

MEXICAN UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH IN THE UNITED STATES:  
EXPERIENCES OF VULNERABILITY AND CLAIMS OF BELONGING

A Thesis

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Abstract  
of  
MEXICAN UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH IN THE US: EXPERIENCES OF  
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Alejandra Aguilar

In 2014, approximately 11.1 million undocumented individuals resided in the United States (Passel and Cohn (2016). Today, Mexican-born immigrants make up 24.8 percent of the foreign-born population, making them one of the largest groups of foreign-born in the U.S. (Lopez and Radford 2015). This study, explores the claims of belonging and legal vulnerability of DACAmented and undocumented Mexican youth in the U.S., Specifically under the Trump administration. This qualitative study uses Borderlands theory to show how undocumented youth's claims of belonging. A total of 6 interviews were conducted for this study, these participants were selected through snowball sampling.

Three themes emerged: 1) An increased sense of legal vulnerability under the Trump administration; 2) A sense of belonging in the US based on their identities as Mexican-Americans; and 3) An acute sense of powerlessness given their circumstances.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Dr. Heidy Sarabia

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## DEDICATION

I, Alejandra Aguilar dedicate this work to my mother, Leticia Aguilar, my brother Adolfo Maldonado, my best friend Brenda Olide, and the rest of my Aguilar family. Thank you for the support and motivation you all gave me to further my education. I would also like to dedicate this study to those who took the time to participate in this study and to those more than 11 million of undocumented individuals who reside in this country. Thank you for your courage and resilience.

Yo, Alejandra Aguilar dedico este trabajo a mi mama, Leticia Aguilar, mi hermano Adolfo Maldonado, mi mejor amiga, Brenda Olide y al resto de mi familia; Aguilar. Gracias por el apoyo y la motivación me que brindaron para seguir adelante con mi educación. También me gustaría dedicar este estudio a esos que se tomaron el tiempo de participar en este estudio, y a esos más de 11 millones indocumentados que viven en este país. Gracias por su valor y su Resistencia.

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Second, I would like to give a special thanks to my committee members Dr. Sarabia and Dr. Barajas, your guidance encouraged me in this writing journey. Your support and emphasis in the importance of the project have been there since the start of the project. I admire you professionally and look up to your work.

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Por último y más importante le doy gracias a mi familia por el apoyo incondicional que me brindaron en esta travesía. A mi madre, gracias por todos los sacrificios que sola has hecho para criar a mi hermano y a mí en un país que no fuiste

bien recibida por no tener “los papeles”. Tus palabras de aliento y amor incondicional me han llevado muy lejos, estoy muy orgullosa de ser tu hija. A mi hermano, tu eres una de las motivaciones más grandes que tengo en la vida. Siempre me has enseñado perspectivas diferentes porque tenemos formas de pensar muy diferentes y eso es lo que más admiro de ti. Solo puedo esperar a ver tus logros en esa forma única que tienes de vivir tu vida. Estoy muy orgullosa de ser tu hermana.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Itzel, an undocumented student attending Washington State University was one of 800,000 undocumented immigrants who applied for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012 (Medina 2017). Itzel felt that DACA opened up opportunities that would not be possible with the absence of this program, “I would not have been able to attend the University of Washington and pay for my personal expenses. I truly have been one of the lucky ones” (Medina 2017). These opportunities allowed her to acquire success. In society it takes more than hard work to “make it”, it also requires structural opportunities, such as legal documents in some cases. Due to the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, Itzel refrained from reapplying to the program and was left feeling hopeless after the election results, “My future of perhaps going to Law School, traveling and maybe one day becoming a citizen were crushed. Will I have a job next year? The uncertainty of this scares me” (Medina 2017).

Itzel, is one of many undocumented immigrants affected by immigration laws in the U.S. Itzel, like many others was brought to the United States by her parents at an early age, she refers to this country as the place where she belongs, “I know no other life. This is where I belong” (Medina 2017). The continued significance of discrimination in the United States has only grown since the removal of the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Similar to Itzel and her family, many other undocumented immigrants cross the U.S.-Mexico border in hopes of a better life. However, when Mexican immigrants cross the border to come to the U.S they are often not welcome if

they lack legal documentation. The term most used to refer to immigrants coming to the U.S without legal documentation is “illegal”, creating a stigma around their legal vulnerability. Gonzales and Chavez (2012), describe this term as dehumanizing individuals with a lack of a legal status. Therefore, the appropriate word to use is “undocumented”. None less, the terminology alone can sear individuals and cause a sense of nothingness, which later results in long lasting psychological effects.

According to Passel and Cohn (2016) in 2014, there are approximately 11.1 million undocumented individuals in the United States. According to the Pew Hispanic Research Center, today, Mexican born immigrants makes up 24.8 percent of foreign-born population, making them one of the largest groups of the foreign-born in the U.S. (Lopez and Radford 2015). The first experience of legal vulnerability undocumented youth undergo is when they cross the border. Those who were old enough to remember how they crossed the border have already experienced “survival”, which begins to shape the way in which they define their identity and claim to belong in the U.S (Solis 2003). Once undocumented immigrants have crossed the border without documentation, they live in a state of “illegality” (Solis 2003). DeGenova and Peutz (2010), argues that the act of deportation is used to by the government to exert their power. Thus enforcing the system of legality in the U.S. as a way to maintain the nation’s domination over undocumented bodies. While many bills have been proposed to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented youth brought as children by their parents none have been successful.

In the fall of 2016, as Donald Trump became president of the U.S., he has been vocal against immigrants and has taken actions that hurt undocumented youth. On,

February 17, 2017, the first DACAmented youth protected under DACA was deported under the Trump Era (National Immigration Law Center 2017). Juan Manuel Montes, 23, living in Calixto, California was deported after federal agents questioned him about his legal status in the U.S. and did not let him retrieve his wallet from a friend's house, which contained his I.D. and proof of his DACA status (National Immigration Law Center 2017). Juan Manuel's case is proof that even those with a temporally legal status under DACA are vulnerable under Trump's administration. As of 2017, there are at least 43 other DACA recipients that have been deported (Asia News Monitor 2018). In September 2017, President Trump announced the termination of DACA.

The purpose of this study is to examine the way in which undocumented students make claims of belonging in the U.S. in the context of their lack of legal status. The study will compare the difference in belonging claims of undocumented students who applied to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and those who did not. The study is important because it explores the experiences of undocumented youth under the presidency of Donald Trump, who has been very vocal about his plans to continue with massive deportations and elimination of current laws and programs that aid undocumented youth, such as the termination of DACA, which was terminated in his first year of presidency. Under this context, undocumented youth feel a greater sense of legal vulnerability. This study explores the attitudes of undocumented students in the context of Trumpism and his rescinding of DACA. How has their sense of belonging been affected? How do they make identity claims in the context of legal vulnerability? How do they view the future?

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Laws and Policies Affecting Undocumented Youth in the U.S.**

To undocumented youth, their lack in citizenship does not only come with stigma, but it also brings a set of challenges that they must navigate in their everyday lives. Gonzales and Chavez (2012) analyzed these challenges using Foucault's theory of biopolitics, saying that for undocumented immigrants, employment forms, birth certificates, driver's licenses, medical insurance and deportations or detentions limit and define their lives. Gonzales and Chavez (2012), examined the way undocumented youth make the best out of their situation, Gonzales and Chavez refer to undocumented immigrants as being treated as abject. They explain "abjectivity" as an "expulsion of an alien element" but that has also successfully established through its expulsion (Gonzales and Chavez 2012; 256). They state that abjectivity has been used to "demarcate the abject of society", and refers to the intersection of gender, race, nationality, legality within other categories that have become abject to society. Furthermore, they find that although undocumented youth in the US are the abject of society they are actively engaging in acts of resistance, which can include education or political activism (Gonzales and Chavez 2012).

One of the ways in which undocumented youth are constantly trying to better their life in the US is through education and by changing immigration laws that limit their daily lives in the US. From 1974 to 1980 through the uniform residency law, undocumented students who were long-term California residents were able to pay in-state

tuition. However, the law was not renewed and from 1980 to 1996, undocumented youth were forced to pay out of state tuition (Madera 2008). In addition, under *Plyler V. Doe*, which was the 1982 Supreme Court decision that maintained that undocumented students were covered by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment's equal protection clause. This decision gave undocumented students the right to attend K-12 in the U.S. In 1985 through the *Leticia A. V. UC Regents and CSU Board of Trustees*, the Alameda county superior court granted undocumented students the right to pay in-state tuition as long as they had been residents for a year and one day; however, in 1990 this law was overturned (Madera 2008).

In 1986, the Immigration reform and Control Act (IRCA) was the last amnesty law passed in the U.S. that benefitted some undocumented immigrants or those that could provide proof of residency in the U.S. From the 3.2 million of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. at the time, about 2.7 million undocumented immigrants were able to legalize their status (Madera 2008). In 1996, former president Clinton enacted the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which added on several restrictions for undocumented youth to access public and economic benefits such as financial aid (Chavez, Soriano and Oliverrez 2007). However, for California student residents Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) was passed in October 2001, for students who attended a California public high school for 3 years, and received a high school diploma or equivalent, AB 540 allows them to pay in-state tuition regardless of their legal status (Chavez et. al 2007). As in California, 10 other U.S. states allowed undocumented students to pay in-state tuition fees; prior to California, Texas was the first state to allow in-state tuition for undocumented students through Bill 1403 (Chavez et. al 2007). Yet

college continues to be financially unattainable for most undocumented students (Madera 2008).

Then in 2001, financial aid became available to undocumented students in the state of California. This bill proposed that those who qualify for AB 540 students could apply for state financial aid, as well as receive scholarships and some cal grant awards (Madera 2008). In 2010, the Dream Act bill was close to passing, the House of Representatives passed the bill but the Senate was short five votes of the 60 needed to keeping the bill (American Immigration Council 2017). The Dream Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) is a congressional Bill that would have given undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children a path to citizenship (Schmid 2013). It has been estimated that there are 2.1 million of undocumented youth in the U.S that meet the required federal criteria for the Dream Act in the guidelines of age, duration of U.S. residency and age of arrival, yet not all of them met the educational criteria (Schmid 2013). While, 66,000 undocumented have a bachelor's degree or higher, 612,000 have a high school diploma or GED, and the largest group of 934,000 that can benefit from the Dream Act are those who are currently working on their high school diploma (Schmid 2013). Under Obama's administration there was a push from Dreamer activist, which lead the executive order Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, in 2012, it allowed undocumented youth to apply for a work permit which facilitated for many the possibility of obtaining a college education for this population (Amuedo-Dorantes and Antman 2017).

Furthermore, employment is another way in which undocumented youth are legally vulnerable, undocumented immigrants are often forced to show proof of legal status in the US, when they are unable to show this legal paper work they forced to turn to the underground economy becoming more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation (Sarabia 2012). According to migration scholars “illegally” is only understood in relation to the state, therefore immigration law defines immigrants who lack citizenship in the US as illegal (Sarabia 2012). In relation to education and labor, “illegally”, also makes undocumented youth in the US vulnerable when they are not able to provide proof of citizenship. Under DACA, undocumented youth were able to provide a work permit and participate in labor economy legally as citizens do. Thanks to this program many undocumented youth benefited in these two aspects; employment and education. As Pope (2016), suggests, education and employment are the two ways in which undocumented youth are often trying to better their life, resisting against living life underground.

Literature on labor market focusing on the benefits DACA had for undocumented youth in the work force has been compared to the 1986 IRCA yet in contrast to IRCA, DACA, primarily benefited young and educated immigrants (Amuedo-Dorantes and Antman 2017). An important contribution that DACA had in the labor market is that it improved the likelihood of employment for those who are eligible under DACA, yet this was more likely to be the case for males than females (Amuedo-Dorantes and Antman 2017). Moreover, DACA, increased the income of those who undocumented immigrants who were eligible for the program (Pope 2016). It is suggested that the reason why

DACA help increase the income of undocumented youth is because this was the first time undocumented youth were able to enter the formal labor force, going from unemployed or underemployed to employed (Pope 2016). Undocumented youth were able to use their DACA status to better their lives in both education and work force.

This research contributes to the literature by exploring how undocumented youth in the U.S. experience legal vulnerability in institutions such as schools and in the context of political hostility. It is important that we provide evidence through research that shows the way in which this population can be affected by legal vulnerability in their everyday lives.

### **Resilience: “En La Lucha”**

Under the Trump administration, grassroots immigrant rights have also emerged as means of resisting the anti-immigrant campaign Trump has engaged in (Kocher 2017). Under the Trump administration, there have been three specific executive orders that are threats to undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. Two of the three were taken into action in his first week in office. “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements”, was the first executive order, which accused the federal government of failing to prevent undocumented immigrants from crossing the border (Kocher 2017). This executive order further militarized the border and sped up deportations of those entering the U.S border without legal documentation, it also includes those immigrants coming from Central America seeking asylum (Kocher 2017). The second executive order, “Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States”, abolished former President Obama’s Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), which worked with state and

local law enforcement to remove undocumented individuals who came in contact with local law. This second executive order sought to facilitate a greater number of deportations with the help of local law enforcement communities (Kocher 2017) and eliminated the priorities that would focused mostly on those with previous convictions. The third anti-immigrant executive order, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States”, denied entry to the U.S to many green card holders coming from Africa, Europe and the Middle East (Kocher 2017). Furthermore, it’s important to explore the effects these three executive orders had for immigrants in the U.S. Essentially these were the first three anti-immigrant actions taken under Trump’s administration which sparked immigrant resilience.

It is important to acknowledge that acts of resilience from immigrant grassroots organizations were not created in response to Trump becoming president of the U.S., but instead have been acting and reacting on many administrations. One example of this was the movement created by DREAMers, which was responsible for the creation of DACA after putting pressure to congress for over a decade, as well as former president Obama during his administration (Kocher 2017). Undocumented youth have been advocating for passage of the DREAM Act for over a decade (Galindo 2012). If passed The DREAM Act would provide them with affordable access to higher education as well as a path to citizenship. There were two important instances of resilience demonstrated by DREAMers (Galindo 2012). One of the most important occurred on March 10, 2010 in Chicago and it became National coming-out day, when multiple students marched through the streets and revealed their undocumented status in front of the media. The

other important event occurred on May 17, 2012 only two months after the coming-out movement. A group of undocumented students, known as DREAM Act 5, participated in an act of civil disobedience by conducting a sit-in at Senator McCain's office. This resulted in 3 students being arrested and led to a new political perspective for undocumented youth called Undocumented and Unafraid (Galindo 2012). This new political perspective rejected the invisibility and criminalization that came along with being an undocumented immigrant.

All of these acts of resistance made by undocumented immigrants in the US are responsible for the immigrant rights mobilization in reshaping immigration policies, an example of this is Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Kocher 2017). DACA was the result of an executive order under the administration of Barak Obama, in 2012 (Gonzales, Terriquez and Rusczyk. 2014). DACA was built as a response to the failure to pass the federal DREAM Act. During the past several decades under other administrations, congress failed to pass the Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) (Wong, Kerwin, Atkinson and McCarthy 2014). In 2013, it was estimated that DACA would defer the deportation of 1.9 million of undocumented youth and young adults in the United States (Gonzales et al. 2014). However, DACA did not offer a path to citizenship; nevertheless, it offered temporary conditional legal status as well as a 2-year work permit to those who were eligible (Gonzales et al. 2014). DACA recipients needed to meet certain criteria in order to qualify for the program. To qualify for the program, the individual must have had come to the United States before the age of 16, be younger than 31, resided in the US for consecutive 5 years, attended high school or GED program or

have had a high school diploma, go through an application process and paid a fee of \$465 (Gonzales et al. 2014).

Through acquiring DACA many undocumented youth were able to gain benefits, such as obtain a position in the work force that suited their bachelor's degree, acquire a driver's license, set social security and open bank accounts (Gonzales et al. 2014). Gonzales works suggest that DACA was a potential factor for undocumented youth to feel a sense of legal "legitimacy", "For many of these young people, this policy represents an affirmation of legitimacy, and the 2-year stays of deportation can ease some of their fears of apprehension, detention, and deportation" (Gonzales et al. 2014;16). According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website, the highest number of DACAmented students are of Mexican origin, having the largest population in the state of California. Another important theme found in Gonzales' work was that by benefiting from DACA, undocumented youth made new claims of belonging, as their status changed from "undocumented" to "DACAmented". However, Gonzales stated that DACA was not seen as a permanent solution because it did not grant permanent legal status, and in 2017, this program was terminated by the administration of President Trump.

As of September 5, 2017, under the presidential term of Donald J. Trump, the "wind down" of DACA was announced (American Immigration Council 2017). No other applications will be accepted as of September 2017, current beneficiaries whose status are to expire before March 5, 2018 could renew their status for another two years if they apply before March 6, 2018 (American Immigration Council 2017). If the beneficiary has

a status expiring as of March 6, 2018, they were no longer able to renew their deferred action or employment authorization (American Immigration Council 2017). Yet, there is a court battle pending to decide the future of DACA as several states, including California have filed a motion to keep DACA active and more than one federal judges have rejected Trump's administration decision of terminating DACA (India-West 2017).

DACA did not completely change the individual's legal status; it only helped as temporary shelter for a two-year period for those who qualified. There is a call for action, for new reforms to be placed as a permanent solution to undocumented childhood arrivals to the United States (Schmid 2013). With the termination of DACA and no recent laws being passed in the last few years, undocumented youth have been exposed to greater legal vulnerability (Menjívar and Abrego 2012).

### **Belonging**

The term "belonging", can be defined in multiple ways depending in the way the individual senses a certain group, place or social location (Youkhana, 2015). Belonging is often associated with citizenship and ethnicity. Undocumented youth in the US have to look beyond what is defined as the law to make claims of belonging in the US Society. Abrego (2011) defines undocumented immigrants as being "against the law" as they are banned from residing in the US, which creates negative stigma. Some ways in which undocumented youth have been able to resist against this legal vulnerability is by making claims of belonging in which they define themselves. The DREAM act gave individuals a sense of membership based on the right to claim themselves as Americans; it granted membership in a collective public way.

Sarabia (2012), states that U.S. legislations on immigration have only affected Mexican immigrants in a negative way casting them as “illegals”. One way in which undocumented youth are “cast away” and excluded as members of the US is by being subjected to deportation, undocumented immigrants hid in the shadows due to fear of being deported. Scholars on immigration analyzed “illegality” as social construct created by the state stating that those who are “illegal” are increasingly criminalized by the state; therefore they do not belong (Sarabia 2012; Ngai 2004). This creates a greater vulnerability for all undocumented immigrants not only creating a greater fear of deportation but by also preventing them from obtaining basic needs. For instance, every day, their lives are being limited when accessing basic needs such as education, health care, driver’s license or obtaining a job, all due to not being recognized by the state as legal subjects (Sarabia 2012).

For undocumented youth, having a DACA status also meant an increase sense in belonging. Siemons, Auerswald, and Brindis (2017), explored the expansion of societal integration a DACA status gave to undocumented youth. Although DACA only alleviated some of the limitations the lack of citizenship places on undocumented youth, it enable societal integration by providing undocumented youth with resources such as a driver’s license, a work permit and for some of them being able to apply to college, resulting in an increase of sense of belonging (Siemons et al. 2017). Although undocumented youth felt a greater sense of belonging with a DACA status, there were still many limitations that did not allow them to feel fully integrated. DACA did not fix the broken immigration

system in the U.S., it only alleviated by giving some integration to a small portion of undocumented youth population in the US (Siemons et al. 2017).

Undocumented immigrants will never fully belong as long as the state continues to criminalize them for not being able to obtain documents before entering the US (Sarabia 2012). It is important to continue exploring the ways undocumented youth are making claims of belonging today, after Trump terminated DACA. Most importantly, it is imperative that we continue to expand the literature that exposes the immigration system in the U.S. as the problem. As Sarabia (2012), explains, undocumented immigrants will never fully belong as long as the focus on the immigration problem is on criminalizing those who are unable to obtain the documentation before crossing the border rather than fixing the internal problem with immigration laws through an immigration reform in the US.

### **In-Betweenness**

Anzaldúa's concepts in borderlands was used to analyze the claims of belonging and legal vulnerability undocumented youth make while living in the U.S. Although, Anzaldúa's focus is not on immigration, she does focus on Mexican/Chicana (os), in a state of "in-between" borders, which makes her work best to analyze the concepts of Mexican undocumented youth. Undocumented youth can be seen to live "across borders", because they experience rejection from the country they know as a home due to their lack of legal status and at the same time they can feel disconnected from their birth country because they left that country as children (Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco and Dedios-Sanguinetti 2013). Through borderlands framework, Anzaldúa analyzes the act of

becoming conscious, this act is described as becoming conscious deeply aware and gaining knowledge, and she calls this the Mestiza consciousness. In the context of undocumented and DACAmented youth, they become conscious after finding out about their legal status and what this entitles in their lives. In page 48 she says “Knowing it’s painful, because after it happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am not longer the same person I was before” (Anzaldua 1987; 48). For many undocumented youth becoming consciously aware means understanding the limitations their lack of documentation puts in their everyday lives in the context of education and employment.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the claims of belonging and legal vulnerability of DACAmented and undocumented youth in the US experience due to their lack of legal status. This study compares the difference in claims of belonging and legal vulnerability of DACAmented and undocumented youth under the Trump administration after the rescinding of DACA.

Grounded theory is great for analyzing qualitative data because it provides guidelines for qualitative research (Charmaz 2003). When doing qualitative research Grounded theory helps identify new patterns that emerge from the data and help create a new theory (Kruger and Meyer 2007). Grounded theory uses two different ways of coding data that help explain the phenomena of the study (Glaser and Strauss 1967). For the purposes of this study, grounded theory will be used to analyze the similarities and any patterns that arise from the data collection of the interviews that were done with undocumented youth.

The study is guided by open ended interview questions; with a general interview guide but allowing for informal conversations (Butina 2015). The study is also important because due to the timing of the study under the presidency of Donald Trump. Trump has been vocal and has increased deportations and eliminated current laws and programs that provide legal reprieve to undocumented youth, e.g. DACA. Under this context,

undocumented youth may feel a greater sense of legal vulnerability and might make more or less claims of belonging.

### **Contribution**

There is no direct contribution to the participants; however, the study's contribution hope to advance our understanding of immigrant experiences that shape the lives of undocumented youth I as they make claims of belonging and in their experiences of legal vulnerability. The expected outcome is that termination or accessibility to DACA creates a greater legal vulnerability among this population. This study attempts to provide an analysis of how DACA as a program aided the lives of many undocumented youth and for some of them reshaped their identity as DACAmended rather than undocumented.

### **Sample and Recruiting Method**

The study consisted of two groups, each with three individuals, for a total of six participants. One of the groups consisted of undocumented students ages 18-25 who attended (dropped out or graduated) or are currently attending a public college/university located in the central valley area of California and who applied and received DACA. The other group consisted of undocumented students who had either graduated or are currently attending or attended (dropped out or graduated), from these public college/universities in the central valley but did not apply for DACA. The participants all meet the same criteria, attended college/university (dropped out or graduated) or are currently attending college/university. They migrated to the United States before age 14, and were 18 years or old, as well as be originally from Mexico. The only difference between the participants is their DACAmended status. The criteria for excluding

participants is as follows: Students who were under the age of 18, students who were not of Mexican nationality, students who were over the age of 25, students ineligible for DACA because this study will focus on undocumented youth who were able to apply for DACA.

The recruitment process in this study was guided by snowball sampling in the central Valley rural area of California. Research participation flyers were placed in various locations across the Central Valley such as laundry mats and convenience stores. The flyers were written in English and informed participants this was a confidential study. The researcher sought a total of 6 participants for completion of this study. Additionally, the researcher contacted a key informant for the purpose of seeking participants for the study and provided her with business cards, email and phone number. A key informant as defined by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) is an individual who is selected from the overall sample of research participants and who helps identify others or with important insight that helps advance the research.

Additionally, the researcher provided the key informant with a flyer to give to participants explaining the purpose of the study. Once the researcher began to interview process, the individuals participating were asked to refer friends. Snowball sample method is the most adequate for this study due to the limitation of obtaining participants in this population for study. Undocumented youth often do not share their legal status due to their fears of legal vulnerability. One limitation of this method is that there is not equal opportunity for participants to be selected. Most of the selection is based on the network participants have with one another, this method involved asking participants who were

selected to recruit other participants (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007). However having several different point of entry diversified the pool of participants.

### **Data collection**

The interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred location, across four different towns in the central valley area of CA, during the months of April 2018 and May 2018. Researcher arranged for the meeting time and place based on interviewee preferences. Researcher traveled to the participant's preferred location in order to conduct the interview. Four of the six participants invited the researcher to meet with them at privacy of their home. Another participant felt more comfortable meeting at a local coffee shop and the last participant asked researcher to meet with her in one of the open areas of her college campus. Any information via phone or email was deleted immediately after the interview to ensure confidentiality to the participant. During the interview, researcher first read over consent form for data collection as well as consent for audio recording to remind interviewees that participation was voluntarily and that they could withdraw at any time. Also, participants involved in this study obtained a copy of the consent form but were not required to sign it, as consent was obtained verbally. Interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes and were conducted in English.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher chose to do this study qualitative because qualitative data allows for themes and patterns to be found within the data collected in order to capture the participants voices (Butina 2015). For the purpose of this study, the data was collected through audio recording by using a tape-recorder. During the interviews, the researcher

also took notes by pen and paper. Next, interviews were transcribed manually to an electronic file in a computer, which remained protected with a password, only used by researcher and the researcher chose to enter data manually. The last step consisted of the interpretation of the finding/themes found from the data gathered. For this study, there were three major findings, which included 1) Belonging, 2) Legal vulnerability and 3) a sense of powerlessness. These three major findings listed above were the prevailing themes that emerged from the narratives of the participants.

### **Protection of Participants**

The California State University, Sacramento Institutional Review Board (IRB) first gave approval to the researcher in order to conduct the interviews. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study as well as any risks that it may present. A consent form was provided to better inform the participant about confidentiality but none of them were required to sign it. Instead of a signed consent form, verbal consent was recorded through an audio recorder prior to the start of each of the interviews. Participant's real names were not used, each participant was provided with a pseudonym to keep identity confidential. Throughout the interviews, the participants were reminded that participation was voluntarily. Any contact information such as text messages, phone numbers, emails, written notes, and audio recordings were kept confidential and under the pseudonyms. Once the interviews were fully transcribed, all the identifiable information was deleted, and transcriptions were made de-identified and participants are not to be contacted again. If at any point during or after the interview the participants felt

the need for counseling services, a referral to the Sacramento State University Health Center was offered.

### **Limitations**

In this qualitative study, it was important to collect the feelings, experiences and thoughts from each of the participants, yet due to the small sample size, we are only able to capture a small part of the whole picture (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007). One limitation of this method of selection is that there is not an equal opportunity for participants to be selected. Most of the selection was based on the network participants had with one another. There could be a minimal psychological risk during the conduction of interviews as participants will be encouraged to share answer to personal questions about their undocumented experience in the US and how this affected their experiences in claims of belonging and legal vulnerability. To minimize the psychological risk, researcher reminded participants that they did not need to answer to all questions, and can choose to skip any question that may make them feel uncomfortable. Any discomfort presented during the interview, was addressed and participants were reminded that their information is kept confidential at all times.

Open-ended interviews are a common approach of qualitative studies; the researcher chose to select this approach to better capture the experiences of undocumented youth living in the U.S. under the Trump administration. The next chapter reviews the main findings and then follows by a discussing analyzing them. See Table 1 in Appendix B for a list of participants and key demographic data.

## **Chapter 4**

### **FINDINGS**

This study examines claims of belonging and legal vulnerability of undocumented Mexican youth who were raised in the United States, specifically in the Central Valley area of the state of California. This study includes a total of six participants, three undocumented and three DACAmented immigrants from Mexico. Three main themes emerged: belonging, legal vulnerability, and a sense of powerlessness. These themes were explored in the context of after Donald Trump presidency as he ran an anti-immigration campaign and also terminated DACA within his first year in office.

DACA's recent discontinuation suggests an increase in insecurity and vulnerability were faced by both DACAmented and undocumented youth (Mendez and Schmalzbauer 2018). In addition, due to race and physical features many Latinos aside from their legal status are often racially stigmatized as not belonging to "this place" (Licona and Maldonado 2014). Lastly, the study findings add to the existing literature on sense of powerlessness due to lack of citizenship in undocumented youth. Gonzales and Chavez (2012), found that undocumented youth living in the U.S. since children are socialized the same way as their documented peers however they are at a vulnerable position and experience powerlessness in their everyday lives due to their lack of citizenship, in the context of "abjectivity".

#### **Belonging**

All participants in the study expressed a feeling of belonging in the United States, some in more ways than others. In fact, three out of the six participants referred to the

U.S. as their “home” and expressed feelings of fear if they were to be obligated to return to Mexico. These three participants referred to the U.S. as the “only home” they knew. DACAmented participants were asked if they felt they belonged in the United States.

For example, Estrella, an 18 year old woman who came to the U.S. at age 4 with a visa, who currently attends college said, “I was 4 years old when I came.. umm, como se dice no soy de aqui, pero no soy de alla tampoco, I’m not from here, I’m not from there, so I would say I’m Mexican-American basically” (Estrella). She stated that although she was born in Mexico she had lived in the U.S for the last 14 years of her life, without once visiting Mexico because her legal status did not allow her to. She self-identified as Mexican-American because she has been socialized as American in her years in the U.S even though her country of origin is Mexico. Estrella also reports feeling in a state of “in-between” much like borderlands from Anzaldua’s borderlands theory, a state of in between Mexico and America belonging to both countries.

Rita, a 24-year old DACAmented woman, came to the U.S. at 10 years old and currently attends college. When asked if she belonged, she responded that although coming to the U.S did not make her American, she did feel Mexican-American because she has embraced the American culture, yet she felt more Mexican than she did American. Due to her parent’s national origin, she primarily identified as Mexican, “but mostly I would be Mexican because everyone in my family is Mexican, it’s not like my dad is white and my mom is Mexican, so I’m just Mexican” (Rita). Similarly, to Estrella, Rita also self-identified as Mexican-American and felt American because of the

socialization she went through when growing up in the U.S., yet she feels more Mexican than American due to her national identity.

Furthermore, Pati an Undocumented 25 year old woman, who came to the U.S. when she was 10 and who dropped out of college, also experienced the feeling of belonging to the U.S. having spent most of her life in this country. When asked if she belonged in the U.S., Pati said,

Pienso que he tenido muchos años aquí en los que he aprendido a trabajar a ganarme la vida, y siento que todo lo que tengo me lo gané gracias a mi esfuerzo y a este país que tiene muchas ayudas-Pati.

She experienced belonging through multiple factors. First, she has lived in the U.S. most of her life; in addition, she attributes belonging to having learned how to earn things through challenging work. Another way in which she experienced feelings of belonging is by taking advantage of the opportunities this country has to offer; yet again, she did not specify what opportunities. These components are what made Pati feel part of this country.

Not all participants experienced belonging through their social upbringing nor because of their feeling as if the United States was their home; instead, a few of the participants found a sense of belonging in knowing that this is where their families reside and if their families were to leave the U.S. they would leave as well. For example, Raul a 20-year old DACAmented man expressed the feeling of belonging in a different manner, “Well my family being here, I have family that is here, my mom and my dad being here, I feel like wherever my parents are that’s where I need to be”. For Raul belonging meant

being with his family rather than belonging to a place, country or national group, or cultural practices, this made his case different to the rest of the participants.

All participants in this study defined their experiences of belonging in different ways. Some referred to the U.S as their “home”, as they grew up and were raised with a Mexican-American culture. Although all the participants’ country of origin is Mexico, they have all lived in the U.S. for over half of their lives mostly in Mexico and Mexican-American communities, Thus, most self-identified as Mexican-American and expressed feelings of belonging to the U.S. due to not knowing any other “home.” The only participant who did not associate belonging with the U.S. but rather with his family is Raul. Although not all participants associated the feeling of belonging to a specific place such as the United States; they all expressed belonging to “home,” whether this meant living in the U.S for most of their lives or being where their families are.

Drawing back from previous literature the term belonging as defined as the individual sensing a certain connection to a group or certain location (Youkhana, 2015). In this study, the participants experienced belonging through a certain place; the U.S. but also on the term “home” and what this meant for them. Belonging has also been associated with a place or social location (Mendez and Schemalzbauer, 2018). With the increase of immigration enforcement not only across the U.S. and Mexico border but also in the interior of the U.S., claims of belonging have decreased and fear of deportation has increased among this population (Mendez and Schmalzbauer 2018). This literature explores why undocumented individuals feel they do not belong, often because belonging is associated with citizenship but tends to minimize belonging experienced through

socialization. The participants in this study all experienced belonging through socialization; they felt they belong to the U.S. because they grew up partaking in the Mexican and Mexican-American communities in the U.S. and because their immediate family members are all residing in the U.S. The voices of the participants indicate that they are being connected to the place through culture and socialization and not to the country in legalistic terms. In summary, this finding suggests that the context in which belonging is defined must be changed to better understand the experiences of undocumented youth living in the U.S. .

### **Legal Vulnerability**

This study also looked at the way undocumented youth face legal vulnerability under the Trump era. All participants were asked questions about their feelings towards Donald Trump taking over the U.S. presidency. All participants expressed fear, disappointment, and an increased sense of legal vulnerability. One way in which they all seemed to experienced legal vulnerability during the Trump era was through an increase of racist incidents and a bigger threat of deportation. For example, Margarita, an 18-year-old undocumented college student who did not qualify for the DACA program expressed a greater fear of deportation as Trump took over the presidency;

You know it's just kind of changed everything because like you know I'm just like more fearful of being deported or detained and like all these things racist people say started coming out and I guess it's harder in a way (Margarita).

Additionally, Trump's presidency has allowed for a greater legal vulnerability among undocumented immigrants. Many felt that they were exposed to more over racial comments towards many minorities groups, which have become more permissible.

Margarita states that such comments cause fear for her life. Margarita felt a greater fear of deportation, as Trump became president because she feels that her vulnerability as an undocumented immigrant, which in the past she felt somewhat protected, is now at risk of exposure with the rise in racism and discrimination directed to Latino/as who look like her. Latinos/as and those who resemble them are prone to face the same damage done by anti-immigrant legislation and profiling (Gonzales and Chavez 2012).

In the experiences shared by the participants of this study, racism was unveiled through the anti-immigrant incidents they experienced. For example, Pati reported to have experienced a greater fear of deportation also due to the racist comments people at her workplace make after Trump took the presidency of the U.S., "...Ya no hay casi igualdad, ya no hay, people are being more racist, they try to do more racist comments y eso es lo que pienso que me ha afectado mas" (Pati). Pati reports feeling more legally vulnerable as more people engage in racist comments such as "go back to your country" compared to how she was treated by others previous to Donald Trump becoming president; Chavez (2008), calls it criminalization of immigration. In the past years, the expansion of immigration enforcement across the U.S.-Mexico border which has resulted in an increased of racial profiling reinforcing legal vulnerability among undocumented (Golash-Boza 2015).

Alma an undocumented 22-year-old college student also expressed feeling greater legal vulnerability with the results of the election and the disadvantages this brought to her and other undocumented individuals. When asked about her feelings regarding Trump becoming president, Alma said,

I felt disappointed because I've been here for so long and you know, as you get older you think things are going to change people are going to accept you more and you live here and you try doing everything by the book, you respect the laws and just to know that people support a person who judges you by the color of your skin or where you come from, it's kind of disappointing to think that you know, people allow that, people would even consider a person like that –Alma

Alma felt that prior to Trump becoming president she had hope that things would change in regard to immigration; however, she felt disappointed not only that he took presidency but also that other people in the U.S. support his views in regard to the deportation of immigrants. Trump has made generalizations about Mexican immigrants as “rapist” and bad people, to what Alma feels he has normalized racist views, which is very disappointing for her. Alma described herself as someone who “does everything by the book” and “respects the laws”, she feels she is doing everything in her power hoping for some change, and now thinks everything has regressed.

Pati, Margarita, and Alma expressed experiencing greater fear of deportation as the result of Trump becoming president. The participants expressed the increase in legal vulnerability was in part due to the amount of racism they have experienced after Trump became the U.S. president. Not only participants expressed their fear towards deportation, but also their vulnerability due to the discrimination and racism they face in their everyday life. Participants uniformly felt disappointed in the U.S. immigration system. For example, Alma reported feeling hopeless knowing that she grew up in a country where people support views of discriminations as she used in her descriptions, someone who “judges you by your skin color” and “where you come from”. The participant’s legal vulnerability increased because of the 2016 presidential election (Mendez and

Schmalzbauer 2018). Previous literature focuses on experiences of legal vulnerability through anti-immigration legislation and profiling instances but ignores legal vulnerability under the Trump era and the experiences of DACAmented and undocumented youth face.

Legal vulnerability in this study was experienced through becoming visible to the world as undocumented individuals. One example of this was, Estrella's experience when applying to a job, she had to fill out the box that asked if is an "alien", she felt discriminated and vulnerable to everyone at her workplace knowing she is undocumented. Lincona and Maldonado (2014), describe visibility in the context of undocumented immigrants as often associated with "unbelonging" and also becoming the target of surveillance and policeability (Lincona and Maldonado 2014). Another way in which invisibility is present in undocumented immigrants' lives is through the act of deportation, Lincona and Maldonado (2014), state that the invisibility of these undocumented immigrants becomes visible to their family, friends and community members, as they are detained or deported. In this study, none of the participants had experienced deportation or had any immediate family members who had been detained or deported. Part of the literature in invisibility and visibility in the context of legal vulnerability comes from the analysis of undocumented immigrants in the work place (Maldonado 2009). Coming to the U.S., undocumented immigrants, to survive their everyday lives, are forced to work. Often, their workplace is not a secure place because they are at risk of deportation. In this study, all participants mention feeling legal vulnerability at their workplace. One participant said she did not feel comfortable sharing

her legal status with the rest of the people she worked with, she felt it was not necessary for them to know. Another participant, as mentioned previously, felt more vulnerable after filling out paperwork that required her to say she was undocumented, she felt exposed and vulnerable. Another participant also felt the most vulnerable after Trump became the U.S. president; she felt customers and coworkers from her workplace became more racist towards her and individuals who look like her, a Latina woman.

In sum, legal vulnerability affects undocumented individuals' everyday lives, they are often wondering when someone is going to ask them for their documents and live in fear of deportation. The findings of this study add to the literature of legal vulnerability by restating that undocumented youth continue to live in fear but there is also a greater fear of deportation under the Trump administration and the rescinding of DACA (DeBry 2014). It is crucial to continue to expand research in this area that will aid those living in fear of deportation limiting their interaction with others in their community, forces them to take jobs where they are discriminated against, and being victims of racism in their everyday lives (Lincona and Maldonado 2014). Uniformly, participants on this study reported to experience everyday limitations due to their lack of legal status; experiences of powerlessness.

### **Sense of Powerlessness**

The feeling of powerlessness is a constant theme that emerged throughout all the interviews. All participants expressed feeling powerless in many instances of their lives, starting with their arrival to the U.S. without being given a choice. Immigrating to the U.S. as children did not allow them to decide whether they wanted to come to the U.S. or

not; instead, their parents made the decision for them. For example, when asked about how Pati came to the U.S, she said, “we were coming in for just vacation and my mom decided that she wanted to just live here” (Pati). Pati references her mother as the one who made the decision to stay as a child and argues she did not have the power to agree or disagree with her decision, making this her first experience of powerlessness under her undocumented identity. Alma described another instance of powerlessness when talking about her college experience as an undocumented student. She felt powerless not being able to go to college right after high school due to her lack of legality in the United States, “I couldn’t legally drive, so that’s why I didn’t drive, so I couldn’t get to school because of that so yeah that’s why I didn’t go right after high school to college” (Alma). Furthermore, Alma did not apply to DACA because she was afraid of getting deported; therefore, she was not able to legally obtain a driver’s license or a work permit. These were factors that made Alma feel powerless in her everyday activities, especially in things she would have liked to accomplish such as attending college after high school.

In another case, Estrella also experienced feeling powerless; one specific instance that she described is when she was hired at her current job. When filling out her job application she was asked if she was an “alien”, this term, is a dehumanizing term.

Estrella said,

When I was barley getting hired it (Job applications), said that if I was an alien and I was like oh my God, like I wanted to cry, like how is it that, why did you guys accept me?, you guys already hired me, why does it matter, yeah that made me feel really bad (Estrella).

Estrella felt powerless knowing she could not change being called an alien in the legal status section in her job application. She expressed hurt that result from being dehumanized by the term “alien” while knowing there was nothing she could do to change the situation made it more frustrating. All participants described feeling powerless in one way or another due to the limited options available to them based on their legality. All participants explained that their powerlessness began the moment their parents took the decision to migrate to the U.S. and continued as their families decided to stay in the United States permanently. Participants described powerlessness in different ways. Pati began by feeling powerless when her mother made the decision to come and live in the U.S; and Alma felt powerless by not being able to attend college because she was not eligible to obtain a license, which deprived her of reliable transportation. Finally, Estrella experienced feeling powerless when her she felt dehumanized by the label she received at her workplace where she had to describe herself as an “alien” because she was undocumented.

Gonzales and Chavez (2012), examined the feeling of powerlessness of undocumented individuals in the context of abjectivity, “casting away”. This abjectivity prevents undocumented individuals in their social economical and biological life. Abjectivity adds in belonging and legal vulnerability to the discussion, it examines the everyday struggles that undocumented youth must face living as “illegal”, what this means is that many times undocumented youth must adjust or abandon their plans due to their legal status. Although undocumented individuals are more likely to experience powerlessness, they are not completely powerless as they engage in personal acts of

resistance. One example of this is the act of becoming educated whether this consists of academic education or becoming educated in political activism towards immigration reforms (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). In this study, although all participants reported having experience powerlessness throughout their life in the US, they also were actively engaging in acts of resistance one way or another. Most of them had attended or been enrolled in college and had full-time jobs. Many of them (DACAmented participants) also talked about obtaining their social security and their driver's license. All these experiences of powerlessness puts them at a position of vulnerability because although they grew up with the same culture as the rest of their documented peers, their undocumented status puts them at a position of legal vulnerability affecting all aspects of their lives (Gonzales and Chavez 2012).

### **Conclusion**

Through the narrative of all participants in this study, three major themes came to light: belonging, legal vulnerability, and sense of powerlessness. It is important to acknowledge that all participants self-identified as Mexican-Americans, not as national belonging, but through socialization, meaning that the U.S government does not recognize them as legal citizens but rather they identify themselves as cultural citizens in regard to being active members of society. Unfortunately, the undocumented and DACAmented participants also experienced legal vulnerability through discrimination, fear of deportation and racism under the Trump Era, all while feeling a sense of powerlessness. Legal vulnerability and powerlessness are intertwined to the belonging the participants felt. In this study, belonging was associated with family, "home" and

one's culture rather than belonging in a legal category. Therefore, we must conclude that undocumented and DACAmented individuals who participated in this study made sense of their belonging through socialization because even when they felt powerless and were legally vulnerable-- they lacked the power and legality to feel like they fully belonged to the U.S as legal citizens. Undocumented youth in the US are in a constant state of limbo living their lives as "illegal" (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). All experiences discussed above can only be are continuously affecting their everyday lives, which is why providing a path to citizenship is crucial, something only Congress can do.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the experiences of six DACAmented and undocumented individuals living in the U.S. under the Trump administration. The research began by exploring the literature of claims of belonging and legal vulnerability as undocumented youth in the U.S. experienced through their lives. The theoretical framework used for this study is *Borderlands* by Gloria Anzaldua. Anzaldua's analysis of borderlands which is guided by the mestiza consciousness that emerges as the individual becomes aware that they are not fully accepted to both sides of the border (Ramlow 2006). This theoretical framework explores the anger and isolation of living in the margins of culture and collective identity. For Anzaldua, borders are not just lines, instead, they are boundaries set up to distinguish us from them. As Anzaldua states, there are physical and cultural borders, the physical one is policed by "la migra" and the cultural one is dominated by the Anglo culture (Anzaldua 1987). Everyday life is different depending on which side one resides in. Undocumented youth in the U.S. become aware of this exclusion that they face once they have come consciously aware of their undocumented status. The mestiza consciousness also refers to being "here" and being "there", for the purpose of this study the experiences of belonging that the participants shared can be analyzed through this framework. All participants self-identified as Mexican American, many of them expressed feeling Mexican due to their Mexican roots and being born in that country yet they also experienced feeling American because they had been socialized with the American culture as they spent most of their lives in the U.S.

Also, in *Borderlands*, Anzaldua (1987), highlights the term “*La facultad*”, which is defined as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities” (Anzaldua 1987; 38). *La Facultad* is the way in which those who have faced exclusion resist e.g. Undocumented youth activists. The participants of this study expressed feeling exclusion through legal vulnerability and experiences of powerlessness. Many of them experienced exclusion in different contexts such as; jobs they applied to, the interaction with peers they attended school with, the racist comments that were said to them by others. Yet, Anzaldua’s analysis of what she calls “Nepantla” or “state of in-between”, this feeling of exclusion is referenced as a form resilience, “Those who are pounced on the most, have it the strongest—the females, the homosexuals, of all races, the dark-skinned, the outcasts, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign” (Anzaldua 1987; 60). For the purpose of the study, the findings suggest that those DACAmented and undocumented participants were actively resisting in the same way in which Anzaldua makes her analysis of *Borderlands*. Undocumented youth shared their experiences of belonging, legal vulnerability and powerlessness through their narrative, yet they all had jobs, had attend, were attending or planning to reenter to a college/university. Many had driver’s licenses, social security numbers or even businesses. These can all be seen as acts of resistance that reject those anti-immigrant restrictions that are pervasive in the U.S.

Furthermore, this study examined the experiences of belonging, legal vulnerability, and sense of powerlessness. All participants reported having these experiences upon their arrival to the U.S. as children. These themes suggests that

undocumented and DACAmented youth in the U.S. have had common experiences of legal vulnerability, belonging and a sense of powerlessness due to their lack of legal status. Particularly one distinction between both DACAmented and Undocumented participants was that undocumented participants reported to feeling more legal vulnerability after Trump became president. Two of the 3 participants who were undocumented married within the first year of Trump's presidency in hopes to become documented and be able to stay in the U.S. DACAmented participants on the other side did not report for marriage to be one of their future plans, instead they felt a greater sense of legal vulnerability knowing that DACA would not longer protect their undocumented status in the U.S. Some of them even expressed feeling overwhelmed and fearful of their future in the U.S.

it was really rough even to this day like it's sad like I think about it and it makes me really overwhelmed why would you just want to do that, what's the motive to do that, why? you know, umm we are not doing any harm to other people (Estrella).

### **Significance**

After the Trump administration took office on January 2017, feelings of fear and disappointment were spread across undocumented immigrants in the U.S. One of the reasons was because three executive orders presented as threats against immigrants under his campaigned were issued (Kocher 2017). Another very significant event that took place under the Trump administration was the rescinding of DACA on September 4, 2017, which protected about 800,000 undocumented young individuals across the US. In this context, there is a greater sense of legal vulnerability was felt among all those who

were protected under the DACA program but it also increased the fear of deportation among all those undocumented immigrants. Trump's administration did not only target DACAmented individuals, it targeted immigrants, specifically brown immigrants. The timing of this study contributes to the new literature produced on immigration under this Trump Era and the termination of DACA. This study adds to the limited literature that has been produced in this area of study, it also shows how DACAmented and undocumented youth reflect on their own experiences of powerlessness, legal vulnerability and belonging under the Trump Era in the US. All interviews were powerful and enlightening, all in different ways but had intersecting themes. As discussed in the previous chapters, the three themes that emerged from this study were belonging, legal vulnerability and a sense of powerlessness.

### **Limitations/Strengths**

The purpose of this study is to capture the experiences of belonging and legal vulnerability DACAmented and undocumented youth are experiencing under the Trump administration, yet it is important to consider the limitations. One major limitation of this study results from the sample size. Due to sample size, the results cannot be generalized to all undocumented and DACAmented youth in the US. Sample size also limited the generalization of location, this study can only be generalized to the geographical location of the Central Valley area in California. There were four major towns where the interviews were conducted that for confidentiality purposes will not be mentioned. One major strength of the use of snow ball sampling in this study is that it allowed researcher to reach a population that could have been difficult to reach if any other sampling method

had been used. Lastly, because a snowball sample method was used, interviews were limited to individuals who all knew each other yet, this was beneficial for the study because it allowed for the completion of the study to be done in a short time.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

At the end of each interview, the researcher collected opinions from each of the participants to further research experiences of legal vulnerability and belonging of undocumented individuals. Based on the findings that emerged from this data one suggestion is to further explore how much representation Mexican undocumented population has in Congress. Most participants when asked of ways in which they feel they could be helped in the US responded by saying that they wanted to see more people “like them”, in Congress or positions that hold power within the U.S. legal system. Representation can further aid the ways in which immigration laws in the US are enacted.

Furthermore, another area that needs to be further explored in regards to a sense of powerlessness, belonging and legal vulnerability in regards to immigration is the ways in which may feel the need to marry a person who can help with the legalization of their legal status. As of today, the research including in mixed-status couples, meaning a US citizen married to a non-citizen is limited, and most have been qualitative (Schueths 2015). Based on this study, the participants who had recently married a citizen and were in the process of legalizing their legal status were the most vocal about the need for immigration changes. Research shows that those with most privileges between mixed-status couples are more likely to be more vocal about the need for immigration change as they are at a lesser risk of deportation (Schueths 2015). The decision to marry, is a

decision taken between the two individuals who are in that relationship with each other but when the decision to be married is made between a mixed statuses couples, the US immigration system plays an important part, specifically when the undocumented individual is Latino/a, person of color (Abrahams 2007). For further research in this area, it is imperative to explore the reasoning behind the marriage of mixed-status couples under the Trump Administration. Based on the findings in this study the suggestion made is that their marriage was partly caused to the increased of fear and legal vulnerability felt as Trump became the US president and resided DACA, their only shield against deportation. This finding was not explored or intended to be explored prior to the study, therefore, the focus was not emphasized in the previous and current literature on this area.

### **Reflection**

In this study, DACAmented and undocumented voices were collected through qualitative interviews. The participants shared their experiences of legal vulnerability from the moment they arrived to the United States to the present day. All participants shared their desire to study and work but were limited due to their lack of legal status. The findings reflect that although all participants expressed feelings of fear in their future as well as experiences of powerlessness throughout their experiences in the U.S. Participants were also actively trying to better their future in the U.S. by continuously looking for education and employment opportunities available for them. Three of the participants seek help from a lawyer as president Trump resided DACA. Two out of three undocumented who did not apply to DACA got married within the past year and are in the process of legalizing through their spouse. The rest of the participants all reported to

be either working a full-time job or attending a college or university full time, four out of the six participants were doing both, working while studying.

Although the participants in this study were actively trying to better their future, it is imperative to understand the gaps in policies around immigration and legalization. At the timing of this study, there are no current policies that fully support or assist Mexican undocumented youth in the US. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), was one program that facilitated the participation in education or workforce for this population. One consistent message that emerged in this study is that Mexican undocumented are in the US as contributors and not burdens. Politicians who create policies involving the legalization of undocumented immigrants in the US need to hear the experiences of legal vulnerability and belonging on DACAmented and undocumented Mexican youth, in order to better serve not only this population but also all individuals in the United States.

APPENDIX A  
Interview Questions

## Interview Question

### **Immigration:**

At what age did you come to the United States?

How did you come?

How did you learn you were undocumented?

Did you know what being undocumented meant?

How do you identify? And why?

Do you feel American? And How? Has that ever changed?

Do you feel like you belong where do you feel like you belong?

### **DACA**

Did you apply DACA?

How did you apply? Who helped you?

Did you have any doubts about applying, if so why?

If not, Why did you not obtain DACA?

What has your experience with DACA been like?

What has your experience without DACA been like?

What was your life like before DACA?

After DACA?

After Trump rescinded DACA how did you feel?

### **Legal Status**

Do you ever share your legal status with others at school?

What was your experience at school like before DACA?

What was it like after?

Do you feel like your legal status has an effect in the way you interact with other?

Do you feel others treat you different after you have shared your legal status with them?

Why?

What is different?

**Education:**

Did you apply to college/university after graduating high school? Why? Why not?

Are you currently enrolled?

What effect did having/not having DACA have in your education?

**Trump's presidency:**

How did you feel when Trump became president?

After Trump rescinded DACA how did you feel?

What is the future like for you?

As a country, what can we do to help? Politically? As a community

APPENDIX B

Demographics

### Demographics

<b>Participant's Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Status:</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Years of Edu. After High School</b>	<b>Relationship status</b>
Pati	Undocumented	25	Waitress	4 months	Married
Alma	Undocumented	22	Office Clerk	Ongoing	Married
Margarita	Undocumented	18	Student	Ongoing	Single
Rita	DACAmented	24	Emergency Medical Technician	Ongoing	Engaged
Raul	DACAmented	20	Business owner	2 years	Single
Estrella	DACAmented	18	Esthetician/student	Ongoing	Single

Table above provides demographics of participants in this study.

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