This research traces the post-graduate experiences of undocumented college students and also documents their hopes and anxieties as they file for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). President Obama recently enacted DACA on June 15th, 2012, which grants a two-year, renewable, work permit to undocumented individuals under the age of thirty-one. This study on undocumented college graduates explores how DACA will create a significant shift in the lives of these individuals from undocumented to "DACA-mented." What are the psycho-social dynamics involved in undocumented college graduates negotiating their legal status? How have they negotiated their working lives and what changes do they anticipate once they file for DACA? The research design of this study utilizes five in-depth interviews with undocumented college graduates. Each recalled how their feelings of accomplishment upon receiving their bachelor's degree were coupled with feelings of despondency. In the university they were "legal," while outside of it "illegal." The double-consciousness felt by each respondent as they worked low wage jobs, with various degrees, was also a persistent theme. However, what also emerged from my interviews was a critique of DACA policy and its effects. For example, would new leadership in the White House possibly revoke DACA? The uncertainty of living was so extensive for one of my respondents that she decided to move back to Mexico. DACA not only provided a hopeful avenue towards white-collar labor, but also at the same time created new instabilities and new anxieties in the lives of undocumented college graduates.

All five of the interviewees identify as Mexican /Latina/o, except for one identifying of Chinese decent, ranging from ages of twenty-five to thirty. The five interviewees were involuntarily brought the United States by their parents during the ages of nine to twelve. All
interviewees are Cal Poly Pomona graduates and acquired their bachelor degrees in various fields such as Mechanical Engineering, Construction Engineering Technology, Ethnic and Women Studies, Political Science, and Math. It is has been at least three to fours years since undocumented college graduates acquired their degree and now hold low wages jobs in areas like Dominoes Pizza, Construction work, baby-sitting, and Denny’s.

My first theme on Re-creating spaces of illegality concentrates on the reformation of illegality undocumented graduates encounter after their college commencement, Cynthia recounts her thoughts and emotions, she notes

“I didn’t want to walk because I didn’t want anyone to know that I was done with school, like nobody. I just wanted people to think I was still going to school because it was so embarrassing, I am done and I am not working where I wanted to, I was not proud of myself, what good is it going to help me with?... and its just sad and embarrassing to have this degree and its pretty much worthless”.

Roberto Gonzalez, *Learning to be Illegal* argues, “Illegality was paired with a movement into stigmatized status that reinforced their legal exclusion while laws limited their access to grown up activities and responsibilities” (610). Garcia explored the exclusion and limitation of undocumented students from high school into adulthood and the same exclusion reappears as Cynthia highlights the social constraints individuals like herself have to abide to during and after their graduation. Furthermore, Shah Ragini in *Sharing the American Dream* investigates personal outcomes of undocumented students that can result from immigration policies or current policies. Ragini, provides evidence of government policies that integrate undocumented children. For instance, states that allow undocumented students to pay in-state-tuition, states that provide public health insurance and child welfare services (675). The author mentions there is
no policy forcing the deportation of these individuals therefore demonstrating a sign that the state acknowledges the undocumented youth in U.S society because no legal deportation is being taken against them (676). The strength of this research was the acknowledgement and argument of the complex double-identity undocumented youth live, one were their identity is imposed by the state. In addition the author introduces legal paradox, were the existence of policies at times includes and also excludes the undocumented youth. Indeed Shah investigates this contradiction but instead of equally mentioning how and what laws exclude and include the undocumented youth in U.S society, it appeared the majority of her argument is based on policies that “include” the undocumented youth. It is important to mention the implementation of policies that incorporate undocumented youth were set into actual laws by the continuous push of advocate groups seeking to improve the circumstances of immigrant youth and were not necessarily enacted through the generosity of the state. In addition, Sagini assumes the government policies that are “inclusive” of undocumented youth equally address all undocumented youth, when in fact this is false. For instance, the health care and welfare benefits and the government’s reluctance to not deport undocumented students only apply to students under the age of 18 and not to those who formally become adults.

Until June 15, 2012 when Deferred Action was announced that some college graduates vision a possible avenue for social acceptance in the United States higher-paying workforce (Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Process, uscis.gov). Undocumented college graduates such as Cynthia and Gloria are constrained from accessing employment in careers pertaining to their professional fields. The second theme Daca-mented conceptualizes the double-status college graduates will obtain, meaning their work becomes legal but the subject itself remains undocumented without a pathway for full citizenship. Their professional
work then becomes legal and to some extension recognized by the state. Mehta et al in Chicago’s *Undocumented Immigrants*, investigates the connection between the unlawful status of undocumented immigrants and the correlation to low wages, working conditions, and the type of employment held. Mehta et al argued the main obstacle for undocumented individuals to obtain a higher education and wages is their unlawful status. Providing legalization is essential to the educational and wage improvement of undocumented individuals (17). Some will argue higher education can influence or enable undocumented individual to acquire higher wages, however Mehta et al discussed this is not necessarily true since the main problem relies in the actual status of the person (18). Considering Mehta’s analysis on the importance of status it will be essential for undocumented college students to become U.S citizens, yet Deferred Action doesn’t provide this pathway (*Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Process*, uscis.gov).

No Second chances” highlights the fears undocumented college graduates encounter while filing for deferred action. The process of waiting to be approved or denied Deferred Action is similar to the post-college experience of undocumented graduates; it is uncertain, and unknown. Upon college graduation, undocumented students do not know what their future entails and the process of Deferred Action keeps them in the same state of ambiguity. Undocumented graduates are repetitively position in illegal spaces and remain confined.

Deferred Action has been enforced for a year and a half now and has done great things such as allowing many of my interviewees to have white-collar jobs. However, these accomplishments are under the backdrop of the Obama administration’s record number of deportations. According to the Pew Center, Obama deported roughly 80 percent the number of immigrants in his first term that the previous Bush administration deported in two terms. In
addition, the Migration Policy Institute notes that 22% of all undocumented people under the age of 30 do not meet DACA’s education requirement. Moreover, Sonia Guinansaca notes that many eligible for DACA cannot afford the cost of the program. She further critiques DACA by stating that it “reinforces the idea of desirable or deserving immigrants, and model minorities… and creates a world where there are good immigrants and bad immigrants.”

While Deferred Action can legalize employment for some undocumented college graduates, it fails to legalize them as full citizens of the country that can vote or hold federal government positions. With Deferred Action, the nation-state reproduces illegality by retaining undocumented college graduates on temporary terms with their work authorization. Immigration policies are romanticized as being productive, this is not to regard all immigration policies are inefficient but rather remain critical about the implication policies such as deferred action can have.
Works Cited


