Title: My Un(DACA)mented Life: Experiences of Undocumented Immigrant Young Adults Growing Up and Resisting Through Activism

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Abstract - We explore how the growing activism by undocumented youth and the recent implementation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have enabled youth to publicly disclose their immigration status and take action in asserting the rights of the broader undocumented community. We briefly analyze existing literature on the experiences of, and activism by, undocumented immigrant youth. Contributing to growing literature on the matter, we also offer our unique insight of navigating everyday life as undocumented immigrants in a border community. We were born in Mexicali, Baja California and have lived in San Diego since the ages of 12 (Carolina) and 13 (Diana). While we recently benefitted from DACA, our immigration status continues to shape much of our lives, including, but not limited to, our education, work, health, and plans for the future.

Introduction

Activism by, and for, undocumented immigrants, continues to redefine what it means to be undocumented and publicly disclose one’s immigration status. In 2001, when the DREAM Act was first introduced, the stories of undocumented youth were told through the voices of members in Congress and allied organizations. The DREAM Act, proposed bipartisan federal legislation, would provide a path to citizenship for undocumented youth who: came to the U.S. at age 15 or younger; have resided in the U.S. for at least five years prior to the bill’s enactment; have good moral character; have or would complete two years of college or military service (National Immigration Law Center 2011). Given the inaction of Congress to pass the DREAM Act or similar immigration-related bills that would provide a path to citizenship for undocumented
youth and their families, undocumented activists have increasingly been in the forefront of rallying around issues affecting undocumented communities.

Undocumented youth are continuously challenging unjust immigration laws, but not without risks. In 2007, three days after Tam Tran, an undocumented student, testified in front of Congress in support of the DREAM Act, her house was raided by ICE officers (Think Progress 2007). There are an estimated 11.1 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Passel and Cohn 2012). Approximately 4.4 million of the 11.1 million undocumented immigrants are under the age of 31 (Passel and Lopez 2012). Because of their immigration status, undocumented immigrants are at risk of being detained, placed in deportation proceedings, and potentially being deported. In fact, one may argue that the risks are even greater at a time when the number of deportations is higher, as such is the case under the Obama Administration, where an estimated 400,000 undocumented immigrants have been deported per year since Obama has taken office, 100,000 more deportations than under President Bush’s second term (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2011).

Over 10 years of organizing around the DREAM Act and beyond, growing activism has challenged deportations, detentions, as well as the legal and political attacks on the undocumented. One of the most recent victories of undocumented youth activism is the implementation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. In 2010, Congress failed to pass the DREAM Act. In 2012, undocumented youth leaders turned to the Obama Administration to provide relief from deportations. Leaders organized “The Right to Dream Campaign”, an effort to urge President Barack Obama to issue an executive order to stop the deportations of DREAM Act-eligible youth. The campaign entailed several actions, both online and offline, one of them was a letter signed by over 80 immigration lawyers and professors detailing that President Obama, contrary to what had been said by the Obama Administration, did in fact have the authority to grant administrative relief to undocumented youth (Green 2012).

On June 15th of 2012, the Obama Administration announced DACA. The program provides temporary relief from deportation and a work authorization card to eligible undocumented youth. To qualify, youth must: (1) be under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012; (2) have come to the United States before reaching 16th birthday; (3) have
continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time; 4) have been physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making a request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS; (5) have entered without inspection before June 15, 2012, or one’s lawful immigration status has expired as of June 15, 2012; (6) be currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and, (7) have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety. August 15, 2014 will mark two years since DACA was first implemented. After a year of DACA, a little over half of the estimated 1.7 million eligible immigrants applied and were approved (Passel and Lopez 2012, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2013, Wong et al. 2013). To apply for DACA, eligible youth have to file an application with USCIS, along with documents to prove that they meet the program’s requirements, and a $465 check.

While DACA was recently implemented, we know from a growing body of literature that DACA has expanded the economic and social opportunities available to undocumented youth, but that deferred action is not enough (Gonzales and Terriquez 2013; Wong and Valdivia 2014). Since deferred action, a large percentage of undocumented have obtained their driver’s licenses (61%), obtained a new job (61%), or opened their first bank account (54%) (Gonzales and Terriquez 2013). Exploring the financial well being of undocumented youth further, Wong and Valdivia (2014) find that many undocumented youth continue to live in financially vulnerable positions. Only 20% of surveyed youth indicate that they have sufficient personal income to meet monthly bills and expenses. Additionally, youth who applied for DACA did so with grave concerns, for example, 79% of surveyed youth were concerned about what would happen if DACA ended, and 59% were concerned with having to reveal their undocumented status to the government. It is important to note that while a large percentage (66%) indicated that they no longer feel afraid because of their immigration status, an even greater percentage (72%) believe that DACA is not enough. Sixty-six percent of
respondents still feel anxious and/or angry because they have undocumented family members/friends who do not qualify for DACA (Wong and Valdivia 2014).

**Literature Review**

*Everyday life and activism of undocumented youth*

Unlike their documented counterparts, undocumented youth often learn about their immigration status as they realize that they cannot obtain a driver's license, legally work, or receive federal financial aid for college (Abrego 2011; Gonzales et al. 2013). This coming of age and realization of what it means to be undocumented, often brings feelings of anxiety, depression, fear, stress, and uncertainty of the future (Abrego 2008, 2011; Hernandez et al. 2010, King and Punti 2012; Negron-Gonzales 2013). Gonzales et al. (2013) finds that in some instances, undocumented youth struggle “to assimilate their undocumented status as an element of their self-narratives, finding difficulty achieving a sense of coherence and continuity” (p 1183). Risks of being undocumented and having others aware of such status whether in private or public spaces also include the possibility of losing one's close friends and facing negative backlash (Gonzales 2011; Hernandez et al. 2010; Negron-Gonzales 2013).

Despite the growing number of deportations and the challenges of being undocumented, undocumented immigrant youth and young adults are becoming civically and politically engaged (Hernandez et al. 2010; Negron-Gonzales 2013; Nicholls 2013; Perez et al. 2010; Rogers et al. 2009; Valdivia Or dorica 2013). Before the 2000s, undocumented youth were not yet recognized as a political group in the immigration political landscape. It was not until the introduction of the DREAM Act in August 2001 that undocumented youth began to identify as “DREAMers”. When the DREAM Act was first introduced, immigrant rights organizations such as the National Immigration Law Center and Center for Community Change played a central role in urging Congress to pass the DREAM Act (Nicholls 2013). While undocumented young adults were not yet at the forefront of organizing for their rights, the participation of immigrant youth is most notably seen in the marches and rallies against H.R. 4437 where hundreds of thousands of youth joined. On December of 2005, Representative F. James Sensenbrenner introduced the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R. 4437).
Ten days after its introduction, H.R. 4437 passed in the House of Representatives. The bill, if passed, would have criminalized undocumented immigrants and those who assisted them. In early 2006, an estimated 3.7 to 5 million undocumented immigrants and allies took to the streets in strong opposition of the bill. Following the actions of 2006, H.R. 4437 failed to pass the Senate, which proved to be an immediate win for the immigrant community (Voss and Bloemraad 2011).

Over the years, undocumented youth-led organizations such as United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth-led network in the nation, have come to increasingly play a central role in representing the stories of the undocumented community and organizing youth all across the United States. For example, “after years of student organizing for access to higher education and citizenship for immigrant youth, immigrant student groups started to emerge in states across the country” (United We Dream 2014). Among them were the California Dream Network and the Student Immigrant Movement in Massachusetts. Networking among undocumented youth is key to forming organizations at the different levels- locally, statewide, and nationwide. The organizations that undocumented youth began to engage in provided a space for them to network, and organize events such as retreats, meetings, workshops, and more. It is in such spaces that undocumented youth formed a collective voice and political identity. Undocumented youth now play a central role in shaping the messaging and campaigns within the movement for undocumented immigrant rights (Nicholls 2013).

Undocumented youth are utilizing both online and offline tools to organize (Corrunker 2012; Nicholls 2013; Valdivia Ordorica 2013). Online activists use the Internet to connect with other undocumented youth, share petitions to fight deportations, spread the word about events, and organize when meeting in-person is not possible due to the lack of transportation or scheduling conflicts (Nicholls 2013; Valdivia Ordorica 2013). By connecting online, activists have also taken their networks offline to form undocumented youth-led organizations (Corrunker 2012). While online tools offer activists ways to temporarily transcend physical boundaries, reach larger audiences, and connect in a fast and easy manner, such tools are not replacing their offline activism. Rather, online activism is enhancing their work offline. Using both tools, undocumented youth are able to organize, raise awareness, garner support, and spread the word around
the events they organize such as sit-ins, hunger strikes, rallies, and press conferences (Valdivia Ordorica 2013).

Undocumented youth have also been “coming out of the shadows” (publicly disclosing one’s undocumented status) as a political act to challenge the exclusion of undocumented immigrants politically and socially due to their immigration status (Abrego 2011; Corrunker 2012; Galindo 2012; Negron-Gonzales 2013; Nicholls 2013). Tania Unzueta, Lizbeth Mateo, Mohammad Abdollahi, and Yahaira Carrillo were the first four undocumented youth to risk arrest, deportation, and publicly declare their immigration status while staging a sit-in at Senator John McCain’s office to urge him to support the DREAM Act in May 2010. After the action, Lizbeth, Mohammad, and Yahaira were arrested and had to fight their deportations (Immigrant Youth Justice League 2010).

Galindo (2012) analyzed the letters written by the group of four that were addressed to President Obama in 2010. The letters were part of a social media campaign to urge Congress to take action and pass the DREAM Act. In the letters, all four young adults stated their full names and said, “I am undocumented”. In doing so, they put a face to the issues affecting undocumented immigrants. Historically, undocumented immigrants have lived in fear because their status could potentially result in deportation proceedings. While some undocumented immigrants still continue to live in fear for various reasons, the action on May 2010 and the social media campaign that followed set the stage for undocumented youth to change the public discourse about what it means to be undocumented, and to come out as “Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unashamed”. Increasingly, youth engaged in civil disobediences across the U.S. in support of the DREAM Act and similar immigration-related legislations because other young adults also felt that their lives and those of others in similar situations could no longer be on hold.

**Personal Narratives- Growing up Undocumented in San Diego**

Born in Mexicali, Baja California, our family encountered a lack of jobs, education, opportunities, and resources. Additionally, our brother was diagnosed with Angelman syndrome at a young age. The disability does not allow him to speak, eat or
walk by himself; nor can he perform several other daily activities we often take for granted. Because of our brother’s condition and the difficult economic times, our family made the difficult decision to migrate to the United States when we were 12 (Carolina) and 13 (Diana). We have both been undocumented since and for many years we were unable to legally work, drive, travel, or receive financial aid.

We have always known about our immigration status. However, our understanding of what it means to be undocumented and its profound limitations have changed over the years. The day we left Mexicali, both of us knew that we could not return. Even though we are only a 2-hour drive away from our hometown, we lack the immigration status to travel outside of the United States. Similar to the experiences of fellow undocumented youth, we did not fully realize what else it meant to be undocumented until our senior year in high school.

Diana’s personal narrative

I was the first in my family to apply to college. When I was eight years old, I had the dream of becoming a doctor. I did not quite fully understand the role of a college education, but I knew that to be a doctor I needed to go to college. My career aspirations changed as I grew older, but the more that I learned about college, the more I wanted to excel in my education. When we first moved to the United States, I was placed in “English as a Second Language” courses in seventh grade. By my sophomore year of high school I took all regular classes. The following year, I took Advance Placement (AP) classes.

With guidance from my teachers and counselors, I learned that if I wanted to go to college it was important for me to get good grades and take AP classes. When I began applying to college during my senior year in high school, I realized that due to my immigration status, my dreams would be far from my reality. I applied to seven universities. In my mind, I applied to these universities not knowing how I would pay for my education. I told myself that the best I could do then was to apply and figure out the rest as I went. I was accepted to four universities. As my high school graduation approached I decided to go to California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). I planned to live at home and find a job to pay for my college education. Shortly after my
high school graduation, I began working at a local clinic. This job opportunity enabled me to afford my entire undergraduate and partially my graduate studies.

I lived in the “shadows” (did not publicly disclose my immigration status) until my third year of college but even then part of me remained in the “shadows”. Only my close friends knew that I was undocumented. Beginning my studies at CSUSM, I knew that my immigration status limited the opportunities I had but I knew that I wanted as much of the college experience as I could have. I became heavily involved in student activities. I joined the orientation team, which is a volunteer group that welcomes new students. I felt like I found a second home on campus, but part of me felt like this home did not fully support me as an undocumented student. In my third year of college, my sister and I, along with other friends attended a social justice summit hosted by CSUSM. During our second day, there was an activity that led me to disclose my undocumented status with students at the summit. This was the first time I talked about my status to a group of people. It was a space for everyone to talk about one’s frustrations and anger. I shared my frustration about the limitations I faced due to my immigration status. There were two other students at the summit that disclosed their undocumented status. I remember feeling a great sense of relief that I was not the only one.

For the upcoming year, I applied for a job at school even though I knew, unlike many of my peers, I would not be paid for the job because of my immigration status. Because I had already come out as undocumented to students and CSUSM staff at the summit, it was easier on me to share my experience during my job on campus. However, it was also a reminder of how my immigration status made me different from my peers. That same year I decided to choose a double major, which would mean I would do a total of five years in college. Without the ability to legally work after college, I saw school as the one thing I could still do regardless of my immigration status even if it meant paying tuition an extra year. Additionally, I began to think, “What am I going to do after graduation?” I thought about moving to Canada. I also looked into a few European countries where I felt it would be easier to apply for residency and a work permit. I did not move or applied for residency in a country outside of the United States. However, the frustration of not being able to pursue my career aspirations after college led me to look at the different options.
By the time I started my fifth and last year at CSUSM, I started to talk to my mentors about a career in student affairs. I chose to obtain a master’s in student affairs for several reasons. One of the main reasons is because I want to help fellow undocumented students. I want to be able to create programs that better support undocumented students, as well as create opportunities that allow undocumented students to thrive in higher educational pursuits. With no concrete job opportunity after graduation, I decided graduate school was my best option. I started my master’s program in Fall 2011 at San Diego State University. Prior to starting my program, I had been offered a paid assistantship, but I was unable to accept it because of my status. It was yet another reminder about missed opportunities. These missed opportunities were part of my reality and while some of them were the reason why I chose student affairs, it was also challenging to continue my education when U.S. immigration laws and particularly higher education continued to deny my right to accomplish my dreams.

As the years go by, I have become more comfortable disclosing my status. After the announcement of DACA, I got involved in community organizing for immigrant rights. I was able to leave the same job I had at the beginning of my freshman year at CSUSM. I worked there for exactly six years. I was able to overcome my fear that my employer would find out about my status if I were a vocal activist. Now, more than ever, I see the importance behind activism by, and for, undocumented immigrants. Prior to my involvement, I followed the growing activism of undocumented youth in the news, online blogs, and social media. After DACA, I was not only staying up-to-date with their activism, but I was a part of it. I believe I am now a part of creating positive change for our immigrant communities. As an undocumented student, I experienced first hand multiple missed opportunities as a result of my immigration status. I will continue organizing and pursuing a career as a student affairs professional in the hopes that I can create spaces of support, resources, and information available to undocumented students at institutions of higher education.

Carolina’s personal narrative

As a senior in high school, my classmates and I were encouraged to fill out college applications. California State University in San Marcos, Fullerton, and Chico
were all in my list. I also applied to more selective schools in the University of California system such as in Irvine and Santa Cruz. However, during the process of applying to colleges I realized that unlike my peers, I did not qualify for federal financial aid. I successfully completed my college applications on time and when letters of acceptance began to come in the mail, it became a moment of mixed feelings. I had been accepted to UC Santa Cruz- my top choice. I had also received an acceptance from CSUSM. Earlier that year, I had the opportunity to visit UCSC and I loved the campus. Without a doubt I was beyond excited. However, I also knew that getting accepted to a university was only half the battle. The following weeks I had multiple conversations with my family, friends, teachers, and counselors about which University I should attend. The more I realized that I could not legally work and travel, and that I was ineligible for state and federal financial aid, the more it dawned on me- UCSC is out of reach given my immigration status. Ultimately, I submitted my intent to enroll at CSUSM. It was the most practical choice- I would save on rent by living with my parents, not have to worry about traveling, and pay significantly less in tuition. At the time I did not know fully what to think about the fact that my college choice was limited due to my immigration status. I also did not realize quite yet that this was only the beginning of many more instances to come of missed opportunities.

I went on to begin college in the Fall of 2007 with an undeclared major, but soon found the field of sociology after enrolling in SOC 105: Introduction to Justice Studies where we discussed social justice issues through a sociological lens. When the topics of race and immigration were discussed in class I felt empowered - we were learning about my community and my own experiences as an undocumented Latina. I decided to double major in Sociology and Criminology at CSUSM.

My first and second years at CSUSM went well. I was focused on my classes, started to become involved in student organizations, began a research assistantship focusing on issues affecting undocumented students, and I balanced my school and work responsibilities as best as I could. By the end of my second year, however, I was unable to keep up with the increasing tuition rates. Adding to my financial difficulties, a car crashed into me when I was driving to work one day that same year. The crash took an emotional toll on me. Because I knew that I would not have enough money to pay for the
coming years at CSUSM, and I could not apply for state and federal financial aid, I thought about dropping out of college. I began to think that a college education was not for me.

Thankfully, I was not alone after having hit rock bottom. I learned then that I was not alone; I belong to a community. Family, friends, professors, mentors, and even strangers at the time stepped in to remind me that I had to keep going. One of the first persons I told about my financial problems was my supervisor from the research center I was doing an assistantship at the time. I remember going in to her office one day and searching for the strength to say, “I am sorry. I will not be able to keep my assistantship next semester… I am not sure when and if I will be able to return to CSUSM”. Somehow I managed to explain my situation without crying. A week after, I went in to the office to work before class and my supervisor told me to head over to another building on campus. There was a lady from CSUSM who wanted to speak with me. I was confused, but I did not ask much and just headed over to my meeting.

Even to this day, as I write and reflect about this meeting, it is difficult to hold back my tears. This is when I found out that the lady I was meeting with and her husband heard about my story and financial circumstances. They were generous in granting me a private scholarship to cover my tuition and books for my remaining years at CSUSM. More than the financial relief this opportunity afforded me, their support reassured me that I had to continue my education. After that meeting I found the strength, support, and encouragement to keep going. To this day, everything I do, from my teaching, activism, education, and research, I keep in mind that I am not doing this all just for myself. While the stress, fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and limitations due to my immigration status have not disappeared, I gain strength from my community. Without their continuous support I would not be at this stage; getting ready to begin my doctorate studies in the fall.

At CSUSM, I found a support network where I found my voice as an undocumented woman of color. Learning what it means to be undocumented, meeting fellow undocumented immigrants, and realizing that our voices and actions have power led me to become civically and politically engaged. As an organizer within the undocumented community, I have served in various leadership positions, which have enabled me to help establish a scholarship fund for undocumented high school and
college students at CSUSM through Standing Together As oNe Dream (STAND), which is a campus based undocumented youth-led organization. As an undergraduate, I also contributed to the establishment of CSUSM’s official website for undocumented students with information and resources to apply and graduate from college. I also helped form the first undocumented-youth led community organization in San Diego, the San Diego Dream Team, to address educational barriers affecting undocumented students, organize to stop deportations, and engage politically in support of pro-immigrant legislation. I also created an online blog, My Documented Life, where I share my pursuit of doctoral studies, resources such as scholarships, and updates about immigration-related policies and activism. Twelve years after first migrating to the United States, I am still learning what it means to be undocumented. I am also resisting anti-immigrant policies and sentiments. My commitment to serving underrepresented communities continues to be central to my education, research, teaching, and activism.

My network of family, friends, professors, and community members has played a key role in my pursuit of higher education. The first time I learned about graduate school was in my third year at CSUSM when my mentor encouraged me to think about my passion and career options. Upon researching graduate school programs and the possibility of becoming a professor, a fellow undocumented student and myself organized several fundraisers to help us afford graduate school applications. For one of our fundraisers, we made over 1,000 tamales and sold them to friends, teachers from middle school to college, and community members. Their financial support enabled us to realize our dream of applying to and attending graduate school. For my graduate studies, I was accepted into Loyola University in Chicago and San Diego State University. Due to my immigration status, as well as my ineligibility to work and receive state or federal financial aid, I decided to attend San Diego State University and pursue my Master’s in Sociology.

My immigration status has limited my opportunities to work, travel, and drive. However, I have been able to continue my pursuit of higher education with the help of immigration policies at the state level like Assembly Bill 540, which allows eligible undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. Additionally, I benefitted from the California Dream Act during the last semester of graduate school, an opportunity that
allowed me to focus much more on my studies and less on worrying how I would pay my tuition and fees. The combination of these two key immigration policies and my support network has enabled me to be at this stage where I am preparing to begin my doctorate studies this coming fall at Harvard University. Earlier this year, I was accepted into Harvard, Columbia, UC Santa Barbara, and waitlisted for UCLA. I am excited about the new opportunities a doctorate education will bring as I continue giving back to my community in various ways.

**Conclusion- DACA is not Enough**

On June 15th of 2012, we woke up to text messages, missed calls, and a busy Facebook newsfeed alerting us that President Obama had just announced DACA. As details about the program developed during the day, we were excited, yet we wanted to learn more before deciding if we would apply. Much of our knowledge about DACA came from undocumented youth-led and immigrant-serving organizations across the nation; among them was United We Dream. For example, on June 15th we read on our Facebook newsfeed that to qualify for DACA, we would need to demonstrate that we were present in the United States on that same day. While we did not get this information directly from the official USCIS website, we decided to go to the bank, make a deposit, and save the receipt. Weeks later when it was official that we needed to turn in document(s) showing our presence in the United States on June 15th, we were ready to attach a copy of our bank deposit slip.

We gathered additional documents like school transcripts and immunization records, and applied for DACA early October 2012. At the time, the San Diego Dream Team (SDDT), an undocumented youth-led organization we are a part of, did not yet have the resources to provide informational sessions and clinics to assist DACA-eligible youth in their applications. A combination of not having access to free assistance and at the same feeling uncertain about the DACA application process, led us to make the decision of applying for DACA through a lawyer. The first lawyer we consulted was charging us $2,000 each on top of the $465 DACA application fee that we already had to cover on our own. We did not go through this lawyer because of the high fees and because we got the sense that he was just trying to scare us. On our first visit, the lawyer
told us that there was a chance we did not qualify because of our tourist visas when we were younger. We then consulted another lawyer who was charging $1,500 each plus the $465 DACA application fee. We applied through this lawyer because we were able to make payments to cover the total $1,500. However, if there had been free assistance and more information available at the time, we would have applied by ourselves or through an immigrant serving organization.

We were approved for DACA on mid-November and by December we had a social security number, California state ID, and driver’s license. Benefitting from DACA has expanded our opportunities in many ways. Our ability to have government-issued identification has lifted the fear, and at times awkwardness, of being turned away, questioned, or looked at with suspicion, when trying to do things such as going to a concert with friends. In addition to being able to legally drive, work, and travel within the United States, we were able to leave our respective jobs to begin working as professionals in our career fields. However, DACA is not enough.

Under the Obama Administration more than 2 million people have been deported. This number alone highlights the reality that DACA is not enough. Deportation and bed quotas are still embedded within the immigration system. Bed quotas mandate that detention centers fill their 34,000 beds across the country (Robbins, 2013). The implementation of these quotas results in the deportations of 1,100 immigrants every day (Golash-Boza, 2014). While DACA has provided partial relief to the youth who have been approved, we believe that such relief needs to be expanded to include a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants. At the same time, we are eager for a legalization program that does not further criminalize the current and future generations of undocumented immigrants. The most recent immigration reform bill proposed by Congress included, like many past bills, an increase in enforcement at the border and throughout the country. We believe our community deserves better than a bill composed of anti-immigrant amendments. Currently, undocumented youth activists are pushing for the Obama Administration to take action in numerous ways, including, but not limited to, stopping deportations now, expanding DACA to our families, and reuniting families torn apart by deportation (Praeli 2014).
Our personal stories shed light on the benefits of DACA, but also demonstrate the necessity for a solution beyond the constraints of DACA for those who do not qualify. The implementation of DACA does not bring back those who have been unjustly deported, detained, and who have lived in fear for years. DACA also does not give us back missed opportunities. It does not recognize us as human beings with the right to live a dignified life. Perhaps no piece of legislation will give us back the years we have lived, and continue to live, in fear, stress, anxiety, and under constant threat that another friend, relative, or community member will be uprooted from their world and separated from their family. However, we are hopeful that in being part of the activism and resistance within our communities, we will continue to create positive change and overturn oppressive immigration policies and sentiments.

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