



**The Integration of Mexican Undocumented Students  
in American Society: An Analysis of the DACA Program**

Master Thesis by Anniek van Keeken

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*Photo on the cover: Volunteers of the NGO Border Angels go into the desert to place water jugs to limit the deaths of immigrants crossing the border illegally (approximately 1,000 deaths of dehydration each year). Source: author.*

## Abstract

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This research demonstrates the significance of immigration status in the integration processes of undocumented Mexican students with regards to their access to institutions and (social) services, belonging, and identity (formation), arguing that the DACA program influences predominantly the economic integration of students while lacking the ability for social/cultural and identity integration of its participants. This DACA program stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and grants eligible students a Social Security Number through which they are able to – among others – apply for legal employment, financial aid, and a drivers' license. The program is temporary in that eligibility is only for two years (after which participants have to apply again) and it is yet unknown if a next presidential administration will continue this program put in place by President Barack Obama. A qualitative study was conducted within the undocumented Mexican student community of San Diego, California to explore their integration experiences. The research draws on participant observation and interviews with both DACA participants and undocumented students. This thesis takes on an interrelated analysis of the DACA program by focusing on its influence on economic integration, – by researching student's access to institutions and services – social/cultural integration, – through student's belonging – and identity integration – through the concept of identity (formation). This ethnographic approach to research was guided by a theoretical framework drawing on anthropological literature attending to integration, access, belonging, and identity. The findings show that while the DACA program positively influence undocumented students' access and economic integration in American society, it has little effect on student's belonging and identity because of the temporary character of the program and because of the hostility students continue to experience by American society, media, and politics.

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# Map of the United States of America



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# Chapter 1 –

## Introduction and Research

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This chapter is an introduction to the topic and an elaboration on how I have obtained my data for this research. The research methods will be described, as well as the strategies regarding the process of the fieldwork will be laid out; who my respondents are and how and where I have recruited them, the research location and its influence on my outcome, and how I have analyzed my data. In addition, I will reflect on my role as researcher and the implications this might have for my data, along with several limitations of this research. But first of all, I will place this research within the broader light of world migration, after which I will address the problem statement and my specific research questions that form the basis of this research project.

### 1.1 – Introduction to Migration

Globalization and migration are ever prevailing occurrences in today's world. There are many pull and push factors for migrating to another country, yet restrictions and regulations for citizenship has become stricter (Obeler, 2006). Those that want to migrate or come to a country seeking asylum often await a long process.

Migration flows consist of migrants – who, for example, move because of economic reasons – as well as refugees from regions with war or dictatorial reign seeking asylum abroad. The flows of refugees arriving at the shores of Greece, Malta, and Italy have been on the news frequently and it has stirred the global question of how to handle these flows. While western countries try to handle the illegal circuit and migration disasters on the one hand, they are also faced with providing humanitarian aid to those who reach the shores and seek help. While some of these refugees disappear in illegality, others wait for years to have their case processed.

Arriving in a host country legally or illegally, out of fear or out of desire; all migrant populations seek a better place to live. From a humanitarian perspective, countries are to treat migrants and refugees with respect and dignity. Yet what to do with those that come illegally, overstay their visa, or refuse to leave the country if their asylum is not granted? In the Netherlands they speak of providing “bed, bad en brood [bed, bath, and bread]” for a certain amount of time to those illegally residing, some countries have no regulations dedicated to those at the margins of society. The line between refugees and migrants is politically contested and nations try to enforce their borders and ensure its continued legitimacy.

This research is focused on the migration and integration debate in the United States of America. Large flows of immigrant populations from Central and South America – in particular from Mexico – cross the U.S.-Mexican border to try and build up a new life in America. Without the legal papers to reside in America, this group is the so-called “undocumented population.” How is America to handle these migration flows? And what to do when there are children involved?



## 1.2 – Problem Statement

In America, the immigration debate has been relatively high on the agenda of each presidential administration and the legislation concerning undocumented immigrants is continuously changing. Of the approximately 12 million undocumented migrants in America, a significant part is young – children, students, and adolescents – and live the consequence of their parents' decision to illegally migrate. The group that came to America as children along with their parents is called the 1.5 generation. This generation is raised in America and is determined to change the immigration legislation in their favor. This group is allowed to go to high school and experience some level of equality until their eighteenth birthday. Once they graduate from high school, these undocumented youth experience exclusion from society instead of inclusion. Continuing to higher education is unavailable for the majority due to financial restraints, limiting their chances of upward mobility. Those that do attend university again experience exclusion after graduation as they are not allowed to put to practice their academic skills without a Social Security Number. This creates a serious problem for a continuously growing group of students.

Some of the undocumented youth qualify for the – relatively new – DACA program and can temporarily stay in America. DACA stands for *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* and is specifically meant for children who came to America with their parents at a young age. This immigration program does not guarantee full inclusion in American society, yet the program grants eligible students a Social Security Number and access to institutions and services such as (legal) employment, financial aid, and travel. Yet many still express experiencing both legal and societal exclusion in their daily lives. What are the affects of the DACA program on the integration of undocumented students in American society?

Those not eligible for DACA try to find a way to citizenship while dealing with their illegality in such a way that they can survive (and possibly thrive) in American society unnoticed. With Obama's proposition called the Dream Act, many undocumented youth and DACA students have formed groups in favor of this act that would grant them citizenship. This immigration legislation has been on the agenda since 2001, but has yet to be legalized. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate are currently housing a majority of Republicans, making the chances of this act to pass slim. Many undocumented students have 'come out' and advocate equal rights while at the same time trying to limit the chances of being deported. How do undocumented students and DACA students deal with their illegality and to what extent does it influence their sense of belonging and identity (formation)? Undocumented immigrants need to be cautious to limit their chances of being caught; a small felony such as running a red light could lead to deportation. Immigration status thus greatly influences undocumented students' daily actions and the way they perceive themselves and their social and economic position within American society.

The immigration legislation is fluid in the sense that the rules and regulations for undocumented immigrants change. President Obama recently (November 2014) expanded the DACA program and as of January 2015 – through the AB60 law – eligible undocumented

immigrants are allowed to obtain a drivers license regardless of their immigration status in the state of California. Consequently, not only the policies but also the immigration status and the forms of inclusion and exclusion undocumented immigrants experience, continuously change. These immigrants thus have to be flexible and knowledgeable about their rights and privileges. Many form groups to help one another and to try to expand their rights. Not only the policies but also these communities and organizations' efforts affect the immigrants' integration in American society, as well as their sense of belonging and identity (formation).

While the federal Dream Act never became legislated, the DACA program did and has been in effect since late 2012. Limited studies have been conducted on this program while DACA raises a number of questions about the benefits and limitations for its participants. How does it influence the integration of the eligible DACA participants? What are the benefits for the American government to legislate such a program? Does it also affect the ineligible undocumented populations? And how does American society regard this program? This particular research will focus on how the DACA program influences the integration of Mexican undocumented students by reviewing the experiences of both DACA students and undocumented students with regards to their access, belonging, and identity (formation).

### 1.3 – Problem Approach

The approach taken in this research is focused on three forms of integration that are identified in the integration literature: economic integration, social/cultural integration, and identity integration. This research will analyze the influence of the DACA program by looking at three aspects of each of the three forms of integration. For economic integration, this research will look into the student's access to institutions and (social) services. With regards to social/cultural integration, the student's belonging will be analyzed, and with regards to identity integration, this research will look into the students' identity (formation). For all aspects, both DACA students and undocumented students have been interviewed to fully analyze the influence of the DACA program.

I will build on the concept of access in accordance with Ribot and Peluso's theory of access (2003). While access creates inclusion for a certain group of people, others are (purposely) excluded from access to resources. Oftentimes boundaries accompany access, yet indirect or illegal access might be enabled through unintended means. This research will look into who does (not) have access to certain resources such as institutions and social services, what the benefits are of access, and through what mechanisms undocumented immigrants are able to indirectly or illegally gain access.

The concept of belonging, seen as aspect of social/cultural integration in this research, is used to further analyze students' access to resources and the accompanying experiences of inclusion and exclusion as those experiences enable or impede the ability to claim belonging. By using Antonisch's (2010) analysis that regards belonging as a dynamic interplay between those "granting" and those "seeking," this research will look into the platforms students use to claim belonging, as

well as the subjects that grant them this space and feeling.

In order to analyze the concept of identity I will further analyze Amit's (2012) definition which regards identity as the way a person views oneself in relation to other groups in society. With this perspective, aspects such as language, education, race, and ethnicity could be influential on one's identity formation. This research will look into the aspects that influence undocumented students' identity (formation) and whether they regard DACA as a new label other than "illegal" or "undocumented."

It must be noted that while all three concepts will be looked at independently for this research to assess the integration process of undocumented students, in everyday life all aspects are related and connected with each other. For example, looking at obtaining one's drivers' license can be regarded as a form of access, yet also influences one's belonging and identity, especially in a country like America where a drivers' license is necessary considering the large distances. Yet looking at access, belonging, and identity separately allows to better focus on the influence of the DACA program on the integration processes of students.

## 1.4 – Research Questions

Then, following from the abovementioned problem analysis, my main research question will be:

**How does the DACA program influence the integration of undocumented students in American society?**

Consequently, I have divided the main research question into several sub questions.

### **1 – How does the DACA program influence undocumented students' access to institutions and (social) services?**

This first sub question looks into the experiences of inclusion and exclusion resulting from immigration policies. It aims to show the influence of the DACA program on the students' access of certain institutions and (social) services, all in comparison to students who are not part of the DACA program. How do the experiences of undocumented students and DACA students differ? In this regard, the DACA program is not merely seen as the fixed label or categorization of undocumented immigrants, but as the daily-lived legal opportunities and limitations this label generates. Looking at access, which institutions or events are undocumented students excluded from (possibly financial aid, drivers' license, a job?) that DACA students are now able to access thanks to the program? And to what extent is the DACA program successful in enabling students to more thoroughly integrate in American society?

### **2 – How does the DACA program play a role in students' belonging?**

DACA is aimed at enabling a certain group of students with more and better opportunities, but to what extent does the program affect a student's belonging? And is there a significant difference

between undocumented students and DACA students in this regard? This sub question aims to analyze the more emotional/psychological influence of the DACA program. In this regard, belonging is looked at from a micro-point of view as to whether or not a student feels it belongs in San Diego, their community, school, neighborhood, organization, etc. Not only DACA, but other aspects such as the aforementioned aspects (community, school, and organizations) could possibly thus also play a role in influencing a students' belonging. Can students claim belonging at these platforms? Do students feel like they fit in and what aspects do they consider important for belonging?

### **3 – How does the DACA program influence students' identity (formation)?**

Whereas sub question 2 focuses on a student's sense of belonging, this last sub questions looks at their identity (formation) and to what extent DACA has an influence on this. Do DACA students identify themselves as DACA student or still as undocumented yet part of the DACA program? And has DACA possibly made them more identify as American? This sub questions looks at the ways in which students can identify themselves and the aspects that influence this formation.

## **1.5 – Methodology**

The following is an explanation of my research methods, the location, recruitment procedure, the research population, the data collection, as well as my data analysis methods for this research.

### **Location**

The fieldwork was conducted in San Diego, the most southern city in the state of California, the United States of America. The state of California was chosen because it holds the largest population of undocumented immigrants in the country (Passel and Cohn, 2009). San Diego itself is a large city with multiple colleges and universities, is conveniently located close to the U.S.-Mexican border (thus regarded as a border city), and holds many undocumented immigrants. Because of its close location to Mexico, the Mexican influence is felt all throughout the city; (street) signs are in English and Spanish, there are numerous Mexican restaurants, all restaurant menus are in both the English and Spanish language, many Mexican-American students attend high school, etc.

While the official name is United States of America, its citizens are sometimes critiqued for claiming the label 'American' while this term technically stands for the entire continent. Yet out of convenience, though aware of the sensitivity of this term, I will shorten the official name for the country and will use the term 'America' to refer to the United States of America in this research.

### **Interview Recruitment Procedure**

Because of the vulnerable status of undocumented students in American society, confidentiality has been a priority in my research. The names mentioned in this research are thus not the real names of the students I have interviewed – unless the student specifically asked me to use their real name. I wanted to make sure that the identity and immigration status of my research participants were protected at all costs.



Recruiting students for interviews was more difficult than anticipated. In order to meet students and improve my knowledge on the subject, I attended lectures on transnational citizenship at San Diego State University three times a week. I was not an official student at the university, but after emailing for permission, the professor welcomed me to her class. Besides the relevant information I learned through her lectures, Professor Adelaida del Castillo also helped me recruit my first two students willing to be interviewed by me. A fellow student from class also helped and was able to connect me with another two students I could interview. Attending classes at SDSU allowed me to get in contact with others who knew undocumented students and enabled me to ask fellow students about their opinion on illegal migration.

About three weeks into my fieldwork, the organizations EWB and SDDT had also started their meetings again after Christmas break. I joined the EWB organization at SDSU and attended their weekly meetings and activities. By actively participating in the events I was able to gain trust and recruited the rest of my students for interviews. Some of the students I interviewed even approached me, instead of the other way around, because they wanted to share their story with me. After a student agreed to be interviewed and before we set a date and time for the meeting, I always emailed a thank you in advance, along with a few questions they could expect. This way I hoped to minimize their anxiety for the interview (acknowledging the sensitive topic) and enabled them to prepare possible answers. To this day I still have contact with half of the students I interviewed and have allowed them to provide me with feedback on this thesis research.

### **Research Population**

The research population consisted of two groups: undocumented students and DACA students. All students interviewed were from Mexican descent. They are part of the 1.5 generation, which means that they came to America with their parents at a young age and grew up in American society and in the American school system. All, apart from one, were university students attending San Diego State University. Many of the interviewees were part or had been part of organizations such as EWB or SDDT (more information about these organizations can be found in Chapter 3). Some of the students had ‘come out’ about their immigration status, others still lived a so-called ‘shadowed life’.

A total of 10 students have been interviewed, of which 5 male and 5 female students ranging from 19 years old to 35 years old. Of the 10 students, 6 were part of the DACA program while the other 4 were undocumented. Because of the large difference in age of the respondents, some of the DACA students had been undocumented for a long time before entering the program, whereas others were able to participate in the DACA program right after high school. Those that are older and have had multiple years of work experience before becoming part of the DACA program might thus have a different opinion when asked about the influence of the DACA program in their lives, compared to the younger DACA students. A short introduction to some of the students and an elaboration on how/when they crossed the U.S.-Mexican border can be found in Chapter 3.

## Data Collection

In order to obtain a qualitative understanding on the influence of undocumented student's immigration status, I based my research method on interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and mainly obtained qualitative information. As aforementioned, the students were emailed a short list of questions beforehand. This enabled me to go deeper into the questions right away because the students had often thought about their answers beforehand. Because I knew the students from attending the weekly EWB meetings, the respondents often felt comfortable enough to be frank and open about their situation, and it made the interviews relatively informal. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to 2 hours, with an average of approximately 1,5 hours. Apart from one interviewee who I visited at his work office, I met the students at the campus Starbucks for the interviews. After offering them a beverage, I allowed them to pick a spot on campus where they would feel comfortable to talk. While I started the interview informal, asking about their day or classes, the interviews were often very personal and emotional. Two of the respondents felt comfortable enough to shed tears during the interview. Although I cannot identify specific ways of ensuring truthful responses, I am extremely confident that the students I have interviewed have provided me with genuine information.

In addition to the interviews with DACA and undocumented students, I was able to have many informal talks with students and professionals; two SDSU professors from the Chicano Studies department helped me gain insight in the immigration debate in America, SDSU study advisor Cynthia Torres informed me about the DACA application process and financial aid opportunities, founder of the NGO 'Border Angels' took me to the desert to place water jugs and explained to me the difficult journey undocumented immigrants undertake to cross the border, and a lawyer from UC Irvine School of Law helped me understand the implications and consequences of the DACA program.

Apart from the formal and informal interviews, I also used participant observation as a research method. Attending and participating in class allowed me to analyze the university perspective on illegal migration and transnational citizenship. In addition to my active participating in events and meetings of EWB being a way of gaining trust, it also allowed me to understand the struggles that undocumented students encounter on a daily basis. EWB discussed certain topics during meetings to inform and help its members deal with being undocumented; they organized workshops to inform students about financial aid, scholarships, DACA applications, their rights, etc. By attending and observing a formal meeting of the San Diego Dream Team (more information about this group can be found in Chapter 3) I was able to understand how this group is formed and what their impact is on the undocumented community in San Diego. Through this organization, I was informed about marches, rallies, and info sessions that were organized in the area. Observing a rally near the San Diego jail revealed to me the difficult process undocumented students go through when coming out to the public about their status. While there was no police brutality of the law enforcement present, the response and talks I had with passing pedestrians gave me a glimpse of the American opinion on illegal migration and undocumented immigrants.

## Data Analysis

Throughout the fieldwork, I have taken thorough notes of my observations, interviews, and discussions. With permission of the interviewee, I was able to record more than half of the interviews I conducted which helped me in the development and analysis of my interviews.

### 1.6 – Reflection

While I try to remain open-minded as a researcher, my (societal/educational) background does have an influence on my research. Growing up within a family that is internationally oriented and welcoming to migrants and refugees shaped my view on migration. Our house is frequently filled with refugees as my father works for the Dutch organization ‘Vluchtelingenwerk,’ and once in a while also had migrants over because my mother is professor and teaches Dutch to migrants (mainly Moroccans, Turkish, and Polish migrants). This upbringing made me open-minded about foreign cultures, and gave me compassion for those who (in)voluntarily migrate to a host society. Likewise, my upbringing has taught me to be compassionate for my neighbor, regardless of religion, culture, or immigration status. I believe the students I interviewed have felt this compassion as I tried to walk side by side – though I am aware that I can only partially understand their situation because of my different life story and temporary stay in San Diego – with them instead of merely focusing on obtaining data for my research.

During my fieldwork, my position as female foreign student also had an influence on the outcomes of my research. I initially feared that the students might regard my research as unprofessional because of my ‘young’ age and regard participating as irrelevant considering my limited influence in the political arena. Yet I believe my age worked in my favor as I was more approachable to my research population because of our similar age. After getting to know each other better, the students were excited to show me – they sometimes laughingly named me the “foreign white girl” – around San Diego. I believe that because we are in a similar life stage, it was less daunting for my research population to participate in interviews. Because I was an actual student attending classes at SDSU and frequently studied on campus, I would walk into students and would greet and talk with them. This made it easier to bond with the students and gain their trust, necessary for comfortable and open interviews.

I tried to look at the immigration debate from both sides during my fieldwork, yet being part of the organization EWB and attending their weekly meetings might have given the students the idea that I was on their side and in favor of more rights for undocumented students instead of being an objective researcher. Yet joining EWB has enabled me to meet and interview DACA and undocumented students and, by actively participating in their events, the students trusted me and felt comfortable enough to be open and honest with me.

It is important to bear in mind that I cannot fully understand what undocumented students are going through on a daily basis. I do not know their full life story and what they have been through. The struggles they have faced, are facing, and will face, shape the way they view society and

has an influence on why they act a certain way. We do not share a similar culture, nationality, or background; yet, I hope to have respectfully approached my research population and have aimed to give a well-informed picture of their experiences in American society.

### **Limitations**

Because the DACA program is relatively new – it was initiated by President Obama on June 15, 2012 – is not yet possible to fully grasp the influence of this program. The DACA students I have interviewed are, apart from Victor, all university students and thus are not yet experienced with entering the work field relevant to their degree. Further research is needed to analyze the influence of DACA on the access of work related to their degree. Because of the age and life stage the respondents are in, the aspects they mentioned as (in)accessible are a reflection of the institutions and services they deem relevant in their stage of life. Interviewing DACA participants from another life stage might give different outcomes.

To more thoroughly evaluate the influence of the DACA program on the integration of undocumented students, more interviews would be valuable. The amount of interviews in this research is relatively few, yet it must be noted that the experiences and stories of the respondents were in accordance with one another; making the obtained information more valid.

This research focused on San Diego, California and in particular on students attending San Diego State University. Given the influence of the AB540 law (a law that allows undocumented students in California to attend higher education for in-state tuition – a law that will be further explained in Chapter 3), the outcomes of this research are not necessarily applicable to other states who do not have legislated a similar law as AB540. This particular law enables undocumented students not eligible for the DACA program to still have access to certain aspects mentioned in Chapter 4 of this research. States without such a law would be expected to have a more significant difference between undocumented students and DACA students with regards to their access of institutions and services, their sense of belonging, and their identity (formation).

Likewise, because of San Diego's geographic location close to the Mexican border, the immigration debate is likely more prevalent than it is in other American cities or states. As will be stated in the results of this research, this continuous debate affects the outcomes of this research. However, it must also be noted that the state of California is, likely because of its location, more progressive than other states and has more liberal immigration policies legislated. The experiences from the DACA students and undocumented students in this research would be expected to be different than those students in other states.

All respondents in this research were from Mexican descent. While the experiences of Mexican undocumented students are expected to be rather similar to the experiences of other undocumented Latinos, this research is limited in its representation of the entire undocumented community. More research would be needed to analyze the experiences of undocumented students



from, for example, Asian or European nations. In this research, the DACA and undocumented respondents claimed that the negative stereotyping of Latinos in American media affects their integration in American society. Considering the limited negative stereotyping of, for example, Asians and Europeans in the American media, the integration process of undocumented immigrants from other nationalities and ethnicities would be expected to be different with regards to social/cultural-, and identity integration.

This research does not necessarily take into account undocumented students who are not part of a student organization in university. Based on this research, student organizations and support groups demonstrated to be platforms where students were able to claim belonging, form their identity, and increased their access to institutions and (social) services. DACA and undocumented students who do not participate in these communities are expected to have different experiences.

While this research focuses on the three concepts access, belonging, and identity (formation), this view limits various other aspects affecting the integration of undocumented students. More research is needed to assess other aspects influencing economic-, social/cultural-, and identity integration.

## Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

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This chapter will introduce literature and studies that have been conducted on the four aspects that are of relevance to this research. Because integration is at the focus of this research, I will first start with a discussion of the studies and frameworks on the integration of immigrants in receiving societies. I will introduce the three forms of integration scholars have identified – economic, social/cultural, and identity integration – and elaborate on how these three forms have shaped and are conceptualized in this research. From this I will argue that the concepts of access, belonging, and identity are important to understand integration.

Following integration, I will discuss the theory of access by Ribot and Peluso (2003). In this research, students' access to institutions and services is seen as a form of economic integration. The theory of access will set the base for understanding who benefits from the DACA program, and through which process they are able to do so. The concept of belonging will be further analyzed in regards to social/cultural integration. Literature has demonstrated that belonging is closely linked to positive social relationships, which has a direct affect on a students' social/cultural integration. This part will discuss the notion of 'granting' and 'seeking' belonging and the different levels belonging can have, as well as the politics of belonging and how discourses relating to different levels of belonging are utilized to maintain and contest boundaries of "us" and "them." To conclude this chapter, the concept of identity (formation) will be discussed as part of the third form of integration; identity integration. By drawing on research by Hardwick & Mansfield (2009), this part will discuss how students construct their identity, and what determinants affect this identity formation process.

### 2.1 – Integration

According to the Migration Policy Institute, "integration remains one of the most overlooked issues in American governance" ([migrationpolicy.org](http://migrationpolicy.org)). While much focus is currently on the immigration legislation, integration policies have not been a federal priority. Also, at the surface of this research is immigrant integration and the DACA program can be seen as a step towards the integration of undocumented students in American society.

While integration is a complex concept, many scholars use it to describe and explain the experiences of immigrants in their new host society. One of the earliest and most popular definitions of integration was by sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (1969) who defined integration as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitude of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life" (735). Integration is a complex multi-dimensional process with different aspects – such as age, race, and nationality – that can affect the possible formation of an assimilated melting pot.

There are multiple integration frameworks that look at immigrant adaptation and assimilation. For one, the segmented integration framework looks into the varied experiences of immigrants. Professor of sociology Min Zhou (1997) argues that new immigrants can assimilate in multiple “segments” of society, rather than just one. The multicultural framework, in contrast, questions the inevitability of assimilation and argues that immigrants are constructing, contesting, and reforming new identities and cultures.

Apart from integration frameworks, research on immigration has identified three forms of integration: 1) economic integration, 2) social/cultural integration, and 3) identity integration (Wang and Fan, 2012). For example, researchers that analyze the economic integration of immigrants could look at the earnings disparities between native-born citizens and recent immigrants to see whether or not immigrants have economically integrated and live as equals (with regards to income) as native-born citizens of a certain country. In addition to income, researchers also look at immigrants’ education or occupation. With regards to the second form of integration – social/cultural integration – researchers may look into immigrants’ social contacts, language, or intermarriage as this form of integration focuses on the extent to which immigrants adopt customs, and social relations/norms. Scholars Wang and Fan (2013) argue that social integration results in “a decline in social distance between groups and more homogenous social values and practices in society” (733). Lastly, identity integration looks at the immigrants’ sense of self in relation to others. This might mean that immigrants adapt the host society’s identity, but might also mean that new identities are created, as previously explained by the multicultural framework.

With regards to the integration of undocumented students in American society, one could argue that the DACA program is aimed at allowing economic integration for its participants as students now have access to legal employment, financial aid, and higher education; all aspects that are expected to have a positive influence on the economic positioning of undocumented students within American society. Yet the program raises questions as to how influential it will be for students’ social/cultural or identity integration. In order to get a comprehensive picture of the influence of this program, this research will look into one concept from each of the three forms of integration. With regards to economic integration, the concept of access will be further analyzed to assess the students’ access to institutions and services that are put in place to enhance students’ economic integration. This concept is chosen because it is all encompassing (e.g. instead of merely looking at students’ income) and relevant for their life stage. In relation to social/cultural integration, the concept of belonging will be built upon to assess students’ social relations and social contacts that affect their social integration and belonging in San Diego. This concept is of relevance to the lives of undocumented students and has been previously used by the undocumented population to claim full citizenship. Finally, with regards to the third form of integration – identity integration – the concept of identity will be built upon to assess aspects that influence identity formation. Like the previous concepts, identity is closely related to integration and analyzing this concept provides information as how students view themselves, in relation to other groups or peoples in American society.

Following, I will elaborate on the three concepts that are used to assess the three forms of integration, starting with the concept of access by building on the theory of access by Ribot and Peluso. Secondly, I will elaborate on the concept of belonging by building on the theory of Antonisch and Yuval-Davis, after which I will conclude this chapter with the concept of identity (formation), researched by – among others – Hardwick and Mansfield.

## 2.2 – Theory of Access

Ribot and Peluso (2003) expand the concept of access and define it as “the ability to benefit from things – including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols” (153). With this definition, they make a clear distinction between the *right* to benefits and the *ability* to benefit. With regards to this research, DACA students do not have the right to benefit but it has been facilitated for them. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services state that they “consider granting deferred action on a case-by-case basis” (uscis.gov). By using their theory, the DACA program can be analyzed from the perspective of who actually benefits from the program, and through what process they are able to do so.

When broadening the definition of access, Ribot and Peluso mention that access also includes and excludes; it creates boundaries – though in those cases they argue the boundaries are not clear. In the case of the DACA program, there is a clear distinction between those eligible and those who are not eligible. Analyzing the influence of the DACA program enables us to see through which processes students are able to obtain access, and what sort of benefits they obtain once their application is confirmed. Yet the scholars also argue that those excluded might have indirect or illegal access “through means that are not intended to impart property rights or that are not socially sanctioned in any domain of law, custom, or convention” (156). They further argue that the law “can never completely delineate all the modes and pathways of resource access along complex and overlapping webs of power” (156). The very existence of undocumented immigrants on American soil is a good example of this, as well as certain forms of access these immigrants still do have; such as their access to education or (illegal) employment regardless of immigration status.

According to Ribot and Peluso, “different political-economic circumstances change the terms of access and may therefore change the specific individuals or groups most able to benefit from a set of resources” (158). As a concept, access and access relations are thus constantly changing, depending on the circumstances and the shifting power between relationships. Because of these changes, the DACA program has been expanded but might also be terminated once a new president takes office. Political-economic circumstances thus affect students’ ability to benefit from policies such as the DACA program. Ribot and Peluso specifically mention that “ambiguities within laws, customs, and conventions are frequent” (162). They argue that the rights defined by these laws, customs and conventions are “mechanisms that shape who *controls* and who *maintains* access” (163).

In this research, I will use the concept of access to assess the student’s access to institutions and services that are put in place to enhance student’s economic integration. By using Ribot and



Peluso's access theory, the borders of the DACA program will become clear, as well as the different dynamic between the officials who control this program, and those who aim to benefit from it. While there are different – indirect or illegal – ways to access resources, the DACA program has set relatively clear boundaries. Yet what are the benefits for DACA participants and to what extent is it possible to access these resources without having the legal right to do so?

Access as concept is valuable in understanding the integration processes of DACA and undocumented students and it also affects the following two concepts of belonging and identity in a profound way. Following, I will first argue its influence on belonging, and how both concepts relate to the overall focus of this research – the integration of Mexican undocumented students – after which I will conclude with the concept of identity (formation).

## 2.3 – Belonging

While the abovementioned concept of access is a form of economic integration and affects discourses and practices of inclusion and exclusion, it also affects student's belonging. The DACA program has set clear boundaries as to which institutions and services are (in)accessible to its participants. Consequently, the services and institutions that are accessible can be seen as sites where undocumented students can construct a sense of belonging. According to the article on migration and belonging by Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2007), "belonging, then, is a dynamic process that involves a constant and ongoing co-construction and reformulation through the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others" (305). Access and the accompanying experiences of inclusion and exclusion are thus of importance when analyzing belonging. Sociologist and anthropologist Spaaij affirms this and states: "Understanding belonging requires a focus on discourses and practices of inclusion/exclusion that enable or impede a person's ability to claim belonging" (305).

Paradoxical as it may sound, Oboler, Professor of Latin American and Latina/o Studies at City University of New York, states that exclusion – or in the case of undocumented and DACA students 'noncitizenship' – is "a much more meaningful and immediate life experience in structuring perceptions of belonging than is citizenship itself" (Obeler, 22/23). As can be seen in the research by sociologist Negrón-Gonzales (2013), undocumented youth form a sense of belonging by forming groups with other undocumented youth which gives them meaning and a voice. Negrón-Gonzales further argues that coming out as undocumented and becoming part of an activist or support group is often not only a necessity but also a new experience of inclusion where they are welcomed regardless of their immigration status. Zimmerman (2011) addresses the underlying effects of immigration legislation such as the federal Dream Act: "for many undocumented youth, legislation like the Dream Act represents much more than a change in legal status, but a validation of their belonging. Julio Salgado, an artist and longtime activist, says that despite the uncertainty of the Dream Act, the movement sustains itself by creating "a sense of community, mutual support, and belonging'" (Zimmerman, 17).

As aforementioned, this research will regard the concept of belonging as an aspect for immigrants' social/cultural integration. Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) makes a distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging. With regards to belonging, she mentions three analytical levels on which belonging can be studied: social locations, individuals' identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values. The first, social (and economic) locations refer to categories to which people are said to belong, for example a particular gender, race, class or nation. These categories "also have a certain positionality along an axis of power, higher or lower than other such categories" (199). These positionalities are fluid, contested, and differ according to historical context. The second analytical level of individuals' identification and emotional attachments refers to the "narratives [and] stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)" (202). These stories relate – directly or indirectly – to what it means to be a member of such a group or collectivity (ethnic, racial, national, religious, cultural). The third and final analytical level of ethical and political values is about the ways the social locations and constructions of identification and emotional attachments are valued and judged.

The politics of belonging, Yuval-Davis further argues, is "the dirty work of boundary maintenance," that separates the world population into "us" and "them" (204). Underneath the politics of belonging thus is "potentially meeting other people and deciding whether they stand inside or outside the imaginary boundary line of the nation and/or other communities of belonging" (204). This aspect entails maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries on one hand, and the contestation and challenge of those boundaries on the other hand. She further argues that people utilize the abovementioned three analytical levels of belonging to maintain or challenge the existing boundaries. In other words, the different levels of belonging – social locations, identities and emotional attachments, and political and ethical values – are used as requisites of belonging according to Yuval-Davis' theory on belonging and the politics of belonging.

Belonging is subjective and is a process (becoming) rather than a state (being); it is dynamic, contested, and can change over time (Antonisch, 2010). Along with the DACA boundaries of access and the immigration legislation, belonging is a dynamic interplay between those who 'seek' belonging, and those who 'grant' it (Antonisch, 2010). Antonisch' theory of 'seeking' and 'granting' can be linked to the politics of belonging by Yuval-Davis by assessing the ways in which those on the "us" side try to maintain and reproduce the boundaries, and the ways in which those on the "them" side try to contest and challenge those boundaries. This research builds on this interplay between 'seeking' and 'granting' and the politics of belonging by addressing the following questions:

One the one hand: By means of which analytical level(s) of belonging does American society/politics maintain and reproduce its boundary maintenance and to what extent do the students experience this as limitations on their quest to 'seek' belonging? And on the other hand: Which analytical level of belonging do students regard as most influential when describing belonging? By means of which analytical levels(s) of belonging do DACA and undocumented students contest and challenge the existing boundaries of 'us' versus 'them' if they do so at all?

Following the concepts of access and belonging, the last part of this research will look into the concept of identity (formation) and how the DACA program influences this process.

## 2.4 – Identity

The third form of integration is identity integration. The concept of identity can be seen as “the way a person views himself/herself in relation to existing groups or social categories in his/her society” (Amit, 1228). While this concept is subjective, the DACA program might have interesting effects on students’ self-identity. For example, sociologist and Professor of Chicana/o studies Leisy Abrego (2008) claims that laws such as the DACA program instills a sense of identity in undocumented students by allowing them to claim a new label other than “illegal” or “undocumented.”

Many of the literature on immigrant identity focus on what factors determine immigrant’s self-identity in the destination country. Identity literature also shows that individuals can have multiple identities, and that identity as a concept is multidimensional and dynamic (Stryker and Burke, 2000). In addition, identity formation is a continuous process; the anthropological picture framed in research is accurate of a particular time, but is likely to have changed already.

Especially for immigrants transitioning from one society and culture to another, identity formation can be problematic. Researcher in immigration and social integration Dr. Karin Amit stresses the relevance of “maintaining the immigrant’s original culture and identity along with the formation of social and cultural relations with the new society” (1288) in order for a smooth transition. While the formation of social relations is regarded as part of social/cultural integration, it does also influence one’s identity. Literature distinguishes social relations between ‘bonding social capital’ – social networks within ethnic groups – and ‘bridging social capital’ – social networks that cross ethnic boundaries. Studies reveal that social capital is an important predictor of immigrant identity (Amit, 2011; Phinney et al, 2001). In the case of America, immigrants might identify with the American culture but might not identify as American. While on a macro-level one could talk of national identity, researcher on immigration and multiculturalism Jack Jedwab argues in his article on immigrant national identity in Canada that there is rarely consensus on how to define or measure this national identity.

An important determination of identity mentioned by scholars is language. Amit argues that language proficiency is related to economic success and further hypothesizes that “language will also be positively related to immigrants’ identity and their sense of belonging to the new society” (1289). Other aspects mentioned in studies to positively influence immigrants’ integration and identity are a higher level of education and work participation (Uunk, 2003), and a higher year since migration (YSM) level (Walters, Phythian and Anisef, 2007). Furthermore, race and religion also influence immigrants’ belonging and identity in a new country. Researching ethnic identification, Walters, Phythian and Anisef (2007) found out that religious immigrants as well as immigrants from a black community felt less Canadian. This ties in with the thought that non-white immigrants in America might have less binding because the common thought is ‘American equals white’ (Del Castillo).

Overall, studies indicated a “significant correlation between self-identity and general life satisfaction” (Amit, 1290).

As mentioned in the article “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging, Yuval-Davis (2006) regards identity as the second analytical level of belonging. She argues that identities are the stories people tell of themselves and others about who they are (not) and these stories – (in)directly – relate to what it means to (not) be part of such a group. In accordance with her definition, researchers Hardwick and Mansfield (2009) conceptualize identity as the “meanings one attributes to oneself and social products that are formed and maintained through the social processes of naming or locating oneself in recognizable categories” (385). In addition to this conceptualization, they mention four aspects that accompany the concept of identity: 1) identity and the accompanying naming implies “ongoing interaction with others and regular idea exchange,” 2) identities are “self-meanings that are formed to accommodate particular situations and contexts,” 3) identities are based on “maintaining and defining the similarities and differences of an individual’s perceptions, values, and roles as compared to the related or counterroles of others,” and 4) identities are “reflexive and symbolic and, therefore, meanings come to be understood most clearly through performativity during interaction with others” (385). In this regard, the concept of identity, like the abovementioned concepts of access and belonging, are closely tied to boundaries and the accompanying inclusion and exclusion. Identity literature argues that identities are not merely constructed as attachments to a place/nation/ideology, it is also a disidentification with other peoples and places (Hardwick and Mansfield, 2009). In conclusion, Hardwick and Mansfield argue that “othering is especially keen for immigrants residing in borderland regions because perceptions of “us” versus “them” frame their everyday lives, experiences, and identities. In a very real sense, then, identities arise because of difference and are relational.” (p. drie86) Identity construction is, like the dynamic interplay of access and belonging, about insiderness and outsidersness.

The last part of this research will look into the identity (formation) of undocumented students in American society as part of the third form of integration; identity integration. Adding to the literature, how do undocumented students identify and what factors determine their identity (formation) in American society? Like Abrego claimed, does DACA instill in them a new identity? And with regards to the research by Yuval-Davis and Hardwick and Mansfield, how influential is the role of insiderness and outsidersness in the construction and formation of undocumented students’ identity?

## 2.5 – Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed literature on the integration of undocumented students and the three concepts that are related to integration theory; the theory of access, belonging and the politics of belonging, and identity formation. The aim of this research is to analyze the influence of the DACA program on integration, however doing so is impossible without also coming to an understanding of the details and requirements of this program, as well as the consequences of participation. These and other dynamics will also be discussed over the course of this thesis.



Similarly, the knowledge previously generated by authors writing on the four concepts – integration, access, belonging, and identity – will be built upon.

While integration will be analyzed from an analytical perspective – dividing integration process in the three concepts of access, belonging, and identity – it must be noted that the realities of integration are multiple, constituting, and far from simple. Adding up different aspects of partial and situated knowledge will never be able to reconstruct or fully represent (social) reality. While this research does find reoccurring patterns relevant for understanding the complexity of being undocumented and understanding several impacts of the DACA program, it is impossible to argue that these will play an equally important role in all students' viewpoints or every situation. This is a fundamental characteristic of qualitative research. To better understand the complexity of integration, the three concepts will be looked at independently, yet some of the overlapping is addressed. For example, higher education is an example to which one could (not) have access, which affects one's belonging (platform for claiming belonging, different social location with accompanying emotional attachment and ethic/political value) and which influences one's identity formation (the way you see yourself/new 'student' label). This research thus focuses on three different concepts independently while in reality multiple concepts play a role on the integration of undocumented students, and all concepts and aspects overlap and constitute each other. By doing so I hope to make understandable the complexity that shape the integration of undocumented students.

## Chapter 3 - Setting the Scene

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This chapter will start with an introduction to the topic of illegal migration to America. How many undocumented immigrants reside in America? And what are the consequences of these illegal residents for American society and politics? Three aspects will be discussed in this American immigration introduction; immigration statistics, the position and experience of undocumented youth, and the changes made during the Obama administration.

Following the American immigration introduction, this chapter will give a short explanation of relevant immigration legislation – most notably the DACA program – to inform the reader about the division between federal and state legislation, as well as the requirements for certain policies and programs. Following I will introduce the two relevant organizations SDDT and EWB and their role in this research. I will conclude this chapter with a short introduction of a few students I have interviewed in order to give a background to their arrival in- and lives as undocumented students in American society.

### 3.1 – The American Immigration Debate

According to recent statistics, there are 41 million immigrants living in America (Migration Policy Institute, 2014). In this instance, immigrants are people “who entered a country lawfully and remain in the country in accordance with his or her admission criteria” (International Organization for Migration, 2011). However, not all immigrants in America enter or have entered the country in a legal manner. On top of the 41 million legal immigrants, there are an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in America. While the common perception is that the majority of these undocumented immigrants entered America by trespassing the American-Mexican border, in fact, the most common way of illegal entrance is through overstaying a temporary visa which allows migrants to work or visit America for a designated period of time (Chavez, 2009). Consequently, these migrants remain undocumented in America and live a shadowed life. Roughly 80 percent of the undocumented population is Mexican, Salvadoran, or Guatemalan, of which Mexicans compose the largest group (Abrego, 2006; Passel, 2005; De Genova, 2004).

Included in the 12 million undocumented immigrants in America is an estimated 2.1 million children under the age of 18; undocumented youth whom migrated with their parents (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Of these, an estimated 1 million undocumented adults have lived in America since their childhood. These particular immigrants are called the 1.5 generation: they are foreign-born but have migrated with their parents at a young age, thus growing up in American society. This group of immigrants remains rather stable, however, there are now approximately 4 million American born children who grow up in a mixed-status family with one or both of their parents undocumented (Passel & Cohn, 2009). This occurs because children born on American soil are automatically

American citizens. This birthright citizenship is called the principle of *jus soli* legalized in the Birthright Act of 2006. Several bills were written to limit birthright citizenship to the children of undocumented immigrants; however, none have been approved by Congress so far (Petty, 48). As a consequence, undocumented immigrants are raising legal American citizens while fearing for deportation and family separation. In order to limit the chances of deportation, these families often avoid programs or agencies, such as child care or food subsidies, which could be beneficial for their children's development which leads to a "underutilization of social services by children entitled to them" (Yoshikawa, 2012: abstract). This mixed-status of members puts pressure on these families and limits their upward mobility within society; a real concern for this ever growing group of undocumented immigrants raising citizens.

### **Undocumented Youth**

The undocumented youth, and especially the 1.5 generation, are in a difficult position and have profoundly different experiences compared to their parents. And while the undocumented population does not have legal access to social benefits – such as food stamps, public housing, unemployment insurance – America does guarantee "a baseline of formal rights and protections for all Americans, regardless of their immigration status. These include workplace protections and K-12 public education" (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012: 2). Because of the Supreme Court ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), "undocumented children are entitled to the equal protection under the law afforded by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution and therefore cannot be denied access to public elementary and secondary education on the basis of their legal status" (Gonzales, 2011: 2). The court made this decision because they regarded undocumented children as "[already] disadvantage[d] as a result of poverty, lack of English-speaking ability, and undeniable racial prejudices, [and without an education the court feared that they] will become permanently locked into the lowest socio-economic class" (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). In addition, schools may not ask about a students' immigration record nor release any information to the immigration authorities according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (Gonzales, 2011). Undocumented students are thus legally protected until their eighteenth birthday, during which their immigration status has little to no effect.

These young undocumented children who grow up with the American educational system (and possibly a Latin upbringing back home) get accustomed to American culture and its traditions. They are educated within a safe environment for the forming stages of their life, and experience a form of inclusion profoundly different from their parents. While many of their parents work in low-wage labor markets with co-ethnic colleagues who share their language and culture, the undocumented children become integrated in American culture and grow up with American peers. This "unity of experiences with friends and classmates promotes feelings of togetherness and inclusion, and these feelings, in turn, shape immigrant youth's identification and experience of coming of age" (Gonzales, 604). Many undocumented youth do not find out about their undocumented immigration status until their sixteenth or eighteenth birthday when they want to apply for a drivers' license or fill out university applications. This realization of exclusion from "daily participation in most institutions of mainstream life" is described by them as "waking up to a

nightmare” (Gonzales, 615). For some this realization propels them forward to prove society that they are worth it, while others feel defeated and drop out of school. “Nationally, 40 percent of undocumented adults ages 18 to 24 do not complete high school, and only 49 percent of undocumented high school graduates go to college. Youths who arrive in the United States before the age of 14 fare slightly better: 72 percent finish high school, and of those, 61 percent go on to college. But these figures are still much lower than the numbers for U.S.-born residents” (Gonzales, 611). However, still each year approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school (Petty, 2012; Passel, 2009). Mainly because of financial obligations to their family do not all undocumented children finish high school, while the number of students that continue to attend community college or university is even slimmer. It is estimated that only 5 to 10 percent of undocumented high school graduates continue to attend postsecondary education. Of those that continue to higher education, the majority attends community colleges instead of four-year university programs (Passel & Cohn, 2009).

In order to encourage undocumented students to continue their education opportunities after high school, laws such as the California’s AB540 law have been legislated. This law allows undocumented California students to pay an in-state rather than an out-of-state tuition to their colleges and universities; a profound discount. Connected to the Institute for Higher Education Law & Governance, Stella Flores argues that “foreign-born noncitizen Latinos living in states with a tuition policy were 1.54 times more likely to have enrolled in college after the policy’s implementation than similar students without such legislation” (Flores, 249). Currently the number of states with such a law increases (Jones, 2010). However, undocumented students are still unable to obtain financial support in the form of a scholarship or grant which continues to make university enrolment a financial burden for this vulnerable group of students. And undocumented students who do graduate from community colleges or universities have no legal possibility to put to practice their recently acquired academic skills. Without a Social Security number, undocumented immigrants are limited in their option and refrained to illegal, low-paying, back-breaking work.

### **The Obama Administration**

Because of its sheer size and influence on American society and politics, immigration legislation has always been high on the agenda of any presidential administration. However, like for many topics, the Republicans and Democrats have a different opinion in this immigration debate, as well as the American public in general. While some regard legislation as needed to keep control of the undocumented migrants who are by them seen as “a national security threat,” others mainly want legislation aimed at improving the socio-economic status of those illegally residing in America.

One of the things high on the agenda of President Obama was reforming the immigration system. In June of 2012, the Obama administration passed the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) policy. This policy allows undocumented immigrants who entered America as children (children who entered America before their sixteenth birthday – and they cannot be older than 31 years old at the time of applying for DACA) and before June 2007 a two-year work permit

and exemption from deportation. To qualify the immigrant must have completed high school or still be enrolled, and not have a criminal record. This status does not provide a path to citizenship but should allow immigrants to obtain a Social Security Number that will enable them to find a job and legally contribute to society. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a DACA status has been granted to 581,000 individuals and denied to approximately 24,000 as of June 2014. The DACA program is specifically for the 1.5 generation who were brought to America by their parents because, as addressed in a speech by Obama, “we should stop punishing innocent young people for the actions of their parents” (White House Press Office, 2011). According to the Obama administration:

“one way to strengthen the middle class in America is to reform the immigration system so that there is no longer a massive underground economy that exploits a cheap source of labor while depressing wages for everybody else. I want incomes for middle-class families to rise again. I want prosperity in this country to be widely shared. I want everybody to be able to reach that American dream. And that’s why immigration reform is an economic imperative. It’s an economic imperative (White House Press Office, 2011).

The reformation of the immigration system is thus high on the agenda of the Obama administration and significant changes have been made. While many undocumented immigrants are in the process of applying for DACA or deportation relief, many other illegal immigrants are left out of the new policies. Because granting undocumented immigrants a path towards citizenship remains a critical debate amongst Americans, the administration ‘only’ provides immigrants with a Social Security Number and a permit for a designated period of time. However, the Republican Party is not in agreement with the actions of the Obama administration and have addressed to vote against any reformation in the immigration system. Instead, they want to expand the budget of Homeland Security which is assigned to keep out undocumented immigrants and strengthen the American-Mexican border.

In essence, there are important aspects that underlie the immigration debate in America as legalizing this large group of undocumented immigrants would have significant consequences for American society and American politics. These aspects, amongst others, create this distinct division between the two opposing groups with regards to the immigration debate. For example, when this group of 12 million undocumented immigrants would be given amnesty, this would have severe consequences for American politics and the division of Democratic and Republican votes. The Republicans fear that this group will vote Democratic, which will negatively affect their campaign and position within Congress. Likewise, it should be taken into account that some fear that the legalization will create extra costs for social benefits and health care considering the socio-economic position of many of these 12 million undocumented immigrants. Also the protection of the American labor market is an underlying aspect that influences the opinion people have towards the legalization of this group. Leo Chavez argues that “the generally negative, but contradictory, views



of undocumented immigrants have a material foundation, and they serve a purpose: they obscure the undocumented immigrants' contributions to the economic well-being of the communities in which they settle" (28). These underlying notions should thus be taken into account when analyzing the American immigration legislation and the debate it creates within American politics and society. The policies concerning undocumented immigrants are fluid and continuously changing which reinforces the fact that there are different opinions and interests at stake in this immigration debate.

### 3.2 – American Immigration Legislation

While the overall immigration legislation is a federal concern, the 50 states all have different policies and regulations concerning immigration and the settlement of immigrants. The policies set by the current administration, the Obama administration, are binding on a national level for all 50 states and are mentioned and explained below. The state legislation, on the other hand, can differ per state but should abide by the immigration legislation of the federal government. As will be explained, immigration policies are sometimes legalized and legitimated by state legislature yet turn out to be unconstitutional.

#### Federal Legislation

As aforementioned, the DACA program is a federal legislation initiated by President Obama on June 15, of 2012. DACA stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and it grants deferred deportation to those eligible for the program. The application is handled by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

You must be at least 15 years old in order to apply for DACA. The following is a list of guidelines that shows who is eligible for the program. You may request DACA if you:

1.	Were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012;
2.	Came to the United States before reaching your 16 <sup>th</sup> birthday;
3.	Have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time;
4.	Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making your request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS;
5.	Had no lawful status on June 15, 2012;
6.	Are 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, or three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety.

If you apply and qualify for DACA, you are allowed to be in America legally, you may apply for legal employment, you can apply for a drivers' license, and you receive a Social Security Number. While DACA provides participants with legal presence in America, they do not have a legal lawful status. Once approved, DACA protection lasts two years after which you have to try and renew your

DACA again.

Renewing your DACA is very sensitive; if you file earlier than 5 months in advance of your DACA expiration your case will be cancelled, but if you are too late you risk not getting your renewal before your previous DACA date expires. If the latter happens, your Social Security Number will immediately become invalid. If you are employed, your employer will find out about this right away and must fire you from your job. Immigrants thus often fear about whether or not their renewal will come on time. It all depends on how fast the official works on your case.

The costs for DACA are \$465 for the biometrics check and administration costs. Many immigrants ask lawyers to help them with all the paperwork, especially if they file for DACA for the first time. With the first DACA applications in 2013, many lawyers took advantage of the situation and asked about \$1500 to \$2000 per person. The total costs for the undocumented immigrant would thus be around \$2000-\$2500 for their DACA application. Currently lawyers often do pro bono work. Every two years when immigrants have to renew their DACA, they have to pay another \$465.

In order to become part of the DACA program, undocumented students have to share all their personal information with USCIS officials. Many students have expressed that this was a difficult process for them and their family.

### **Californian Legislation**

The California state law AB540, enacted in 2001, allows eligible students to pay in-state tuition at all public community colleges and universities in the state of California. In order to qualify, students must have attended a California high school for a minimum of 3 years or have graduated from a California high school or attained the equivalent. Both undocumented and DACA students may thus be eligible.

The California Dream Act, enacted in 2011, consists of two Assembly bills; AB130 and AB131. Together, undocumented students are able to apply for/receive private scholarships (AB130) and state financial aid, university grants, and community college fee waivers (AB131). The requirements for this state law are the same as the abovementioned AB540. This law helps cover about 75% of tuition for DACA students or undocumented students and is thus of significant value to the students.

AB60 is another new law that was legislated in January 2015, which allows immigrants to get their American drivers' license regardless of their immigration status. While this is not a form of identification, undocumented immigrants can now get legal papers to drive in the state of California.

### **Current Changes**

In November of 2014, President Obama announced a renewed and extended DACA program. In this research I will call this the DACA 2.0/extended program. This extension allowed more

undocumented immigrants to apply (immigrants must have entered America before 2010 instead of the initial 2007 and applicants no longer have to be younger than 31 years old in order to qualify) for DACA and it made the program effective for 3 years instead of 2. The Pew Research Center estimated that now an additional 330,000 immigrants are eligible for this DACA 2.0/extended policy. Those who have come to America recently or who might come to America illegally in the future are not eligible for this program.

Undocumented immigrants were not yet able to apply for this extension until Wednesday, February 18, 2015. However, this deadline was delayed as a federal judge in Texas – U.S. District Court Judge Andrew Hanen – placed a hold on this program on Monday, February 16<sup>th</sup>; two days before the program was to take effect. Along with this extension, also the DAPA program (a program for the undocumented parents of legal American citizens) was placed on hold until further notice. To this day it remains unclear if/when the hold will be banished and immigrants can apply for the new DACA program. This injunction does not affect the DACA program legislated in 2012.

### **3.3 – National and Local Organizations**

There are several national and state organizations that work on improving the policies and lives of undocumented immigrant populations in America. For example, a large national organization is United We Dream. This organization organizes marches and rallies to keep immigration reformation on the political agenda. Large national organizations like these often keep undocumented immigrants up to date with the changes in legislation and deadlines for applications like the DACA program. The following is a short explanation of the two organizations in San Diego that I joined for my fieldwork and their activities for undocumented communities.

#### **San Diego Dream Team**

This organization which is founded in 2010, is led by immigrant youth and aims to organize and advocate social justice for immigrant communities. They do so by “(1) working to pass local, statewide, and national legislation that will change the living conditions of immigrants, (2) empowering and informing individuals to seek and obtain resources in higher education, and (3) building awareness in San Diego County of the recurring issues faced by youth in immigrant communities” (website San Diego Dream Team). Many American cities have a so-called Dream Team that aims to empower undocumented communities through info sessions and workshops.

In this research, this organization will be referred to as SDDT. I have attended a meeting and an organized rally of this organization to find out how SDDT is set up, what their role is within the community, and how they organize marches/rallies and the effects this has. Through this organization I was able to meet and interview undocumented students.

#### **Education Without Borders at SDSU**

Whereas SDDT is community based, EWB is more focused on students attending San Diego State University. This student organization tries to “highlight the issues affecting, and create a support

system for, undocumented and other marginalized students which encourages diversity and the right to equal access of education. [They do so by providing students with] networking resources such as community service, social events, fundraisers, and other leadership opportunities” (website EWB at SDSU). The members of this organization do not necessarily have to be undocumented or part of the DACA program, yet many are, in some way or form (e.g. children of undocumented parents), related to undocumented immigrants.

Education without Borders is referred to in this research as EWB. Through active participation with this group, I was able to meet and recruit many of my respondents for this research.

### 3.4 – Introducing the Students

The following is a short introduction to four of the students I have interviewed. The students mentioned are some I have talked to in depth, or who have an unusual history of coming to America. These introductions are aimed at giving a face to the voices from this research, and – by sharing their life stories of how and when they came to America – I hope the situation and life choices of the students become better understandable.

Gonzalo came to America in 1988, along with his mom and older sister. He had a hard time growing up without a father and without legal papers. Gonzalo’s mom has been deported about 8 or 9 times, but was always able to come back. He clearly remembers the first time it happened and feared that she, just like his dad, had left him and his sister on purpose. After high school, Gonzalo was expelled from college for 5 years because he tried to enroll with a false Social Security Number. After 10 years of (illegally) working, Gonzalo was able to be part of the DACA program in 2012 and went back to school. Though his future looks much brighter now, he still has difficulty dealing with all that he experienced while living as undocumented immigrant in America for 27 years. Gonzalo’s sister is married to an American through which she gained American citizenship. She petitioned for Gonzalo’s mother who is now a legal resident and will gain citizenship soon. Gonzalo hopes he will soon be able to get legal residency as well. Gonzalo has recently joined EWB at San Diego State University and says he is learning to be more open about his immigration status. Character-wise, Gonzalo is very sensitive and becomes emotional when talking about his years of residing in San Diego illegally. Especially the transition from undocumented to DACA has been hard for him: “It is really difficult to change your mind set. I was always undocumented but now I have papers. You go from hopeless, to resilience; to thinking you might have a chance.” On the difficulty of being open with others, Gonzalo shares: “It is complex. I want to stay hidden and not share my difficulties. But at the same time I understand that I have to share my story so others know and things might be able to change for the better for me. But it is hard.” By the end of my interview with him, Gonzalo boldly asks me to mention his real name in this thesis. When I use quotes from my interview with Gonzalo, I will refer to him as the kind and sensitive student that he is.

Alejandra was 9 years old when she came to America with her mother and younger sister. Her father had already worked in America for a year and wanted his family to come over. In 2001, Alejandra flew with her mom and younger sister to Tijuana to cross the border. The two young children crossed by car, a few weeks later her mom came after crossing the desert. Alejandra realized she was undocumented at age 15 when she could not attend her friends' birthday party which was held in Tijuana. Alejandra is a very hard working, determined and motivated individual. Both she and her younger sister are part of the DACA program and her parents are able to apply for DAPA if the program becomes legislated because they had a baby boy born in America. Alejandra had to switch from a Nursing major to a Psychology major at SDSU because of her immigration status as her status did not allow her to do community work nor an internship abroad; requirements for the Nursing program. Alejandra is on the board of the EWB organization, is a mentor for freshman students, and is actively involved in community work. Because of her status growing up, and her current DACA status, Alejandra is very motivated to help others and educate them about their possibilities. She had made a list of things she wanted to tell me before our interview, to make sure she had shared with me all the important aspects of being undocumented/DACA and all the dreams and expectations she had for the future. While she aspires more for the undocumented populations, she mentioned multiple times how thankful she is of the opportunities given to her and the possibility she now has to share that with others via this research. In this research, Alejandra will be mentioned as the enthusiastic major-switching student.

Juanita came to America in 1999 at age 16, along with her little sister and little brother. Both her parents had already lived in America for four years while the children lived with their grandparents in Mexico. Juanita finished high school in America and signed up for community college. Unfortunately, she did not feel like she fitted in, so left and started working instead. When the Californian Dream Act passed in 2011, Juanita was able to go to university and signed up for San Diego State University pursuing a major in Nutrition. Juanita's younger sister is part of the DACA program, yet she says her brother made the mistake of going back to Mexico for a while. He is now two years short of presence in America and thus not eligible for DACA. Juanita is a junior at SDSU and will soon graduate. She does not know yet what she will do after graduation. She used to be member of EWB but does not attend their meetings or activities anymore. While Juanita was initially timid during the interview, she is very outspoken about her situation and the difficulties she and other undocumented students have to go through. She remains conscious of the surroundings during our interview and stops talking when others pass us. Juanita really tries to make me understand what it is like to be undocumented and is thankful for other people's desire to understand her situation. She continuously thanks me over email for interviewing her and actively tries to recruit more students for this research. Quotes from Juanita will introduce her as the timid undocumented Nutrition student.

Gabriela came to America when she was 18 years old. She came with her parents and two younger sisters with a legal visa. Her dad was soon able to get residency and citizenship and collected papers to petition for his family. Gabriela's mom and two sisters were quickly processed



and became legal residents. Because of her adult age, Gabriela is still waiting for her case to be processed. She filed her case in 2001 but is still waiting to hear from the immigration services as the system is very backed up. They are currently processing files from 1999. Gabriela has been waiting for over 14 years now; the long process of not knowing about her status or future in America makes her very emotional. Upon arriving in 2001, Gabriela attended adult school where she got her GED and high school diploma. She continued to community college where she founded the organization IDEAS for undocumented students. She took two years off of college out of fear for deportation. ICE (The Immigration and Customs Enforcement) often used to stop people at trolleys to ask about their identification and Gabriela would not want to risk deportation while traveling the trolley to her school. This was a difficult time for her that she rather not talks about. Eventually, after graduating from community college, Gabriela transferred to San Diego State University pursuing a major in Sociology. She is currently the President on the EWB board. Gabriela is a kind, outgoing, and social person. Even though I was the only white person part of EWB, she was very welcoming to me and was so interested in participating in this research that she approached me because she longed to tell me her story. Gabriela will be referred to in this research as the kind, waiting for her case, EWB leader.

## Chapter 4 – “DACA has opened so many doors for me”

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The following three chapters are the results from three months of fieldwork, each representing one of the concepts looked at with regards to the influence of the DACA program on the integration of undocumented students in American society. This first chapter looks into the influence of the DACA program on student's access of certain institutions and (social) services. To what extent have DACA students more or better access than undocumented students?

Both DACA and undocumented students have mentioned several aspects in which they feel limited or aspects which they regard as improvements. The responses are divided into four types of access which the students deemed most noteworthy: 1) access to work, 2) access to education, 3) access to financial aid and social services, and 4) access to travel. I have thus divided the chapter into four parts. In addition, the students mentioned that support systems are of significant importance with regards to access. While DACA and undocumented students both have access to education, without the knowledge of this privilege, students might not apply to higher education or apply without signing up for financial aid. Support from school officials, family, and organizations are thus of relevance with regards to students' access of institutions and (social) services. These support systems are mentioned as aspects of the four types of access mentioned below.

### 4.1 – Access to Work

DACA has enabled students to become socially and legally more included in American society by providing them with, among others, a working permit. The majority of students expressed that the ability to legally work has had the biggest impact on their life. Whereas the undocumented students often also work with a fake ID or at large fast food chains who do not ask about their Social Security Number, DACA allows students to work for minimum wage and, more importantly, allows them to practice what they studied for. The enthusiastic major-switching student Alejandra remembers her enthusiasm when DACA passed in 2012 and shares being overwhelmed with happiness: “DACA has opened so many doors for me. I was most excited about being able to work. I had not worked much before because of the risk of working with a fake ID. I had only done some church summer internships and babysitting jobs. After I applied for DACA I immediately applied for jobs. My DACA was passed in November and in January I started my first job! I now work on campus and look forward to pursuing a career after graduation.” DACA allows undocumented students to legally work and, by being able to put to practice what they studied for, DACA opens up students' chances of moving forward in life.

Being undocumented does not necessarily mean that the students are unable to work; many of the students interviewed have, or have had jobs in various sectors. This ties in with the research by Ribot and Peluso (2003) who argue that those excluded might have indirect or illegal access to

resources. And being undocumented does not necessarily prevent students from pursuing higher education either. However, without the proper documentation, undocumented students are unable to apply for jobs in their field of study after graduation. Juanita, who will have a degree in Nutrition, cannot practice what she studied for because of her immigration status. She mentions that she feels “stuck in this situation. I cannot apply my degree to the fullest. It’s like I stay a kid forever.” She mentions this because without the right to legally work, her job perspective will very likely come down to having to do low-paying jobs such as restaurant work, domestic labor, cleaning, etc. These particular jobs are physically demanding and the immigrants are paid under the table – often below the minimum wage – and are vulnerable to exploitation. Juanita recalls multiple occasions in which her boss claimed to not have cash money to pay Juanita after her shift had ended. She made sure she always received her money though, stating “I’m not afraid. You owe me money. If you don’t pay me I could call my friends. I have some rights too.” But even though she made sure her employer would pay her her wages, Juanita did work below the minimum wage. She reported to work for 7\$ per hour, even though the minimum wage is a little over 9\$ per hour. Juanita said she accepted below the minimum because of convenience: the job was close to home so she did not have to drive to work and pay money for gas. After working at this job for two years, her employer ‘promoted’ Juanita for the minimum wage.

In addition to not being able to legally work, undocumented students are also unable to serve the country even though they often feel part of America and are loyal to it. A DACA student had said that if he had gotten a Social Security Number earlier, he would have wanted to join the Marines. He says: “it is very hard for me, especially because I consider myself part of this country and this society.” He wanted to fight for this country and represent it overseas. Also sensitive student Gonzalo says “I do feel like I owe this country something. I’m loyal to it.” So compared to DACA students, undocumented students are limited in their work options and are often fearful because of their vulnerable position at work.

## 4.2 – Access to Education

Students who are part of the DACA program now have a Social Security Number which makes it easier for them to access education. The application is faster, and the funds available to them allow many to pursue higher education. DACA students are able to apply for (private) scholarships, and are able to choose any university. While certain majors require students to partake in a study abroad experience, DACA students are not limited in their study program choices because they are able to travel abroad. While many undocumented students initially decided to (illegally) work after high school, since the DACA program many of these students (for example the sensitive Psychology student Gonzalo) have decided to continue their education and applied for college or university. While children under the age of 18 have the right to education regardless of their immigration status, this does not apply to higher education. However, thanks to the DACA program, its participants have the ability to benefit from their access to education.

With the passing of the Californian Dream Act, undocumented students are also able to apply for higher education at in-state tuition. As aforementioned, these students are called AB540 students amongst university officials. In addition to this reduction in tuition, undocumented students are also able to apply for financial aid; multiple funds are set up of for “undocumented students with potential.”

Yet even though there are funds available for undocumented students, the financial assistance is limited and the in-state tuition is still relatively high. Because of financial reasons, many undocumented youth thus do not have the option to choose for higher education. And, in the case of enthusiastic Alejandra, undocumented students cannot choose the major of their liking because of certain university requirements. Alejandra shares that it has been her lifelong dream to become a nurse. She worked hard for it in high school and had a 4.3 GPA. She got accepted to the nursing program at SDSU, but had difficulty with the community service hours she had to put in. She approached the president of the nursing association and shared her immigration status and that she could not do 100 hours of community service as that required a background check she would not pass. Likewise, she would not be able to do the required abroad internship either. The president had never heard of her situation before and decided that she could not continue her education and advised her to change her major. Alejandra recalls thinking “What am I doing here if I can’t do nursing?” After her first year of university, because of no alternatives, Alejandra decided to switch her major from nursing to psychology. She recalls the fear she felt of having to approach the nursing school officials about her situation; it surprised her that they were unaware of the term AB540 (she was already accepted as AB540 student in their program) and their lack of sympathy for her situation. So even though higher education has become more attainable for undocumented students, because of a disparity between school requirements and their immigration status, undocumented students are sometimes unable to choose the study program of their liking.

### **Support from Family**

An important requirement for students’ access to higher education is the support they receive from their family. The support of family is a good drive for the students, and their parents’ desire for them to achieve more than their own life accomplishments pushes the students forward. One male DACA student said he did not know how to pay for college, but only knew that he wanted to go. Even though his parents only make little money and can barely sustain their family of four, they took on extra jobs and were able to work and pay for his tuition; 3 years of college in total, of about 1200\$ per year. After community college graduation, the student decided, with approval of his parents, to continue to university. Without the support of their family, undocumented students are unable to experience the form of inclusion they experience by being part of campus life and student organizations.

Yet while undocumented students acknowledge the support they receive from their family, it is not always easy to be raised in a Mexican household in an American society. All undocumented students mention that their parents barely speak English. The language the students speak at home

with their parents is often Spanish; with their siblings they speak Spanglish. And because of their parents' immigration status and inability to speak English, they are limited to certain types of jobs that are regularly only done by Latinos – thus mainly speaking Spanish at work. This result ties in with the result done by Amit (2012) who argued that language proficiency is related to economic success and the successfulness of immigrants' integration and assimilation in the host country. A result of their lack of integration (with regards to the English language), the children of these parents often carry lots of responsibilities and have to translate and mediate between their parents and American society. A student recalls having to call with the electricity company at a young age because their electricity had been cut off and her parents had to rely on her to have the situation solved. So while family is a big support system for undocumented students and their help allows them to achieve goals unimaginable for their parents, their home situation is a reminder of the exclusion and limitations experienced by many undocumented immigrants. Not only does their family not have access to many services, they rely on others to help them get a hold of the few they can get.

### 4.3 – Access to Financial Aid and Social Services

DACA enables students to apply for financial aid. Apart from paying for university at in-state tuition, students are also able to apply for grants and scholarships that will help them pay for college or university. Several students expressed being able to attend university with approximately 75% of tuition paid for by financial aid from diverse funds. This aid has made it considerably more obtainable for undocumented students to continue to higher education instead of opting for low paying jobs many of their parents execute. In addition, accompanying a student's enrollment at many American universities, is student health care. While DACA students are thus now able to use this social service, several students express not yet having utilized it; the sensitive Psychology student Gonzalo says “even though I have student health as SDSU student, I don't use it because I'm just not used to it.” It seems as if some DACA students are still in the mindset of being fully undocumented where they are excluded from social services and have to be cautious about their whereabouts. Gonzalo and other DACA students have the ability to benefit, yet are not familiar with having this facility. Several students express fearing the consequences of applying for financial aid, or simply do not believe they actually have access to funds. Even though DACA students might not (yet) use certain services, they are eligible for financial aid and student health care.

Because undocumented students technically should not reside in America, they are not eligible for health insurance or any social services. Emergency visits to the hospital may not be denied, but the financial consequences of a visit are a real burden to them. Though this particular aspect might seem very important, especially considering the low-income families undocumented students come from and the physically demanding labor their parents often partake in, not much emphasis was put on undocumented immigrants' inability to access health care or social services. An explanation might be that the undocumented students interviewed might not yet have had much contact with health care because of their relatively young age. Yet some of the undocumented students also express an immense fear for using health care as going to the hospital also entails



sharing sensitive personal information. Yoshikawa (2012), in his research on undocumented parents raising legal American children, argues that this fear is so instilled in undocumented immigrants that they will not utilize services even though they (or their children) might have access to it (especially in cases of emergency). However, it must be stated that DACA student's access to financial aid, health care, and social services is of significant value to their lives, and is a large form of inclusion compared to the situation of undocumented students.

### **Support from School**

All of the students, both DACA and undocumented, expressed that counselors and teachers in high school have played a profound role in getting them into college. While some of them have had some negative encounters with school staff, all express that they would not have been in university had it not been for the help of particular counselors.

DACA is a federal program and, compared to AB540 being a Californian law, the program's information is very much available. The AB540 law remains, unfortunately, complicated and is not known or used by all educational institutions. While students did not necessarily contact counselors or teachers about the DACA program, they did very much rely on support from their school with applying for AB540.

Because DACA is a relatively new program, many of the interviewees applied for community college or university as undocumented students. Before DACA, the students did not have a Social Security Number, and thus had to sign up as AB540 students; a program that, like DACA, is relatively new. A student recalls that his teacher really helped him; they did research together, she helped fill in applications, and helped him with his status and approval for in-state tuition. Though this particular student found it initially difficult to share with her his status, he trusted her and she was the one who heard about the AB540 law that would help him. Also for Juanita, Gabriela, Alejandra and many other students, help was provided to them after they had informed one of their teachers about their status. In one student's case, a counselor had given a short talk in class about AB540. This particular counselor knew a lot of her students were undocumented and by sharing the possibilities, she hoped her students would improve their lives by going to college. In another student's case, one of the teachers not only shared about AB540, but even paid for the down payment for the university application. This student proudly shared that her teacher had said that she "saw potential in me, and she saw this big financial gift as an investment."

## **4.4 – Access to Travel**

DACA students are able to get a drivers' license and are able to travel around freely. Even though America consists of fifty states with open borders between the states, all across America are checkpoints. These checkpoints are strategically located on busy highways. Passing cars are stopped and travelers are checked and, in case of suspicion, asked for their papers. These checkpoints are a clear example of a boundary, mentioned by Ribot and Peluso (2003). Inclusion and exclusion created boundaries, and the checkpoints are a physical real boundary as a consequence of

inclusion/exclusion practices. Now that DACA has given students a Social Security Number and a form of identification, students mention confidently travelling around America. Students are even able to travel internationally, yet many do not do this because they believe it remains difficult to come back into America afterwards. While this is not the case according to the official description of the DACA program, this is a fear deeply instilled in students. Out of fear, none of the students (except one student mentioned below) expressed to risk their status by going abroad. DACA students mention now being able to travel to Los Angeles to visit friends or family or even go to another state for school conferences or short holidays. The students are no longer limited in their mobility but can freely travel to other places inside and outside of America. One student who – unlike many – did use his DACA to visit family in Mexico shares, after his trip, the following on his Facebook: “I am humbled to have the privilege, the ability, to be able to travel (with less fear) through the homeland of past, the homeland of present and homeland of future generations of Original Peoples, my/our extended family, extended community and by extension build and strengthen relationships to the land, water, air and fire, everything that is Turtle Island, everything that is Anahuac, to work on healing and mending ancestral (re)connections and timeless spirit friendships.” The ability to visit Mexico, “the homeland,” is of significant value to all Mexican undocumented students. All express wanting to visit, meet (sometimes for the very first time) family and friends, experience the culture and traditions, and simply “breathe different air.” Being able to travel freely, both to other countries as well as within America (many express having family in other parts of America) is an aspect of DACA that is deeply valued by undocumented students.

While DACA students are now able to travel around freely, undocumented students are very much restricted by the checkpoints in America. These restrictions are especially deeply experienced when family back in Mexico become ill. One student shared that her father had become seriously ill and they did not know if he was going to make it, but, after much consideration, she decided not to go back home to visit him. She said it would bring her consolation to visit her brother in Arizona but because of checkpoints she is not able to do that either, even though the two live in the same country. Because of these limitations, she says she often wonders “Is this worth it? I haven’t seen my parents in 14 years. Is this worth it?” Other students express feeling left out when other peers are able to go abroad for their education. One student expresses he would love to study abroad, but because of the delay with his DACA 2.0/extended application, he is not able to do so. The undocumented Nutrition student Juanita mentions that her study program allows for students to experience what university is like abroad. She says “There is a big difference between me and DACA. I can’t travel because of the situation. I’m missing out. All go abroad, I’m the only one of my class who stays here to do community service instead. The others complain about expenses, but it is cheaper than going by yourself. I would go, there are ways to make it happen. It’s not even possible for me.” Not being able to travel around freely can also be the reason how students find out about their undocumented status. Major switching student Alejandra recalls an event where her American childhood friend had invited her and other friends to go with her to celebrate her birthday in Tijuana, Mexico. It was then that she found out about her immigration status when her parents explained to her why she could not attend the birthday party.

With regards to the ability for students to get a drivers' license, a new Californian law called AB60 enables any person, regardless of their status, to get a drivers' license. While many undocumented immigrants initially drove around illegally, they are now able to legally access the streets by car. Though they can drive legally, if stopped by police they are still prone to deportation as their driver license card clearly states their illegal status. Juanita, about getting her drivers' license through AB60 exclaimed: "Can you imagine? It is great, it is my first ID, the first time I have a form of identification." Nonetheless, it must be mentioned that these driver's licenses cannot be used for identification purposes. Yet this particular law has a big impact because immigrants used to drive without a legal license; an act that made them feel vulnerable and scared. Kind, waiting for her case student Gabriela, on the other hand, says she prefers to wait with getting her driver's license. She is skeptical and fearful of this new law: "You never know with the government. They say 'we are here for your help' but I am hesitant. ICE then has access to all my information. In the end I will probably get it [her driver's license] but I will wait and see how others do it first." As previously argued, fear can play such an important role in students' life that it can keep students from utilizing the resources they have access to. Nonetheless, the AB60 law is very influential in the lives of undocumented immigrants and many have already taken the opportunity to get a legal drivers' license. This law is a clear example of what Ribot and Peluso (2003) call political-economic circumstances changing the terms of access. Likely because many undocumented immigrants already used informal access by driving around illegally, they have now been granted access to benefit from a drivers' license. With regards to American drivers' licenses, there is no longer a clear boundary between those eligible and those ineligible based on immigration status.

### **Support from Organizations**

Being part of an organization enhances the student's access to services, and their knowledge about their rights. All these organizations organize workshops, info sessions, and conferences to inform the students and their community about changing legislation, as well as their rights when stopped by police. Being aware of one's rights, not only shows the students' the limitations of their status, but – more importantly – their options. Gabriela says she had attended a "Know your Rights" workshop. A lawyer was invited to share with everyone what their rights were as undocumented immigrants in America. Gabriela says: "I am still afraid, but am now more comfortable about my rights and options. I know now what I can do or not when police approach me. No I'm not afraid actually; afraid is if you do not know what to do, I do know now and that has helped a lot." Many undocumented students have shared about such workshops and the impact it has had on their life. Students now know they have the right to remain silent when stopped by police, and have – like American citizens – access to a fair trial and lawyer when arrested. So not only do these organizations create support groups and allow undocumented students to feel part of a community, the organizations also inform students about their rights, gives them tools, and gives them access to valuable information such as their personal rights. In Gabriela's case, knowing her rights is valuable for her ability to travel and go to school. While attending community college, she feared being stopped by police on her way to school while traveling the trolley. She decided to not go to school out of fear of deportation. She stayed home for two years before feeling comfortable again to travel.

This is a clear example of the fear many undocumented students experience and that limits them in their everyday life. Knowing one's rights, through organized workshops is thus a great way to limit the influence of fear and improve students' knowledge and ability to utilize access.

## 4.5 – Conclusion

Comparing DACA students with undocumented students with regards to their access to institutions and (social) services, the DACA program has enhanced students' access. DACA students are able to more fully participate in American society and their ability to benefit from working in the field of study for at least minimum wage, and their ability to benefit from traveling around freely were mentioned as the most influential differences to their lives after participating in the DACA program. Undocumented students remain limited in their access to institutions and services and though they find illegal or indirect forms of access, they are confronted with the difference between those eligible for the DACA program. Thus in line with Ribot and Peluso's theory of access (2003), access creates boundaries between who is (not) able to benefit from resources. While undocumented students are sometimes able to indirectly or illegally access the sources also available to DACA students, there remains a clear boundary between those included and those excluded. To build upon the theory of Ribot and Peluso, aspects such as sentiments of fear can also affect the theory of access as fear can impede students' ability to utilize their access to resources. Being undocumented for a number of years has instilled in immigrants a certain mindset that is difficult to break from.

Though not only DACA has an impact on students' access to institutions and services, also the Californian law AB540 is of particular value to undocumented students. Whereas DACA only impacts those eligible, AB540 is applicable to all undocumented students in California who have attended high school for at least 3 years and who want to apply to university. This law enables them to attend university at in-state tuition and grants them financial aid. Thus not only DACA students, but also undocumented students are now able to attend university and get a degree. This not only gives undocumented students access to a higher degree, it also gives them the opportunity to be part of campus life, a student community, and student organizations. The support students get from high school, family, and organizations are important indicators with regard to the access students experience. The knowledge they obtain from counselors (about AB540), and from organizations (about their rights and possibilities), enable students to expand their mobility and sense of security as undocumented students or DACA students in American society.

In conclusion, the DACA program has a positive influence on student's access to work, education, financial aid/social services, and travel. As Alejandra shared, DACA opens many doors for its participants. While the California Dream Act and AB540 law somewhat diminish the difference, DACA students remain much more privileged in comparison to undocumented students. Because of the long-term consequences of participation, the program enhances its participants' economic integration in American society. Many undocumented immigrants have used their participation in the program to quit their illegal jobs and attend higher education to improve their life opportunities. The financial aid and social services (such as health care) that accompany this

attendance further enables them the ability to benefit. Yet as Ribot and Peluso argue, access accompanies boundaries and experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and the boundary between DACA and undocumented students has increased with regards to access. Nevertheless, DACA is a program that enables its eligible undocumented students to integrate in American society by increasing their access, as well as their life opportunities.



## Chapter 5 – “This is Like my Second Home, I Belong Here”

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Chapter 4 has demonstrated that DACA has positively influenced student’s access to facilities and services. Now that DACA students are able to attend higher education, travel around freely, and legally work, does it also positively influence their belonging in America? And how does this compare to undocumented students? This following chapter looks at the extent to which DACA plays a role in a student’s belonging in America as well as how discourses related to different levels of belonging – social locations, individual identifications/emotional attachments, and ethical/political values – are utilized to maintain or challenge the boundaries between ‘us’ versus ‘them’.

This chapter is divided into four segments. The first part will start with looking at the sense of belonging DACA students experience, after which I will compare it to the experiences of undocumented students. Is there a difference between the two groups? The second segment will analyze the students’ responses after which two aspects will be discussed – by using the theory of politics of belonging – that students experience as limitations on their quest to ‘seek’ belonging: 1) their difficulty with making friends, and 2) the negative stereotyping in the media. Following, by looking at the role of family and support groups, the third segment will argue that the discourse of individual identification and emotional attachments, as level of belonging, is often utilized by DACA and undocumented students to claim belonging and challenge the existing imaginary boundaries set in American society. To conclude this chapter, the fourth segment will look into the discourses relating to different levels of belonging that can be read in the DACA program requirements. By using social locations, individual identifications/emotional attachments, and ethical/political values, the American government – through the DACA program – maintain and reproduce the boundary between citizens and undocumented immigrants, while at the same time allowing a certain group of eligible participants access to institutions and services (as argued in the previous chapter) and allow them to be somewhat incorporated in the “us” versus “them” binary opposition.

### 5.1 – Belonging: Comparing DACA Students and Undocumented Students

Considering belonging, the following are some responses from DACA students:

“I don’t identify as American, but this is my home. I belong in here,.. in San Diego.”

“I know the American education system, holidays, the culture. I feel like I belong here.”

“I cannot imagine living anywhere other than here.”

Yet are these responses to belonging the result of DACA and the possibilities this program has

given them to integrate in American society, and in the city of San Diego? The following are some quotes of undocumented students who were asked the same question about belonging:

“This is like my second home. I belong here; I have my aunt and uncle here, a house where I can live, my school..”

“My uncle says I am here for a reason.”

“Everyone has the right to call anywhere home. This is my home. People shouldn’t be limited. Everyone should be open to others. In an ideal world, citizens should own their privilege and use it to help others who don’t have citizenship.”

“I remember being in a bus who got stopped at a checkpoint. The officers did not go into the bus, but only asked some questions to the bus driver instead of checking our IDs. I was scared but I guess life did not want me to go back to Mexico.”

“My parents and sisters are always there for me. They give me energy and power to keep going and say ‘I can do this!’ I belong here with them.”

Both DACA and undocumented students have similar responses with regards to their belonging. While the DACA program allows students to be more (economically) incorporated in society and increases their access to multiple institutions and services, it also influences student’s belonging. Yet the responses of both DACA students and undocumented students related to belonging show little difference. It could be argued that both groups of students already felt belonging, regardless of the DACA program. Based on this research and in line with Zimmerman’s (2011) argumentation, it would be expected that the DACA program is (merely) a validation of the participants’ belonging.

In accordance with Yuval-Davis (2006) theory on belonging and the politics of belonging, undocumented students are temporarily taken out of the category ‘illegal’ (discourse relating to the level of social location) when they qualify for DACA, and placed in the category ‘temporarily allowed residency’. The boundary work has thus shifted, yet DACA students remain on the “them” side of the “us” versus “them” separation as this chapter will illustrate. How do DACA and undocumented students claim belonging? The following section will analyze the abovementioned quotes according to the three discourses relating to different levels of belonging.

## 5.2 – Limitations to Claiming Belonging

The abovementioned quotes relating to students’ belonging can be analyzed as claiming belonging, challenging the existing imaginary boundaries of belonging, and fighting for citizenship (and thus full inclusion). While DACA and undocumented students are legally not a part of America – and thus technically should not claim belonging to it – the politics of belonging is used to contest and challenge the state that they are “deserving of aid” (Yuval-Davis, 2007) and inclusion.

By making statements such as “this is my home,” “I know the American education system, holidays, the culture,” and “I am here for a reason,” the students challenge the boundary at the belonging discourse level of emotional attachment. Their knowledge of America and their participation in society is used as a signifier of belonging<sup>1</sup> that aims to justify their presence and contests for their inclusion.

While students claim belonging and challenge existing belonging boundaries, students also experience limitations on their quest to seek and claim belonging. The students in this research came with two main aspects of which the first aspect – difficulty making friends – limits their ability to claim belonging and the second – negative stereotyping in the media – does not ‘grant’ them belonging.

### **Difficulty Making Friends**

Many of the students I have interviewed expressed that they did not have community life or friends when they grew up. The following are thus aspects that have limited the belonging DACA students and undocumented students feel towards San Diego and America. While the students have expressed to feel belonging, these aspects shake and hamper that belonging. In many of the cases, both DACA students and undocumented students share interchangeably about their experiences. Many students are still able to reflect on the time they grew up as recently arrived undocumented immigrants.

According to Juanita, the undocumented Nutrition student, the hardest part about her immigration status is feeling isolated. She says: “It is hard to trust people. They can make use of it. My life depends on them.” She therefore tries not to share her status to others because of fear. By not sharing, she again experiences a form of exclusion where she does not allow others to fully understand her personality, battles, and situation. She thus excludes herself from intimacy. It is an aspect psychology student Gonzalo can relate to as he did not share his immigration status with his friends (American citizens) growing up. He says it helped him to not dwell on his problem, yet it made him feel alone as well. He regrets not being able to share the ‘coming of age’ experiences with friends. While others had their first drink at a bar or got their drivers’ license, Gonzalo could not relate to them. Another student defines this as feeling ‘out of place’ when he hung out with his friends. He compares his university application process to theirs and says, “I had to think about aspects such as costs, location. My experience is very different.” As undocumented student, he could not apply to universities who were more than a checkpoint away, and had to be extra cautious about tuition. While friendships are very important, especially as young adults growing up and wanting to fit in, many of the students expressed having difficulty in trusting others and developing friendships because of their immigration status. The fear that accompanied their vulnerable status impeded their ability to engage in social relations and limited their belonging. Though many now have friends from the student organizations, growing up they often did not have a group of friends they belonged to.

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars may also refer to this as cultural citizenship.

In conclusion, social relations are a critical aspect of social/cultural integration of immigrants. Yet many students expressed to find it difficult to trust others and make friends because of their vulnerable position. In many instances, the students are unable to relate with fellow American peers; in particular with regards to getting one's drivers' license, travelling, purchasing liquor, or university applications. The students express that their individual identification does not match with their American peers, nor are they able to emotionally attach to friends. Not feeling confident about one's status and not being able to make friends impedes the students' ability to claim belonging.

## Media

Media is a powerful tool that influences the sentiments both American citizens and undocumented immigrants have towards the immigration debate. Especially in the southern states of America, the flow of undocumented immigrants is often on the news and the impact of their arrival can be seen everywhere. For example, San Diego is a real border city where all the (street) signs and menus are in both Spanish and English. Many of the inner-city schools have more Hispanic students than American students, and Mexican restaurants/shops can be found everywhere in San Diego. While these aspects seem to be integrated well, the media can be very harsh and negative about the influences of Mexican immigrants in America. One student who had moved from Illinois to California says he sees many hostile sentiments in the media. The portrayal of undocumented immigrants is very negative and having legal papers is very important, a characteristic he did not experience as severely when he lived in Illinois. Because of the constant debate in California, he explained that it has only made him more aware of his status and difficult situation. He admits trying to stay away from the media and information on legislation sometimes, because it is too sensitive and negative. Sensitive student Gonzalo shares that the immigration debate and politics made him feel like a bystander: "There is hardly any change. It infuriates me. I just try not to look. It is hard for me to have conversations about this. I try to stay away, but have mixed feelings about it. It reminds me of the powerlessness in the situation. I felt like a bystander. There's no change, I don't like that. Sometimes I rebel just to rebel. Society pushes me and undocumented immigrants in a corner." Even though Gonzalo now has DACA, he still remembers clearly the powerlessness of being undocumented. The negativity they hear in the media – students especially point out the hostile comments underneath online immigration articles – is a reminder that they are not welcomed and do not belong in the country they often call home. This media hostility, negative stereotyping and accompanied powerlessness that fuel the fear undocumented immigrants already experience on a daily basis because of their status.

Another student mentions that he feels part of society, but at the same time rejected. He says he was constantly reminded of his status growing up undocumented. He remembers having to be extra cautious because "American citizens who do not follow the law pay the consequences, yet I cannot not follow the law because I did not have documents. I always had to pay close attention to what I was doing." For the landscaping company he had started, he shares he had to drive a lot even though he did not have a legal drivers' license. Being cautious, he says, is now rooted in his nature;

an aspect no longer necessary now that he has DACA. While this cautiousness illustrated to him that he did not belong in America, another student said that she has always felt out of place, even back home in Mexico. She ironically explains that she was seen as inferior in Mexico because of her gender, but is also seen as inferior in America because of her status. According to her, females in Mexico are to marry, have children, and take care of the house. To which she replies: “That’s ok, but I wish more for my life.” Even though she has more opportunities as female in America and is able to attend university, she is often reminded of her inferior status. She feels that, as is portrayed in the media, she is not welcome here even though she does feel like she was destined to come to San Diego.

In conclusion, when trying to understand the role of the media on students’ belonging, it is relevant to regard Antonisch’ research on the dynamic interplay between “granting” and “seeking” belonging as well as Yuval-Davis’ theory on politics of belonging. All students expressed that they experience the media as not granting them belonging with all the negative stereotyping of undocumented immigrants. In particular the hostile comments underneath online articles are mentioned as daunting and limit students’ ability to claim belonging. Different levels of belonging such as undocumented immigrants’ race, nationality, or gender (along with the accompanying judgment) are utilized by the media to maintain the boundary between “us” and “them,” and reproduce the notion that DACA and undocumented students are not part of America.

### **5.3 – Utilization of Discourses to Claim Belonging and Challenge Boundaries**

Despite the limitations students experience, the following two aspects – the importance of family and support groups – are brought up by DACA and undocumented students as the main aspect and platform to claim belonging.

#### **Family**

An important aspect, if not one of the most important aspects, in order to feel belonging is having people around who you can call ‘family’. In the case of undocumented students, students might not always have their close family (parents and siblings) with them, but often also consider their good friends, or even their neighbor, as part of their family.

One student explains that undocumented immigrants initially went back and forth between Mexico and America. While the family stayed back home in Mexico, the men went to work in America for a few months to send home remittances. Now that the families have come along with the men because of stricter border surveillance, Mexicans create a living in America. He explains that even though undocumented immigrants are not given the same opportunities as citizens, they will survive: “Hard work pays off. You don’t hear undocumented immigrants complaining. They just work hard, earn money, and go back home. Now with the fence, this has become home. We want to stay. Life is difficult, but it is possible.” Having one’s family in America creates a sense of belonging for the immigrants. There is less incentive to go back home now that Mexican families build their lives in American society.

Family is very important in Mexican culture and several students expressed becoming even closer as a family after having to deal with their immigration status in a foreign country. For example, Gabriela – the student who is still, after 14 years, waiting for her case to process – says her family is very valuable to her: “My parents and sisters are always there for me. They give me energy and power to keep going and say ‘I can do this!’ I belong here with them.” Gabriela is the only one of her family who is not yet legalized; Gabriela’s mom is resident, and her dad and two younger sisters are citizens. Reflecting on this, she says: “I feel happy for them. They had to pass other hurdles and I’m glad they do not have to worry about this [immigration status]. I am fortunate to have them, they give me everything.” In this particular case, Gabriela expressed feeling a sense of belonging in America, because her family lives in San Diego.

In other cases, having a family with both legal and undocumented children can cause friction. One student shares that he initially resented his two younger brothers who are born as American citizens. While his brothers were able to visit their family in Mexico every summer, he has never been back to his homeland, nor met his Mexican family. Another student, on the other hand, is thankful for her three younger American siblings (5, 7, and 12 years old) and often takes care of them. She says “there is nobody to blame for this situation. I’m really glad it’s not my brothers [without documents]. I am really glad they don’t have to go through what I had to go through. I’m glad I’m the oldest so I can help them. Tell them I’m willing to show them, even though I don’t get as much opportunity as they get. I got this far, so they can do it too. My family is very united. I don’t feel jealous at all about their situation. They will get more opportunities than me.” She expressed that she belongs in her family and in San Diego, and that she considers it a great opportunity to teach her legal younger siblings about their privileged situation.

One student has two younger legal siblings and he says that he is happy that they are able to “fly higher than me.” Like others, he regards it his responsibility to make them aware of their privileged position. As the oldest child of the family, he is very responsible and mature. He says he will have to take care of his younger siblings if his parents were to be deported. He is not immediately in fear about this, but he says it is an awareness that plays a role in his life. He says “We need to be careful. I am prepared to face that situation. I fear more for my parents if that happens.” Because his little brothers are American citizens and belong in San Diego, this student says he belongs there as well. And if his parents were to be deported, he is prepared to face the challenge of raising his brothers.

Another student regards San Diego as her home because of the opportunities it has given her. While she has no immediate family in America (she lives with her aunt and uncle) she made the difficult decision to cross the border illegally to be able to do something for her family back home. Her desire was to own a store and send remittances to her family. But after many struggles surviving as undocumented immigrant, she realized that she is “not able to do big things for them. I don’t earn money. Being here is an opportunity for me. I want to show my degree if I ever go back and show them it was not just fun being here.” Living in San Diego for a little over 14 years already, she



regards America her home and calls her aunt, uncle and friends her new ‘family’. Her initial reason for coming was to support her family back home, however; now she is focused on improving her own life in the country she feels she belongs in.

One student shares that while he came to America with his family, he was left by himself at the young age of 17. His parents thought he belonged in America and was to send home remittances. He was old enough to take care of himself and to find a job. While he initially felt excluded, now, almost twenty years later, he has a wife and child and has created his own family. He still sends home remittances, and with DACA he is able to improve his life and continue his education. He feels part of society, yet rejected in certain aspects, and belongs in San Diego with his wife and American born child.

In conclusion, family is brought up as the main reason why DACA students and undocumented students claim belonging in America. While some are emotionally attached because their family resides in America, others are emotionally attached and feel belonging because they have an obligation to provide for their family back in Mexico. With regards to the politics of belonging, in particular in families with legal American citizens (e.g. both parents and the older children are undocumented, yet the youngest child(ren) is/are born in America) the family as category (level of belonging: social location) is utilized because of the ethical/political values that accompany this category. American society and politics value ‘family’ and breaking up families is considered unethical. Thus the social location of ‘family’ and the accompanying ethical value of this category can be regarded as being utilized by undocumented immigrants to challenge the existing boundary of belonging and contest for their inclusion. While the program is currently still on hold, the DAPA program is a response to this contestation and allows the parents of legal American citizens deferred deportation.

### **Support Groups**

In addition to family, also support groups are important for students to feel and claim belonging. And with a growing group of undocumented immigrants in San Diego, supporting policies and support groups have been formed. Many marches and rallies had been organized to fight for more equal treatment; programs such as DACA and AB540, as well as the current AB60 law have been positive outcomes of this lobbying. Because of America’s geography, the immigration debate is more progressive in California than in other states, an aspect reflected in the media. Because of extensive lobbying, no Californian newspapers would dare to use the term ‘illegal,’ but would use ‘undocumented’ when describing the immigrants who crossed illegally. In the northern parts of America, on the other hand, many Americans have never heard of the term ‘undocumented’ when I described them my thesis research. Population-wise, there are relatively fewer undocumented immigrants situated in the northern states of America and the implemented state immigration policies (or the immigration debates for that matter) are not as progressive as those in California.

There are multiple organizations in San Diego who support the undocumented community. Those that are run by students (e.g. EWB, SDDT, and IDEAS) are more focused on supporting one another than on rallying for better rights. For example, the vice president of the EWB organization, shares that EWB has expanded from only focusing on AB540 students to now also broadening itself to marginalized students to not exclude anyone. Their focus is on providing members with a support system, but acknowledges that each year the focus of the organization shifts with the installation of a new board. The activities they organize are focused at allowing students to interact and share life with each other, develop leadership skills, and supporting the community by organizing workshops and doing voluntary work. Students do not necessarily have to become a member to participate in the events or attend the weekly meetings. There are many fun outings like movie/bowling nights or hiking trips that bond the students and allows for friendships to develop. Looking back on his freshman year at SDSU, the EWB vice president says he experienced campus life as quite daunting. He felt overwhelmed amongst the thousands of students and overload of activities and events. Joining EWB was his “best decision” and enriched his college experience. After 1.5 years as EWB member, others realized his IT skills and he was asked to design the EWB website. While interviewing him in his own personal campus office with access to multiple computers, he proudly explains that others could not update the website he had made so he was assigned EWB officer in charge. He fitted in, attended all events, and felt accepted.

One of the students I interview is a real politician and attends many conferences across California. He is an active member of the San Diego Dream Team and frequently attends EWB activities. He lobbies, transfers the knowledge he obtained from conferences to the community via info sessions, and is regularly interviewed by local TV stations. He is one of the spokespersons for the SDDT and fights for equal rights for undocumented immigrants; a population he believes belongs in America. He is undocumented but would have been able to apply for DACA 2.0/extended had not a Texan judge delayed the approval of this program. After attending a SDDT meeting, he sits down with me and shares that the current delay concerns him: “it shows me politicians don’t care about us. It is a political tactic. That’s why we need to keep pushing because we are not a concern to them.” Joining SDDT and EWB has allowed him to use his qualities and lobby for equal rights. He fits right in and can develop his leadership skills.

Another student shares that she likes to be part of groups that encourage one another. She remembers a large march in 2008, in downtown San Diego. She says it was for dreamers and undocumented immigrants. In college she was part of IDEAS, now at SDSU she is part of EWB. She says “the feeling is good. Regardless the cause or if we achieve anything, at least we feel good about doing something.” This latter experience applies to many students I have met. Whether some of the students have joined an organization to make friends, develop leadership skills, lobby for equal rights, improve their resume, or share life stories with like-minded students, many have found a sense of belonging within the organization. Being part of a student community/family enabled them to feel included and helped create a sense of belonging in university, and in San Diego at large.

While the abovementioned argued that many students express that organizations such as EWB and/or SDDT has enriched their life and gave them a large group of friends that they feel part of, Nutrition student Juanita, on the other hand, has left EWB because she no longer felt like she belonged there. Though she still considers the group as her family, after the implementation of the DACA program she decided to no longer attend. She says she feels like she is one of the only ones of the group who was not eligible for DACA; an aspect that greatly saddened her and something which she does not want to be reminded of. Though she still meets with friends from EWB, she no longer attends the weekly meetings or activities. While she expresses feeling happy for her friends, she wonders: “What did I do wrong? Why am I not included? I don’t go to EWB anymore. It’s not helping me. I want to stay away from that, not thinking about all that. No workshops for me anymore.” Whereas EWB hopes to create a support system where marginalized students can belong to, in Juanita’s case she feels more excluded from the group now that many of the students are no longer undocumented but are DACA students.

In conclusion, the responses of the students – about the importance of supports groups in relation to forming and claiming belonging – ties in with the existing literature on belonging. As Negron-Gonzales argued, forming groups allows undocumented students to form belonging, give meaning to their lives, and it gives them a voice. Coming out about being undocumented and becoming part of a support group is a new experience of inclusion. The students are welcomed regardless of their immigration status (there is no ethical/political value placed on their illegality so they can somewhat let go of their fear), and can share life experiences with students who have had similar experiences (emotional attachment). In accordance with Antonisch’ theory of ‘seeking’ and ‘granting’, support groups are thus platforms to seek and construct belonging for undocumented students. Yet in the case of Juanita, it can also negatively influence one’s belonging when students feel like they can no longer emotionally attach/relate to members. Yet all other students expressed to experience inclusion and feel belonging because of the support groups they are a part of.

#### **5.4 – Analysis of the DACA Program as Politics of Belonging**

While aspects such as family and support groups partake in boundary work in order to contest and challenge, the DACA program also partakes in boundary work in order to maintain and reproduce the existing boundaries. Politics of belonging is the “dirty work of boundary maintenance,” and maintenance asks for a continuous reproduction of the existing boundaries between “us” and “them.” The DACA program can be seen as expanding the “us” and allowing some of the “them” to enter under certain strict conditions. The politics of belonging by Yuval-Davis (2006) can be used to analyze the requirements the USCIS places on DACA eligibility.

One of the DACA requirements for eligibility is that the participants are “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.” In this regard, the DACA program utilizes the discourse of social location as a level of belonging for its participants. The social location here is the

category of ‘education’/‘class’ and assumes the positive political value USCIS places on education and serving the nation.

Likewise, another requirement is that the participants have “continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007 up to the present time.” This particular requirement can be seen as a political project that constructs belonging as a person’s solidarity and loyalty to the American nation. Failing this requirement means one does not belong in the DACA program. This political project of belonging is primarily based on the identificatory and emotional level, yet it also assumes adherence to specific political and ethical values that are seen as inherent to good citizenship.

The following requirement can be analyzed according to the third level of belonging of ethical and political values: “have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety.” This level of belonging shows that there is a value and judgment on certain social locations and constructions of individual and collective identities and attachments. In this particular case, there is a judgment on undocumented students who have been convicted of felonies. Along with the other requirements, having a clean record thus becomes a prerequisite for the new boundary of “us” versus “them.”

In essence, all the different requirements can be analyzed as political projects of belonging. Several discourses relating to different levels of belonging are utilized as requisites for undocumented students to claim belonging and become incorporated in the “us”. USCIS participates in the “dirty work of boundary maintenance” and the DACA requirements have set the game for which undocumented immigrants are granted participation and which immigrants remain part of “them.”

## 5.5 – Conclusion

Even though the DACA program has enhanced its participants access to institutions and services, it has not necessarily influenced their sense of belonging within American society. Comparing the sentiments of both DACA students and undocumented students showed that both groups express to belong in America, regardless of the hardships they might face. It would thus be expected that the DACA students already felt belonging before they became part of the DACA program.

In particular family and support groups are important requirements for feeling belonging according to the students. Many of the students depend on their family and express having grown tighter as family since arriving in America. While some express having their family with them in San Diego gives them belonging, others express feeling belonging in America in order to send home remittances to their family back home in Mexico. Family can be regarded at the belonging level of emotional attachment, and family as category/social location is utilized as discourse – because of the ethical value placed on family – to claim belonging and contest the existing boundaries of belonging set in American society.

Now that the fence between Mexico and America is closed and it has become harder to cross, many families have settled in America. Along with the growing group of undocumented immigrants are the organizations that support these communities. Many of the students interviewed have been or are involved in student organizations and express that it has helped them in many ways. For example, EWB is a place where the students feel they fit right in, and where they can share their lives with students with similar experiences. They are able to develop leadership skills and feel needed and included when asked to perform board positions. Organizations create community life and help students feel included. On the other hand, since DACA, students not eligible for this program might feel like they no longer belong – feel excluded – and might avoid the organizations, regardless of its right intentions and support. Yet support groups remain platforms where undocumented students claim and construct their belonging.

Like the undocumented students, the USCIS also partakes in the politics of belonging by utilizing discourses relating to all three levels of belonging. By use of certain requisites, only a certain group of undocumented immigrants are granted eligibility for the DACA program. Yet while the boundaries of belonging have thus shifted, it remains to be argued whether the participants are included in “us” or remain seen as “them.”

Support groups and friends are important for student’s connections, yet many students expressed finding it difficult to trust people and make friends. The hostile comments some have received from school staff or friends are a constant reminder and fuel to their fear that they do not belong in San Diego. Also the media portrayal of Mexican immigrants shows them that they are not welcomed by American society. Politics of belonging and the “dirty work of boundary maintenance” is utilized to reproduce the existing boundary between “us” and “them.” Negative stereotyping is a judgment placed on social locations and individual identifications/emotional attachments (e.g. race, status, gender) and limits the students’ ability to claim belonging. Undocumented students have to be cautious and cannot freely live their lives. Many of the students express that growing up in fear has embedded in them a sense of caution and reluctance. And while DACA is a good step forward in acknowledging a certain group of undocumented immigrants as human beings with potential and rights, it does not affect the media portrayal of this group. Yet even though there are several aspects that moderate and shake the belonging students experience, all students expressed that they feel like they are in the right place and could not imagine living someplace else.

## Chapter 6 – “I Feel American, but I do not Identify as American”

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Chapter 4 showed that DACA has significantly influenced the student’s access to institutions and services which enabled them to more fully participate in American society. While DACA students are more included in this regard, it did not have a noticeably consequence to their sense of belonging as Chapter 5 argued. This last chapter looks at whether or not DACA influences a student’s identity (formation). It must be noted that identity formation will be looked at from the perspective of integration; how do students see themselves in relation to other existing groups in American society, and to what extent do they feel accepted by society so as to form their own identity?

With a great deal of instability in their lives, it can be difficult for DACA and undocumented students feel included and construct an identity. Students express juggling with growing up in a Mexican household where parents hold tight to their traditions and Spanish language, while at the same time experiencing and desiring American culture outside of their home. Does DACA influence student’s identity (formation) compared to students who are still undocumented? And what aspects play a role in students’ identity formation?

This chapter ties in with chapter 4 on students’ access and especially how the accompanying inclusion and exclusion they experience affects their identity formation. The chapter is divided into five aspects that were brought up by the students when asked about their identity (formation). The first two segments – American society/politics and American popular culture – will look into the general role of American society and argue that students continuously try to claim an “intersiderness identity.” The third segment – Education – will focus on the difficulty of growing up in the American educational system while from Mexican households. The fourth segment called ‘Borderland’ analyzes the role of San Diego’s location and how the “us” versus “them” perception that frames the students’ everyday life affects their claim for an identity in such a way that they feel “split in half.” The chapter will conclude with a fifth segment that argues that many students regard their identity as a work in progress.

### 6.1 – American Society and Policies

All of the students, both DACA and undocumented, expressed not identifying as American because they are constantly reminded by American society and by immigration policies that they are, in fact, not legally American. Major-switching DACA student Alejandra says “with regards to identity, I am Mexican yet I know more places in America than in Mexico. Yes, I feel American, but it is hard to say it with all these policies saying that I’m not.” Alejandra says she remembers Mexican traditions and celebrations and she misses them, but that she’s lived more than half of her life in America and feels more familiar with the American culture. “They keep telling me I’m not American, but then what am I?” Another DACA student says with regards to identity: “I feel very much rejected by



society; I feel American, but I do not identify as American.” He says he is constantly reminded that he is, indeed, not an American.

Of the American immigration debate, a DACA student says: “sometimes it feels like it’s following me. I don’t necessarily have to seek it out.” He says the legislation makes him disillusioned because it is a constant going back and forth, where some politicians want change and reform, yet not much is done according to him: “Maybe I’m pessimistic. I don’t want to be fixated on the law, legality, being validated. I don’t align to that. I don’t look to be validated. I’m not looking at “make or break” with laws. We are worth more than we’re portrayed as.” While there is a general sense of hope amongst undocumented students now that DACA has passed, many of them also express being fearful of what the new presidential elections will bring. Apart from having to renew one’s DACA, the program does not provide a lawful status. With no legal status, the impermanent character of DACA, and the continuous societal immigration debate, both DACA students and undocumented students express not identifying as Americans.

Undocumented Nutrition student Juanita shares that she does not feel acknowledged, especially because she pays taxes but does not get recognition for it. She says “I don’t feel appreciated. I’m pushed aside from society early on. You want an identity. I am me; I can see and feel myself. But not in society. Even if I contribute they do not recognize it.” She shares sometimes feeling as if she is without identity yet the struggle for identity can be seen as her identity. The attempts to belong to a group are what forms and is one’s identity. As aforementioned, being able to get her drivers’ license was a significant milestone for her; she says it was a form of identification and recognition of her identity. Yet not being eligible for DACA, DACA 2.0/extended, or DAPA remains a disappointment for her. Many students no longer have any expectations for the future because immigration legislation has been pending for so long. Especially undocumented students express to not try and think much about their dreams or aspirations out of fear for disappointment. Not being able to plan their future forms their identity in such a way that it seems as if their identity formation is put on hold; like the immigration legislation, their identity is still pending.

In essence, the exclusion students experience in their everyday life, and in particular from American society and politics, create an “us” versus “them” perception as argued in Chapter 5 on the politics of belonging. Not having access to certain institutions and services, and not being “granted” belonging, affects the students’ identity. The social category they are assigned – that of ‘illegal/undocumented’ – and the accompanying ethical/political value placed on it, places the students in the “them” category. While the students try to be included and try to identify according to the American national identity, they remain and are reminded of their “outsiderness.”

## 6.2 – American Popular Culture

Like any American young adult, American popular culture is valued by DACA and undocumented students, and it influences their identity. American TV series and movies are watched frequently and also American music is popular. For many American young adults, American popular culture is part

of their identity and a frequent topic to talk about with friends. For example, a DACA student shares that his taste in music, TV shows and films are all English based. He says “I am Mexican only by birth. In a way I’m more American, yes, but then again, not really.” About his identity, he says the following: “I am not really American, not technically, but sometimes I feel like I am more American than my legal brothers because I have no Mexican experience. Yet I am not entirely sure if I belong here.” Because he came to America at two months old, he has no memory of life in Mexico compared to his two younger American brothers who visit family in Mexico every summer. Reflecting on the different experience his brothers have, he says “I don’t know the Mexican culture. I would be lost there. I have no connection with my family there. Mexican culture, festivals; I don’t know. I grew up with American culture, TV, series, music.”

Not only American popular culture is well-liked and used as a form of expression amongst DACA and undocumented students, also American clothing is used to express one’s identity. While his mother made sure sensitive DACA student Gonzalo wore American clothes growing up, to make sure he did not look undocumented, it formed Gonzalo’s identity. He remembers; “my mom made sure I would not wear striped clothes because she said it made people look like they work on a ranch. Instead she bought me patriotic USA t-shirts so I would look more American than Mexican.” To this day, this is something that has stuck with him and that he lives by. Also other students expressed wearing particular clothes because it is in fashion and because they want to fit in. While they might not always identify themselves as American, they do want to fit in and look American clothing-wise.

By participating in American popular culture through listening and watching similar music and series, undocumented students have their identities “formed to accommodate particular situations and contexts (Hardwick and Mansfield, 385). Engaging in this regard can be seen as an attempt to claim ‘insiderness’ while acknowledging that American popular culture is – at the same time – their everyday life experience growing up in American society. In addition, clothing according to how Americans clothe themselves – in this particular example mentioned – is a form to distance oneself from “them,” which is particularly valuable if “them” in this regard is illegal and could face deportation. This ties in with Hardwick and Mansfield research that argues that identity is also a disidentification with other peoples and places.

### 6.3 – Education

The CA Dream Act and the AB540 law have enabled undocumented students and DACA students to attend higher education which, apart from increasing their chances of improving their living conditions, also expanded the student’s exposure to the American educational system. Their enrollment in- and exposure to American education is often mentioned when the students’ talk about their identity. For example, one student says she identifies as “an Americanized Mexican.” She regards herself as both, but also remembers her roots. She says “Because of my education here, I would call myself Mexican-American.” Also kind EWB leader Gabriela says she identifies as San Diegan because “my adulthood was in America and my home, family, friends, and education is here.

These play an important role for my identity and belonging.” Both these students are undocumented, yet express feeling a sense of belonging in San Diego and, partly because of their American education, identify as Mexican-American or San Diegan. When asked if Gabriela also identifies as American in addition to San Diegan, she expresses to not identify as American, but as Mexican. With regards to her residency, she says “I’m already a resident of San Diego, but just not legally.” So while she does identify on a small scale as San Diegan, she does not identify as American.

Another undocumented student also shares that if people ask him where he is from, he would respond with “I am San Diegan.” However, in his heart he identifies as Mexican. His siblings too, he says, identify as Mexican; even though they are born in America they do not truly see themselves as Americans. There does not seem to be a difference between undocumented and DACA students though. Major-switching DACA student Alejandra also shares that growing up in America and attending high school and university in San Diego has made her feel American, yet she does not identify as one. In essence, many of the students express to identify as ‘student’; an identification that is made possible thanks to the California Dream Act, and AB540. In this sense, DACA does not necessarily influence their identity.

Another aspect of education that influences students’ identity is the trainings, workshops, and conferences they attend. EWB leader Gabriela shares having been part of program that helps Latinos and Chicanos to transfer from community college to university. The program helped her gain leadership skills and joining had helped her improve her written and spoken English. She was public relation officer and community liaison; positions she was proud of being solicited for. She remembers being honored with a certificate of student of the year. She recalls being surprised: “You never expect those kind of things. It is really nice that they appreciate what you’ve done for them. I really felt like part of them.” It is educational opportunities like these that help form the identities of undocumented and DACA students, along with improving their skills and forming their character. Also ‘Know your Rights’ workshops decreases the level of fear students experience on a daily basis and the workshops influence their access to institutions, general position in society, as well as student’s self-worth, confidence, and identity.

Students thus mention that growing up in the American education system is sometimes difficult to combine with their Mexican upbringing in the household. Yet through the inclusion they experience from attending school allows them to claim the identity of ‘student’. The ethical and political value placed on this social location/category is positive which helps the identity formation of undocumented students.

## 6.4 – Borderland

While many of the students regard San Diego as their home, growing up in a border city or on “borderland” also makes it difficult for undocumented or DACA students wanting to integrate. A DACA student says growing up in a borderland made her “feel like split in half.” She says “I’m

Mexican, I don't consider myself American. I don't know how others look at me though. Once I was named 'Chicano.' I do a lot of Spanglish; some days I prefer English, sometimes Spanish." Because both the Mexican and American cultures are so prevalent in San Diego it makes it difficult for students to identify as either of the two nationalities as the two are so blended. Of course they do not necessarily have to choose between one or the other. Oftentimes it seems as choosing to identify as "San Diegan" is a safe middle ground.

Another aspect mentioned as making the students feel split in half is because they do not regard themselves as true Americans, nor as true Mexicans. Identity wise, an undocumented student mentioned that he is not regarded as true Mexican in Mexico either, because they view them there as "them from the North." Trying to deal with this, DACA student Gonzalo expresses that he aims to be "Chicano when with Chicanos, Mexican when with Mexicans, and Mexican-American when with Americans." He has a difficult time with not being regarded as American in America but also not being considered Mexican if he were to ever go to Mexico. It seems as if both DACA and undocumented students see their identity as something flexible and in 'borderland' because neither country – Mexico nor America – truly accepts them or makes them feel at home.

The students expressed to feel on the "them" side according to what they hear and see from American society and politics, yet participating in the American education system somewhat incorporates them in the "us." Yet growing up in a borderland where the "us" versus "them" perception is so prevalent, the students express to feel "split in half." Yet unlike in the research by Hardwick and Mansfield (2009), the students did not participate in a clear "othering" to distance themselves from the Mexican culture (except for the American clothing previously mentioned). However, the borderland and the prevalent "us" versus "them" perception they continuously experience influences their identity formation in such a way that the students feel unable to identify (their national identity) in any form of way.

## 6.5 – Identity: a Work in Progress

Overall, many students express till trying to form their identity and figuring out their position in American society. Because the students crossed to America at an age where they were still in the process of forming their identity, they often feel split between the two countries. Even though many have lived a longer period of time in America than in Mexico, they are very loyal to their homeland and, partly because they are not fully accepted or integrated in America, remain Mexican by heart. While many feel a sense of belonging in America, none of the students expressed to fully identify as American. In reality, many regard their identity as a work in progress dependent on outside factors such as the American immigration policies and society's opinion.

While DACA does not give students a lawful status, it is regarded as a step forward in the right direction and participating in the program has become some of the students' identity. As aforementioned, one student said she is "proud to be DACA," which makes it seem as though participating has become part of who she is as person. This directly ties in with Leisy Abrego's

research that showed that the DACA program allows its participants to adopt a new label other than illegal or undocumented. Also others identify themselves as a Dreamer<sup>2</sup>, an AB540 student, or as undocumented. For example, a DACA student said “I do not identify as American but do I identify as undocumented, Chicano, queer,..” Yet while some students identify themselves according to the terms given to them by American society and policies, other students want to change the narrative. A student said he does not like the term dreamer and prefers the term undocumented/immigrant youth with dreams. Yet another student asked me if I could address her as AB540 student instead of undocumented. This latter has likely to do with the fact that the term ‘undocumented’ is well-known in California whereas the term ‘AB540’ is not. Being called AB540 might thus feel safer to some students. A narrative students try to alter is the narrative of the 1.5 generation students who were brought to America by “no fault of their own.” While this perspective is part of why the DACA program has become legislated, it does put the parents of these children in a negative perspective. Students want to oppose the binary opposition that there are only good or bad immigrants, and wish there was a middle ground. Instead of victimizing the 1.5 generation (‘no fault of their own’) and criminalizing the parents (who came illegally and brought their children), the students want to show that they are not necessarily victims, nor are their parents the criminals. By sharing the stories of their parents, the struggles back home in Mexico, and the hardships when crossing the border, they hope to humanize the narrative. One student explained that illegal immigration is not merely a black and white picture; there is a large grey area that needs to be told.

## 6.6 – Conclusion

While DACA has enabled its participants to access numerous institutions and services; it does not provide them with a lawful status. This is a significant feature why students do not identify themselves as American, even though many of them have lived more than half of their lives in America. Along with the continuous immigration debate, students express to being reminded by society and politics that, indeed, they are not Americans. So even though many of the students feel American and feel a sense of belonging in America, they do not identify as such.

It must be noted that one of the students interviewed shared an aspect of the DACA program that had influenced his identity. In order to apply for DACA he had to collect papers; from birth certificates to addresses and vaccinations. Through this process, he was able to find out information he had not heard from his parents. DACA enabled him to find out more about his history; it proved to be a life event that formed his identity. Also other students express that their immigration status is not just an obstacle, but also a challenge that made them grow; it made them more mature, value education, work hard to achieve goals, appreciate community work, tightened the family bonds, etc. These are all aspects mentioned by DACA and undocumented students to have formed their identity.

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<sup>2</sup> Undocumented students eligible for the federal Dream Act – though not legalized – are often called Dreamers.

Yet all in all, it seems like the instability students experience from being DACA or undocumented makes it difficult for them to claim an identity. Many express juggling between being Mexican or American as they do not feel like they belong to either of the two. Students are still trying to form their identity and their position in American society. Undocumented students express to want to have an identity, mainly referring to American citizenship. And while DACA students are somewhat acknowledged through the DACA program, the students are unable to fully claim an American identity because their status is somewhat floating; they are neither American, nor fully undocumented. The “us” versus “them” is so prevalent in American society and politics, and in particular in the borderland region of San Diego, undocumented students express feeling limited in their ability to claim insiderness. While participating in the American education system allows them to claim the positive label of ‘student,’ and engaging in American popular culture and clothing is used to express their identity, American society and politics are so powerful that the students are constantly reminded that they are, in fact, excluded.



## Chapter 7 – Conclusions

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This chapter is the concluding chapter of this research. In addition to a short summary of the overall results, a discussion about the influence of DACA will be provided, along with the relevance of undocumented immigrant integration in American society. This chapter will close with recommendations for further research.

### 7.1 – Conclusion

In this conclusion, I will bring together the most relevant points from this thesis by providing an answer to the main research question:

**How does the DACA program influence the integration of undocumented students in American society?**

In order to answer this main research question, I will bring together the relevant results from the three aspects of integration that I have looked at in this research; the influence of the DACA program on students' access, belonging, and identity (formation).

Even though it is relatively new and it is difficult to assess the full influence of the program, DACA has already directly affected the lives of its participants. The older participants in this research who had worked multiple years as undocumented immigrant now took the opportunity to attend higher education; improving their employment possibilities. California state laws such as AB540 and the California Dream Act also play a role in the increase of undocumented students attending university as they significantly reduce the financial strain university tuition is often regarded as. DACA students have considerably more and better access with regards to work, education, financial aid/social services, and travel. In essence: DACA opens many doors. Yet as Ribot and Peluso (2003) argue, access accompanies boundaries and experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and the boundary between DACA and undocumented students has increased with regards to access. However, laws such as AB540, the California Dream Act, and AB60 diminish this gap along with undocumented students' ability to claim indirect or illegal access.

Yet what remains at the core of students' access and integration in American society is the sense of fear I experienced during the interaction and interviews with both groups of students. In accordance with Ribot and Peluso's theory of access and as seen in the indirect/illegal access, access is not a black and white picture of either having access or not. Especially with regards to undocumented immigrants, there are underlying sentiments that influence students' motivations to make use of their access or not. An example of this is DACA students' access to financial aid and social services. While DACA students have access to scholarships and health care, few students take

advantage of this ability. Students mentioned that they are afraid of the consequences that scholarships might bring with them, or are simply not used to health care and thus not make use of it. Likewise, undocumented students mention that they will wait with applying for a drivers' license through the AB60 law because of fear for what the government might do with their personal information. One student even mentioned that she did not go to school for two years out of fear for meeting the police on her way to school. Thus while students (even undocumented students) might have access to higher education, other aspects such as fear might prevent them from utilizing this access. And while the DACA program provides many benefits, many students expressed dreading the application because of having to share their personal information. For other students the apprehension takes precedence and – even though they qualify for DACA – have not applied for this program out of fear for what the federal government might do with their private dossier. In short, fear is a common sentiment felt amongst both DACA and undocumented students with regards to access. This fear has such an impact, that it influences the students' ability to benefit from access to institutions and (social) services, and thus also from their integration in American society.

The results of this research show that participating in the program does not necessarily impact students' belonging. Because of the utilization of discourses relating to different levels of belonging (social relations, individual identification/emotional attachment, and ethical/political value) boundaries are maintained, reproduced, contested, and challenged. The role of the media is particularly mentioned as impeding students' ability to claim belonging. While DACA somewhat incorporates students, they remain policed as undocumented immigrants. Remaining on the “them” side of the “us” versus “them” perception in American society mainly occurs because the DACA program does not grant its participants a legal status. While DACA acknowledged a certain group of undocumented immigrants, their status does not change, nor does the media portrayal at large. The hostility they experience from the media and from American society at large influences their (claim for) belonging. Many of the students express that growing up in fear has embedded in them a sense of caution and reluctance. It is again this fear that impedes them to claim belonging, even though they experience inclusion because of family and support groups. Yet the politics of belonging from their opposition who utilizes discourses and do not ‘grant’ them belonging, limits the students on their quest to ‘seek’ belonging. Not being able to relate to American peers and constant fear of trusting others with their vulnerable immigration status disables students to engage in friendships and relationships, thus also limiting their social/cultural integration in American society.

This constant reoccurring theme of fear can also be seen when the students are asked about their identity (formation). None mention to claim the American national identity – even though they feel American – because they are constantly reminded by American media and society that they are, in fact, not American. The negative ethical and political value that is attached to their social location of ‘undocumented’ is in this regard of influence to their level of fear for claiming certain identities. The “us” versus “them” is so prevalent in American society, and in particular in borderland regions such as San Diego, that undocumented and DACA students express feeling limited in their ability to claim insiderness. The 1.5 generation is thus an interesting term as DACA makes students feel split

in half; they are neither fully undocumented nor fully legalized, they are neither fully American nor fully Mexican, and they are neither integrated in- nor disconnected from American society. Whereas their parents are expected to identify as Mexicans, these students have lived the majority of their lives in America – including the more profound coming of age years – and feel like their national identity is floating between Mexican and American. Growing up in a borderland, as well as partaking in the American educational system yet growing up in a Mexican household, affects the identity formation of students and makes them feel “split in half.” Also the DACA program is a program that places its participants in a sort of grey-zone; in between legality and illegality. This uncertainty along with the vulnerable position of DACA and, in particular, of undocumented students, fuels the fear they are constantly experiencing from illegally residing in America and not only affects their access and belonging, it also shapes and forms their identity.

So while the DACA program influences its participants to have better and more access to institutions and services, the overall fear I felt and heard from students affects their ability to fully benefit from access, to form belonging, and to construct an identity in such profound ways that it impedes their integration in American society. A program such as the DACA program does not influence this fear – mainly – because of its temporary character (students continue to fear DACA renewal and the program’s continuation), as well as its limited influence on the overall perception and stereotyping of the undocumented population at large.

## 7.2 – Discussion

The DACA program enables its participants to benefit from access instead of giving them the right to benefit. This is a clear demarcation upheld by the temporary character of the program; those eligible are only able to benefit from the program for two years (after which they have to try and renew their eligibility) and it remains unknown whether or not the program will continue when another president takes office. While it enables the process of (economic) integration for its participants, it also challenges the notion of citizenship. The 1.5 generation is politically argued to have come “with no fault of their own,” yet they technically do reside in America illegally. Regardless of their illegal residency, America has granted them access to many of the resources that also accompany citizenship or legal residency. This program thus raises questions about the notion of citizenship and the legitimacy of American borders. By allowing eligible participants temporary access to the benefits that accompanies participation in the DACA program, the value of citizenship and its benefits diminishes. Though DACA students are unable to vote, they do obtain a Social Security Number that technically only is provided to legal residents or migrants/refugees who have entered America or applied for citizenship in a legal manner. The DACA program legitimizes that there are, in fact, undocumented populations in America of which the American government now has records, yet, it also questions the legitimacy of the American borders and devalues citizenship.

It must be clearly noted that the DACA program is a form of incorporation, but is in no way amnesty as the program does not provide its participants with a chance of citizenship. The program is in all aspects temporary; not all participants are able to renew their DACA and there is no

guarantee that the program will continue after the new presidential elections. While the program challenges the notion and value of citizenship as aforementioned, it also challenges the humanitarian idea behind the program. The program only temporarily helps its participants; it does not provide a long-term solution to the problem, along with the fact that only a small number of the total undocumented population is eligible. While the current DACA participants are able to improve their lives and somewhat integrate in American society, if the program were to stop, immediate deportation will be the direct consequence for all participants. Now that the American government has all their information through the DACA application, this is a serious fear of the DACA participants. While the DACA program currently opens many doors to its participants, it remains questionable what will happen to the participants when a new president takes office, or when the DACA program is no longer beneficial for the American government or economy.

### 7.3 – Relevance

This research ties in with the current societal debate on migration flows and the integration of (legal/illegal) immigrants and refugees. As mentioned in the introduction of this research, many countries currently deal with large flows of immigrants and refugees coming in; either asking for asylum or disappearing in illegality. Within the broader migration debate it has become clear that actions need to be taken to solve this problem. The DACA program is one such temporary solution that might also appeal to other countries. While it does not provide a long-term solution, it does give a perspective of the problem as it allows governments to keep record of its population, as well as temporarily provide (illegal) immigrants with a Social Security Number. The DACA program ties in with a similar solution the UN has in mind to solve, in particular, the risky migration by boats that currently occurs in the southern nations in Europe (Ludeker, 2015). By providing people with a chance to get a visa for one year – in order to find a job – the UN hopes to diminish the illegal side of migration and human trafficking. Migrants are then able to come to the EU to find a job, yet have to leave if they are unable to do so within a year. Those that overstay their visa are prone to deportation. An analysis of the DACA program, as this research provides, will likely be of relevance and interest to other nations that think of implementing a similar temporary status to immigrants.

In addition, this research enriches the existing literature and theories on the concepts used. While the theory of access by Ribot and Peluso was not necessarily written with the integration of undocumented immigrants in mind, this research shows that the theory is, in fact, applicable and allows for a clearer picture of the students' (inability to) access to institutions and services in American society. The results of this research show that, in accordance with Ribot and Peluso, access is not part of a binary opposition (you either do or do not have access) but that people have and find ways in which they can have indirect or illegal access. Likewise, by adding to the research on belonging and the politics of belonging by Antonisch and Yuval-Davis, this research demonstrates the dynamic interplay between those 'seeking' and 'granting' belonging, as well as the utilization of discourses both sides partake in to claim belonging. This research is relevant in that it shows that the concept of 'belonging' fits as concept amongst the literature on social/cultural integration. Similarly, this research further demonstrates the current research on borderland

identities and shows the relevance and apparent perception of “us” versus “them” in the formation and construction of identities, as already argued by Hardwick & Mansfield and Yuval-Davis. Yet while Hardwick & Mansfield argue that borderland identities are sometimes formed as disidentification with one group of peoples or place, this research, on the contrary, shows the loyalty the Mexican students continue to have for their homeland more in accordance with the multicultural framework. The results further show that DACA is indeed used as a new label that students claim, other than ‘illegal’ or ‘undocumented.’ In return, this again demonstrates the relevance of linking identity with concepts such as access, belonging, and insiderness/outsiderness.

The concepts used are relevant for the topic of integration in that they all resonate a different form of integration, and have an impact on one another. The different concepts used shed light on economic-, social/cultural-, and identity integration with aspects that are relevant for the age and life stage of the research population. While it is useful to look at the diverse approaches to integration independently, this research also clearly shows the interconnection between access, belonging, identity, and its influence on integration. All concepts have a direct impact on the integration process of undocumented students and add to the existing literature on integration and multicultural frameworks.

## 7.4 – Recommendations

Because the DACA program is relatively new, further research is necessary to fully understand the influence of this program on the integration of undocumented students. A longitudinal study would be advised to assess the long-term effect of the program on the lives of these students, and their experiences of integration in the American society. The participants’ integration in American society will likely intensify the coming years, especially when the students are able to obtain a job in the field of their degree. However, the DACA participants who immediately applied and qualified for the program in late 2012 have currently been in the process of renewing their DACA. The costs and effects this renewing is expected to have on the integration process – in particular on their belonging and identity formation – is yet unknown. In addition, it is unknown if renewal has caused any difficulty or issues for the participants.

Likewise, further research is needed to analyze the different experiences between older and younger DACA participants to fully understand the impact the program has had. While the majority of this research’ participants were young and had applied for DACA while still in high school, the impact of the DACA program on the lives and access of older students – as well as their integration experiences – is expected to be experienced as more impactful and intense. While this research focused on students, it would be interesting to analyze the effects the DACA program has had on immigrants who did not go (back) to higher education, but are now able to transfer from their illegal job to legal employment. Similarly, the integration experience of undocumented students from other nationalities – for example Asian or European undocumented immigrants – is expected to differ from the results mentioned in this research, especially with regards to the relatively limited negative stereotyping of these ethnicities.

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## List of terms

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- AB540; a California state law that allows eligible students to pay in-state tuition at all public community colleges and universities in the state of California.
- AB60; a California state law that allows anyone to obtain a drivers' license regardless of their immigration status.
- A.Ch.A.; a student organization at San Diego State University that aims to enable and empower Chicano/a students.
- Californian Dream Act; a California act that allows undocumented students to apply for/receive private scholarships and state financial aid, university grants, and community college fee waivers.
- Checkpoints; the United States Border Patrol operates 71 traffic checkpoints of which 33 are permanent (all near the southern border). The purpose of these inspection stations is to detect illegal migration and smuggling activities. These stations are located along major U.S. highways.
- Chicano/a; a chosen identity of some Mexican-Americans in America. The term is often used to express cultural, ethnic and community pride.
- College; a higher education institution as constituent part of university. Oftentimes, college is less expensive than university and provides programs or trade trainings (compared to degree programs universities).
- DACA; this program stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. It allows eligible participants deferred deportation and provides them with a Social Security Number through which they are able to – among others – apply for legal employment and a drivers' license.
- DACA 2.0/extended; this program is an extension of the abovementioned DACA program which allows more undocumented immigrants to apply because of a new age requirement, and which makes the program effective for three years instead of two. DACA 2.0/extended is currently still on hold.
- DAPA; this program stands for Deferred Action for Parents of Americans. It would grant deferred deportation to undocumented immigrants who have lived in America since 2010 and have children who are legal American citizens or lawful permanent residents. Like DACA 2.0/extended, this program is currently still on hold.
- EWB; student organization Education Without Borders at San Diego State University. This group aims to empower marginalized populations.
- Federal Dream Act; a proposed bill that would allow eligible undocumented immigrants to obtain citizenship after a certain process.
- ICE; The Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The American police and ICE work together with regards to deporting undocumented immigrants.
- IDEAS; a student organization from San Diego community college.
- Latino/a; a person who traces their origin or descent to Latin America.
- SDDT; San Diego Dream Team is a student organization that aims to empower undocumented

immigrant populations in the San Diego community through info sessions and lobbying.  
SDSU; San Diego State University.

Social Security Number; a nine-digit number issued by the American government to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and temporary (working) residents. It is not only used to track individuals, but is also a form of identification. Interviewees refer to their status as not having 'social'.

University; a higher education institution that provide undergraduate (4 year Bachelor programs) and graduate (2 year Master programs) education.

USCIS; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. Applications such as DACA (and DACA 2.0/extended and DAPA) are handled by the USCIS.