweet nephew. I love playing with all your toys when I visit your grandma’s home even though you always tell me, “Mine!” Hope, I can inspire you to become an academic of some sort one day or at least get you interested in going to college.

To Hugo and Gustavo. It sucks immigration authorities deported you both years ago. That said, I will always support whatever you both do in your lives.

To all the professors who have supported me throughout this journey. Thank you! I will always be grateful for your support, friendship, among other things. I am especially grateful to MCI for always having my back! You are, in the words of this undocumented scholar, a true social justice advocate in both theory and practice.

Lastly, shout out to all my cohort members who already completed their theses and/or are about to finish! You all created a space in the classroom where I felt comfortable and safe. P.S. We should get pizza some time. 😊

## INTRODUCTION

Its early morning. I am walking to my middle school's cafeteria for breakfast. My stomach grumbles as I stepped out through the main entrance of my apartment complex only minutes away from school. As I wait to cross the street, I noticed a group of students walking out from our middle school. There are no smiles or laughter like other mornings. Rather, they are chanting something intently. It is hard to make out what they are yelling over the sound of cars bustling on the street. The students get closer to where I am standing. Snippets of their collective chant begin to reach my ear: "187!" I wait a few seconds longer. The grumbles coming from my stomach slowly fade away as the students' mouths become more visible. I can clearly hear them chanting at the top of their lungs: "No 187! ... No 187!" A familiar face, a young-Latina waved her head to the left signaling for me to join the group. She is holding a brown cardboard sign above her head displaying a tagged-out name: ~~Pete Wilson~~. I ran across the street and joined the group as the grumbles from my stomach completely faded away.

I am among a group of about fifty-something middle school students.<sup>1</sup> They are all classmates. Among a brown backdrop are specks of white. Familiar faces. We continued chanting, "No 187!" pass rows of apartments drowning out the sound of cars zooming by. We want our neighbors to hear us, but specifically, we want Californians who voted in-favor of Proposition 187 (Prop. 187), an attempt to keep undocumented immigrants from using state funded services, and an explicit assault on our education to see and hear we are not going to

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<sup>1</sup> According to newspaper reporters, Bloom and Roletti (1994) about 58 middle-school-age youth took to the streets. They suggest students were "lured" by rumors of a protest. I disagree. Walking out of school was the protest. That said, I am aware not all undocumented students walked-out of school as their way of protesting Prop. 187 (Menendez 1997).

stand by as they assault the undocumented immigrant community. Emotions are high. Fear. Anger. Grief. But, there is also a sense of togetherness.

Prop. 187 and its anti-immigrant intentions had crept into our school environment and our lives weeks earlier. Specifically, the rumors floating around school campus suggesting teachers were going to report “illegals”<sup>2</sup> to immigration authorities were frightening, so much that I spent nights thinking about what could happen. Will immigration authorities deport me? What will people think? The rumors were hurtful, they made my heart sink, but it was more disheartening that no adult showed any signs of being on our side. There were no words letting us know everything would be “alright.” Rather, educators went about their day as if there was nothing going on. And their actions (for example, locking down the school) signaled to us students we should not step out of line. This was the toxic climate Prop. 187 and its supporters had created, one that educators intentionally (or not) supported leaving us students to deal with all of its effects.

In less than an hour, we marched from our middle-school campus to City Hall and assembled at a nearby park with older Latinx/Chicanx<sup>3</sup> students chatting words of resistance, “Fuck Pete Wilson! ... No 187! ... *Viva la Raza!*” Some of these young people faced City Hall from the park where we had assembled raising a middle finger in the air. Others stood around in small groups talking, whistling, or people watching. Among the many youth and young adults, one or two Mexican flags slithered in the air.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a derogatory word meant to dehumanize and devalue people. I use the word (“illegal”) only for context. To make visible the anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric imbedded in the fabric of the United States of America. Many newspaper reporters used this word to talk about undocumented youth and young adults throughout the 1990s (Silver 1992; Martinez 1992), and many anti-immigrant folks still used it today.

<sup>3</sup> I used the term Latinx (as well as Chicanx) as gender neutral terms.

With the sound of a crackling speakerphone local police officers interrupted out protest, saying it was “unlawful” and demanding for students to board the yellow buses waiting next to the park. Soon after, police officers began herding youth/young adults into buses as if we were cattle. Once onboard, they immediately brought us back to campus where the principal unlocked the main gate and other adults with a tone of contempt in their voice reprimanded us for supposedly ditching school. To this day, I can still hear scolding: “Ditching school, IS NOT, how things get done!”

I shared snippets of my life above, first of all, to begin documenting my story as an undocumented student. The morning when I joined the Prop. 187 protest I was not distraught or anything. For me, it was a regular day, I woke up that morning, hungry, and headed to school to eat breakfast like other days. However, when I saw many of my friends marching down the street chanting (“No 187!”) I knew I had to join them. There was no question in my mind that’s where I needed to be.

Second, I share this particular time in my life to highlight the political involvement of undocumented youth in past decades. But also, to show how the actions of everyday people like my educators can discourage youth/young adults from getting involved politically. When an adult tells a child, “that’s not how things done” they are suggesting there is a “right” way of doing things and anything outside that is “wrong.” For me, I continue with my education, but did not join a protest until my early thirties. I have always wonder what it would have been like if my educators had legitimized our protest. Finally, I share my story to begin weaving together past struggles involving undocumented youth and young adults with current struggles playing out as I write this document. In many ways, the current political atmosphere under the Trump

administration is reminiscence of the Prop. 187 context I experienced as a youth. It reminds me the struggle is not over.

The current study focuses on the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx young adults who are directly involved and/or support the Undocumented Youth and Young Adult Movement (UYIAM) and immigrant rights more broadly.<sup>4</sup> These are young people who are on the receiving end of continuous anti-immigrant assaults both directly and indirectly coming from anti-immigrant folks at all levels of U.S. society. These young people counter such assaults in whatever way they can. Some have placed their bodies in the front lines to bring about social change. Others have taken less visible forms of resistance such as sharing information online. Nonetheless, they have all contributed to the movements actively resisting the actions of anti-immigrants folks who suggest only citizens belong in the United States. These young people stand up for their communities, families, and themselves.

In what follows, I will present the statement of the problem. I propose numerous people view immigrant rights associations and lawmakers as the changemakers in the lives of undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth and young adults. However, as I will show Latinx/Chicanx youth and young adults have always been fighting alongside lawmakers and immigrant rights associations. Through my writing, I aim to explore the following question: What are the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx young adults (undocumented, DACAmented<sup>5</sup>, U.S. residents, and

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<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this study, I will refer to the Undocumented Youth Movement as the Undocumented Youth and Young Adult Movement (UYIAM). This is my attempt to highlight that some people don't identify with the 'Youth' aspect of the movement. Consider the following statements made by two participants in my study: "Now old youth, but yea, when it started, yes" (Frank). "Well, I'm not sure if I still count as youth because I'm 21 and I haven't gone to many rallies" (Alyssa).

<sup>5</sup> DACAmented is a term adopted by young people who applied and gained protections of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program implemented under the Obama administration. It is a move away from the word undocumented.

U.S. citizens) involved in immigrant rights activism/advocacy currently playing out under the Trump presidency?

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The narrative presented by some scholars about undocumented youth/young adults and the emergence of the Undocumented Youth/Young Adult Movement (UYIAM) suggest immigrant rights associations organized, mobilized, and presented undocumented youth to the American public in the early 2000s upon the introduction of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act<sup>6</sup> (Nicholls 2013; Enriquez and Saguy 2016). Sirriyeh (2018:1), for example, citing Nicholls (2013) suggests,

In 2001, immigrant rights [organizations] began campaigning for the federal Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act to provide a pathway to citizenship for many undocumented youth ... This campaign continued throughout the 2000s, leading to the emergence of the undocumented youth movement.

As Sirriyeh (2018) states above, immigrant rights associations rallied behind the DREAM Act, in support of undocumented youth/young adults, which led to the emergence of the UYIAM. This is a common view put forth by other scholars and some allies of the UYIAM, but a problematic one (Nicholls 2013; Enriquez and Saguy 2016; Pérez 2016). Some scholars who grew up undocumented and have experience the anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric firsthand understand the UYIAM did not emerge overnight and have contested the idea

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<sup>6</sup> Congress folks introduced the DREAM Act in 2001. It is a piece of policy meant to open up a pathway to citizenship, if it becomes a law, for undocumented youth/young people. Specifically, it was targeting young people under the age of about 30, who were brought to the U.S. before the age of 16. I first learned about this piece of policy around 2010.

suggesting the UYYAM emerged upon the introduction of the DREAM Act (Anguiano 2011).

Anguiano (2011:78-79) contends,

Many might suppose that the undocumented immigrant youth movement began when the DREAM Act bill first was introduced, but that is not the case. While it is difficult to point to an exact date or event that can be labeled the beginning of the movement, it had its origins long before the introduction of the DREAM Act.

The narrative above suggesting immigrant rights associations are responsible for the emergence of the UYYAM is coupled with the idea that it is up to lawmakers to better the lives of undocumented youth and young adults. Gonzales (2011), for example, suggests, the “fate” of undocumented youth and young adults “rest largely in the hands of the state” (p. 616-617). Whereas, Gonzales and Chavez (2012) contend, “Until congress acts” undocumented youth and young adults “will continue to live with uncertain futures” (p. 268). Gonzales and Chavez (2012: 256) both recognized the agency of undocumented youth, in their study Latinx/Chicanx, but place their focus elsewhere. Gonzales and Chavez (2012:256) focus their attention on, “the experiences of living in abjection” only to find agency. They contend,

Undocumented 1.5-generation Latinos, despite the structural constraints they face, are often active agents working to make the best of their situation and to change the laws that constrain their lives.

The agency mentioned by Gonzales and Chavez (2012) is something that I experienced firsthand growing up. I have seen undocumented Latinx/Chicanx friends protest not only in public spaces as mentioned above, but also in more private spaces like the classroom. Outside of school, I also saw how undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young people have defied and resisted the actions of local anti-immigrant lawmakers, immigration authorities, and the police. This all took place before the introduction of the DREAM Act and the UYYAM gaining notice.

By focusing on the efforts and actions of both immigrant rights associations and the state, some scholars, and undocumented young people themselves have minimized, not intentionally the agentic efforts of undocumented youth and young adults who have struggled against anti-immigrant sentiment, rhetoric, and actions (for example, through policy) since at least the mid-1980s<sup>7</sup>. In some ways, this has distorted an important segment of the earlier formation of the UYYAM. It has led scholars, immigrant rights associations, and both undocumented youth and young adults to believe we have been living in the shadows (Corrunker 2012; Chen and Rhoads 2016; Enriquez and Saguy 2016 ). That only recently we stepped into the public eye of American society.

I aim to reframe the story suggesting the UYYAM emerged because immigrant rights associations and pro-immigrant lawmaker got involved on our behalf, by placing attention on the political activity of undocumented youth/young adults who came before the emergence of the movement.<sup>8</sup> I will demonstrate that undocumented immigrant youth and young adults have been actively involved in immigrant rights activism since at least the mid-1980s. While I recognized the valuable support and allyship of both immigrant rights associations and pro-immigrant lawmakers (Seif 2004; Abrego 2008; Kimitich 2009; Nicosia 2017), I contend some scholars give too much credit to these social actors for the emergence of the UYYAM. The story overlooks both “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott 1989) and “everyday acts of defiance” (Baumgardner and Richards 2000) undocumented youth have undertaken in past decades in their lives. These

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<sup>7</sup> Here I contend we need to unearth the earlier struggles before the movement. Their stories are our stories. If we only focus on the movement today, we leave out these earlier efforts of resistance and defiance which are important to better understand the story of the UYYAM today.

<sup>8</sup> There is no agree upon year when the movement emerged. See Anguiano’s (2011) comment above. What is clear, is that undocumented youth/young adults have been in the forefront of the movement since 2010 (Carrasco and Seif 2014).

efforts took both direct and indirect, conscious, and unconscious pathways of resistance and defiance (Velez et al. 2008:17).

I agree with Mansbridge and Flaster (2007), who argue, “... many social movements are composed not only of organized activists but also of individuals who have never taken a public stand supporting that movement” (p. 628). This is a statement supported by scholars who have suggested, “The very presence of the DREAMers within the U.S. is resistance” (Weber-Shirk 2015:585). Immigration is both contentious and political – to be undocumented or non-citizen means being implicated in this political arena whether viewed as political or not.

In this section, I will shed light on the early-early political involvement of undocumented youth and young adults before the emergence of the UYYAM. I will weave together the political involvement of undocumented youth and young adults from past decades with the ongoing struggled still playing out today. Rather than telling the story through actors such as immigrant rights associations and law makers, I place the experiences of undocumented youth /young adults at center of it all.

### **Placing the Spotlight on Early (Un)documented Latinx/Chicanx Youth Activism**

In his book, *The DREAMers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate*, sociologist Walter J. Nicholls (2013:47-48) wrote:

Before 2001, “DREAMers” did not exist as a political group ... There were no labels to mark the group’s political existence (“DREAMers”), there were no common arguments and stories to express a singular political voice, and there was no infrastructure to foster political connections and consciousness between dispersed youth. There had been several campaigns to win in-state tuition for undocumented youth in the 1990s, but these campaigns were mostly led by state legislators, administrators, and rights associations. Undocumented youths only play residual roles within them. Their nonexistence as a political group at the start of the decade stands in sharp contrast with their major political

presence after 2010 when DREAMers emerged as a central player in immigration debates and became a driving force of the immigrant rights movement.

As the excerpt above suggest, some scholars view undocumented youth and young adults prior to the emergence of the UYYAM as apolitical. Whatever efforts undocumented youth and young adults contributed to the pro-immigrant rights struggled back in those days are regarded as “residual roles.” Meanwhile, much more credit is given to the immigrant rights associations and law makers fighting for the rights of undocumented youth and young adults. This view is common within the literature. Fiorito and Nicholls (2016), for example, suggest, “Undocumented youths in the United States did not exist as a public and political subject” (p. 288).

Yet, undocumented youth and young adults have always resisted the anti-immigrant atmosphere in their lives in their own ways and alongside the immigrant rights movement. Nicholls (2013) points out, “The immigrant rights movement emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s during a time of great hostility toward immigrants” (p. 21). I contend undocumented immigrant youth and young adults have been key actors within this movement, but their contributions have often been minimized, neglected, and rarely recognized (Gonzales 2008).

Undocumented youth/young adults have been fighting for educational rights since at least the mid-1980s. However, scholarly articles documenting their political involvement are rare. The one or two scholarly articles available make visible how some undocumented young adults used litigation to maintain their right to higher education (Olivas 1994; Rosas 1995). Undocumented youth and young adults were far from nonexistence public or political subjects. There are numerous newspaper articles about undocumented youth and young adults and both their political involvement and educational aspirations. Together, these writings highlight the public presence and political voice of undocumented youth and young adults as far back as the mid-1980s.

### **Mobilizing the *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) Ruling**

All undocumented youth and young adults who have attended public schools have played a crucial role in the mobilization of the Supreme Court Ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), which guaranteed all children an education up to the twelve grade irrespective of their immigration status (Abrego 2008). Think of it this way, Ruby Nell Bridges Hall, for example, one of the first Black children who walked into an all-white school during the desegregation era in the South was also mobilizing a ruling (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka – 1954*), which clearly stated segregating children by race is unconstitutional (Christiansen 2009). By attending an all-white school, Ruby, was implicated in a political action unsupported by many anti-Black people. Similarly, undocumented youth/young adults who have gone to school, are also implicated in a political action which anti-immigrant folks have contested throughout the years. For example, in California, as illustrated in the introduction, in the early 1990s anti-immigrant people such as ex-governor Pete Wilson took public efforts, though both rhetoric and policy, to keep undocumented youth/young adults out California's public schools. The message is clear, like the white people who surrounded Ruby as she made her way to class, shouting profanities and displaying their racist sentiment on cardboard signs, many anti-immigrant people, from lawmakers to everyday U.S. citizens want undocumented youth/young adults out state public schools. Currently, we can see this sentiment playing out in states such as Georgia, for example, where anti-immigrant law makers blocked access to higher education based on immigration legal status (Peña 2012).

### **Suing the University of California System**

In the past, like today, anti-immigrant folks have done everything in their power to keep undocumented students out of public schools in California. In the early 1980s, undocumented

young people attending the University of California system found their educational pursuits blocked off. Leticia A., Lorena M., Sonia V., Carlos S., and Manuel S., all undocumented young adults had been accepted to different campuses within the University of California (UC) system and were scheduled to attend classes in the Fall of 1984. However, UC personnel informed these students they would have to pay out-of-state tuition rates to attend school (Olivas 1994; Scott-Blair 1984). Unsettled with the UC's decision, these undocumented young people with the support of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) sued the UC system in defense of their public education (Chavez 1984; Scott-Blair 1984). The following year, in *Leticia A. v. Board of Regents of the University of California (1985)*, the Alameda County Superior Court ruled in the students favor ruling they were eligible to attend the UC system at in-state-tuition rates like any other citizen (Olivas 1994).

This victory brought forth by undocumented young people and their allies opened-up educational access for undocumented students in California's higher education public schools. Undocumented students were able to attend community colleges and four-year schools (both UC's and Cal State Universities) at in-state tuition rates. It also inspired educators to create the *Leticia "A" Network* to support undocumented students (Guillen 2003; Seif 2004). Anguiano (2011) suggest, the *Leticia "A" Network* is "the earliest known example of a formal support group singularly designed to advocate on behalf of undocumented students in institutions of higher education" (p. 80). According to newspaper reporter Leonel Sanchez (1993), "About 400 educators and activists across the state, including in San Diego, participate in that network, named after a 1985 case in Alameda County, that allowed the California State University to charge resident fees for undocumented immigrants." Carlos, an undocumented student who graduated from UCLA in 1993 credited the *Leticia "A" Network* for his higher education

success (Sanchez 1993).

Undocumented students who aspire to pursue a college education after the *Leticia “A”* ruling were able to do so. By going to college, again, they were mobilizing the *Leticia “A”* ruling which afforded them with in-state tuition rates (Abrego 2008). However, both their victory and the mobilization of the ruling came with some resistance from people working in public state schools of higher education.

### **Derailing the Mobilization of the *Leticia “A”* Ruling**

Since the *Leticia “A”* (1985) ruling undocumented students were able to attend community colleges and four-year institutions (both the Cal State University and UC University) at in-state tuition rates (Wilkinson 1990). However, a “street-level bureaucrat” name David P. Bradford working for the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) used his discretion and refused to enroll undocumented students as California residents (Lipsky 1980; Wilkinson 1990). For his actions, UCLA administrators relief Bradford from his position at the university. He retaliated by suing the UC system in 1986 arguing UCLA wrongfully admitted undocumented students to its campuses at in-state tuition rates (Wilkinson 1990; Perez 1991). In 1990, the court sided with Bradford and by 1991, UCLA administrators implemented policy to keep undocumented students out of their institution by charging out-of-state tuition rates (Perez 1991; Gordon 1992).

Irma Muñoz, an undocumented student had applied to UC Davis in 1991, but because of the changes taking place in the UC system concerning undocumented students, her application was flagged for lacking certain information (Lapin 1993; Nicosia 2017). In an interview with *The 74*, an online news site dedicated to issues about education in America, Muñoz recalled how almost overnight her life changed after someone leaked her story (Nicosia 2017). As newspaper

reporter Lisa Lapin (1993) wrote, Muñoz was, "...thrust into the spotlight by those eager for her to testify as a model immigrant." Muñoz remembers applying to college right around the time anti-immigrant Californians ramped up their assaults on the immigrant community. She said, "...unfortunately my case was used publicly as a debate point during the controversy over Proposition 187" (Nicosia 2017). While Muñoz was in the process of fixing her immigration status, she was still mortified by the fact she was now a public figure (Nicosia 2017).

In this context, Muñoz worked alongside pro-immigrant law makers to open up affordable access to higher education for undocumented students (Koury 1993; Lapin 1993). For her pro-immigrant stance, three anti-immigrant young men, on two separate occasions, assaulted her on the UC Davis campus (Koury 1993; Lapin 1993). However, these assaults did not discourage Muñoz from voicing her support for undocumented students. Muñoz used her experience to raise awareness among the Latinx/Chicanx student population. In a talk she gave at Stanford university, she said:

The attack came not when they cut my hair, not when they scratched my arms ... It came when they wrote 'wetback' on my leg. That was an attack on all of us. (as quoted in, Koury 1993)

Like Muñoz, other undocumented students found the door shut as they made their way into higher education institutions in California. However, they did not allow closed doors to stop them from pursuing their college aspirations. For some, their stories were featured in newspaper articles all throughout the 1990s. Rafael Ibarra, for example, a 19-year old high school valedictorian petition immigration authorities hoping to get a break to pursue his college aspirations (Perry 1993). Carlos, who graduated from UCLA, shared with a newspaper reporter how he paid for tuition: loans (Sanchez 1993). Other students applied for private monies (Guzmán-Garcia 2012). Some undocumented students turned to the more affordable community

college (Acosta 1999) or the California State University (McEntee 1995). In some cases, undocumented students found ways to sidestep such exclusionary practices such as lying on their college application (Legon 1995). One undocumented young woman who went this route stated:

It doesn't feel good to have to lie in order to continue with my education ... But I also don't think it's fair that racists are filing lawsuits to try to kick us out of school. (as quoted in Legon 1995)

### **Hunger Strike at the University of California, Los Angeles**

About two years after the *Leticia "A" (1985)* ruling, undocumented Latinx/Chicanx students and their peers staged a hunger strike at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) (Ashcraft 1987; Gibbons 1987). It had been about a year since Bradford had sue UCLA for firing him after he refused to enroll undocumented students as California residents. The protest at the UCLA campus concern the financial situation of undocumented students. A group of Latinx/Chicanx students were demanding financial support for undocumented students on campus. Among the strikers were supporters and potential beneficiaries of the protest. At least twenty undocumented students were present that day (Ashcraft 1987). Ashcraft (1987) and Gibbons (1987) interviewed one undocumented student, who said was ready to drop out of UCLA because the financial aid office took away her financial aid monies. She stated:

They (UCLA officials) took away my financial aid that I had a right to ... We are here just to educate ourselves. That's all we want. (As quoted in, Gibbons 1987)

This case highlights how undocumented young adults with the support of peers were politically active on their campus. Together, they raised an issue that may have (or not) been unknown to school administrators. Further, it shows they were strategic about their actions. Having many people present at the protest who were both undocumented and documented was strategic. The idea is to create a space were undocumented students can be visible and at the

same time blend in (Villegas 2010).

### **The Prop. 187 Era**

A third case involving undocumented students took place in the early 1990s. Seif, Ullman, and Núñez-Mchiri (2014:185) suggest:

Undocumented youth began political organizing around the time of California's Proposition 187, the 1994 "Save Our State" ballot initiative that aimed to bar immigrants without legal status from receiving social services, health care and public education.

Newspaper reporters Daniel de Vise and Joe Segura (1994) add:

The students who have become [Save Our State] activists seem to reflect a hodgepodge of situations and views. Some are undocumented students who stand to lose their right to education. Others are legal students who oppose the measure on principal.

For Martinez (2014), Prop. 187 sparked the emergence of the UYYAM. Martinez argues, "The Undocumented Youth Movement emerged as a site of youth organizing against anti-immigrant policies" (p. 2). While I agree with Martinez (2014), that undocumented youth/young adults have stood up against anti-immigrant policy over the years adding to the emergence of the UYYAM, I do not believe this was the only factor. I see other factors contributing greatly to the emergence of the movement as well. For example, the mobilization of the *Plyler v. Doe ruling* (1982), the *Leticia "A"* ruling, and the AB 540 law in California (Abrego 2008). Without undocumented youth and young adults going to school every day such rulings would mean nothing. Further, there would be no "model" students to point to.

During the Prop. 187 era many Latinx/Chicanx students, both undocumented and documented took to the streets to defend their educational right all throughout California (Sanchez 1994). This included middle school (Bloom and Roletti 1994), high school (Anima 1994), and college students (Jones 1994). However, not everyone took to the streets. Many

Latinx/Chicanx students went to school to show their devotion to their education (Downey and Gutierrez 1994; Hughes and Portillo 1994; Menendez 1997). This was their way to resist and defy the intentions behind Prop. 187.

In the Prop. 187 context, some undocumented students came out as undocumented to raise awareness. Vladimir Cerna, a student at a Cal State University, is one example (Tamaki 1996). Cerna disclosed his legal status in a newspaper interview (Enriquez 1994). The hate mail and phone calls soon followed (Gorman 1996). However, that did not stop undocumented Latinx/Chicanx students from voicing their concerns. Some spoke to newspaper reporters. The Long Beach Press documented some of these voices coming out of this era.

Maribel Martinez, an undocumented student said,

“I’m here to say, ‘Listen to me: Proposition 187 is wrong.’ It gets me mad because I want to go to school and I want to stay in school. What will I do if Proposition 187 passes?”

Melissa Martinez, a college student stated,

“I want them (undocumented students) to use me - I’m documented and I’m here to speak out for them ... this will show that we will stick together.”

While some undocumented youth/young adults spoke to the press during the Prop. 187 to express their concerns, other students resisted this anti-immigrant policy in other ways. Alberto Cisneros, a high-school student, for example, organized an afterschool rally to provide students a different venue to push back against Prop.187 and the anti-immigrant atmosphere it had created (Vigil 1994). According to Newspaper reporter Vigil (1994), Cisneros worked his networks to put together the anti-Prop. 187 rally. This event brought together students and community leaders from all levels of society. Through this community event, Vigil (1994) suggest, Cisneros

“freely revealed in his speeches” he and his family were undocumented. A bold move in a time where anti-immigrant forces were extremely active.

### **Informal Support Groups**

In college, undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults supported each other. Fredi García-Alverdín (2015), who attended a community college in California in the late 1990s found little institutional support. However, Fredi and his friends (some undocumented like himself) supported each other (p. 25). This support came in the form of an informal group (Valenzuela 1999). Supporting each other was one of the main purpose of AB 540 groups that were formed after 2001. According to Anguiano (2011) “... early groups ... their primary purpose was support, not advocacy, for the DREAM Act (p. 89). Supporting each other was not an easy. Undocumented students were few in higher education institutions rather than in the shadows as suggested by some scholars and undocumented young adults. A 1992 study carried out by the Auditor General of California found, out of about 35,000 students attending San Diego State University no more than 90 students were said to be undocumented. The number mentioned above probably got smaller after 1995 when the Cal State University system began charging undocumented students out of state tuition rates to attend (Petix 1995).

### **The late 1990s**

In the late 1990s, some undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults, often students, continued the strategy of sharing their stories with newspaper reporters to bring light to their situation (Acosta 1999; Ainsworth 1999). The stories of Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults, as had been the case in the early 1990s caught the attention of people working in immigrant rights associations, but also lawmakers who then freely shared them in congressional

spaces (Acosta 1999). In some cases, undocumented young adults themselves told their own story, for example, in Sacramento (Ainsworth 1999).

In Los Angeles, California some Latinx/Chicanx undocumented youth/young adults got involved with local immigrant rights associations working in their communities (Seif 2004). They supported and rallied behind pro-immigrant bills meant to open up access to affordable education for undocumented students in public schools of higher education. Similarly, in states like Texas undocumented youth and young adult were doing the same (Rincón 2008). These efforts were ongoing since the early 1990s (Koury 1993). Meanwhile, undocumented high schools students continued to mobilize the *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) ruling by going to school. There, they became involved in clubs and other school organizations where they cultivated and acquired different social and life skills (Gonzales 2008). At the college level, some undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults continued to pursue their dreams however way they could.

According to Seif (2011) the “activism” that took place in the late 1990s in California, for example, “created networks of experienced youth organizers” (p. 67-70). Both Seif (2004) and Abrego (2008) point out undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults were instrumental in passing the first law (AB 540) guaranteeing in-state-tuition rates for undocumented students in California. These victories brought forth by Latinx/Chicanx undocumented young people and their allies has allowed a greater number of undocumented students to attend college. These young people have played more than “residual roles” as suggested by some scholars. However,

only few scholars have documented these earlier struggles (Seif 2004; Seif 2016; Burciaga and Martinez 2017).

### **Final Reflection**

In this section, I have demonstrated different ways everyday undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults have contributed to the emergence of the UYYAM. I argued that going to school, that is, “mobilizing the law” (Plyler v. Doe, Leticia “A”, AB 540) was one factor behind the emergence of the UYYAM. This created pathways where new cohorts of undocumented students could follow suit. They took their rightful place among their documented peers. When anti-immigrants folks assaulted their education through litigation or policy, for example, undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults responded alongside documented peers and supporters. Some stayed in class to counter anti-immigrant policy such as Prop. 187, while others took to the streets. Undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults did not shy away from the fight. Some were more vocal than others (for example, the UCLA hunger strike), nonetheless they all contributed, in one way or another, to the emergence of the UYYAM. Throughout the 1990s, undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults spoke to newspaper reporters to bring awareness to their situation. These efforts increasingly caught the attention of immigrant rights organizations and pro-immigrant lawmakers who used their stories in congressional spaces. This eventually led to the introduction of the DREAM Act in 2001.

These early efforts are extremely important. Tester (2004) points out, “the first six years of the AIDS movement was dominated by self-help behaviors and everyday life activities” and “argues that these activities are in fact social movement behavior” (p. 52). Following this line of thinking, I argue the actions of undocumented youth and young adults such as going to school (that is, mobilizing the law), protesting anti-immigrant policy targeting their education openly or

in private (for example, Prop. 187), and speaking to newspaper reporters to shed light on their situation were factors in the emergence of the UYYAM. In those days, few undocumented youth/young adults attended college or universities. Yet, they fought tooth and nail for their education through litigation (for example, the plaintiff of the *Letica "A"* case), protest, and by showing up to class.

Every year, roughly 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools throughout the country (Drachman 2006). Over half of this number are Latinx/Chicanx (Drachman and Langran 2008). As more undocumented Latinx/Chicanx youth/young adults mobilized the *Plyler v. Doe (1982)* ruling they created a situation which local, state, and national lawmakers could no longer ignore. The growing presence of undocumented youth/young adults in educational settings raised moral and political questions. At the national level, lawmakers answered the question of what to do with the undocumented student population achieving high school, but also college diplomas in 2001: The Dream Act. The scholarly story told from this point forward suggest immigrant rights associations and pro-immigrant lawmakers began organizing, mobilizing, and presenting undocumented youth/young adults to the U.S. public leading to the emergence of the UYYAM. But as I have attempted to show that is not the whole story.

We are facing new challenges and perhaps new opportunities. While congress folks have introduced a new version of the DREAM Act, we have a sitting president (that is, Donald J. Trump) who has clearly shown his stance, through rhetoric, policy, and immigration enforcement, toward the undocumented immigrant community (American Immigration Council 2017). Even before Trump became president, he demonized the undocumented people by saying they were a threat to national security. When he became president, Trump got rid of the DACA

program, which created a situation in which many undocumented young people graduating from high schools no longer have access to work permits and social security numbers. In this anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere, I aim to better understand undocumented Latinx/Chicanx activists/advocates, that is, young people who have brought their situation to the public and political attention. Behind, every major immigration decision, laws, and executive orders are grassroots activists/advocates who brought the issues to the public and political arenas. Of these activists, some were allies and others were undocumented themselves. This thesis will profile current Latinx/Chicanx undocu-activist/advocates who are fighting for comprehensive, inclusive, and humane immigration reform. I want to understand their experiences with struggle, their motivations, and challenges in fighting for a future law or set of laws that would encompass the largest immigration reform in recent history. In what follows, I will present the literature about undocumented Latinx/Chicanx activists/advocates to begin understanding their activism.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: Undocumented Young Adult Activists**

As I write this literature review, undocumented young people and their allies continue to show their commitment to fight on behalf of their communities, families, and friends through public protest and other activity. On the 9 of November 2017 undocumented young adults and their allies staged school walkouts throughout the country, while many others occupied the Hart congressional building, were police arrested at least fifteen (Gallucci 2017). These young people are demanding a “Clean DREAM Act” which does not criminalize their families, communities, and their lives<sup>9</sup>. However, the Trump administration has created a hostile anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate through rhetoric, policy, and immigration enforcement.

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<sup>9</sup> John, one of the participants in this study explained that “A Clean Dream Act basically means no wall, no border security funding. Basically, giving amnesty to all undocumented immigrants.

According to a 2017 Human Rights Watch report, the Trump administration has broadened the definition of what constitutes a “criminal offense” (P. 12). This same report suggests something as simple as J-walking is grounds for deportation. Buenavista and Gonzales (2010-2011) who examined the Dream Act “in the context of Filipino history” (P. 29) argues, “[the] passage of the Dream Act creates the potential to criminalize progressive activism...” (P. 30). Buenavista and Gonzales (2010-2011) suggest, “... radical political activism can be mistaken as “crimes against the government” and “offenses that jeopardize national security” – two practices in violation of good moral character” (P. 32).

Negrón-Gonzales (2015) refers to undocumented immigrant youth activism as a “counter-spectacle” or what Gonzales (2008) refers to as, “planned action organized” by immigrant youth. These actions varied by the location where undocumented young people find themselves (Burciaga and Martinez 2017), and do not always involved high risks situations that can lead to both arrest and possible deportation (Gutiérrez 2016). Some of these actions include acts of civil disobedience (Galindo 2012; Negrón-Gonzales 2015; Burciaga and Martinez 2017), anti-deportation campaigns (Patler 2018a), and infiltration of detention centers (Heredia 2014). Others have included “mock graduations” which have also ended in the arrest of young people (Gonzales 2008). Such actions also include “educating and informing” their communities, families, and themselves (Nájera 2015:37). Yet, for public faces of the UYYAM, the concern of both possible arrest and deportation is a real concern (Unzueta Carrasco 2018).

With the increasingly public appearance of undocumented youth/young adults and their political activity throughout the United States, scholars from different academic disciplines using a number of methods began documenting their political resistance and defiance. This level of “attention” stands in sharp contrast to the interest scholars placed on the political activity before

the 2000s (Zeynep 2017:30). In some ways, scholars missed the opportunity to “lift up the [voices] of” undocumented youth and young adults prior to gaining wide and public national attention (Creswell 2014:20).

The stagnant scholarship about undocumented youth and young adults political activity prior to becoming public figures points to a lack of concern of the academic community for this population back in those days (Machi and McEvoy 2012:15). At some level, the academic community may have viewed undocumented youth and young adults as vulnerable and in need of protection (Seif 2004).

The few scholars who spearheaded the undocumented youth/young adult literature portrait these young people as resilient individuals committed to pursuing their college aspirations in the face of multiple barriers – one being their immigration legal status (Olivas 1994; Rosas 1995). In the face of systemic barriers such as the denial to attend college at in-state tuition rates, undocumented youth and young adults took it upon themselves, with the support of allies, to fight for their right to affordable and inclusive education at American colleges and universities (Olivas 1994; Rosas 1995).

Olivas (1994) and Rosas (1995), both documented how undocumented young adults suit the University of California system in the early 1980s, again supported by their pro-immigrant rights allies, after the UC system required these young adults to pay out-of-state tuition fees. Undocumented young people were at the forefront of the lawsuit aimed at ensuring their right to higher education. According to Seif (2004:220), “the lawsuit could not move forward without the active participation of undocumented students as plaintiffs. They also needed to speak out to raise public awareness and support.”

While the literature about undocumented youth and young adults political activity was scarce, newspaper reporters documented some of this activity. Undocumented young adults were involved politically on their school campuses – while strategically concealing their identity (Ashcraft 1987; Gibbons 1987; Villegas 2010), but also took to the streets against measures targeting their education at times explicitly making visible their undocumented status (Tamaki 1996; Vigil 1994). While some reporters portrait undocumented youth as gullible (Bloom and Roletti 1994) – this does not take away from the fact undocumented youth and young adults took to the streets and/or remained in their classrooms to fight for their education (Anima 1994; Menendez 1997).

By the late 1990s, some scholars began working closely together with undocumented young adults associated with an immigrant rights association in the Los Angeles area working to open-up access to higher education for undocumented students (Seif 2004). In Texas, Rincón (2008), documented a similar situation involving undocumented young adults and their allies. Collectively, these studies showed how undocumented young people were involved in the fight for higher education. From rallies to telling their own stories in congressional spaces, undocumented young adults made their presence and voices count (Seif 2004). Burciaga and Martinez (2017:458) argue, “The 1990s through the early 2000s were crucial years in shaping the undocumented youth movement in Los Angeles and Orange County.” However, academic interest did not gain traction until at least 2001. According to Gonzales (2015:519),

Since the introduction of the federal Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act in 2001, their circumstances have captured the attention of the American public as well as the academic community.

The academic community has surely become interested in the political activity of undocumented young people. In the last two decades, scholars have churned out various research

articles about undocumented young adults and their political activity (Seif 2004; Abrego 2008; Gonzales 2008; Gonzales and Chavez 2012; DeAngelo, Schuster, and Stebleton 2016; Williams 2016). Central to these scholarly articles has been the participation of undocumented youth and young adults. Undocumented young adults welcomed researchers into their organizations and provided a first-person view into what their political activity looks like on the ground (Gonzales 2008; Nicholls 2013).

Much of this literature has focused on the political activism of undocumented young adults in California (Nicholls 2013; Terriquez 2015; Negrón-Gonzales 2015; DeAngelo et al. 2016; Enriquez and Saguy 2016; Schwiertz 2016), but some scholars have brought attention to the political activity of undocumented youth/young adults and their allies in other states, such as Illinois (Seif 2014; Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 2014; Swerts 2015), Michigan (Corruncker 2012), Arizona (Galindo 2012), and both New York and New Jersey (Lauby 2016). Yet, while most of the research about undocumented young adult activists has been carried out in California, it is heavily concentrated in areas such as Los Angeles (Seif 2004; Nicholls 2013; Hinton 2015; Schwiertz 2016) and Orange County (Gonzales 2008; Gonzales and Chavez 2012). Less attention has been paid to areas closer to the border such as San Diego County where undocumented activism is well and alive (Getrich 2008; Valdivia and Valdivia 2014; Schwiertz 2016).

My contribution to the literature about undocumented young people and their political involvement is to bring attention to North County, San Diego, a hotbed not only for immigration enforcement (Valdivia 2019), but also ground for political resistance and defiance. I also contribute to the literature about undocumented youth and young adults political activity by writing as an undocumented scholar. Few undocumented or previously undocumented scholars

have carried out their own research (Unzueta Carrasco and Hinda Seif 2014; Anguiano 2011).

Gonzales (2015) suggest,

Many undocumented immigrant youth are now conducting their own research. These “cultural insiders” have a unique set of insights that can be of great scholarly importance when paired with rigorous research training.

At some level, I am writing myself into the literature about undocumented youth/young adult and their political activity. However, this is no easy feat.

According to Chang et al. (2016:1168),

... being undocumented is an experience that can only be safely written about after the fact. In other words, if I were still undocumented, I would run severe risks in divulging such information... this approach is both personally rewarding and has larger implications for the larger undocumented population. Just being able to write about my undocumented status is empowering and cathartic. At the same time, I know that I am not alone in my experience and for others to see themselves reflected in this work can also serve that same purpose.

My insights as an older undocumented student allows me to weave together the political involvement of undocumented youth and young adults throughout the 1990s with the current and ongoing struggle. However, I am mindful that my contribution is only partial since I am speaking as Latinx/Chicanx.

Much of the literature has focused on Latinx/Chicanx undocumented young adults. However, some scholars have begun to bring attention to the political involvement of undocumented Asian (Wong and Ramos 2011; Buenavista and Gonzales 2011; DeAngelo, Schuster, and Stebleton 2016; Schwiertz 2016) and Black young adults who are politically active in the UYYAM (Palmer 2017; Patler 2018b). Further, organizations such as the UndocuBlack Network are also bringing this issue to the forefront (<http://undocublack.org/asdasd>). While

Black undocumented young adults themselves are making their voice heard through different media outlets (Anderson 2016).

### **UYYAM: An Overview**

Overall, the scholarly literature about undocumented youth and young adults and their political activity highlights their continued resistance and defiance of the anti-immigrant status quo created through rhetoric, policy, and immigration enforcement by local, statewide, and national level law makers, public officials, and everyday citizens (Seif 2004; Gonzales 2008; Nicholls 2013; Cabaniss 2016; Patler 2018a).

Some scholars relying on field work, in-depth interviews, and content analysis have brought attention to the public actions of undocumented youth/young adult led organizations that make up the UYYAM (The S.I.N. Collective 2007; Gonzales 2008; Corrunker 2012; Morrissey 2013; Patler 2018a). Swerts (2015:345), for example, relying on data collected through field work and in-depth interviews in Chicago as she observed and interacted with an undocumented youth/young adult led organization - Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL) between 2010 and 2012 found undocumented youth/young adults are publicly sharing their stories as a “political tool” and as a way to gain more support for their struggle. Specifically, Swerts (2015:346) argues, “... storytelling is used as a means to incorporate undocumented youth into a community, mobilize support, and legitimize grievances.”

Other scholars have turned their attention to the “backstage” of what takes place in undocumented youth/young adult led organizations (Cabaniss 2016; Fiorito and Nicholls 2016). It is in the backstage where undocumented youth/young adults and their allies practice for their public performances that have captivated the American public over the years (Gonzales 2008; Cabaniss 2016; Fiorito and Nicholls 2016). Cabaniss (2016) relying on field work data collected

in 2010 and supplemented by both in-depth interviews and a content analysis of movement documents sheds light on gender dynamics that play out as undocumented youth/young adults prepared their stories for public use.

Cabaniss (2016:15) found what she refers to as a “gendered division of emotional labor” as undocumented youth/young adults refined and later told their stories publicly. For the most part, young women were more public with their emotions as they shared their stories while young men took on supportive roles (Cabaniss 2016). However, young women are doing more than just displaying their emotions in public, Milkman and Terriquez (2012) found young women are leading the UYYAM.

Undocumented youth/young adults and their allies working in local, state, and national level organizations have informed much of the literature about undocumented youth/young adults and their political activity (Nicholls 2013; Gonzales 2015). Gonzales (2015:521) suggests,

Many undocumented student groups are now being asked to participate in senior thesis projects, doctoral dissertations, localized ethnographic research, and larger studies. As a result, the same individuals are sometimes sharing their stories with more than half a dozen researchers.

I contribute to the literature about undocumented youth and young adults with an attempt to bring attention to the political activity of undocumented young people before 2001 and tying it to the ongoing struggle. My hunch is that undocumented young women and their allies were also leading the struggle prior to the emergence of the UYYAM. That their work has carried over to today. Scholars are encouraged to unearth these efforts.

The undocumented youth/young adult struggle is characterized by what Terriquez (2015:345) refers to as, “intersectional mobilization” or “high levels of activism and commitment among movement participants who represent a disadvantaged subgroup within a

broader marginalized constituency.” This includes people who are members of both the undocumented and LGBTQ communities (Seif 2014) and represent different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Corruncker 2012; Cabaniss 2016; Dao 2017; Buenavista 2018; Patler 2018b). In her ethnographic study, Corruncker (2012), for example, mentioned “Ali,” a twenty-five-year-old undocumented queer man from Iran who is a leading figure within the UYYAM.

Ali was one of five young people<sup>10</sup> who occupied senator McCain’s office in Arizona in 2010 – what some scholars referred to as the “first act of civil disobedience” by undocumented youth/young adults and their ally (Corruncker 2012; Galindo 2012:590). This was around the time undocumented youth and young adults began “escalating” their political activity (Corruncker 2012:145). Other scholars have also highlighted the racial/ethnic alliances forged by undocumented youth and young adults (Wong and Ramos 2011; Dao 2017).

When the movement gained notice around 2007, undocumented youth/young adults and their allies, specifically involved in immigrant rights organizations, relied heavily on the “perfect DREAMer” narrative (Lauby 2016:376). They were presented to the American public by either themselves or their allies as well-behaved, educated, and a fairly youthful group of people who played by the rules despite their immigration status (Lauby 2016; Schwiertz 2016). This falls in line with what sociologist Nicholls (2013b:84) refers to a “national identification” strategy. By this Nicholls (2013b) means undocumented people embrace everything valued by American society if they are to be seen as human. In fact, Nicholls (2013b:85) argues, “The more hostile

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<sup>10</sup> Tania Unzueta, Yahaira Carrillo, Lizbeth Mateo, and their ally – Raul Alcaraz also participated in the McCain’s Office sit-in (Galindo 2012). However, I would not call this the first act of civil disobedience. As mentioned in the Statement of the Problem, some undocumented youth and young adults have been politically active since at least the mid-1980s. The example I provided is a hunger strike at UCLA in which undocumented students participated (See Ashcraft 1987 and Gibbons 1987).

the environment, the more undocumented immigrants need to stress their identification with national cultures and moralities.” Nicholls (2013b:85) clearly states this is not the only strategy afforded to undocumented people and their allies living in the U.S., but that such strategy “assumes greater prominence under conditions of greater hostility...”

Undocumented youth/young adults and their allies had forged a powerful, but fairly narrow statement for why they deserved to be included into the fabric of U.S. society. As Lauby (2016:375) argues, “the use of the ‘perfect DREAMer’ narrative has led to the marginalization of other undocumented migrants who have been implicitly constructed as less deserving because of their age or level of education.” The more undocumented youth and young adults portrait themselves as good people they casted a shadow over people who did not possess those qualities.

Over the years some young undocumented youth/young adults involved in the UYYAM began deconstructing and unpacking the perfect DREAMer narrative. In the process, they began disidentifying with the strategy mentioned above (Morrissey 2013). Today, undocumented youth and young adults aim to include people who stand at the margins of U.S. society (Corrunker 2012; Sirriyeh 2018). They have turned their attention away from the “DREAMer narrative” in support of undocumented people undergoing continuous assaults coming from anti-immigrant law makers, the American public, and more recently the current president (Sirriyeh 2018). Undocumented youth and young adults continue to be involved in anti-deportation campaigns, but also continue educating and informing their communities through, for example, Know Your Rights events (Nájera 2015; Sirriyeh 2018).

While some scholars argue “civil disobedience” was key to the many changes brought forth by the UYYAM such as the implementation of the DACA program (Negron-Gonzales 2016; Pérez 2016), I contend everyday forms of resistance and defiance such as going to school

(that is, mobilizing the law), educating, and informing others have also contributed greatly to the struggle (Scott 1989; Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Abrego 2008). We should be careful to give “civil disobedience” more value than less contentious forms of resistance and defiance.

Scholars have shown undocumented youth and young adults have allies at all levels in society. In California, for example, the passage of AB 540 was a team effort involving Latinx/Chicanx legislators, immigrant rights organizations, and undocumented youth and young adults (Seif 2004). Undocumented youth and young adults have also motivated some of their educators to become involved in their movement as allies (Chen and Rhoads 2016). This support is crucial in states where anti-immigrant lawmakers continue to deny undocumented youth and young adults access to higher education institutions (Peña 2012).

The internet has been a useful tool to connect, communicate, advocate, organize, and mobilize with other undocumented youth and young adults (Corrunker 2012: 147; Valdivia 2015; Zimmerman 2016). Some well-known undocumented leaders have given credence to web-spaces such as the DREAM Act Portal (DAP) as being essential to undocumented youth/young adult activism (Corrunker 2012:147). It is online that undocumented youth and young adults find, inform, and support each other often leading to getting political involved offline (Valdivia 2015; Zimmerman 2016). They can follow undocumented-led national level organizations and stay informed within the safety of their home (Valdivia 2015). I learned about the AB 540 law through the online forum (Dream Act Portal) while living in a rural town in Louisiana.

### **Final Reflection**

This section provided an overview of the literature about undocumented youth/young adults and their political activity. I argue that while most of the existing literature successfully captures the political involvement of undocumented Latinx/Chicanx young adult activists, my

study will contribute to this body of knowledge by examining the experiences of young people under the Trump presidency. To my knowledge, only a handful of studies have begun documenting these experiences (Andrade 2017). The aim of the current study is to highlight the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx activists/advocates in San Diego County, California. My project will explore how their efforts have been shaped - both professionally and personally - by the current political climate created by the Trump presidency.

### **THEORY: Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)**

In this study, I interviewed undocumented Latinx/Chicanx activists living in North County, San Diego. I used a Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) framework to interview participants and to analyze the data. LatCrit is a useful framework because it acknowledges the diversity of the Latinx community. The LatCrit perspective considers race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and immigration legal status. As an undocumented Latinx/Chicanx scholar, I want to speak from this position. For this reason, I situate my work in the LatCrit perspective. In this section, I will briefly describe the history of the LatCrit framework, describe its central tenets, and finally how it applies to the current study.

#### **Origins of LatCrit**

In the mid-1990s, a group of Latinx law professors and non-Latinx colleagues attended a Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA) annual meeting in Dorado, Puerto Rico, where they devoted a full-day to discussing the invisibility of Latinx/Chicanx in critical legal scholarship, specifically, in critical race theory (Hernandez-Truyol 1997; Valdes 2005). This gathering was titled, *Representing Latina/o Communities: Critical Race Theory and Practice* (Valdes 2005:153). That evening, a group of friends, who had attended the academic meeting earlier in

the day, created the “LatCrit” name. On this night, the group also decided to continue moving this school of thought forward (Hernandez-Truyol 1997; Valdes 1997:1090).

As an extension of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the LatCrit framework, at its core, carries many of the central tenets belonging to CRT (Huber and Malagon 2007; Huber 2010). A CRT perspective considers how the lives of People of Color are affected by various forms of oppression (Huber 2010:77). In other words, it considers how race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality create barriers in people’s lives (Huber 2010:78).

CRT scholars contend that white hegemony is structural, institutional, and society wide (Taylor 1998). In this light, for example, CRT scholars argue United States law is in the service of white hegemony (Spade 2011; Taylor 1998). It is through law that People of Color are stripped away of legal protections (Taylor 1998). Apart from the law, white Euro-Americans use ideology to maintain white hegemony. For example, Taylor (1998) explains how white Euro-Americans use both myths of meritocracy and color blindness to openly disadvantage people of color. Through colorblindness, for example, white Euro-Americans have dismantled affirmative action policy on college campuses by claiming it is discriminating white Euro-Americans (Taylor 1998). CRT contests these myths through an interdisciplinary approach by showing how structures and institutions such as the education system disadvantage students of color (Huber 2010). The founders of CRT oppose Euro-centric knowledge by legitimizing the knowledge of People of Color (Taylor 1998).

### **The Basic Tenets of LatCrit**

In the article, *Under Construction--LatCrit Consciousness, Community, and Theory*, Francisco Valdes (1997:1089) points out, “LatCrit theory is the emerging field of legal scholarship that examines critically the social and legal positioning of [Latinx’s], especially

[Latinx's] within the United States, to help rectify the shortcomings of existing social and legal conditions." However, the LatCrit perspective is open to non-Latinx/Chicanx scholars (Valdes 1997).

Valdes (1997:1092) explains that "almost from the outset [they] sought to develop a theory about legal theory." According to Valdes (1997:1092) "this theorizing about legal theory is prompted and informed by the histories and experiences of Critical Legal Studies, Feminist Legal Theory, Critical Race Theory, and, to some extent, Queer Legal Theory. It is a project infused with a desire to transform theory itself (Valdes 1997:1096).

Valdes (1997:1093-1094) presents four functions of LatCrit theory:

1. *The Production of Knowledge*
2. *The Advancement of Social Transformation*
3. *The Expansion and Connection of Anti-Subordination Struggle(s)*
4. *The Cultivation of Community and Coalition, both within and beyond the confines of legal academia in the United States*

### **LatCrit in Action**

LatCrit is useful to understand the experiences of undocumented Latinx/Chicanx activists because it legitimizes their experiential knowledge. Lindsay Perez Huber and Maria C. Malagon (2007) used a LatCrit theoretical framework to gain insights from six undocumented Latinx students (Guatemalan, Salvadorian, and Mexican), between the age of nineteen and twenty-six, about their experiences as students in California higher education institutions. This small sample included both female (four) and male (two) students who were attending a California community college (two) while the rest (four) were attending a University of California (UC). All students were interviewed in the Spring and Summer of 2006. Through a LatCrit analysis Huber and

Malagon (2007: 842) found that all the undocumented Latinx students in their study experienced “institutional neglect,” that is, a lack of social support, financial support, and a campus climate where they felt excluded.

By allowing these six undocumented Latinx students to talk about their experiences Huber and Malagon (2007) were able to bring forth some of the structural barriers affecting these students’ as they navigated their educational setting. In this light, I intend to open a space where undocumented Latinx/Chicanx young people can share their experiences. In what follows, I outline the methods I used to create a space where Latinx/Chicanx young people can begin sharing their experiences.

## **METHODS**

Politics and policy have shaped my research – it both inspired my study and also impacted the scope of my sample. Like many members of U.S. society, I had been closely watching the 2016 presidential election through both social media and public television. Donald J. Trump’s comments about building up the U.S./Mexico border wall, a so-called urgent matter of national security, and also his blatant assaults, rhetorically, but also through mandates on both documented and undocumented immigrants particularly of color stood out to me the most. It was clear Trump was targeting communities of color by making their lives unbearable. For example, Trump promised to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, implemented under the Obama administration, allowing undocumented young adults a chance to live more comfortably in the United States. There was also Trump’s anti-Mexican rhetoric which painted people from Mexico as so-called criminals, drug traffickers, and rapist. As an undocumented scholar who is both Mexican and a member of the immigrant community, Trump’s assaults hit a nerve.

In this context, I began to consider what Trump's assault on immigrants (both documented and undocumented), the DACA program, and Mexicans would mean for members of the Undocumented Youth/Young Adult Movement (UYYAM). I had been following the UYYAM since at least 2010, never an active participant directly, but always keeping up with their/our struggle, resistance, etc. Through the Internet, I followed the work of national undocumented youth/young adult organizations like United We Dream and DreamACTivist.org. I also followed local undocumented youth/young adult led organizations like San Diego Dream Team (SDDT). In late 2018, I not only began following San Diego Border Dreamers (SDBD), when I learned they were actively pushing back against Trump's insults and actions, but also participated in my very first Dream Rally.

The UYYAM Movement gained noticeable attention under the Obama administration. Collectively, UYYAM members, supporters, and followers had persuaded president Obama to do something about their/our situation. Through their efforts, members of the UYYAM and their many allies gained the DACA program, which protected undocumented youth from deportation and provided them with a way to legally work, live, and play in the United States. However, on the horizon was a wealthy-White-businessperson, spitting out racist ideology, insisting he would end the DACA program as soon as he became president of the United States. Many members of the UYYAM embody what Trump seems to regard as unworthy of U.S. society – they were immigrants, DACA recipients, and many of them Mexican.

Naturally, I became interested in the experiences of “Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic” (UUU) Latinx/Chicanx activists under the Trump administration. I knew UUU members of the UYYAM would resist and defy Trump, so I wanted my study to capture such efforts. Donald J. Trump became president of the United States as I attempted to interview

people for my study. In office, Trump immediately began to carry out some of his campaign promises such as ending the DACA program. On September 2017, under Trump's order, Jeff Sessions appeared on national television to announce the end of the DACA program and set a deadline (March 5, 2018) supposedly for congress to do something about the situation of DACA recipients.

### **Data Collection and Strategies**

In this project, I sought to document, amplify, and legitimize the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx young adults who are involved directly and/or support the UYYAM. To do this, I went with the qualitative method closest to my heart: semi-structured interviews. Growing up, I sat around my family's kitchen table asking my parents questions about their journey to the United States: How did you cross the borderlands? Who crossed you? How much did it cost? What was the experience like?

I chose to use semi-structured interviews, a qualitative method because I was interested in participants' stories (Seidman 2013). Esterberg (2002) suggest, in-depth interviews “[allows] interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own ways” (p. 87). It is a way to “understand what life is like from perspectives other than our own” (p. 87). According to Seidman (2013), “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9).

An interview involves two people. This face-to-face interaction can be impacted by the race (Tamale 1996), gender (Williams and Heikes 1993) and power differences (Grenz 2005) of the interviewer/interviewee, and sets the stage for emotions to arise (Blee 1998; Tamale 1996). In her study, Tamale (1996), a Black woman and researcher found white students were hesitant to talk to her about race related issues, specifically the topic of racism, whereas as Black students

did not hesitate. Tamale (1996) suggest, “Black students spoke to [her] without inhibition” (p. 484). Further, Tamale (1996) found women shared more personal information than men (p. 489).

Overall, I felt participants shared personal details about their communities, families, and their lives such as the deportation of a parent, the policing of their communities, and the constant anguish arising from uncertain futures. Throughout the interviews there were moments of laughter, tears, and silence. In many ways, I could relate to much of what participants shared with me. For example, concern over the possible deportation of a family member or myself.

During the interview, I asked participants open-ended questions about their lives. My aim was to better understand the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx young adults who are directly involved and/or support the UYYAM and immigrant rights more broadly. I asked participants to tell me about themselves by asking about their education, family, etc. I started each interview with a similar question to get participants sharing details about their lives.

*Okay, so, am just going to start by asking you to ... tell me a little bit about yourself. Just ah ... your story, I am interested in your story.*

I also asked each participant whether they consider themselves activists (*Do you consider yourself an activist?*) and followed up with the following question: *If you were to give me a definition of an activist, or an image, description ... what would you tell me, who would be an activist, who fits that category?* Throughout the interviews I also probed for more information: *Can you tell me more about that? When you say you fixed your status, what do you mean by that? Are you talking like DACA, residency?*

Each interview took between 1 to 1.5 - hours and were carried out in private spaces agreed upon by both participants and me. I used a voice recorder to document the interviews after going over the consent form and getting approval from participants to do so. At the end of each interview, I provided each participant a \$10 - dollar gift card as a token of my appreciation.

I also provided each participant a list of resources about immigrant rights organizations and both health and mental clinics in the surrounding communities.

### **Study Participants and Sampling**

The sample was purposeful in that - I wanted to recruit participants if they self-identified as Latinx/Chicanx, an activists/advocate, ally, and/or actively followed immigration developments. Participants had to be involved at some level with immigrant rights issues not limited to the Undocumented Rights Movement.

I began my data collection efforts by reaching out to my networks both through email, social media, and in person. First, I send out an email describing the study and my interest in interviewing potential participants. In the email, I introduced myself, described the purpose the study, and outlined the eligibility requirements (at the time, Latinx/Chicanx, undocumented, self-identify as an activist). I also sent out Facebook messages to community organizations led by undocumented activists in San Diego County, California (for example, San Diego Dream Team). Lastly, I visited local grassroots organizations that support undocumented immigrants at a California State University and out in the community (for example, North County Immigration Task Force).

I got word from people (mainly young women; also, one local organization) who expressed a willingness to talk to me, however, the interviews never took place because of time and other constraints. For example, Members of San Diego Border Dreamers (SDBD) were not only willing to talk to me, but also invited me to come join the cause. One SDBD member responded to my email with the following message:

... We will be more than happy to collaborate with you. Half of our group will be flying to Washington D.C. and the other half is going to have an action on Monday March 5th at

12pm in front of San Diego College. We would love to have you at our event to meet some our members. My name is ... I manage communications and social media.

Here is my cell # ... ..

Feel free to give me a call if you have any questions.

I had contacted SDBD's through Facebook after one of my cohort members pointed me in their direction. Prior to this, I was unaware SDBD's existed. I was unable to meet SDBD's in person. SDBD had invited me to come out to an event they were hosting in San Diego, but as an undocumented researcher who uses public transportation, I was not comfortable traveling their way. There had been rumors circulating in the community about immigration officers sightings at main transit centers (Valdivia 2019). For this reason, meeting members of the SDBD's organization never took place.

A young Latinx woman was the first person who agreed to an interview. Talking to this young woman made me realize I needed to broaden my category of who I was looking to interview (originally, UUU activists). She did not identify as an activist or a member of the movement even though she follows their work and is actively involved. I felt it was important to include the experiences of various individuals working toward immigration justice, whether that be through the UYYAM or any other way.

## **The Participants**

In total, I interviewed 6 participants and provide sample details in terms of demographic summaries (Table 1) and descriptions of their lives.

*Table 1: Demographics of Sample.*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Immigration Legal Status</b>	<b>Childhood Arrival to U.S.</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Alyssa	20	Mexico	Bachelors in progress	DACA recipient	4-years-old	Latina	Female
Manuel	28	Mexico	Associate Degree in progress	U.S. permanent resident	2-months-old	Chicano	Male
John	29	Mexico	Masters Completed	DACA recipient	2-years-old	Mexican	Male
Inez	24	United States	Master's in progress	U.S. citizen	N/A	Chicana	Female
Frank	31	Mexico	Bachelors in progress	Undocumented	11-years-old	Mexican	Male
Jay	22	Mexico	Bachelors in Progress	DACA recipient	8-years-old	Latino	Male

Out of the six participants – four were men and two women. Five of the six participants were born in Mexico. Only one was born in the United States. One participant was a U.S. citizen, one a U.S. permanent resident, three were DACA recipients, and one said he was undocumented. The oldest participant was 31 years old. The youngest was 20 years old. The average age was 25.4 years old.

**Alyssa** was born in Mexico, but grew up in North County, San Diego (Oceanside, Carlsbad, and Encinitas) since the age of four. Her early childhood U.S. education started with kindergarten. At the time of the interview, she was a third-year student at a public state

university. Alyssa self-identify as a Dreamer, but did not embrace the undocumented and unafraid slogan and/or identity. Rather, she mentioned being undocumented and afraid. She became a DACA recipient in high school. Alyssa self-identified as an advocate and is involved with clubs both on campus and out in her community when possible. Her main focus and concern at the time of the interview was work, school, and the DACA deadline.

**Manuel** was born in Mexico, but grew up in North County, San Diego since he was two-months old. For about twenty-one years, Manuel grew up in North County, San Diego - near a U.S. military base. He grew up undocumented all those years and eventually became a U.S. permanent resident. At the time of the interview, Manuel was a second-year student at a community college. He is involved both on campus and in the community with organizations that support undocumented youth/young adults. In late 2017, for example, he traveled to D.C. to advocate for the passage of a “Clean Dream Act.” He did not self-identity as a Dreamer, DACA recipient, or Undocumented and Unafraid. However, he self-identified as an ally of the UYYAM and vow to keep fighting for the cause.

**John** was born in Mexico, but grew up in North County, San Diego since the age of two. By the third grade he was attending an elementary school in Oceanside. Manuel did not consider himself a good student growing up. At the time of the interview, he had achieved a master’s degree from a public state university. John did not self-identify as a Dreamer or embrace the undocumented and unafraid slogan and/or identity. Instead, John self-identified as a DACA recipient. He favors a bi-partisan solution for the situation of undocumented youth and young adults. John contributes to the UYYAM through an online organization where he shares information and chats with undocumented youth/young adults across the nation.

**Inez** was born in San Diego, California. Although she is a U.S. citizen, she has family members who are undocumented and empathizes with their struggles of living an undocumented life. At the time of the interview, Inez was a first-year graduate school student at a public state university. Inez does not identify as a Dreamer, a DACA recipient, or with the undocumented and unafraid slogan or identity. “It’s not my space,” she said. However, she self-identified as an ally to UYYAM. She works with a campus organization that supports the local undocumented immigrant community. She keeps up with the struggle of undocumented youth/young adults by following an online organization.

**Frank** was born in Mexico, but grew up in North County, San Diego since the age of eleven. He has lived in Escondido all of his life. Frank’s U.S. education started with middle school and by 2005 he had made his way into a state public university. At the time of the interview, Frank was a second-year student at a public state university. He was the only participant who self-identified as undocumented. Frank supports undocumented youth/young adults through a campus organization and is also involved out in the community.

**Jay** was born in Mexico, but grew up in North County, San Diego since that age of eight. In high school, he played sports. His legal status was not an issue back then. In his senior year of high school, Jay found out he was undocumented. At the time of the interview, he was on his last semester of undergraduate school at a public state university. Jay is a DACA recipient and embraced the undocumented and unafraid slogan and/or identity. Throughout his four-year education, he was involved in various organizations on campus. He was president of an organization that supports undocumented students for about two years, and was also involved with the Latinx Center on campus and supported a coalition advocating for an end to sexual violence.

## **Data Analysis**

I first analyzed the data in this study with an “open coding” technique (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011:175). It is a process that requires the researcher (in this case, an undocumented Latinx scholar) to immerse the self in the transcribed material, a sentence at a time, to bring up as many codes as possible. Specifically, I paid attention to codes about everyday activism, advocacy, and resistance. I also paid attention to instance where participants talked about the sociopolitical context, involvements in clubs or organizations, and ways they continue to move forward with their lives. I later contrasted the codes to identity and explore any patterns or themes that kept showing up.

I began with one transcript at a time. My aim was to write up a counter story to the ongoing anti-immigrant rhetoric and discourse floating around the internet and television news outlets. To do this, I had to familiarize myself with the participants’ lives. I read each transcript once and allowed for the information to flow into my mind. I then went back and re-read each transcript. The more I read, the more I began to see connections across participants stories. Here, I decided to use “In Vivo Coding” to select quotes. The idea, in Saldaña’s (2009) words was to “prioritize and honor the participant's voice” (p. 74).

## **Researcher reflexivity**

For about a quarter of a century, I have lived my life in the United States *indocumentadamente*. My presence in the United States is both “unlawful” and unwarranted by the nation state. Having grown up undocumented, and still living within this social position provides me with great insight about the struggles undocumented people face in their everyday lives. The fear of deportability that lingers in the deepest regions of our minds. The effects this has on our thoughts and emotions. But, I am also keenly aware of our will to resist and defy

people who tells us we do not belong, that we are invaders. I know what it is like to miss, but also gain opportunities because of my immigration legal status. What is like to have to negotiate and navigate everyday situations and interactions where immigration legal status plays a significant role. How my immigration status intersects with my gender and ethnicity, for example, to provide (or not) certain privileges.

My undocumentedness, that is, my Otherness is entangled with privilege. First, I live in a state that has been supporting undocumented students reach their educational goals since 2001. In California, undocumented students can attend college at in-state tuition rates. They are also able to get some state financial support to attend college. This is a privilege undocumented students in other states do not have. In my case, this has allowed me to explore and build upon my undocumentedness through education based on social justice and human rights. Currently, I am inching closer to completing a master's degree in sociology from a public state university. This process involves undergoing rigorous training in the art of sociological research. More specifically, qualitative methods. As an undocumented scholar, I embody both privilege and non-privilege. My lack of immigration legal status grounds me to the current sociopolitical reality many undocumented people living in the United States are currently facing.

I have never considered myself to be an activist, but am becoming fonder of the label. Over the years, I have defied and resisted unjust immigration policy and rhetoric directed at the undocumented community in my own way. My pursue of a master's degree is both an act of defiance and resistance. It is one way to better support the undocumented community. The education from the public state university has allowed me to become more involved in my local communities in different ways. For example, talking to undocumented high school students to better understand their experiences.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This is a small, exploratory study. My aim was not to have a generalizable study or to make broad statements. My purpose is to provide glimpses of the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx young adults, in a specific context, who are directly involved and/or support the Undocumented Youth and Young Adult Movement (UYIAM) and immigrant rights more broadly. Perhaps due to my own identity (male heteronormative), I interviewed more men than women and none identified as LGTBQ. Scholarly literature suggests young women and/or members of LGTBQ communities are in the frontlines of the undocumented immigrant movement (Wong and Ramos 2011; Milkman and Terriquez 2012; Carrasco and Seif 2014). Additionally, all those in my study were Latinx/Chicanx, which does not reflect the wide variety of ethnicities and races who participate in or support, UYIAM.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this study, I was interested in the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx young adults who are involved and/or support the Undocumented Youth and Young Adult Movement (UYIAM) and immigrant rights more broadly. Through the interviews, it became clear participants were keenly attuned to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate under which the current study took place. They shared how anti-immigrant people, from the President, Donald J. Trump to congress folks, and local representatives continue to assault their communities, families, and their lives through rhetoric, policy, and immigration enforcement. What these assaults look like on the ground and how they push back while carrying on with their lives.

In this section, I first explain how the current anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere impacts the participants. Second, I show how participants were exposed to issues impacting the immigrant community early in their lives. How this, at some level, was a factor to their political

involvement. With this information in mind, I explored whether participants self-describe as “activist” and what “activism” means to them. How this relates to both local and national movements. Specifically, I explore whether participants view themselves as part of the UYYAM. Then, I shed light on participants contrasting views of local and national level organizations. Finally, I end this section by highlighting some barriers related to participants involvement on their public state colleges and university campuses and in their communities. I focus on participants and the struggles they faced to being involved fully in groups or organizations actively resisting.

### **“The DACA thing”: Attuned to the Current Anti-Immigrant Sociopolitical Atmosphere Under Trump and its Effects**

Alyssa, the first person I interviewed, for example, mentioned taking on more classes to graduate before the DACA deadline.<sup>11</sup> This is an added pressure on top of a self-disclosed disability and an already busy schedule. During the interview, Alyssa shared she does not like being too stressed and that she becomes anxious easily. Alyssa also mentioned, “[She] mostly [spends her] time doing school and working.” And that attending a public state university is expensive even with the financial support provided by the state of California. Although I did not ask Alyssa about the anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate, in a passionate tone of voice she said,

... Specially with all of this going on, like with DACA right now. Originally, I was trying to graduate in five-years, but because of the DACA thing, now I am taking way more classes and I am trying to graduate in four. This semester I have twenty units. Next semester I have nineteen, and the semester after that I have nineteen; And that’s how I am going to get out of here [a public state university]

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<sup>11</sup> The DACA deadline Alyssa mentioned is March 5, 2018. The Trump administration rescinded the DACA program on September 5, 2017 and left it up to congress to do something about the undocumented youth/young adult population living in the United States.

on time. I started school taking only twelve, thirteen units. So, you can see how ... the DACA deadline is forcing me to take on a lot more work. Just to stay within that deadline of, I graduate before it expires, and I am good.

Alyssa's statement above clearly shows how attuned she, a Latinx/Chicanx DACA recipient trying to complete her undergraduate degree from a public state university, is to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere in which this study was both situated and carried out. Her statement also highlights how it affects both her life and strategy to resist and defy the situation created by the Trump administration. For Alyssa, the threat to her life and personhood, is the possible end of the DACA program which is "forcing" her to take on more work to complete her undergraduate degree from a public state university. Alyssa's strategy is to achieve her undergraduate degree before her DACA permit expires by adding extra units to her schedule each semester. Instead of completing her undergraduate education in five-years as she had originally intended to do, now Alyssa is looking at completing it in four-years. The DACA deadline is pushing her to take on more work, and if she makes it to the end, Alyssa said, she would be "good." This comment shows her agency and outlines the plan to navigate the anti-immigrant obstacle set in her pathway to achieve an undergraduate degree. However, she sees how unfair it is for her in comparison to U.S. citizens to have to take on more work.

Alyssa, keenly aware of the anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere and what she must do to achieve her undergraduate education, compared her experience with the experience of U.S. citizens and mentioned undocumented people undergo mental agitation, which is heightened under the Trump administration. Alyssa said,

... Being undocumented already sets you up for being more mentally agitated because you have this concern that other people don't have. Other people can just go on about their day and about their life. "You know, if this doesn't work out that's okay, I can take a few extra years, I can take this time off, I can always

come back because I am going to be here my whole life, it's going to be fine," but like I am saying with me, it's just like, "Well, my DACA expires by this time, if I don't graduate college by this time I might never get to because they may take me away, because they have all my fucken information. They can just take me, so if I am going to do this, I have to do this right now! Even if it is this much, it has to get done right now! And if I am a U.S. citizen, I can be like, "Oh, I am kind of stress with school, I think I am just going to take a chill, maybe take three classes, maybe take two classes, maybe take a year off and then come back, and finish my bachelor's degree later because I am too stress right now. Because I have my entire life ahead of me. I have all that fucken time." And, when you have DACA or are undocumented you don't.

Alyssa's main concern is the expiration of her DACA permit and the consequences that would have on both her education and life as a whole. Of equal or greater concern is the possibility of being deported because, "they [the government] have all [her] ... information." This is a real threat on her live and personhood that creates a heightened sense of anxiety. Alyssa mentioned undocumented people are on edge because of the sociopolitical atmosphere created by anti-immigrant folks. The Trump administration without a doubt contributed to this mental agitation by creating a situation where undocumented people like herself, who had current protections under a program like DACA, are currently dealing with a lot of uncertainty. Yet, while the Trump administration has oppressed some of Alyssa's dreams and aspirations, it has failed to tame both her fighting spirit and eagerness to reach the graduation finish line. Alyssa in a somber tone of voice stated,

... When I was young, I was like, "Oh, yeah! I am going to do this and that." I had all these goals, but I am not that person anymore. Now, I am just the person that lives day by day. Because I can't see the staircase. All I think is, "What do I have to do, you know, today, next week, maybe in the next year," but beyond a year from now I just have to see what happens and then act, because there is just

not a way anymore. The longest I can plan is just a couple of years from now. You know 2019. Actually, a year from now because we are in 2018 ... That's how long term I am planning ahead, just one year.

Alyssa's statement highlights the current anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere makes her feel like, "there is just not a way anymore." At some level, she no longer views herself as the person who had "all these goals." The longest Alyssa is plans ahead is one year. Like a game of chess, she waits to see "what happens" to "then act." In these plans, Alyssa shared a worse-case scenario with tones of resistance and defiance. She enthusiastically stated,

... So, I am trying to graduate. Get the hell out of here! Get my driver's license or at least just get a car, and if shit comes to worse I am taking that shit with me to Mexico, "I don't give a fuck, ok! You take advantage of me; I am taking advantage of you. I am taking all of my shit, you ain't getting nothing" (slight laughter). Yeah. If they do kick me out, "I am taking it, fuck it! I am just going to buy everything, max out my cards, take everything with me, and fuck you!" You know. "Because you are doing this to me, I am doing this to you. You are mad about me taking U.S. money over there, well you fucked me over, this is what you get." Like, you know (slight laughter).

Alyssa's statement clearly highlights tones of defiance and resistance and also a worse-case scenario plan. She said, "if shit comes to worse" she was willing to go back to Mexico, but not before taking some items with her including her education, a car, among other things. An eye-for-an-eye. She said, "I don't give a fuck, ok! You take advantage of me; I am taking advantage of you. I am taking all of my shit, you ain't getting nothing." This is clearly a bold, "fuck you!" to anti-immigrant folks. When she says, "you ain't getting nothing" one can only assumed she is referring to everything she has achieve up

to this point in her life. This clearly shows her agency, resistance, and defiance albeit only in words – whether she would go through with it all is unknown.

Manuel also mentioned the DACA deadline in conversation. I had asked him to share with me what came to mind when he heard the word, DACA. In a passionate, but serious tone of voice, he said,

Anger, so much anger! I think it was a cheap way for the Democrats to wash their hands and settle a strong movement that was happening in 2012 for Dream Act. I think that the Dream Act was growing and getting bigger and there was a lot of people being outspoken and it was hitting somewhere. Although I think DACA it's a good thing; I think it's a great thing for the people [who] are able to work and have a driver's license and not feel like every single time [they] go through San Clemente that [they're] going to get pulled over and get deported. I think in that sense, it's good, but at the same time, I think that it shrank that movement that was happening in the mid-2000s. Even more anger that it wasn't in legislation, that it was in executive action; even more anger that Donald Trump rescinded it, anger that we're still here. In 10 days, DACA is going to expire for everyone. A lot of anger because it's not a real solution to my friends. It's not a real solution for my family. It's a not a real solution for the millions of people [who] need it. Despite whether they go to school or despite whether they have a good job, or they pay their taxes or whatever it is that they do, despite any of that, whatever they do, they deserve to be documented. They deserve to feel that same sense of relief that everyone else that [who] is here legally has.

Manuel's statement clearly highlights, first of all, that he is keenly attuned to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate which undocumented people currently have to navigate while in the United States. Some of these people are both friends and family. In the statement above, Manuel with great concern stated, "In 10 days, DACA is going to expire for everyone" and said Trump was responsible for the situation. However, Manuel went even further than just Trump,

by pointing to the inadequacy of the DACA program – that is not a “real solution” for his friends, family, and community.

While Manuel is a U.S. permanent resident, he is still impacted by the anti-immigrant atmosphere and actions of the Trump administration. Manuel mentioned being angry throughout his statement, not only at the Trump administration, but also at Democrats, who he feels placated the movement by implementing the DACA program. Manuel is conflicted by the democrats actions because, on the one hand, they alleviated some of the concerns of undocumented youth and young adults. As he mentioned, DACA recipients can work and drive without concern. They can also traverse immigration checkpoints knowing they won't be arrested by immigration officers. Yet, Manuel sees how the movement lost traction when democrats gave undocumented youth and young adults the DACA program, something that is only temporary.

Like Alyssa who alluded to mental agitation undocumented people undergo because of the actions of anti-immigrant folks, Manuel said undocumented people living in the United States do not have a sense of relief like everyone else and believes they should. His remarks above also clearly show how people who are documented like himself do not have a sense of serenity in their lives. They are concern about their friends and family members who are undocumented. Manuel closely watches the actions of the Trump administration geared toward the undocumented community and understands the impact this will have on the people he loves and cares about.

For participants in this study, who were Mexican or of Mexican descent, the Trump's administration assaults are personal. Frank, for example, with indignation in his voice mentioned,

In his [Trump's] initial campaign, he said, “Mexicans are bringing drugs, they are criminals, they are rapists” and he said, “some of them are good people.” It was a

direct attack on Mexicans. A metaphor. He wasn't just talking about immigrants; He was making sure there was a direct relationship between immigrants and Mexicans. Who [are] the immigrants he [Trump] ... [wants] to kick out? He put an ethnicity, something that in the previous administration ... there were categories of bad immigrants that they [wanted] to kick out. Under the current administration, there is no categories. If you look Mexican, if they can prove that you are an immigrant, that you have no documents, you are getting kicked out. Before there were restrictions, on whether they can deport someone or not, now the door is open.

Frank's statement clearly illustrates the anti-immigrant and inflammatory rhetoric put forth by the current president, Donald J. Trump and how keenly attuned he is to such language and the possible effects on the Latinx/Chicanx community. Specifically, he highlighted how under the current administration no one is safe from the threat of deportation. Frank contrasted the current anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric to the previous administration in which undocumented people who had committed crimes were both primary subjects and objects of deportation. However, under the current administration any undocumented person is potentially at risk of being deported.

This was a concern Alyssa revealed in the statement presented above. Although still protected under the DACA program, but with a deadline on the horizon, a sense of vulnerability became salient for Alyssa. As Frank mentioned, "Under the current administration, there is no categories." Even DACA recipients once deemed as good people are also in danger of Trump's willingness to deport just about anyone. This certainly creates a sense of uncertainty and indignation among undocumented people who are specifically from Mexico or of Mexican descent.

Inez also mentioned the increased anxiety in the immigrant community because of the Trump administration. She said,

... Just recently with Trump's visit, *otra vez se pusieron calientes las calles* [the streets got hot again]. There was a higher presence of ICE [Immigration and Custom Enforcement] in the community, they were everywhere! I heard they were going to the Sprinter [train] station, now causing more fear in the undocumented community; Now, you can't even go to work kind of thing. I'll never understand that because I'm a citizen, *pero* [but] it still hurts because I am part of the community, it's my family. It's like them [the Trump administration and immigration authorities] telling them [my family and friends], "You don't belong here unless you have this piece of paper, unless you were born here, unless you're eligible to become a resident or to become a citizen through the naturalization process."

Inez's statement above clearly illustrates what the anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere climate looks like on the ground. She mentioned an increased presence of immigration officers in the community when Trump visited San Diego. Inez said, "they were everywhere!" The visibility of immigration officers in the community created a climate of fear in which undocumented community members who rely on public transportation decided to skip going to work. It is no longer just anti-immigrant rhetoric affecting her community, but a more in-your face threat to their livelihoods.

Inez's suggested that citizens like herself will never truly understand what it means to be undocumented and what it is like to navigate the anti-immigrant climate induced with fear created by the Trump administration through rhetoric, policy, and immigration enforcement. In this case, Inez illustrated how the mere presence of immigration officers in the community was enough to scare some undocumented community members from going to work. Yet, while Inez states she cannot truly understand what it means to live an undocumented life because of her

U.S. citizenship, she said, "... it still hurts because [she is] part of the community, it's [her] family." That is, while she is a U.S. citizen, she is still impacted by it all. Current literature carried out in San Diego County support the statements made by participants above. In her study carried out in 2017, Valdivia (2019:116) found, "the geographies of deportability" have expanded in San Diego County (Valdivia 2019:116). And that undocumented people in this region are likely to encounter immigration officers in places such as stores, for example.

While the climate of fear keeps some undocumented community members from going to work, for others it impacts and shapes their political activity. Inez's statement below illustrates how Trump's anti-immigrant and Mexican rhetoric shapes her view of how people should act in public while protesting. She passionately stated,

The [events] that I've been to, it's mostly advocating for communities of color; So, then we're already seen as criminals, we're already seen as defiant, as rapists, like how Trump says that we are. We're already seen as so many different things, so we need to make sure that we're representing our community and the way we actually are. We're loving, we take care of ourselves, of-each-other, and we're doing this because we care about our communities.

Inez's statement clearly shows what a counternarrative to Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric looks like on the ground. She said, "We're already seen as so many different things" – criminals, defiant, and rapist. She warns people who are out protesting to represent the community in the best way possible. Inez's said, "We're loving, we take care of ourselves, of-each-other, and we're doing this because we care about our communities."

The notion of caring about our communities is transmitted in Alyssa's remarks about the UYYAM. Alyssa mentioned keeping a watchful eye of the DACA deadline and how that impacts the movement. She stated,

Next year, I see it [the UYYAM] getting dismantled. I am keeping my eye on the March 5th deadline. One hundredth twenty-two people are losing their DACA each day. Not each day, I think each week. Do you see how many people we are losing? That's what I am worry about, so many people are getting thrown out. To keep a movement going, you need to have [an] ... army. You need to have that many people there. If that many people are thrown out, then the movement has less power. If we have a big movement protesting right now, then it's like, "Yeah!" but if it's just me and you, [yes] we are still powerful, but we need more. And that what worries me. The numbers are going down because people are getting taken out.

Alyssa's statement clearly shows very passionately how attuned she is to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate. Her attention is on the March 5<sup>th</sup> deadline, but also on the number of people the Trump administration has thrown out of the DACA program. For Alyssa, as more people lose their DACA protection the movement will get smaller. And as the movement gets smaller undocumented youth/young adults will have less power. This is a genuine concern for Alyssa who sees power in numbers. As she mentioned, "If we have a big movement protesting right now, then it's like, "Yeah!" but if it's just me and you, [yes] we are still powerful, but we need more."

Collectively, participants highlighted how attuned they are to the current anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate operating in both their communities and their lives. This atmosphere has impacted them both directly and indirectly. For some, the current state of affairs has weakened their aspirations. As Alyssa mentioned, she lives day-by-day and waits to see what happens next before she acts. While waiting she keeps a close watch of everything that is currently taken place before her eyes. The deadline set by the Trump administration, how DACA recipients are losing their protections each day, and what effect that has on her life. For example, the possibility of being deported before she graduates from a public state university.

Some of these concerns were also brought up by Manuel, a U.S. resident. At the time of the interview, there were only ten-days left before the DACA program expired. This made Manuel angry. Adding to this concern is the ongoing portrayal of the Mexican community under the current administration characterizing them as so-called rapist, drug traffickers, and plain out criminal. Such characterizations were contested by Inez, who said, “We’re loving, we take care of ourselves, of-each-other, and we’re doing this because we care about our communities.” This concern came up when both Alyssa and Manuel said the undocumented immigrant community as a whole need a sense of relief where they no longer feel mental agitation because of anti-immigrant people. In this context, they all continue to live their lives as best as possible and struggled to support their communities, families, and friends.

### **“...This Has Always Been the Case:” Exposure to the Anti-Immigrant Sociopolitical Atmosphere Prior the Trump Administration**

“Everyone is supposedly waking up now, they're like,

“Oh, shit! Trump is president,”

but this has always been the case.” (Inez)

Participants in this study mentioned being exposed to anti-immigrant sociopolitical issues affecting their communities, families, and their lives even before Trump came into power. As Inez mentioned above, “... this has always been the case” at least for the undocumented immigrant community and their love ones. Participants mentioned the constant anti-immigrant rhetoric and practices affecting their communities, families, and their lives. From checkpoints at the local level to anti-immigrant policy implemented at the state level throughout the United States. In some ways, the pre-Trump anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate was responsible for the political involvement of some of the participants in this study.

Frank, for example, the oldest person in the study experienced the treatment of the undocumented immigrant community under both the Obama and Trump administrations. Specifically, Frank mentioned immigration checkpoints disguised as Drinking Under the Influence (DUI) checkpoints purposely situated in places frequented by Latinx/Chicanx – from schools to churches in plain day light. He recalled,

Some of these checkpoints, at least in the beginning, after 2007, and till about 2011, these checkpoints were done in the middle of the day, near schools, near churches, near places where people were going to shop or just to do their daily life ... These checkpoints were not meant to deter people from drinking and driving, but ... to get immigrants driving without a license ... It was a direct attack on immigrant families to push them away from Escondido. That's what we saw and that's what we intended to fight.

Frank's statement clearly illustrates how he was exposed to an anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere even before Trump became president and began an open assault on communities of color. He specifically highlighted systematic so-called DUI checkpoint meant to catch undocumented people driving without a license. These assaults were done in plain daylight near churches, schools, and shopping centers. Frank said, this was a plain out assault on his community and something he intended to fight.

Frank also mentioned how local anti-immigrant representatives drafted and attempted to implement policy to keep undocumented community members from renting apartments in Escondido. He stated,

... This started because back in 2006, in 2007, after the conversation nationally, [the] anti-immigrant sentiment trigger down to the local. Representatives decided to do local ordinances or local laws to prohibit immigrants from renting apartments back in Escondido ... To prohibit immigrants who do not have a valid social security [number] or documents to rent apartments.

Frank remarks clearly illustrate the anti-immigrant sentiment at the national level trickled down to his local community. He suggested anti-immigrant city officials willingly and explicitly drafted and attempted to implement policy with the intention of keeping undocumented immigrant member from renting apartments without the right legal documents, in this case, social security numbers. These actions only added to the local anti-immigrant atmosphere in which EPD cooperate with specifically targeting undocumented drivers.

Inez was exposed to the struggled of living an undocumented life through family members as a youth. The owner of the apartments where family members lived took advantage of the fact they were undocumented. He refused to fix up the place they were renting. She said with tears running down her cheeks,

As long as I can remember ... I myself am a citizen, but I have close family members who are not, who are undocumented, who are afraid to go outside, to advocate for their children in school ... Where they live is not the greatest, because the person who owns the building, he doesn't care, *el no arregla nada*/he does not fix anything; It's not the best conditions, but he doesn't care because he knows they can't say anything; They're undocumented and they're afraid to be outed or to be reported to Immigration and Customs Enforcement – ICE or to the police, so it's always a struggle.

Inez statement clearly shows the ways she was exposed to the undocumented struggle through family members as a youth. She described what the anti-immigrant sentiment and practices look like on the ground. Through conversation with her undocumented family members, Inez learned about the fear and abuses undocumented people face. In this case, the owner of the apartments refusing to fix up the place they lived in even though they pay rent. As Inez mentioned, the owner of the apartments knows her family members will not speak up because they are too scared immigration authorities and even the police will be call. Not only does Inez statement highlight how she was exposed to an anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate

prior to the Trump administration. Her statement also corroborates Frank's statement above suggesting Escondido city officials explicitly and openly did everything in their power to keep undocumented community members from renting apartments. While one group did everything to keep the undocumented community from renting apartments, everyday people like the apartment owner mentioned above took advantage of her family's situation.

Manuel, only a high school student back in 2006 and not yet a U.S. resident mentioned learning what it means to be undocumented though different life events such as not being able to get a driver's license or a job like his friends. He navigated all these obstacles while keenly attuned to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical sentiment present at the time. He recalled,

It wasn't until I was closer to high school that I start feeling, "Okay, this is what it means to be undocumented." My friends are getting their driver's license. Everyone is applying to colleges and universities. I was trying to look for a job and that wasn't even going to happen. Riding the public bus to school after Oceanside decided that they didn't want to fund school buses anymore ... It started this domino effect of thinking, "Okay, what if I'm not here?" Thinking about responsibilities with my family, what it meant for me and my future career wise, education wise, and just in general. I think that's when my defining moment, I realized, "Okay, I'm undocumented." It just coincided with this anti-immigrant sentiment that was happening in the country.

Taken all together, participants have painted a picture of the anti-immigrant atmosphere their communities, families, and themselves experienced even before the arrival of the Trump administration. Participants mentioned local police carried out checkpoints near churches and schools. How local representatives drafted policy with the intent to keep undocumented families from renting apartments. In some cases, everyday people, like the owner of some apartments took advantage of the situation of undocumented families and refuse to fix up the places they rented. Even riding the school, as in the case of Manuel, created a sense of vulnerability which

he had to negotiate. While participants alluded to the anti-immigrant atmosphere under the Obama administration they also spoke about how their communities, families, and themselves defy and resisted whatever came their way.

### **“I Joined the Marches”: Pushing Back Against the Anti-Immigrant Sociopolitical Atmosphere Under Obama**

At some level, exposure to the anti-immigrant climate under the Obama administration led participants to become political conscious and/or become involved in the pro-immigrant struggle. Both Manuel and Frank joined the marches in 2006. As mentioned above they both had been exposed to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate. Frank saw firsthand the assaults on his community through so-called DUI checkpoints. He also knew city officials were openly targeting the undocumented immigrant community through policy – an attempt to keep them from renting apartments. Manuel on the other hand experienced firsthand how he was excluded from getting a job and a driver’s license because of his immigration legal status. He was also keenly attuned to anti-immigrant sentiment felt in his life. To counter the anti-immigrant sociopolitical climate at the local and national level participants got involved. Manuel, for example, participated in a school walk out at his high school. He shared,

My first real form of when I realized the power that I had and being out on the streets was back in 2006, 2007, close to that. I forget what grade I was in, but I was in high school. We were at that time getting a lot of anti-immigrant rhetoric coming from Arizona with SB 1070. We were having a lot of anti-immigrant sentiment during that time, and we did a walkout in my high school. During that time ... I didn’t consider myself an activist. I didn’t consider myself to be taking power, but I walked out with everyone else. My friends were walking out. The people I knew were walking out. I decided that day that I was going to also walk out. I remember walking out of campus and security was trying to keep students in. We were about 100 students, 150 because different schools ended up

coming together as well. We didn't know what we were doing. There wasn't an end goal to that day, but we knew we were taking up space; We marched from [our high school] to Oceanside's civic center. There were police in their riot gear who came out. That was my first experience with getting a feel for activism.

As Manuel's statement clearly illustrates, he joined a walk out at his school to counter the anti-immigrant sentiment present at the time. Manuel did not consider himself an "activist" or understood the exact meaning of his actions, but knew he was "taking up space" with his friends. His statement also illustrates not only the anti-immigrant sentiment of the time, but the actions of everyday people (school security, and also police in riot gear) who attempted to discourage him and his friends from taking their protest to the streets. For Manuel, both the walk out and marching in the streets toward City Hall was "[his] first experience with getting a feel for activism."

Around 2006, Frank, a first-year student at a public state university joined the marches taking place throughout the United States. He stated,

My first year at [the public state university] there were big marches all throughout the nation because there was some law they [anti-immigrant law makers] wanted to pass in congress. There were massive deportations at the time. There was a lot of anti-immigrant sentiment, a continued conversation about keeping immigrants from getting benefits, public benefits from like clinics and schools. So, I joined the marches. At that time ... I was nineteen, twenty years old.

Frank's statement illustrates the anti-immigrant atmosphere he had to deal with as a first-year student at a state public university. He mentioned law makers attempted to pass a piece of anti-immigrant policy targeting the undocumented community. He also mentioned numerous deportations were taking place. At some level, the anti-immigrant atmosphere led him to join the resistance by marching in the streets with other people.

Frank also mentioned later joining a grassroots organization which began alerting the undocumented community when Escondido police officers carried out DUI checkpoints. He said, ... I already had been working with a grassroots organization; We decided to ... form this coalition or this organization that would send alert messages whenever there were checkpoints, whenever there were immigration raids. So, that was the idea behind it. This started because back in 2006, in 2007, after the conversation nationally, anti-immigrant sentiment trigger down to the local ... They [the undocumented immigrant community] were ... pushed out with continuous law enforcement. Escondido's police department [EPD] joined immigration [and customs] enforcement – ICE ... It lasted until last year, well, the beginning of this year, 2018. So, over ten-years that was the collaboration of EPD and ICE. At the time, we decided we could not target such collaboration. There was a lot of anti-immigrant sentiment in the community. There was a lot of fear in the community. We couldn't empower the community to fight for their rights. And at the same time, we couldn't go out against the police department and the collaboration because [anti-immigrant folks] really supported [it] ... So, we couldn't go against them. What we did, we warned the community whenever there [was] a checkpoint, disguised as a DUI checkpoint to make sure people weren't drinking and driving.

Frank's statement clearly shows he began to counter the anti-immigrant atmosphere and actions of everyday people (police and immigration officers) by joining a grassroots organization sending out alert messages. Frank said, going this route was necessary since they could not go against both EPD and ICE. Instead, their strategy was to inform their community when a checkpoint or immigration raid took place. This show Franks agency, resistance, and defiance. It also highlights the care him and the grassroots organization he is involved with has for the undocumented immigrant community.

Alyssa only a child was ready to fight for undocumented students after hearing about the DREAM Act on television and asking her mom what that was all about. She said,

I was really, really little. I don't remember exactly where I was. I don't remember if it was here or in Mexico, because I was so little. But I saw something on tv. In 2001, they were talking about the Dream Act. And I was like, "Mom, what is that?" And she is just like, "Oh, it's undocumented students, students who do not have papers, that are trying to get rights, but don't worry that's not you." She straight up lied to me. I was seeing myself before I knew that I was myself, you know, that stuck with me. And then she told me not to tell people I was born in Mexico. I could never get that out of my head, I thought that was just something random, I thought what I saw on tv wasn't going to affect me. I care about it, but I don't have to worry about me personally going through that. So, what I should do, I should fight. That seed got planted in my head.

Alyssa's statement clearly illustrates she was exposed to the struggle of undocumented students which in some sense compel her to want to join the fight. That is, in the anti-immigrant atmosphere undocumented students were fighting for their rights. She learned about their struggle through television and her mom. This led Alyssa to want to get involved. As she stated, "... I should fight. That seed got planted in my head." At this point, Alyssa was unaware of the fact she was undocumented. She said, "I was seeing myself before I knew that I was myself." Yet, she was concern about undocumented youth and was willing to join their struggle.

Collectively, participants alluded to an anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere prior to the arrival of Trump and his anti-immigrant rhetoric and practices. As mentioned above participants saw firsthand how local representatives used their power to keep undocumented people from renting apartments. How police officers joined immigration officers in an attempt to keep undocumented drivers of the streets. Participants felt how the anti-immigrant sentiment at the national level trickled down to where they live. In Alyssa's case, she learned about the undocumented youth struggle through television and her mom. After learning this information,

she felt a need to get involved. Manuel and Frank both took to the streets as a way to take up space and counter the anti-immigrant atmosphere affecting their communities at the time.

### **“An Activist Can Take Different Forms”: Expanding and Challenging Notions of an Activist Identity**

Participants shared they had become politically conscious and/or active, at some level, from exposure to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere under the Obama administration. They also expressed their commitment to support their communities and their families who are impacted not only by the anti-immigrant atmosphere, but also more localized assaults coming from anti-immigrant folks. Therefore, I wanted to know whether they self-identify as ‘activist’ and what that meant to them. Also, I was interested in whether they consider themselves part of the UYYAM.

Five of the six participants I interviewed said they were activists and then proceeded to challenge or described what that meant to them illustrating different views of an activist and the idea of activism. In his work, Escudero (2013) found not everyone he interviewed was at the same level with an ‘activist’ identity and in turn they expressed different notions of activism. I provide excerpts from the interviews in my study and compare them to Bobel’s (2007) notion of a “perfect standard” to an activist identity (Bobel 2007). Bobel (2007) argues, “The conception of activist is anchored in key values of humility and rigor expressed as a ‘perfect standard’. And this standard ... places the esteemed identity activist out of reach for many social movement actors who deem themselves unworthy” (pg. 150). Bobel adds, “An activist is valued for the level of unyielding sacrifice s/he brings to her social change efforts. An activist, in this view, is

noted for her/his willingness to go to extremes in the service of the cause – no hardship, no trial is too much” (pg. 153).

Bobel (2007:156) further suggest that, “Activist, as an identity, is out of reach for many who, in spite of doing the work, resist the identity.” As already mention, most of the participants in my study said they consider themselves activists, and immediately move to challenge or expand on what that means to them. They also highlighted notions of what they consider as activism.

Manuel, for example, clearly stated he, “[considers himself] an activist,” and right after challenged the idea of what that means. Manuel said,

I consider myself an activist, yeah! There’s this idea of an activist being a person who goes out in the streets and they rally, or they come together with other people, physically. But, ... an activist can take different forms ... I’ve been out and done rallies, and out in the streets and done the chanting, but also a social media aspect, sharing, and resharing information. Just every single day ... being a brown man living in America is me being an activist. I’m always fighting for my space and every space that I find myself in.

Manuel’s statement clearly shows he views himself as an activist, but challenges the narrow definition of what that means. Manuel first provides the idea associated with an activist. He said, “... a person who goes out in the streets and they rally, or they come together with other people, physically.” After presenting the idea of an activist, Manuel then moves to provide his view of an activist. He stated, “... an activist can take different forms ...” The different forms Manuel mentioned include a “social media aspect, sharing, and re-sharing information,” but also pointed to his ethnicity for his activist identity. For Manuel, the definition or idea of an activist floating around is too narrow. He expands and challenges this definition by clearly stating, “... activist can take different forms.”

This allows Manuel to expand on the idea of an activist to someone who shares information from behind a computer.

Manuel's notion of an activist challenges what Bobel (2007:150) refers to as "a perfect standard" – which she argues, "places the esteemed identity activist out of reach for many social movement actors who deem themselves unworthy." As mentioned above, Manuel embraces an activist identity and challenges what that means by giving value to political activity from behind a computer, that is, "...sharing, and re-sharing information." Rather, than feeling unworthy of an activist identity, Manuel, embraces the identity and moves to expand what that means.

John considers himself an activist through his work online. He shared, "I'm part of an organization right now that's for a bipartisan Dream Act, and we always try to keep each other informed about what's going on with DACA and with the senate bills..." John pointed out that some people do not view this type of work as activism. John said, "Most of my activism has been done through Facebook, but some [people] don't consider that activism." When John suggest, "...some people don't consider that activism," he is pointing to the "perfect standard" associated with an activist which in his case is too narrow. For John, "[keeping]" his online community informed (and vice versa) qualifies as activism. In this way, he challenges and expands the narrow notion some people have of activism. John's notions of activism align with Manuel's idea of being an activist, who shares information online.

Inez also embraced an activist identity. She stated, "Right now, in my aspiring identity as an activist, I'm at the beginning stages just trying to find who I am and build up a strong foundation, so I can go out there and contribute something." For Inez, at first,

an activist is “out there ... [contributing] something.” She aspires to become an activist of that sort. In one sense, she is drawing on the “perfect standard” or idea suggesting there is one type of ideal activist and she is working towards it. However, Inez continued to share her thoughts and ultimately challenged and expanded notions of what that means in her life. She said,

Being an activist, it could be on a spectrum. It depends on who you talk to and what their experience have been or what they wish to do with their experience, but to me it's you willing to learn about things you might have not known before, and that's okay. The thing that makes it okay is that you're taking action and learning more about whatever it is you want to commit yourself to ... Some people say that to be a true activist you have to be linked to an organization, because through that you can make more drastic change. You're organizing, and then you're organizing marches, you're organizing community workshops, you're organizing various different things. But to me, it can just be a small act ... It's being there for your community and helping as much as you can, even if it's a little thing. It could be the smallest act and it could still be seen as a form of activism because it's something new and it's something filled with love and care that person might have never felt before. It's even just telling someone, “I'm happy you're here, I'm happy you exist.” I think that's a form of activism because our existence is resistance.

Inez is not bound to the “perfect standard” described by Bobel (2007), which she suggests makes an activist identity unattainable for some people. Inez places an activist identity on “a spectrum” where people provide their own notions of what that means. She said, “It depends on who you talk to and what their experience have been or what they wish to do with their experience, but to me it's you willing to learn about things you might have not known before...” At some level, Inez is suggesting that people experiences will lead to different notions of an activist identity. For Inez, an activist

learns and acts. For others, Inez, suggest, “a true activist” is “linked to an organization.” However, she challenges this understanding. Inez stated, “But to me, it can just be a small act ... It's being there for your community and helping as much as you can, even if it's a little thing ... It's even just telling someone, “I'm happy you're here, I'm happy you exist. I think that's a form of activism because our existence is resistance.” Inez notions of an activist identity align with the way both John and Manuel see an activist identity. That is, it can be a small act such as sharing information from behind a computer and letting people across the nation they exist.

Frank’s statement below also clearly shows he embraces an activist identity, but placed his focus on “doing organize work.” He said,

I am. I know activists have a bad rep [reputation] out in the community. There is a time to be an activist, to react to something that is happening. More than anything, I would like to highlight the importance of doing organize work. To be doing organize work. Because, not only does that put you in a reactionary position, it also puts you in an advance position. You organize, look ahead, strategize, and make sure that this is what is going to happen. These are the attacks that are going to happen in the community. Especially looking at the conversation and discourse at the national level. Whether it’s the immigrant community or attacks on the LGBTQ community. Attacks on Muslim communities. Being in an organization, organizing individuals, gives us an advancement. Like a lens. “Okay, this is what is going to happen. How are we going to organize ourselves to counter attack?” To be able to fight those attacks on our communities ... An activist sees an attack and reacts, whether it is through a rally. Through a protest or a civil disobedience; *But to do civil disobedience you have to be really organize.* That’s the difference that I see between activists and an organize group of people.

Frank’s statement above clearly shows he considers himself an activist even though ‘activists’ have “a bad reputation out in the community.” However, he quickly

places his focus on “doing organize work.” In his view, this allows activists like himself to counter the assaults on the community. While he expresses notions of the “perfect standard” – that is, he mentioned that, “An activist sees an attack and reacts, whether it is through a rally, ... a protest or a civil disobedience.” Frank realized as he was saying this that activists are not disorganized. He said, “But to do civil disobedience you have to be really organize.” At some level, this final statement challenges the idea that activists are out there in the streets without any sort of organization and by definition expands an activist identity.

Taken together, the participants portray a multi-faceted approach to activism or advocacy. They are all working toward immigration justice but doing so in ways that are not always visible or traditional. For Manuel, activism can take place behind a computer, in the streets - in everyday spaces. He mentioned activism is simply exposing the body to certain spaces. For Inez, activism was letting someone else know they exist. Whereas John views his online involvement with a Facebook group as activism. However, he mentioned some people do not see that as activism. While participants may not always be out in the streets protesting, they still contribute to the cause in their own ways. Alyssa, for example, makes this point. She said,

I don't feel like I am super, super active, I mean I kinda just mentioned that I only go to things like that [protest, rallies, and marches] occasionally, because that's kind of only when I have time. What I try to do is voice my concerns to maybe somebody that is active or that can do something. At least in my mind, I think they can do something.

Alyssa is not as involved as she would like to be. She participates when she has time. What she tries to do instead is to voice her concerns to people who she feels may do

something about the situation. She said, “At least in my mind, I think they can do something.” Alyssa’s notion of an activist clearly highlights the “perfect standard” mentioned above. She was the only person who did not self-identified as an activist – rather, Alyssa mentioned being an advocate. Alyssa said,

An activist is someone who organizes a protest or the people who organize the movement in general, because the Dream Act hasn’t existed forever, it started in like 2001. Somebody had to start that; That person is an activist. The people who are out there marching more consistently, because I do it occasionally when I can, but people who are doing it more consistently, they are activists. The people who get in peoples’ faces and they are like, “you know. this is wrong,” those are activists. Here on campus, when the border patrol was here and people where not okay with it, they went and told people in charge, “okay, you should probably think about undocumented students, they might feel uncomfortable, you know, maybe have a separate career fair for them, so the border patrol doesn’t come here,” those people who were voicing that, getting in the faces of administration, those are activists.

As Alyssa mentioned above, even though she marches here and there when she has time, she does not consider herself an activist. It is not that she is “[resisting] the identity,” rather, she just does not see herself as such (Bobel 2007:156). For Alyssa, an activist organizes protests and/or a movement more broadly. Activist, according to Alyssa march more regularly. They also get “in peoples’ faces and voice their concerns when they see an injustice.” As she said, “[they] are activists.”

In 2010, Manuel became a U.S. permanent resident. He shared how he regrets not being active publicly after he got his papers. While he was doing work in his everyday life: engaging people and educating them. He felt it wasn’t enough. He said,

One of my biggest regrets is that I didn't partake in a lot of these events. One of my biggest regrets has been that I was able, I was privileged enough to fix my status in 2010, and as soon as I fixed my status, I didn't continue fighting for those people that didn't have a status publicly, publicly out in the communities and engaging and connecting and resisting that way. I was in a sense, through my own way, I was being active through engaging people and educating them on what being undocumented means, what the experiences of an undocumented person are, what the immigration process is for someone who's undocumented and how it's not so easy to get citizenship, as a lot of people like to put it. Engaging people to try to correct them in their false beliefs of their oversimplification of the immigration process when they say all immigrants just get in line like everyone else and resisting and saying there aren't any lines. I don't know what you're talking about, lines? It's not the [Department of Motor Vehicles]. In that sense, I was being active, trying to change minds locally with my friends and family and people that I knew, but I wasn't out in the streets. I think that I still have this ... It still gets me how I look back now and that I didn't do anything.

Although Manuel was doing something ("trying to change minds" in his everyday live) he ended his statement with, "... I didn't do anything." When Manuel looks back at what he could have been doing (participating in public events) he feels a sense of regret. This highlights how much more value public activism has than more private activism like being involved online like John (that is, sharing information). Manuel was doing activism in his everyday life, but when he looks back he felt regret for not doing more in the public eye. While educating is just as important as protesting in the streets for some reason it does not seem to be enough. Perhaps, some people, in John's word, "... don't consider that activism."

Taken all together, the participants' ideas and definitions about activism are rooted in their lived experiences and their immigrant statuses, especially as they changed or compared to their family or peers. Each participant carved out what they consider to be taking social action – in small and big ways, in person and online. I argue that all of these forms of activism are part of what one of the participants called “a spectrum” of activism.”

### **“Nah, that's bullshit. Nah, that's bullshit”: Different Views about Local and National Level Organizations**

Within the UYYAM there are local and national level organizations working on alongside and/or on behalf of undocumented youth and young adults. United We Dream (UWD), for example, is one such organization with reach and influence across the United States. In the current study, participants expressed different views about UWD, but also about more local level organizations. These are concerns coming from people who follow, support, and/or are actively involve with some of these organizations.

John, for example, said,

... United We Dream ... basically say they're representing the voices of all undocumented immigrants, but they're not! And every time we [the online organization John is involved with] try to get across to politicians about a bipartisan Dream Act or bipartisan immigration reform, we're always blocked by United We Dream or big organizations who just have a progressive agenda, who want everybody to be legalized. Even though we know ... legalizing everyone is not realistic. It's very idealistic.

While John could have mentioned any other national level organization by name working with and/or on behalf of undocumented youth/young adults, he focused his

attention on UWD. This highlights not only the reach and influence of UWD across the U.S., but also some of the oppositional views John holds about this specific organization. John firmly contested the idea that UWD speaks for “all undocumented immigrants.” He straightforwardly suggested, “they’re not.” This statement is coming from a person who UWD claims to represent, in this case both a DACA recipient and potential beneficiary of Dream Act legislation. John, a strong supporter of a bipartisan Dream Act sees in some sense UWD as getting in the way of some type of compromise. He said, “we’re always blocked by United We Dream...” John views UWD’s immigration reform philosophy as “idealistic.” John, on the other hand, believes in some type of middle ground, a more realistic view in his opinion. That is, compromise between republicans and democrats that could potentially lead to the passage of the Dream Act.

John also spoke about the fact UWD is always asking for money and that they kill every single bill that has been put on the table. He said with a serious tone of voice,

One of the other problems too, ... organizations such as United We Dream, ... they're always talking about fund us, fund us type of thing. You know, they go to Washington D.C. and they have their lobbies there and they're killing every single bill that they don't agree with. Every single bill that doesn't protect parents of undocumented immigrants or, I mean, of Dreamers. And then, those bills are always being shot down by them, by United We Dream ... And then, after that they say, “Oh, ... congratulations! Yeah, we did it! We stopped a bill that would imprison us. Yeah, we did it! we stopped a bill that would imprison us. Please, fund us. Please, continue this. Please, support us, so that we can continue ... fighting for a Clean Dream Act.” And, that's their slogan.

In John’s statement above his frustration with UWD and some of their practices is clearly on display. Again, he mentioned how UWD “[shoots] down” bills in congress that do not align with their values and beliefs. For UWD, some bills would, “imprison” their

members. However, in some sense, John views these bills as a step in the right direction. John views UWD as a powerful entity. Powerful enough to influence the conversation in congress about undocumented youth/young adults. However, John feels UWD is asking way too much from congress folks. That is, to include more undocumented people into some of the bills being proposed in congress.

John's statement also highlights he is connected and follows UWD's actions. As a follower, John receives notices from UWD where they ask for money to continue fighting for the cause. This, in John's view, is a concern. In some sense, John feels UWD is not taking his voice into consideration. Not when UWD is killing every single bill and then turning around and saying, "We stopped a bill that would imprison us," only to ask for money.

John has reached out to UWD, but said they do not take him seriously. In the comment below, John transmits this sentiment. In a passionate tone of voice, John said,

I've shared information with [UWD]. And they just look at it like, "What the fuck is this?!" Like, "We don't give a fuck about you!" They respond. But, that's basically their response. Like, "What the fuck is this?!" They read it, but they're just like, "Nah, that's bullshit. Nah, that's bullshit." (slight laughter)

John's statement above clearly shows his frustration with UWD. He reached out to UWD and shared information, but his bipartisan input was not validated. The message he got from his online interaction with UWD is, "We don't give a fuck about you!" While UWD responded, their feedback about John's information was, "that's bullshit." These comments clearly show how John feels about UWD. In his view, they were unsupportive of his contribution to the conversation about undocumented youth/young adults and the cause as a whole.

In late 2017, Manuel joined UWD in D.C. where he participated in sit-ins meant to garner the support of lawmakers for a Clean Dream Act. Manuel, a witness to what transpire during the sit-ins hesitantly shared UWD pushed some people to “come out” when they may not have been ready to do so. This strategy employed by UWD folks seemed to be of great concern for Manuel. He said,

... if people aren't comfortable with coming out, I don't think ... they should be made to come out. One of the reasons ... I have that negative criticism. I don't want to say negative criticism. That criticism of United We Dream. When we were in D.C. and we were doing our sit-ins, it was almost as if those people that didn't want to come out or identify themselves as undocumented at the time or DACAmented or whatever their status is, they were almost obligated to. It was almost ... as if they were made to feel a little bit guilty that they weren't coming out; And then, pushed ... in front of the cameras and in front of the movement during that time; To come out and to say, “I'm undocumented.” Even if they weren't ready to say it; That was like that sense of, “Well, if you are [undocumented], then you should come out now.” I heard that once, “If you are, then this is the time.” I don't think that was okay because we don't know that person's experiences. Undocumented and unafraid, I like the term, but people should talk to it however they feel; Whenever they feel that it's okay for them and they feel safe, and ... feel like it'll make a difference for them.

Manuel's statement above clearly highlights concern for undocumented youth/young people, but also about the strategy employed by UWD during the 2017 sit-ins in D.C. As a first time participant of one of these events, Manuel noticed how UWD folks pushed some people to disclose their status as a way to garner support for the cause. UWD folks told some people, “Well, if you are [undocumented], then you should come out now.” Manuel disagrees with UWD's tactic of pushing people into the spotlight when they may not be ready. However, he expressed this disagreement hesitantly. This was

transmitted when he said, “I don’t want to say negative criticism.” For Manuel, UWD could employ more inclusive and reflexive tactics. He said, people should come out when they feel ready and in a safe environment, rather than in the terms of some of UWD’s folks. Some scholars have highlighted coming out can be empowering for the youth/young people who do it, however, these young people did it on their own terms and when they felt ready (Corrunker 2012; Seif 2016).

Despite their critiques of UWD, both Manuel and John still view UWD as having political influence in congress and within the UYYAM. John, for example, wished UWD would start negotiation. He said,

We kind of wish ... United We Dream would start negotiating. Recently, [UWD] said ... they would start negotiating. But, we’ve seen them negotiate in the past. And, right up until the point where the shit is really going to get done they start chanting, “Clean Dream Act!”

John’s statement clearly shows he views UWD as a powerful entity with the capacity to move some type of deal for undocumented youth/young adult forward in congress. However, John reiterates to what he had suggested earlier, that is, that UWD only supports bills like a Clean Dream Act which do not offer congress folks any type of compromise. John is discouraged by UWD’s stance because in some sense he understands some congress people won’t support such a bill leaving people like himself in the same situation or worse under the Trump administration. Nonetheless, he still views UWD as crucial in moving the conversation about undocumented youth/young adults forward.

Manuel, on the other hand, said UWD is being active. He stated,

... As far as identifying with [UWD], I don't think I feel as strongly on that end. I think it's just the means to the end. I don't think it's the goal. It's how are we getting there? With some organizations I don't agree with completely, but I still think it's a great thing. They're being active.

Manuel's statement highlights that while not in total agreement with UWD, he still sees this national level organization as instrumental in gaining some type of relief for undocumented people. As Manuel mentioned, UWD is active.

While some participants expressed some criticisms of UWD, other participants did not. Alyssa, for example, views UWD as a great source of information that keeps her alert and aware about everything that is going on. She follows UWD through their various social media outlets. Alyssa said,

I am not personally part of the organization, but I support [United We Dream]. I am subscribed to them through email, so I always know what is going on. Just so that I am aware. There is a lot of news outlets and stuff, but I feel like they're really good about, you know, keeping up to date with what's going on. All the things that they are fighting for. So that just keeps me more aware. If they say, "This is going to happen," I will be more aware to be careful that day.

In the statement above, Alyssa clearly states that while she is not "personally part" of UWD, although she is an online follower, that she supports the organization. In some sense her comment shows how UWD has not build up an online community. It seems the flow of information is one way. It keeps Alyssa inform and up to date, but leaves her feeling she is not "personally" part of UWD. Nevertheless, she supports UWD.

Jay has worked with UWD, that is, sharing information online. Further, Jay supports UWD and their work. He shared over the phone,

Jay has volunteered for United We Dream. Sharing information. He followed the sit ins in D.C. during the month of December through social media outlets. Jay

shares some of the values and mentality as UWD. “I would back them up,” he said.

Although Manuel was hesitantly critical of UWD’s tactic of pushing some people out into the spotlight when perhaps they were not ready to do so, his involvement in the sit ins with people from across the U.S. left him with an overall feeling of community. Manuel said,

I felt that sense of community. That’s what I brought back with me, that sense of community from being there ... Here we are, we don’t have a Dream Act yet! It was disappointing to find out ... we were there, and we didn’t achieve what we were there to do. It was also very heartwarming, and it was good to know that we came back with this sense of community, this sense of leadership, just this knowledge and being able to connect with people from other states.

A “sense of community” which Manuel alluded to in the comment above is not something John, feels towards UWD. As John’s comments above clearly show, he feels UWD is not representing his bipartisan voice.

Participants spoke more favorably about the local level organizations they are familiar and/or involved with, but also raised some slight concerns. Alyssa said some of these local organizations were too far away for her to reach physically. She said,

In North County, most of the organizations for undocumented youth or just immigrants, all that kind of stuff, the whole sphere of immigrants and undocumented, I feel like most of that is all the way in downtown San Diego, and I live all the way over here [in North County]. I feel like there should be more activists clubs here or more organizations, just to get help here, because I feel that most of it is in downtown San Diego. And that kind of makes sense because you know it’s really close to the border. So, it makes sense that most of those organizations would be close to the border, just because that’s where there is more

danger. But, there should be more here. Um, so, yeah, I can't really be involved in those organizations because they are so far, and I can't get to them.

Alyssa knows she can visit one organization on her school campus and that her voice will be validated. Alyssa said,

So, if I voice concern, "I don't think this group is doing enough," not the group [name of organization] specifically, if I say for example, "I don't think the school is doing enough for this and that" they are not going to be like, "Oh, you are ungrateful, blah, blah, blah" I know they are going to validate that I feel that way, so that's pretty good.

In comparison to John, Alyssa knows her voice and input counts in the organization on her school campus. This is a very different sentiment than what John expressed concerning UWD and the way they responded to the information he provided them.

Manuel, like Alyssa, spoke about the lack of "activism" on his community college campus. He said, "I have felt that there isn't a strong campus activism, and it's been hard to identify and then bring information." In 2017, Manuel along with peers jumpstarted what used to be an AB 540 club (renamed, Dreamers club). This club was meant to support undocumented youth/young adults at his community college. On the day the Trump administration ended the DACA program, Manuel and other Dreamer club members put on a campus event to show their support for undocumented youth/young adults. He recalls,

We did ... a big rally the day president Donald Trump reversed DACA. We did ... a rally here on campus where ... community members, ... students, ... and faculty [came] out. We did this big nice wall with different colored butterflies where ... people just put messages ... and then tag it on to the wall. I think, that brought a sense of community to anyone that was experiencing anxiety because of

what was happening during that time. The only thing is you can't, because we don't know who those people are, we couldn't really know how much effect that something like that was doing. You just hope that it's reaching those people, that it's reaching our community, our people, not those people, our people.

In this section, Participants provided their views of national level organizations, but also about the more local level organizations they participate in. There were different views about these organizations. From feelings of "I would back them Up" to "We don't give a fuck about you!" John, a DACA recipient, specifically mentioned UDW, one of the biggest organizations working alongside and/or on behalf of undocumented youth/young adults. In John's views, UWD has the power to influence the conversation about undocumented youth/young adults in congress, but just wishes they would start negotiating rather than demanding broad immigration reform something he views as unrealistic.

Other participants, like Manuel, who view UWD as "being active" expressed concern with one of UWD's tactics. Manuel mentioned how UWD folks in some sense "obligated" youth/young adults to come out during the sit ins in D.C. in 2017. Manuel was conflicted by these actions. For Manuel, people should come out when they are ready and not when UWD folks decide its time.

Other participants saw UWD as a great source of information to stay inform about all the changes taking place in the country concerning undocumented youth/young adults. Both Alyssa and Jay said, they support UWD and their work. However, Alyssa suggested she is not "personally part of [UWD]." Broadly speaking, Alyssa comment highlights the need for UWD to better create online community where youth and young adults feel they

are part of UWD. In this online community, their input, whether it comes from a person like John should be validated.

### **“Life Happened!”: Barriers to Political Involvement**

The participants in this study are involved with local and national level organizations. They have participated in marches, protest, and rallies. Participants also use the Internet to follow national level organizations like UWD, where they get information about the many ongoing changes taking place under the current anti-immigrant atmosphere. More locally, participants attended club meetings, participated in fund raising events, and support their friends and families in different ways.

Participants, while making efforts to stay politically involve highlighted different barriers that have at times derailed their political activity. Martinez and Salazar (2018) and Valdivia (2015) found demands outside of school (for example, work) kept some of the participants they interviewed from becoming politically involved. A similar theme arose among the participants I interviewed. In Frank’s words, “Life happened.” Yet, participants continue to navigate the anti-immigrant sociopolitical context and do their best to support their communities, families, and themselves. This is exemplified by Inez’s statement above which states, “...We're loving, we take care of ourselves, of each other, and we're doing this because we care about our communities.”

Jay, for example, shared over the phone, he has cut back on his activism and involvement with school organizations. At the time of the phone interview, Jay was focus on achieving his undergraduate degree and working to pay bills. He works, goes to school, and devotes time to a community organization for an internship class.

Working to pay bills is something other participants brought up. Alyssa, for example, mentioned being in and out of groups because of work demands on her time.

Alyssa shared,

So, I tried to do that, but I have always ended up going in and out of groups. Here is what I mean. So, my [the first] year here, not in high school, but here [at the public state university]. I started getting involved with [Name of campus organization]. That's a club regarding mental health ... And then, I also joined [Name of organization], you know, the club for undocumented students, or immigrant students, or just people who support undocumented immigrant students, but also the students with mix-status families. But then, at the time, I also had two jobs. So, it was kind of hard ... It always kind of backfires because, you know, the club meets from 12 to 1, and I have to work from like 8 to 4. Well, I cannot make it. Or let's say the club is like from 4 to 6, but I have class from 4 to 6. You know, the gaps are taken ... With [Name of campus organization], I mostly went to the meetings. There were a couple times when I helped with the fund raiser. You know, where you sell stuff to make money for the scholarship for undocumented students. But yeah, I didn't really get to be involved, I wanted to be, but you know, the working, the classes, and the, ah, just everything.

Alyssa's statement above makes visible some undocumented students struggled to get involved fully on their school campus because of demands outside of school. In her case, she was working two jobs and had little time left for getting involved on her school campus. Further, she mentioned her work schedule not aligning with times when the school club meets. Yet, she tried to make meetings when she could and even helped sell food to raise money for a scholarship for undocumented students. In the end, Alyssa clearly stated she wanted to be more involved, but added, "...but you know, the working, the classes, and the, ah, just everything." This last statement transmits Alyssa's frustration with not being able to get involved as much as she would like.

John also said something similar. He mentioned he could not be working for “free” anymore. In some sense, John is suggesting that getting involved requires time which may be used to make money to pay for everyday needs. He said,

I reached out to [Name of campus organization for undocumented students] for a little bit. But then, I started working and it got really difficult to meet up ... Yeah, it just got really difficult cause work would take over. And, I wasn't available to be working for “free” anymore. You got to make money to pay tuition...

John's statement gets straight to the point. While he tried to get involved at the public state university, he said, “...work would take over.” That he no longer had time to give up. He ends, by saying, “You got to make money to pay tuition...”

Manuel hesitated to join UWD in D.C. to advocate for a Clean Dream Act in 2017. He mentioned rent and having a life like everyone else. In the end, Manuel went to D.C., but suggested that if UWD had giving him a week to consider saying yes, he may not have joined the event. He recalled,

There was one workshop where the people that were organizing said, “Okay, we’re thinking of taking a D.C. trip. We don't know how many people are going. If it’s only 10 people, then we’re just going to fly them out. If it’s more than 10, then we’re going to do a cross-country bus ride to D.C.” My first instinct, I’m 28, I live with my girlfriend, rent is really expensive in San Diego, and I have classes and basically a life like everyone else. My first thinking is, “I don’t think I can afford to leave for a week, week and a half, but who knows?” I just left it up [in the air]. I said, “Well, who knows?” I signed up just in case; So, they could send me information. They sent the information to my friend first and so she texted me and said, “Hey, they sent me an email. Sign up now, because there’s only a limited number of seats available and they’re going to fly us out.”

It took me a little bit to actually say yes. Finally, I was like, “You know what?! I got to do this. I’m going to go. I think it’ll be a good experience. I know people

personally who are still undocumented, who were affected by DACA being rescinded, who continue to be affected. I know people that aren't part of DACA or will never be able to be part of the Dream Act because either they're too old or don't qualify because of education or whatever the qualifications are." Because of them, I said, "I got to do this. They're not going to be able to do it. I can sacrifice a lunch, less money and not being able to buy lunch a few days at work and go."

Manuel's statement clearly shows that even documented people struggle to get involved politically. As Manuel mentioned above, "it took [him] a little bit to ... say yes" to an invite to protest and advocate for a Clean DREAM Act in D.C. In the end, he decided to go for the people who he knew would be unable to attend. He willingly decided to forgo some of his lunch during the week so he could attend this event.

Frank, who is involved more fully on his school campus [a public state university] and out in the surrounding communities highlighted the journey it took to get to that place. He firstly stated, "One of the things ... I did not mention is going to school. I was not part of the school community. [I would] go take a class and go back to [my] house. Go back to work." Secondly, Frank began describing the journey of his political involvement where he stopped out on different occasions. Frank began by sharing he participated in the 2006 marches and attempted to continue his political involvement thereafter. He said,

I continued organizing. In 2008, I joined the Obama campaign. I joined an organization that was doing the Get Out to Vote campaign in Escondido. I went and volunteered a couple of days ... I went knocking on doors and telling them [potential voters], "Hey, November is getting closer." We went to houses that were already registered to vote. We would tell them [potential voters], "Make sure you come out and vote on November." We were also advocating for some propositions they were pushing. I did that a couple of weekends. Then, again, life

happened. I didn't continue. In 2012, again, I came back and joined the Get Out to Vote campaign as a paid internship, paid volunteer from one of the organizations that was doing work in the community.

For Frank, there were moments during his involvement in political activity where he had to stop out. As he clearly stated above, "Life happened." He describes what this meant,

I started getting older, twenty, twenty-one years old. You become more like an adult. Now you have other responsibilities ... Making sure that your parents go to work or go to the doctor appointment. Making sure ... I can help them financially so that at least they have food on the table.

The support of family and allies allowed participants to have more free time.

Alyssa, for example, said an old teacher helped her financially. She went from working two jobs to only one.

... the first semester of my sophomore year I actually had an old teacher that I was working with, you know, [she] introduced me to her friend, they were both helping me with my education and stuff. They even helped me a little bit financially. They are like, "Okay, this is the deal, if you get these grades, we can give you this money, you know, just to help you with rent and stuff like that." Because I was working two jobs. So then after that I was only working one job. It's like I said, it's really expensive. So that made it a little bit easier for me, but now it's harder for me because now I don't have a job. Like, fuck! You know?

Frank mentioned how his family supported him when he first started attending the public state university. They provided shelter, food, and moral support.

My mom always had food for me to take, frijoles con huevo or papas con frijoles [beans with eggs or potatoes with beans]. There was always food that I was able to have to go to school. And because I stayed in the area that was one of the support that I got from my family. Living at my brother's house allowed me to

save money. I did not have to pay rent. That's one of the things that supported me. I am really lucky to have those support throughout my education. I had that support to help me continue going to school.

Yet, in some cases, family members will discourage participants from getting involved politically. This was especially true for the two young women in this study. Inez mentioned her parents asking her not to attend protests. She said,

... just talking to my parents ... they always let me know like, "We know you like to go to protests, and you like to fuck things up, but you also have to remember that you're representing us as a family," kind of thing. "You're in grad school, and if you get arrested and all these different things, how are you going to continue your work, or what if something bad happens?"

Alyssa also mentioned something about how perhaps her parents would not want to drive her to a protest.

I don't know if my parents would have driven me to the protest. They would have been like, "I don't know, I don't want you doing that stuff," and then I would have been like, "Well, how am I going to get there?"

It's not just on campus that participants are unable to fully participate. Some alluded to being unable to be involved politically outside of school. Alyssa mentioned,

You need money, and you don't have that as an undocumented student. It's ironic too. Because you are the one who cares the most about the cause, but you can't fight in the cause because you are constraint by the cause, I don't know (slight laughter). Or, not constraint by the cause, because the cause is good. You are constraint by the status, which is making the cause (giggles).

Alyssa's statement above clearly shows the people "who [care] the most about the cause" are usually the one who cannot participate as much. She said, "the status" is a

constraint to getting politically involved. As she mentions in the comment below, if she was a U.S. resident or Citizen she would also be out in D.C. protesting. Alyssa added,

The people that do have time to do it, the resources to go do that, are out there doing that; like I told you ... if I was a U.S. citizen or U.S. resident ... I would probably be in D.C. right now; You know, getting arrested because I could afford the plane ticket. And if I fail my classes, that's okay, I can repeat them because I am here my whole life. You know, I have that kind of leeway. Um, because I am not crunch for time, so, that's definitely what I would be doing if I was on the other side.

Collectively, participants made visible some of the barriers that get in their way of getting more fully involved in their school campuses and in their communities. Alyssa and Frank both mention having two work two-jobs at a time. In some cases, their work schedules did not align with the times when the organizations on campus met. Frank shared, he went to class, back home, and then to work and repeated this pattern daily. For him, he became more political involved over time and finally feels he is part of the campus community. For both Alyssa and Inez, their parents asked them not to get involve politically. For Manuel, making the decision to join UWD in D.C. was not an easy one. As he mentioned above, "... My first thinking is, "I don't think I can afford to leave for a week, week-and-a-half, but who knows?" In the end, Manuel joined UWD in D.C. in 2017 to support the UYYAM and people who could not attend.

### **Final Reflection**

The participants' experiences and insights reflected some of what the literature found on undocumented youth/young adults as their continue commitment to fight for their communities, families, and themselves. They have been key to opening access up to higher education (Seif 2004). Under the Obama administration undocumented youth and

young adults and their allies carried out “acts of civil disobedience” that got them access to work permits and social security numbers (Galindo 2012; Pérez 2016). However, they have also turned their attention to educating their communities (Nájera 2015). The internet has been one way they come to share information (Corrunker 2012; Valdivia 2015; Zimmerman 2016).

Participants in this study also highlighted how they have been resisting the anti-immigrant atmosphere not only under the Trump administration, but also the Obama administration. However, at some level, this led them to become politically involved. Their political involvement was not just protesting and marching in the streets, they also share information through social media and care for their families and their communities in other ways. While they are committed to getting involved on their school campuses and in their communities they mentioned everyday responsibilities such as work keeps them from fully getting involved. Yet, for the participants I interview, they saw everyday actions as telling someone they exist whether in person or online as activism and most embraced an activist identity. Those who are able to get involved more fully participated in events away from home on behalf of people who cannot attend. They are allies to the movement.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to document, amplify, and legitimize the experiences of Latinx/Chicanx young adults who are directly involved and/or support the Undocumented Youth/Young Adult Movement and immigrant rights more broadly. Some of the participants would benefit directly from the movement’s victories. While others are involved in a supportive role. They are allies who have either grown up undocumented themselves or have family

members who are undocumented and empathize with their struggle. The participants I interviewed are all impacted by the continuous assaults on their communities, families, and their lives in one way or another. The anti-immigrant rhetoric, sentiment, and practices coming from federal, state, and local governments and representatives produces anxiety and much uncertainty.

### **Comprehensive, inclusive, and humane immigration reform..**

This study has shed light on the ongoing struggle of the undocumented immigrant community since at least the mid-1980s. Specifically, I focused on undocumented youth/young adults who have resisted and defied anti-immigrant rhetoric, policy, and immigration enforcement coming from and supported by everyday citizens, lawmakers, and the current president. Participants in this study spoke about being keenly attuned to the current anti-immigrant atmosphere, but made clear is not new phenomena. Inez's words above captured this sentiment clearly when she emphasized, "This has always been the case."

In the current anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere, it is crucial to continue raising our voices and pushing for comprehensive, inclusive, and humane immigration reform. As participants clearly described in this study, the current anti-immigrant atmosphere continues to create anxiety through actions such as ending the DACA program. This has created a situation in which DACA recipients must take on more work and deal with much uncertainty.

The anti-immigrant atmosphere is all over the news. The Trump administration, for example, is fixated with families coming from Central America seeking political and humanitarian asylum. The Trump administration has vowed to keep these families from entering the United States by all means possible. In fact, the Trump administration has deliberately separated children from their parents while in prison camps. They have also used tear gas on people who attempted to set foot in the United States. More recently, the Trump administration

began floating around the idea of charging a fee to people requesting humanitarian asylum at ports of entry – this is simply irresponsible and inhumane.

The current situation demands for people to continue contesting the current anti-immigrant status quo. They need to double up on their demands, advocacy, activism in whatever ways they can. If it's just sharing information online that's fine. The point is to continue chiseling away at what I believe has been normalized – that is, an anti-immigrant status quo in which is alright to assault those who are outside formal citizenship.

### **Continue to support undocumented students and their peers on college campuses.**

Most of the participants in this study alluded to the fact that personal responsibilities (work) kept them from getting involved on campus fully. “Falling behind” and “getting left behind” were statements made by participants who were undocumented or DACA recipients throughout the interviews. In particular, participants shared how demands outside of school such as work and personal responsibility within their families kept them from getting involved more fully on their school campus.

There are many more visible organizations on campuses dedicated to assist and support undocumented students, however, participants in this study spoke about being unable to get more fully involved because of personal responsibility such as work. Having to work to pay rent and other expenses was a theme that came up during the interviews. The threat on the DACA program only added not heightened the anxiety of some participants, but it also pushed them to take on more work. Alyssa, for example, mentioned adding taking more classes each semester to graduate before her DACA permit expires.

If undocumented students are working they cannot make club meetings as much as they would like. By not getting involved they cannot push their school campuses to do more to

support undocumented students. Community college and university administrators need to do more to support undocumented students on campus by supporting organizations working on their behalf. While there are some professors who are doing great work, administrators need to step up.

### **Inclusive practices for local and national level organizations.**

Participants in this study spoke about embracing an “activist” identity and what that means to them and their activism. I found participants used broad and inclusive notions of activism such as telling someone, “I’m happy you’re here, I’m happy you exist.” In some sense, this is getting away from the idea that activism is about protesting, marching, etc.

While participants challenged and expanded on what activism means to them, they also highlighted the many ways they get involved. These activities range from selling food to raise money for a scholarship for undocumented students to joining a national level organization in D.C. to advocate for a Clean Dream Act. However, not everyone is able to get out into the street to protest. Alyssa, for example, pointed to her immigration status as getting in the way of being out there “getting arrested.” She cares greatly about the cause, but feels constraint by her immigration status. So instead, she advocates and gets involved politically in whatever ways she can and when she has time.

I advocate for broad and inclusive notions of activism not to water down the definition, but as a mindful and reflexive understanding of the situation some of these young people find themselves in. Not everyone is ready or has the time to be out in the streets marching or protesting. For this reason, local and national level organizations working with and on behalf of undocumented youth/young adult need to adopt broad and inclusive notions of activism and find other ways to get undocumented young people involved without jeopardizing their safety.

### **National-level organizations. .**

A surprising finding for this study was the intense and negative feedback about national organization, United We Dream. The responses from the participants could help change the UWD approach, scope and goals. For example, John shared his views and feelings about UWD. His statements were powerful, emotional, and thought provoking. No DACA recipient should feel as if their input is, “bullshit!” or that UWD, “[Does not] give a fuck about [them]!” Also, Manuel hesitantly shared how UWD folks pushed some people into the spotlight during the sit-ins in D.C. in 2017. Manuel got a sense as if UWD folks were obligating some people to come out: “Well, if you are [undocumented], then you should come out now.” UWD wants to empower undocumented youth/young adults by encouraging them to embrace their undocumented status publicly. There are other approaches to supporting and advocating for comprehensive change and immigrant rights.

Also, while working at the national level is important, UWD cannot forget about local communities and the people most affected. It is in these local communities where most of the anti-immigrant happenings are taking place. This is where everyday people like Alyssa, Manuel, Inez, John, Frank, and Jay are defying and resisting what they perceive to be unjust anti-immigrant sentiment, rhetoric, and immigration enforcement. Support in these communities is needed and UWD can provide it. Or, perhaps a new national undocu-organization is needed that can be inclusive of alternative perspectives and that work closely with local grassroots efforts.

### **CONCLUSION**

I want to see a definitive and inclusive law passed that will positively impact the immigrant community so that they finally gain much needed relief from the anti-immigrant sociopolitical atmosphere they have experienced for most of their lives. It is possible.

I have seen progressive changes with my own eyes in California – a once anti-immigrant state which now grants access to driver’s licenses and allows undocumented students to pursue their college dreams. I also witness how the UYYAM and its allies persuaded Obama to implement the DACA program. When the DACA program came into being, I was left out, ineligible because of one of the requirements, but I continued to find ways to pursue my aspirations. Family, friends, and professors helped me move forward. I was able to get to a point where I found my voice. This allyship can also help the undocumented community as a whole to finally gain some sense of relief.

My work as an undocumented sociologist informs the work of future scholars to better understand the ongoing undocumented youth/young adult struggle. Through my research, I unearthed neglected knowledge pertaining to undocumented youth and young adults. I have been able to connect undocumented past experiences with more current experiences. Because of this, I feel more connected to the current ongoing struggle and intend to continue the fight. I am committed more than ever.

Where would I like all of this to end up? As stated in my recommendations above, I am hopeful like the participants I interviewed that we will achieve social justice for the undocumented community as a whole. I imagine a time in the future where students will one day learn about our struggle in history classes, just like I learned about the many struggles in school pertaining to other racial and ethnic groups who had to fight for their existence and humanity.

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