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# American Dreams: DACA Dreamers, Trump as a Political and Social Event, and the Performative Practice of Storytelling in the Age of Secondary Orality

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**AMERICAN DREAMS: DACA DREAMERS, TRUMP AS A POLITICAL AND  
SOCIAL EVENT, AND THE PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE OF  
STORYTELLING IN THE AGE OF SECONDARY ORALITY**

by

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“I’m always trying to serve the community, always trying to give back. I think that’s what, um, I think that’s what a lot of people under DACA are all about, you know? They’re all giving back to the community, all of them are doing something proactive to help other people. We’re not here to steal anybody’s welfare, we’re not here to take anything that’s not ours. I’ve never considered going back to Mexico. Everything I have, everything I’ve planted - my faith, my religion, my friends, are all here in the United States.” – Jesus Contreras, Houston TX

“I was a child, you know, I was brought here by my parents. And my parents, they aren’t devious people and it’s their fault that I’m in this position. My parents wanted the best life for me. So what they did is they went to a new country. Right? America. And they were trying to provide what every other immigrant parent wants for their child - a better life.” - Silvia Aldrete, Los Angeles CA

DACA helped me get a job – a job that helped me support mi familia, helped me pay my bills, my gas and my school. If DACA was to come to an end, everything I worked so hard for, everything I have built and everything I accomplished will be worth nothing. All the time invested will be long gone and worth nothing. Without DACA, I will go back to being an immigrant student with dreams. We've come so far to just see this dream go into the air like dust.  
"I am a Dreamer." - Leyni Rosas Cuevas, Hawthorne CA

“I’m 19 years old and I work for my county’s food bank. When I was 18, I was kicked out of my parents’ house for being a lesbian. Without DACA, I wouldn’t have been able to find a job to support myself. Thanks to DACA, I bought a new car, was able to get my driver's license, rented an apartment and was able to get a new job to replace my old waitressing one which just wasn’t making ends meet. I fully believe that Trump’s position to end DACA isn’t about politics, laws or even concerns for the American citizen. It’s about racism and white supremacy.” - Alisha Roacho, Brawley CA

“I was three when I came to the U.S. I know no other home. Torn between two worlds and not being accepted to a place I call home. The United States has been the hardest struggle of my life. Never mind the lives I save on a daily basis, working 12-hour shifts in the ICU, saving your mom, your dad's life or your grandmother’s. Sacrificing my health, my well-being and my time with my family to be there for others’ loved ones. Being the last line of defense in one of the country's highest crime rate cities, Chicago. Proudly and wholeheartedly do I do that, day in and day out, knowing deep down that I still don't belong.” - Anonymous, Chicago IL

## Introduction

### What is DACA?

DACA, or The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program, was an immigration policy enacted on June 15, 2012 under the Obama administration. It allowed for the deferred action from deportation for undocumented individuals who entered the country as minors. It also allowed recipients to obtain Social Security numbers and valid driver's licenses, enroll in college, and legally secure jobs. DACA recipients also pay income taxes, as do many undocumented immigrants.<sup>1</sup>

DACA was implemented as an executive order in response to the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors). First introduced in 2001, the latest version was voted down in Congress in 2010. Notably, the DREAM Act offered legal status for those attending college or serving in the military. DACA, in contrast, offered no means for establishing citizenship or legal permanent residence. To be eligible, applicants must be under thirty and have arrived in the United States before age sixteen. They must also have been residents for more than five years. The program defers action for two years, after which applicants may apply for renewal.

As of June 2017, 793,026 undocumented people have been approved for the program with over 34,000 first-time applications being processed. Almost 900,000 applications have been renewed to date (Struyk). Mexico is the country of origin for an overwhelming majority of accepted applicants, followed by El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (Shoichet).

### DACA Today: The Sociopolitical Context of Trumpism

In September 2017, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the Trump administration's plan to rescind DACA. September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 marked the last date that new applications were accepted, and renewal applications were processed until October 5<sup>th</sup>. This announcement followed a lawsuit threat posed by ten attorney generals earlier in the year if the administration did not rescind the program by September 5<sup>th</sup> (Struyk). A strict list of requirements for any subsequent deal proposed to protect DACA recipients (several of which have already been created and sit before Congress) makes it almost impossible for DACA recipients to receive the same quality of protection as currently offered by DACA (Shoichet). If Congress does not act within an allotted six-month window, deferrals will continue to expire and undocumented people will continue to lose their protected status to the tune of as many as 983 people per day (Struyk).

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<sup>1</sup> A study conducted by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy in 2016 reported that undocumented immigrants pay nearly \$12 billion per year in state and local taxes (Christensen Gee et al. 1).

This announcement situated itself in the greater context of the incoming administration, which in 2016 marked a new chapter of sociopolitical tumult. A newly vocalized rhetoric of what some have called “Trumpism” swept the nation. This ideology, named for the recently elected president whose campaign platforms and strategies evoked it, was characterized by racist, misogynist, nationalist, hatred- and fear- driven populist sentiment. The rise of this new nationalist<sup>2</sup> rhetoric has both directly and indirectly violent implications for undocumented citizens. The insurgence of anti-immigrant and isolationist attitudes has made them now more than ever the objects of hateful speech. But even more violent than this is the indirect way that the undocumented identity has been reduced and conglomerated into one singular objectified and dehumanized entity, and subsequently co-opted to fit the needs of its user – be that American citizens, the media, politicians, or even the president himself. The appropriative nature of this action is evident in the inconsistency with which it is employed. This is perhaps best illustrated by a few of President Trump’s infamous tweets. Shortly after announcing the revocation of DACA, Trump tweeted: “Does anybody really want to throw out good, educated and accomplished young people who have jobs, some serving in the military? Really!”<sup>3</sup> On multiple occasions Trump has professed a “great heart” and “great love” (Fabian) for undocumented citizens protected by DACA (a great majority of whom come from Mexico) while simultaneously commencing plans to construct a wall along the US-Mexico border.<sup>4</sup> It is this oppressive, dehumanizing and inconsistent environment in which undocumented youth struggle to assert their identity, citizenship, and indeed humanity, every day.

### **DACA Dreamers: Undocumented Youth Respond**

Undocumented immigrant youth began mobilizing and organizing in 2001, in efforts to bring awareness to immigrant rights at both state and federal levels. Organization and participation rates have seen enormous growth in response to Trump’s campaign and subsequent administrative policy changes. These youth call themselves Dreamers, a direct reference to the failed 2010 bill but also a name with weighty social and historical connotations:

“DREAMers take their name from the acronym for the legislation they are rallying behind, but it’s not lost on most participants or those they are seeking to influence that the term has a number of other important connotations. Not only does it speak to the role that dreams play in the civic imagination (dreams of a new future) but also to the nation’s

<sup>2</sup> In a recent interview, former vice-president Joe Biden dubbed this rhetoric a “phony nationalism,” calling it “so course, so vile, so demeaning” and placing it in stark contrast with a nationalism that, despite disagreement on issues, “is about being out there and actually having a common sense about what is good for the country” (CNN).

<sup>3</sup> A tweet that garnered responses like “Wait what?” (@freddyfloormat), “You’re kidding right?” (@Janazur) and “Well, you do apparently. Or did you forget it was your idea?” (@pammcnary\_) (Trump).

<sup>4</sup> One of his only consistent platforms in the 2016 campaign.

political past and present. By calling themselves DREAMers, these young people evoke the American Dream - one that is being rewritten to include not just economic prosperity, but also the affordances of citizenship - and echo Martin Luther King Jr.'s iconic call for racial equality, 'I Have a Dream'" (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 187).

Interestingly, the Dreamers' unifying namesake is a policy that has for seven years been obsolete. This fact should not be overlooked in that it points to a larger truth about the Dreamer movement. Many Dreamers have organized into powerful groups – United We Dream, Immigrant Youth Justice League, and the California Dream Network to name just a few.<sup>5</sup> One of the largest organizing efforts, United We Dream, boasts an impressive network of over 100,000 immigrant youth and allies, and 55 affiliate organizations in 26 states (United We Dream). Many self-purported Dreamers, however, are not associated with any particular organization effort. Instead, they disseminate their stories independently by means of news outlets (with which no affiliation is generally held) or social media outlets. Many Dreamers are now speaking out in attempts to garner support for a Clean Dream Act: a new version of the 2010 policy that has yet to be formalized and proposed, but has nonetheless garnered support by politicians like House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

Political resistance can be particularly difficult - and dangerous - for these undocumented youth. Direct forms of participation like voting or running for office are unavailable to Dreamers. Studies have shown that undocumented status can disengage youth, as they "become disaffected, frustrated and alienated" (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 192). Furthermore, political engagement is high stakes as many young activists risk deportation for revealing their undocumented status. Many youth cope by "passing" or "living in the shadows," blending in as their command of English language and American culture allows them to do quite easily.

DACA Dreamers are, however, redefining political resistance by redefining themselves. A (re)articulation of identity is the means by which they do so. A French explication of the word "articulate" helps us to understand the anatomy of this identity.

"In anatomy, the term 'articulation' denotes the set of means of union of two pieces of the skeleton between them. It does not necessarily imply the notion of mobility, since fixed joints unite the bones of the skull . . . Because of their mechanical role, the joints are subject to sometimes considerable forces that can determine various traumas . . . The ligaments that maintain the joint can be stretched or torn, during sprains, with synovial involvement often associated (hyarthrosis or hemarthrosis). When the joint connections have been dislodged, it will be dislocation, sometimes complicated lesions intra-articular sliding structures (menisci) . . . But articular pathology is more the result of repeated microtrauma, or immunoinduced attacks and inflammatory lesions that accompany them,

<sup>5</sup> Others prominent organizational efforts include Dreamers Adrift, IMARTE, Dream Activist, Orange County and Los Angeles Dream Teams, and New Mexico Dream Team among countless others.

or metabolic disorders associated with senescence of joint tissue” (Encyclopædia Universalis).

The anatomy of joint articulation offers a striking metaphor for the articulation of identity. As the skeleton is united by joints and considered “whole” in their composite articulation, so too does a wholly realized identity require a simultaneity of articulations. When ligaments that maintain the joint are “stretched or torn,” so too may the Dreamer’s ability to fully express identity be impeded by the imposition of a harmful narrative. We might also compare the lack of mobility of “dislodged” joints with the inability for full identity expression when articulations of individual and collective identity cannot function concurrently. The following pages are dedicated to expanding this metaphor - to understanding what (and who) constricts the articulation of Dreamers’ identities, and how they resist and learn to articulate in new ways.

Dreamers exist in a sociopolitical environment where their experiences and needs and very identities are constantly being invented and reinvented for them. This process has effectively written them out of the community in which they grew up. Moreover, it strips away their agency and autonomy. As we have seen, it creates a situation in which attempts to reclaim agency and autonomy are met with violence and further threats to one’s humanity. Here, too, I use the term “situation” purposefully. According to Sartre, “the situation is for each and every one of us the position in the middle of the world with the trials and obstacles that this world contains and that conditions the realization of a personal project. The situation is correlative to the subject’s action that hopes to surpass what is given towards an end” (Duméry). Thus, a *re*-assertion of identity (both on an individual and community level) is in reality a bold method of resistance, of attaining the ends and surpassing the containment.

As will be explored in the following chapters, the voice and the image can be powerful tools of identity expression. Signifying affectivity, exploring subjectivity, and reclaiming and repurposing the “third space,” are also means by which one can establish an individual identity. Then we will turn to the articulation of a collective identity. This entails the construction of a collective memory and collective experience, as well as a careful analysis of the idea of citizenship in terms of identity. Finally, establishing a participatory culture and revisiting the terms of the “third space” on a community level are integral to the process of producing a collective identity. Each of these mechanisms may be achieved through the act of storytelling. But first it is necessary to attain an understanding of the era of storytelling within which these Dreamers operate.

## **Secondary Orality and Social Media in the Dreamer Movement**

Within the DACA Dreamer movement, individuals and networks alike use video sharing as a primary means of publicizing personal narratives (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 195). Video sharing sites like YouTube and Vimeo, as well as social media platforms like Tumblr,



Facebook, Twitter and Vine have been instrumental to this effect. United We Dream, for example, has cultivated a strong Facebook presence with over 272,000 “likes” and “follows.”<sup>6</sup>

Dreamers’ skillful navigation of the social media space is indicative of a broader age in which we now live: what Walter Ong has dubbed the age of “secondary orality” (Ong 11). The “secondary” positionality of this new age is a reference to the age of communication that came before it. According to Ong, “primary orality” characterized a culture isolated either temporally or geographically from the modern western culture we know today.<sup>7</sup> This culture remained untouched by any understanding of writing or print. Its mode of communication was wholly oral. But the introduction of modern technology brought with it this new age of secondary orality. This new orality, Ong claims, is “sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print” (Ong 11). While secondary orality is in many ways similar to its predecessor, particularly in its “participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its uses of formulas” (Ong 136), there are a few central differences. Most notably, the audience changes. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan classifies this audience as the “global village” (McLuhan xxxvi). Technological advancement, he claims, “brings us at the opening of the electronic age to the sealing of the entire human family into a single global tribe” (McLuhan 9). In pre-technological societies, the audience composed whoever was close enough to hear a spoken word. With the introduction of television, radios, and telephones – and later even more wide-reaching technology like the internet – the scope of potential impact grew exponentially. Here, too, Donald Trump’s tweets provide a potent example. On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 Trump’s Twitter account was suspended for exactly eleven minutes. The event became a breaking news story, making headlines at major news sources like Time Magazine, CNN, Huffington Post and The New York Times. Trump’s personal Instagram account, @realDonaldTrump, has at the time of this writing over 41.7 million followers.

As we will see, social media’s role in social movements like that of DACA Dreamers demonstrates perfectly what can be achieved with a large audience. However, “audience” does not necessarily have the same connotations as “village” or “tribe” as invoked by McLuhan and, by extension, Ong. While social media may provide a platform that reaches a global audience, I would venture that it does not by its very nature create a *community*. Instead, the Dreamers utilize social media as a means through which the content they share, and the people with whom they share it, act as the real catalysts of community. The means by which community is built, and to what effect, will be explored at length in this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> See “Participatory Culture of Secondary Orality” in Ch. 2 for an analysis of how society uses terms like these to connote inclusion, and to what effect.

<sup>7</sup> While Ong primarily framed these oralities temporally, it should be noted that cultures characterized by primary orality still exist today, untouched by “modern” culture, and, by extension, secondary orality.



## Personal Significance

My interest in the DACA Dreamer movement was piqued when, in the initial stages of my research on modern storytelling, I came across a Dreamer video testimony. Since then, this project has evolved into an effort to better understand the experiences of young people who are my fellow classmates, neighbors, coworkers and friends. This thesis is not an attempt to *explain* the mechanisms behind their experiences or circumstances, nor is it an attempt to rescue anyone. Instead, it seeks to humanize what has become a highly contested – and indeed high-stakes – issue in today’s sociopolitical climate. It seeks to refocus upon the faces, names, and stories behind the chaos of public policy and media. Ultimately, I hope to learn from the Dreamers how storytelling might be used to effect intersectional resistance and foster action-inciting Dreams in an otherwise scary and capricious world.

## Chapter I: Storytelling and Individual Identity

If we are to consider that DACA Dreamers employ a number of mechanisms through storytelling as a means of individual and collective resistance, we need to first look at the way storytelling shapes and has been shaped by the modern cultural context in which it is now situated. Modern research and theory ranging from social psychology and communication theory to neuroscience, neuroeconomics, and positive psychology are lenses through which we can begin to explore the power of storytelling. However, this perspective, while illustrative of the sociocultural dynamics of the act of storytelling (and its application as a means of social resistance), is inherently limited. Thus to add dimension to our understanding of what is truly a dynamic phenomenon, we will engage a few theorists whose writings have important implications for thinking about identity – Anzaldúa, Derrida, Freud and Scott to name just a few. This allows us to put each of these elements in conversation with each other in order to think critically and hopefully about the powerful potential of storytelling as a means of resistance in the DACA Dreamer movement. It is worth noting that while this chapter focuses on how the individual identity is cultivated, this cultivation often necessitates the use of interlocutors as the individual is always positioned in terms of relationality.

### Exploring Subjectivity and the Self

The study of the self and of subjectivity is central to contemporary psychology. Dr. Matthew Lieberman, prominent social psychologist and neuroscientist at UCLA, specializes in the social and cognitive neuroscience behind the formation of self-schemas. In an interview with *The Atlantic* he shares that he was recently offered three million dollars for an academic position. In context, this comment was meant to serve as an example of a shifting American value system - away from interpersonal relationships and toward material success. Lieberman goes on to say that he turned down the position because it meant extended amounts of time away from his family, thus conveniently supporting the conclusions of his own research.<sup>8</sup> But the most telling detail of the interview was the astonishing figure Lieberman cites at the beginning. A three million dollar offer is essentially unheard of among psychology professors, who tend to make less than six figures and are left to patch together research grants (Smith). The offer places a tangible monetary value upon our society's astounding infatuation with the "self."

Another conspicuous example of this is the growing canon of modern "self-help" literature. In particular, the practice of mindfulness has garnered significant attention in the last few years. Rooted in eastern philosophy, it has been co-opted by Western pop psychologists and self-help experts as a most fashionable buzzword. It is all about "refocusing," "re-centering" and getting back in touch with the present "self," which has apparently been lost in the chaos of

<sup>8</sup> In the *Atlantic* interview, Lieberman shares the central findings of his 2013 book, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*.

modern life.<sup>9</sup> Information abounds on how to practice mindful parenting, mindful weight loss, even mindful dating. (The slogan for Meetmindful.com: “Finally. Mindful living meets online dating” is conveniently plastered across the faces of a classic millennial couple, the man sporting a beard, earring and “man-bun.”). In this way mindfulness has been effectively integrated into modern progressive values centered on self-discovery and self-improvement. This recent fad has shaped the way we understand and use storytelling, as it becomes a mechanism for expressing selfhood. We see this in the way that Dreamer narratives are highly oriented toward preservation of the self. But when examining this idea of selfhood and subjectivity as it pertains to DACA Dreamers, a crucial qualification must be made. As the self has been shaped by society, it is often thought of as an inherently isolated phenomenon. However, the self is *always* relational. Relationality can be dangerous if power relations are left unexamined. It can no doubt render subjectivity vulnerable. The question becomes, how can we engage with our own understandings of selfhood in a way that resists violent attempts at reconstruction by others? This is the question that faces Dreamers who use their own narratives as an apparatus of resistance.

Derrida raises another question as to the legitimacy of using storytelling to interpret subjectivity. This question is situated within his analysis of J. J. Rousseau’s “Essay on the Origins of Language.” Storytelling, in Derridian terms, is a supplement in a system of a never fully articulated subjectivity (or what Rousseau refers to as nature). “It is clearly confirmed that the concept of nature and the entire system it commands may not be thought except under the irreducible category of the supplement” (Derrida 180). The supplementary nature of orality will be explored later in this chapter. What is relevant here is Derrida’s paradoxical assertion that to tell a story is to participate in a system in which the supplement is constantly distancing itself from the origin, from the nature that it is supposed to materialize and locate. In other words, does articulation of the self-narrative necessarily take the storyteller further from an ever-elusive self? Does subjectivity get lost in relationality? Dreamers tell their stories in attempts to reclaim selfhood. But do these stories keep them from doing so? According to Derrida, yes. But I argue that this is the case only when selfhood and subjectivity are considered to be completely isolated from the present. This is essentially Derrida’s implication of *différance*. But when the relationality of the self is recognized (because indeed the Dreamer identity is a purely relational one), this supplementation can effectively subvert the transparency of reason and the subjectivity it grounds.

This analysis allows us to delve into the question of manipulation during the process of self-identification. DACA Dreamers do this in three apparent ways: “passing,” performing and redefining identity. “Passing” and “living in the shadows” are terms with which many Dreamers are intimately familiar. Undocumented youth are “American in every sense of the word except legal status . . . [They] are often fluent in English, have been socialized in and graduated from American schools, and view themselves as no different from their peers” (Jenkins et al. 2016,

<sup>9</sup> This is in no way meant as a critique of the actual benefits of a sustained mindfulness practice. Rather it is a critique of the way it has been appropriated to fit the Western crusade to locate, explain, and exercise power over the “self.”

193). This socialization makes it relatively easy for them to play into assumed identity categories (i.e. “legal,”<sup>10</sup> “American”) but also reveals these categories’ inherently arbitrary and exclusive nature.

“Living in the shadows” is an act directly antithetical to that of performativity, which is in essence a quest for visibility. Modern studies of the Dreamer movement recognize the performative nature of storytelling but not necessarily its violent implications. Often the narrative is simply “a means by which individuals perform identity, create the self, and form a new reality” (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 196). But while many Dreamers strive to be “seen” through their stories, this begs the question: seen by whom? Activism in the name of visibility suggests a panopticon-like system of surveillance, in which the oppressed seek recognition (read: freedom to exist) in terms of the culture that oppresses them. When Dreamers use their stories for this purpose, storytelling becomes purely performative. These narratives beg to be understood. One Dreamer, Silvia, impresses, “I was a child, *you know*, brought here by my parents . . . My parents wanted the best life for me. So what they did is they went to a new country. *Right?*” [emphasis added] (Kim & Shalby). Jesus Contreras says, “I’m always trying to serve the community, always trying to give back. I think that’s what, um, I think that’s what a lot of people under DACA are all about, *you know?*” [emphasis added] (BBC News). Contreras’ use of the American colloquial phrase “you know” at once reinscribes his American-ness and, by addressing an unseen “you,” constitutes a common system of reference. The paradox here lies in the fact that the suggestion of understanding reveals the actual ignorance of the interlocutor(s) to which the colloquialism refers.

In the above portrayals, selfhood requires an external authority to establish it. But in the last method of self-identification, Dreamers use storytelling as a means of reclaiming the self as relational. They tell stories not to establish the self as isolated, but in order to critically and politically engage with their own relationality. Here, in the body that is identity, all articulations must operate in relation to one another in order for the whole to function fully and healthily. In this case, to articulate personal identity is to subvert the (inherently violent) narrative of oneself as told and defined by others. Many Dreamers’ stories are solicited and/or mediated by news sources, politicians, “experts,” and other positions of authority. Such a mediated narrative can paint a positive or negative picture of the undocumented youth Dreamer. At its best, it can aid in the bridging of cultural gaps, the dissolution of ignorance and prejudices, and the discovery of a common humanity. At its worst, it can further perpetuate ignorance, intolerance, hate and violence against its subject. Both are violent in their claims of accurate representation of the undocumented youth experience.

A potent example of the former attempt is BBC’s coverage of the story of a Houston firefighter named Jesus Contreras. The headline reads “Harvey Hero Now Faces DACA Deportation” (BBC News). Contreras is charismatic and good-looking, sporting a shirt that reads “HOUSTON” in black letters with the “US” printed in red. His proclamations of the importance of giving back to the community and his love for his Texas home are interspersed with shots of

<sup>10</sup> The terms of legality will be examined in the “Citizenship Identity” section of this chapter

him in his uniform and providing aid following Hurricane Harvey. BBC's overt heroization of Contreras no doubt evokes empathy and identification in many. But it is nonetheless a narrative mediated by an "authority" that lends his story a sense of legitimacy. Contreras himself could never have written the story's headline.

The bottom line is that Dreamers' stories are being regulated for them. Beyond the potential social consequences, Lieberman suggests this could have serious neuropsychological effects. Social psychologists, he claims, "have long speculated that the self is a much more social phenomenon than it intuitively feels" (Cook, G). Lieberman's research has shown that the medial prefrontal cortex, which is the region most clearly associated with "self-processing" and self-reflection, is heavily influenced by the expressed beliefs of others. In other words, the medial prefrontal cortex allows others' judgments and opinions to significantly manipulate personal judgments and opinions. By these measures, mediated narratives can be easily internalized by their subjects. This underscores the importance of the sharing and archival of personal narratives. Richard Delgado<sup>11</sup> introduces stories as legal mechanisms and "counter-realities" to an oppressive mainstream narrative:

"Many, but by no means all, who have been telling legal stories are members of what could be loosely described as outgroups, groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized" (Delgado 2412).

According to Delgado, the outgroup stories serve a critical purpose in undermining an "ingroup reality." Sharing their stories through various social and digital media platforms have empowered undocumented youth to do just that – the narratives have "allowed youth to challenge and, at times, supplant mass media representations through more locally constructed and participatory forms of messaging" (Jenkins et al. 2016, 203).

That Dreamers recognize the extent of this power is reflected in their own narratives. Erick Huerta is an outspoken Dreamer and activist. One of the first Dreamers to share his experiences publically, he continues to do so in his writing and verbally with online blogs. He recalls that his initial inspiration came from a complete lack of conversation surrounding undocumented youth experiences:

"I wasn't seeing conversations being had about folks that were undocumented and what that meant from a personal perspective. I also didn't want to wait for somebody else to come and find me or somebody else like me and kind of tell our story from their perspective, kind of like from an outsider in" (Jenkins et al. 2016, 201).

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<sup>11</sup> Delgado teaches civil rights and critical race theory at University of Alabama School of Law. His piece *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative* (1989) introduces storytelling as a vital tool in legal scholarship.

Gabriel, another Dreamer, feels similarly. In his video, Gabriel asserts:

“We have the power to define who we are, as undocumented students, as undocumented immigrants. Unfortunately, we are not using that power. We are letting people like . . . Lou Dobbs and Bill O’Reilly<sup>12</sup> . . . define us. And how can we counteract this? By saying these simple words: “My name is ----- and I am undocumented” (Jenkins et al. 2016, 204).

Gabriel’s final statement punctuates his effort to assert his individuality, which is so easily clumped into one uniform “experience” as dictated by others. Gabriel and Erick echo the testimonies of many others. Their stories speak to the fact that a true fight for human rights may only begin when the concerned parties have a crystal-clear understanding of the human lives involved. Current political efforts have effectively obscured the individual human story behind each statistic, rendering policy-making a no-brainer question of economics and “national security” rather than the toll it takes on human lives.

It is in part due to the high societal value we place on the “self” that storytelling is such a potent way of declaring that humanity through the enunciation of subjectivity. On these grounds, Dreamers use storytelling to rearticulate the terms of value so that their lives may be included and recognized as such. It could be argued that this rearticulation is still *for* someone else. Are they not just pleading for the further manipulation and articulation of their bodies, their identities, by an outside “authority?” No. They do seek entirely new terms upon which they themselves might freely articulate. But they do not do so in an effort to totally isolate themselves. Relationality is inevitable in today’s age, unfortunately. We cannot exist outside of this social consanguinity. Moreover, retreating and sequestering oneself in a self-contained and self-governed community is neither realistic nor what DACA Dreamers are asking for. To this end, the narrative may be just as much for someone else as it is for oneself, as long the narrative recognizes that unexamined relationality is not the basis upon which subjectivity should be granted.

### **Repurposing the Third Space: An Introduction**

“I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face . . . to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture - *una cultura mestiza* – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar...” – Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* p. 22

The third space, a term that is attributed to theorist Homi Bhabha, has become a staple in postcolonial theory. While there is extensive theorizing on what is also referred to as the “liminal

<sup>12</sup> Dobbs and O’Reilly are two infamous Fox News personalities who have been outspoken in their support for rescinding DACA.



space,” for our purposes the most relevant thinker on the subject is Gloria Anzaldúa with her work in *Borderlands*. The third space, or what Anzaldúa calls *la conciencia de la mestiza*, plays a very important role in the Dreamer movement. Many of the mechanisms that Dreamers employ are means of situating themselves in or navigating through that third space in order to rearticulate their relationality, so it is important first to establish a clear understanding of what it is.

Anzaldúa cites Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos as one of the first to develop a racial theory of inclusivity, *La Raza Cosmica*.<sup>13</sup> With this, the “alien” consciousness was born. This is a place of contradictions, of crossings over, of plurality and of simultaneity. The new *mestiza* who occupies this space, Anzaldúa claims, “copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (79). The space becomes an alternative to the externality that is thrust upon the *mestiza* by a colonizing culture. Anzaldúa examines this violent externality in terms of sexual identity: “the queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe’s fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human” (18). This external positionality effectively dehumanizes its occupant. This is what it means to inhabit the liminal space. Postcolonial theorists offer an alternative space. Anzaldúa redefines it.

She is critical of the rigidity with which these theorists have constructed the third space. She doesn’t believe it should be sought or desired. She contends that this is not a space in which to seek comfort. It is not another space to belong, just as it is not another space to which the colonizers may confine the colonized. And it is an understandably alluring place. The third space, as articulated by postcolonial theory, delineates new terms of existence. In this way, it may be particularly inviting (in a backward sort of way) to the marginalized seeking respite from imposed exteriority. But these terms are unsatisfactory to Anzaldúa. “It is not a comfortable territory to live in,” she writes, for indeed she does not want it to be. “Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create” (73). Dreamers seem to agree. They do not seek a space to rest. They are all too familiar with the exteriority to which they, too, have been confined.<sup>14</sup> But as we will see, they use their externality to reinvent legality, citizenship - to reinvent the terms of their existence. This is the only way to seek freedom. Freedom as dictated in the terms of the oppressor simply isn’t enough. To let go of that delusion of freedom is what “transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else” (73).

Dreamers are presented with two lands, in neither of which they can truly belong. The first: America. The land they didn’t choose, but which now feels most like “home.” The land that is now rejecting them. The second: a land they never knew, but one that is now being thrust upon them as “theirs.” In reality, DACA as a policy aids in creating this divide. By its very nature, it splits families and creates generational divides. It forces young people to individualize their

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that Vasconcelos’ “inclusivity” is based on a *mestizaje* that privileges whiteness. This idea today is vastly contested for many pertinent reasons.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, their positionality is directly contingent upon the very word that Anzaldúa uses in the quote at the beginning of this section: “home.”



“dream,” and identify it as separate from those of their parents and their communities. This can be an incredibly painful process, as Anzaldúa attests, “to this day I’m not sure where I found the strength to leave the source, the mother, disengage from my family, *mi tierra, mi gente* . . . I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me” (16). To Anzaldúa, it was not she who betrayed her culture but her culture that betrayed her. That Dreamers were brought into this country unknowingly is a similar betrayal. Dreamer Silvia Aldrete recognizes the complexity of this betrayal: “I was a child, you know, I was brought here by my parents. And my parents, they aren’t devious people and it’s their fault that I’m in this position. My parents wanted the best life for me. So what they did is they went to a new country” (Kim & Shalby). She acknowledges that her parents’ intentions were good, but it was in essence a betrayal nonetheless. Indeed, DACA Dreamers are doubly betrayed. First, by their families for being brought unknowingly and illegally into the country; then by the culture in which they were raised and that which they consider their own. This culture betrays with its rejection.

Dreamers respond to this betrayal, this rejection, by creating their own land. A third space. And they use social media in a calculated way to do so. Secondary orality itself occupies a particular kind of “third space.” Belonging neither to primary orality nor to writing, it creates a space of its own. Dreamers see a kind of kinship here, and capitalize upon it accordingly. This is in part a simply logistical tactic:

“Like so many of the other young activists we’ve discussed, the DreamActivist.org participants were willing to use not only any media necessary to further their goals, but a wide range of new and traditional activist tactics to enact national change. Too often, debates about digital activism assume an either-or logic – either online or off, either networked or geographically local, either expressive or tactical; meanwhile, the members of many of the groups discussed herein are finding ways to do it all” (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 215).

Another organizer reifies this:

“You have to be able to use Facebook and Twitter, but you have to be intentional about it, and strategic. At the same time, you have to also utilize traditional media outlets because our “tios” and “tias” are not using social networking. They are still watching Univision and the nightly news. So you have to engage in both” (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 211).

This strategy has been dubbed *transmedia mobilization*. It allows Dreamers to employ both mediums, and to inhabit at least in part, for a time, both spaces. We will see how they use other instruments in a similar manner, and in turn to redefine the terms of the space they occupy.

## Voice & Orality

Secondary orality marks the era of texting and tweeting. But this age of modern technology carries with it an important element of its predecessor: the voice. A central premise of the concept of secondary orality, as outlined by Ong, McLuhan and others, is that the voice itself lends power to a narrative that a written statement could not. The September 2017 *LA Times* article “In Their Words” publishes the accounts of numerous Dreamers immediately following the Trump administration’s decision to repeal DACA. Each written statement is accompanied by a recording of the statement read aloud by the person who submitted it. To what effect? There is the obvious ability of the voice to communicate affectivity in a way that is unavailable in writing. Storytelling as an outlet for affective exchange will be explored at length later in this chapter. But beyond that, voice assumes several important roles in storytelling and identification.

Voice is used as an important instrument in situating oneself in the third space. Let’s revisit the idea of “passing.” Accent, like language, reveals the existence of an “in-betweenness” that is not necessarily apparent upon first glance. As we’ve seen, many Dreamers (like other undocumented youth) “blend in” as “normal” Americans based on (meaningless) physical indicators like the color of their skin. Others are identified as “different” almost immediately by that same standard. Accent is not so apparent. While certainly still indicative of “Otherness,” accent is not so easily demarcated. It requires more explanation. It is not as immediately exhibitively of *what* that difference may be. It allows for a little more flexibility, for a bit more agency on the part of the marginalized to dictate the exact grounds upon which this marginalization occurs. This sounds absurd. But when, as it is delineated above, the third space may be repurposed from a place of oppression into a place of creation and resistance and reinventing, the accent may play an important role.

Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* presents a different perspective on voice. By Freud’s account, orality is a component instinct that is operative in early development.<sup>15</sup> It is a means of gratification and of pleasure seeking that, while elemental to sexual development, must be moved *through* and subsumed in a normal reproductive-oriented heterosexuality in order to reach what Freud considers “normal” development. By its nature as a component instinct, orality must necessarily be subordinated to the social “norm.” What does this have to do with DACA? The answer lies in our understanding of “normality” and “abnormality.” First, Freud considers this polarity inherent to neither orality nor the body itself. It is entirely socially construed. Freud recognizes that “the limit of such loathing is frequently purely conventional; he who kisses fervently the lips of a pretty girl will perhaps be able to use her tooth brush only with a sense of loathing” (Freud 16). Abnormality secures and protects the prohibitive identities and practices produced in the subordination of orality as a component instinct. (Freud calls this the Oedipal conflict). In other words, abnormality is the prohibitive nature of a situation in which

<sup>15</sup> Here we get creative with Freud’s discussion of “orality.” While voice and orality are not necessarily synonyms, the former is taken as a means to the latter. The voice is just one mechanism of orality.

one's natural or "normal" state is disciplined or restrained. (It should be noted that Freud's analysis was positioned within the context of normality as pertaining to heterosexual reproductive sexuality). It very easily follows then that Trump's America, restricting the Dreamer psyche and body, might be described as "abnormal."

Freud's analysis points to orality as a potential subversion of abnormality. The storyteller's voice expresses the component instinct that exists prior to the prohibition. This disruption reveals a paradox of "free society," and the illusory yet necessary nature of the Dreamer's crusade. The constraints of society never grant full mobility, to *any* body. Full articulation is never truly available. But that doesn't mean it shouldn't be sought.

For Derrida, voice is also of a supplementary nature, just as Derrida's evolution of writing and reason (which are used interchangeably) is comparable to Freud's "abnormality." Each supplementation "carries within itself the principle of its own degradation, of the supplementary degradation, of the degradation of degradation" (Derrida 179). Derrida diagnoses the degeneration of writing as symptomatic of social and political degeneration (169). This degeneration is couched in an economic logic/justification, an order of morality. But this morality reflects a self that never is, or ever has been, fully "present." Derrida questions the progression of reason/morality, demanding, "since the supplementary mimesis adds *nothing*, is it not useless? And if nevertheless, adding itself to the represented, it is not nothing, is that imitative supplement not dangerous to the integrity of what is represented and to the original purity of nature?" (203). Thus it is precisely this morality that requires supplementation. Derrida calls upon the voice. While it is still a "supplementary degradation" of its own kind, the voice undermines the previous supplementations and returns to a degree of Freud's "normal," restoring in part the mobility/articulation that had been constrained by morality/reason.

Derrida is particularly taken with Rousseau's ability to at once participate in and critique this system of supplementation. He observes that,

"Rousseau's discourse lets itself be constrained by a complexity which always has the form of the supplement of or from the origin. His declared intention is not annulled by this but rather *inscribed* in a system which it no longer dominates. The desire for the origin becomes an indispensable and indestructible function situated within a syntax without origin" (243).

Echoing Freud and our earlier theorizing on the relationality of the self, Rousseau's origin is something that should not - indeed *cannot* - be truly returned to. Yet still, the voice as supplementation is necessary as it allows for an increased articulation of identity. Dreamers return to the voice through storytelling. Their stories act as a supplementation of the stories told for them - stories that embody the "superficial morality" of which Derrida speaks. Dreamers recognize that they must return to the voice as a supplementation both a little closer to and a little further removed from the expression of a purely "American" identity. Of course, an Americanness in its "original form" does not exist. Dreamers are, after all, working within a

system of relationality. Nonetheless, their verbal articulation supplements and subverts the violent supplementation that preceded it.

Chela Sandoval proposes the idea of the “third voice” as it pertains to Derrida’s theorizing of the voice and supplementation. Voice, she says, is a vehicle which navigates “différance,” a space that eludes every construct that has been thus created by supplementations of reason. Voice, when situated in this *différance*, is a

“reflexive mode of consciousness” that “self-consciously deploys subjectivity and calls up a new morality of form that intervenes in social reality through deploying an action that re-creates the agent even as the agent is creating the action in an ongoing, chiasmic loop of transformation” (Sandoval 156).

The “third voice” as a verb form, which Sandoval claims is “unused in any living language today” (148), is again an opportunity to reinvent subjectivity by asserting an exterior positionality. Thus here again, the voice helps to navigate the third space.

## Language

In the introduction, we explored how many Dreamers “pass” or blend in as “normal” Americans. But no matter how well they are able to “pass,” their Americanness is still defined by their cultural roots/origins. This includes different ways of speaking, as they often internalize or mimic the ways their parents speak English (for whom English, as a nonnative language, also carries implications). In this way, language is much more than just an idiom. “The word lives,” Bakhtin says (284). It lives in the way we speak, the tones we use, the way we write, the way we move, the way we experience culture. Language is not just an instrument. It is an instrument that is defined by every element of life that surrounds it.

However, language *can* also be a tool that Dreamers further use to navigate the social space. Anzaldúa’s third space is particularly interesting in that regard. The Dreamers, for example, employ “Spanglish.” Spanglish is a term used to describe the hybrid language that combines words and phrases from both Spanish and English. The way Dreamers exercise Spanglish reflects the “in-betweenness” of two colonizing, oppressive languages – a space with which Anzaldúa is all too familiar. They, like she, are often challenged to treat their language as an unequivocal identifier: “If you want to be American, speak ‘American.’ If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong” (Anzaldúa 53). Challenges like these attempt to force a decision, a polarity. A “one or the other.” Dreamers respond accordingly, repurposing language as an identity politic of their own. Their narratives often feature a combination of Spanish and English, as Leyni demonstrates. “DACA helped me get a job – a job that helped me support mi familia, helped me pay my bills, my gas and my school” (Kim & Shalby). This is a simple example compared to Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, in which she switches frequently between multiple languages, sometimes for full pages at a time. But the intention is the same: “*un nuevo*

*lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*” (Anzaldúa 55). After all, when one does not fully identify with either option presented to them, what choice do they have but to create their own, new language?

“For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves – a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both” (Anzaldúa 55).

Anzaldúa’s personal account matches that of many Dreamers almost to a tee. So they again forge their own linguistic space. This space is not produced to appease either/any colonizing language. Sometimes it is understandable to no one but the speaker themselves. Produced in this manner, the language might be judged “fake” or “inaccurate.” But their language, like Anzaldúa’s Chicano Spanish, “is not incorrect, it is a living language” (Anzaldúa 55). It reflects their ability to navigate the interstice.

But a question remains: is there something inherently oppressive about the “colonizer’s” language? Can a language, even when mix-and-matched, even when totally incomprehensible to anyone else, ever be truly “new” or wholly one’s own? It’s true that it is impossible to remove language from the social and historical context in which it is located. But Bakhtin offers an alternative:

“Languages do not *exclude* each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways (the Ukrainian language, the language of the epic poem, of early Symbolism, of the student, of a particular generation of children, of the run-of-the-mill intellectual, of the Nietzschean and so on). It might even seem that the very word “language” loses all meaning in this process – for apparently there is no single plane on which all these “languages” might be juxtaposed to one another” (Bakhtin 291).

To this end, Dreamers use the same linguistic markers but populate it with their own meaning to purpose their own language. It is, in many ways, the language(s) of their oppressor(s). They use the same nouns, the same subjective indicators, the same expression of culturally loaded terms like “home” or “belonging.” But Dreamers repopulate the words with a different intention/impulse. So yes, this language might begin as someone else’s. Indeed, according to Bakhtin it is a medium that is “overpopulated” with the intentions of others. And these intentions, as it turns out can, be extremely violent. But language can be rescued and repurposed:

“As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as a heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting to it his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own” (Bakhtin 293).

Some storytellers do this to the extreme.<sup>16</sup> But Dreamers’ narratives suggest that their purpose is not to totally upend any linguistic system. Instead, they work within the limitations of these languages to reclaim the intentions and impulses that populate the words used against them daily. Frequent references to “community,” to “home,” to identity and subjectivity signifiers, and to indicators of ethics and moral standards throughout the video narratives propose that storytelling is the medium through which a (re)appropriation of language can occur.

## Image

The photograph, as a reproduction of an image, has a long and violent history as a tool of oppression. Writer and human rights activist Susan Sontag explores this violent history in her book, *On Photography*. She claims that, “to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge -- and, therefore, like power” (Sontag). By this account, the photographer becomes the authority by which the subject of the photograph is defined, and their “knowledge” is the grounds upon which subjectivity is contingent. Photography has been used to ascribe identity for the purpose of oppression since the 19th century.<sup>17</sup> “In deciding how a picture should look . . . photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects.” Thus, “despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth” (Sontag).

Sontag implicates even the most well respected photographers in this (knowing or unknowing) oppression, including the likes of Dorothea Lange, Ben Shan and Russell Lee. Another prominent example of this is the work of American photographer and ethnologist Edward Curtis. In the early 1900s, Curtis took it upon himself to capture the lives and

<sup>16</sup> The work of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector comes to mind here. *The Stream of Life* is meant to repopulate the intention of words in ways that leave any reader attempting to “understand” thoroughly dizzied. “Disorientation is the orient of this text,” claimed Hélène Cixous in the introduction to the book (Lispector xxii).

<sup>17</sup> According to Sontag, the industrialization of camera technology shifted the function of the camera and its products from purely artistic to social. The concept of social purpose lent an “imperial[ism]” to the photograph not present in preceding art forms.



experiences of Native Americans across the continental United States. His magnum opus, a culmination of twenty-five years in the field, was titled “The North American Indian” and contained over 2,200 original photographs. His mission: to preserve a “dying race.” Claimed Curtis, “when the last opportunity for study of the living tribes shall have passed with the Indians themselves, and the day cannot be far off,” photographs “will grow more valuable as time goes on” (Curtis xvii). At the time of its publishing, Curtis’s work was lauded as heroic. Perhaps even more surprising, he is remembered no differently today. His biography is a testament to “his enlightened view of humanity, the strength of his individualism, and his creative genius” (Cardozo). But according to Sontag, even the best of intentions are no less violent. “Images which idealize ... are no less aggressive than work which makes a virtue of plainness ... There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera” (Sontag). And in reality, Curtis’ intentions seem to have been far from the innocent fervor with which he was (and is) so often painted. Many of his pieces were altered in post-production to hide any signs of modernity.<sup>18</sup> In many others, it is evident that he reuses costumes on members of completely different tribes. Here, the violence lies in the intentionality with which Curtis altered his photographs – and in effect further isolated the subjects in time and space.

Stories like Curtis’s are not uncommon. But the photograph is not the only method by which image reproduction as identification may be oppressive. Jean Genet’s *The Thief’s Journal* recounts the exchange between a group of tourists and French beggars (Genet 161). The tourists, commenting to each other on the “sublime quality” of the beggars, use aesthetic judgment of the object (the beggar) to produce their own subjectivity.<sup>19</sup>

Through their video narratives, Dreamers resist the reproduction of the image that has historically been so destructive. They are all too familiar with spatial and temporal isolation. The self-produced video offers the opportunity for Dreamers to choose how they are represented, how their own image is reproduced. Interestingly, the ephemerality of these videos plays an important role here. Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman note that many of the video narratives that were shared between 2010 and 2013 (when the video narrative movement was at its peak) are no longer accessible online. This temporality counters “the popular notion that material shared online (video and photo representations especially) will ‘last forever’” (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 205). It also directly combats an element of image reproduction that cements the subject in time or space. These Dreamers’ narratives will not be sequestered in a distant past, nor will they sit around, readily available to be (re)produced for the benefit of another viewer long after they have served the purpose of their original producer.

<sup>18</sup> See Curtis’s “A Piegan Lodge,” in which an alarm clock was edited out of a shot that in all other respects embodies the primitive, tribal stereotype that so frequently was assigned to Native Americans.

<sup>19</sup> It is worth note that in *The Thief’s Journal*, the beggars pose for the French tourists. One might wonder how this changes the mechanics of the relationality in which the tourists attempt to conjure their own subjectivity.



Part of the Dreamer's effort is establishing a sense of "sameness" with the audience.<sup>20</sup> If so much of the violence of the camera is isolating in time and space, the Dreamers rebut this not only by representing themselves on their own terms, but also by demonstrating a "sameness."<sup>21</sup> The content of many stories centers on the roles Dreamers play in larger communities and the ways their lives overlap and intertwine with their "legal" equivalents. With such content, they effectively render obsolete "difference" (manifest in spatial and temporal isolation) as a legitimate basis upon which others deny them humanity. Youth organizers of Dreamers Adrift launched a series called "Undocucribs," based on the MTV series *Cribs*, which tours celebrity homes. A comical pop culture allusion, "Undocucribs" leads viewers on virtual tours of the homes of undocumented youth (Dreamers Adrift) with a more serious underlying agenda of allowing sneak peeks into their lives – lives that, they emphasize, don't look all that different from anyone else's.<sup>22</sup> Many narratives utilize identity categories to the same effect. Dreamers are graduate students at USC, are paramedics, are valedictorians, are user researchers at Fortune 500 companies, work long shifts in the ICU "saving your mom, your dad's life or your grandmother's" (BBC News, Kim & Shalby). They post videos titled "Undocumented - A Day In My New York Life" or "My Life As an Undocumented Student!" (AskAgy, Garcia). The message: They are undocumented, but they are a lot of other things too. Dreamer Mohammad films his story from his bedroom, a "room that could belong to almost any 20-something, with magazines stacked on the windows and a poster for a popular TV series on the wall" (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 186). Even simple background details like these communicate likeness.

A tension emerges here, as evoking "sameness" doesn't seem to align with Dreamers' efforts to create their own third space. Isn't "sameness" just another way of submitting to oppression? Not necessarily – it is okay to establish a "sameness" as long as that "sameness" is not the grounds upon which one is granted subjectivity or humanity. The Dreamers do not appeal to their "sameness" as the premise of their demand for the basic human rights being denied to them. They do utilize "sameness," as we see above. But it is by no means the foundation of their crusade.

### **Affectivity**

*"[Dreamer narratives] serve as a psychic survival mechanism, providing an outlet for affective sharing and release on individual and communal levels"* (Jenkins et al. 2016, 199).

<sup>20</sup> Dreamers use different mechanisms to appeal to different audiences. In this case, the audience is one that has previously established a belief of identity disparity between themselves and Dreamers – usually on the basis of legality/citizenship but also often on race or country of origin.

<sup>21</sup> Dreamers do posit their sameness as existing simultaneously with difference, but as we will see they disarm the power of difference as utilized by those who attempt to establish that disparity.

<sup>22</sup> "Sameness" must obviously be qualified as it is limited to people of similar socioeconomic standing, demographic, etc. - the implicit difference here being legal status.

It doesn't take much to guess what Jenkins et al. refer to in their invocation of "survival." As we've seen, the sociocultural context of the Trump administration is a frightening and violent place for the undocumented youth – and even more so the undocumented youth activist. But what impact does this isolation have on identity formation, and what does affectivity have to do with it?

A colossal body of research affirms the importance of human connection. Countless studies have produced data that suggest that humans, as with many mammals, are profoundly shaped by our social environments. Matthew Lieberman claims that our need to connect with others is as intrinsic and essential as our need for food or water (Cook G). One study by Holt-Lunstad et al. found that the quality and quantity of individuals' social relationships had as critical an effect on mortality rates as other thoroughly scientifically corroborated risk factors like smoking. Sustaining healthy social relationships (versus unhealthy relationships, or a complete lack thereof) was as significant of a health indicator as not smoking. Moreover, data across over 308,000 individuals followed for on average 7.5 years indicates a 50% higher likelihood of survival for those with "adequate" social relationships compared to those with "poor or insufficient" social relationships (Holt-Lunstad et al.). By this data, social and emotional isolation is violent on a very physical and tangible level. Dreamers thus use their narratives as a means of affective resistance.

But "sharing and release" – indeed any social connection at all - necessitates the presence of interlocutors to reciprocate or receive. Storytelling, which requires a teller and a listener, provides a natural platform for this exchange. Moreover, neuroeconomist Paul Zak claims that hearing a story<sup>23</sup> triggers the release of cortisol and oxytocin. These chemicals prompt our ability to empathize, connect and create meaning. Storytelling is "literally in our DNA" (Brown 6). It follows that the narrative as an "affective sharing and release" serves as an effectual mechanism for Dreamers.

Dreamers use storytelling for affective resistance on multiple fronts. First, they use it to connect with each other. This allows for the mutual acknowledgement and affirmation of experience and emotion by those who have similar stories. Santiago recognizes the affirmative power of this exchange: "The sorrow, pain, happiness, and everything else in my life clings to my story and the struggles that my parents have gone through. And so many other people can see their story reflected in mine, in my footprints" (The Dream Is Coming). Secondly, Dreamers use storytelling to appeal to those who attempt to isolate them. We see this clearly in testimonies like that of an anonymous Dreamer from Los Angeles, who identifies herself as a "mother, a wife and daughter deeply saddened by the continuous attacks on minorities and immigrants" (Kim & Shalby). Not only does she evoke sadness here, but perhaps more powerfully she appeals to several universally identifiable and emotion-laden familial roles. Suddenly, her sadness is intimately available to all mothers, wives, and daughters regardless of their background or legal status.

<sup>23</sup> Zak specifically characterizes a story as a narrative with a beginning, middle, and an end.

As with their invocation of “sameness” with the image, an affective appeal is not the grounds upon which Dreamers premise their humanity. But it does serve as a useful tool in dismantling the barriers of emotional isolation that have been constructed against them. In turn, they may reclaim their right to feel and participate in affective experience on their own terms.

## Chapter II: Storytelling and Collective Identity

The previous chapter focused upon storytelling and resistance through the rearticulation of individual identity. This chapter will expand its lens now to consider resistance through storytelling and iteration of a *collective* identity. But don't be fooled by the fact that these different articulations of identity are separated by chapters. The two are inextricably intertwined. We have already explored the idea of the community in the ways that individuality and subjectivity are purely relational concepts. This heavily invokes the necessity of a community. However, in the following chapter the articulation of a collective identity/community is conscious and intentional whereas in the previous chapter it was presented in terms of the individual identity (and its interlocutors). Similarly, invocations of individual identity are present in this chapter in terms of collective identity. Nevertheless, this chapter will focus primarily on the way that the collective identity is articulated through storytelling. Revisiting the metaphor of the body, we understand Dreamers' need to set identity in motion in that each individual articulation is crucial to the overall healthy function of the whole body. However, in this it is still necessary to maintain the integrity of each individual articulation. Hence the necessity for the individual and collective to work together.

Polletta & Jasper define the collective identity as "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined<sup>24</sup> rather than experienced directly" (285). In this chapter, we will explore the collective identity of Dreamers and how they employ it to aid in their resistance against the dangers of the American sociopolitical reality in which they currently live.

First, we will examine the community and the positionality of the individual within that community, as Dreamers challenge and deconstruct the notions of community that bind or exclude them. We will analyze the role of collective experience and memory in the way Dreamers propose a new subject-subject identification process, then will turn to the concept of the citizenship identity and how Dreamers resist by confronting conventional definitions of nationhood and citizenship. Lastly, the participatory culture of social media and secondary orality offers great opportunity for resistance in a socio-politically tumultuous world.

### The Individual in the Community

Dreamers' resistance efforts highlight the unique positionality of the individual within a community. For our purposes, it is important to clarify the relationship between "community," and "collective identity." The Polletta & Jasper definition above shows that collective identity is the *framework* by which an individual may identify as being part of a community. A community, then, occurs when individuals possess a "perception of a shared status or relation" relative to one

<sup>24</sup> Later we will explore this invocation of imagination in a discussion of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, along with other elements of Polletta and Jasper's definition.

another. Benedict Anderson touches upon the concept of a community in his description of the nation: “the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (Anderson 26). For community to exist, there must be an element of continuity – temporal, geographical, or otherwise – that allows for the sustained sentiment of relationality among individuals. Anderson’s “homogeneous” time allows the subjects of a nation to exist together in a collectively understood simultaneity, despite often never even encountering each other. Time is “empty” in that different people or events may populate it in different ways. By this definition, DACA Dreamers may exist within and populate time with a different understanding than the one that had been previously populated by American society. Also by this definition, Dreamers identify by and work within multiple communities; one or more identity signifiers represent each of these communities. In this case, the most salient may be 1) American, 2) The national identifier of their country of origin and 3) Dreamer. The inner- and intra-workings of these communities/identity categories will be examined at length in this chapter.

Let us revisit McLuhan’s concept of the “global village” (McLuhan 9). According to McLuhan and Ong, technological advances have allowed for the existence of a community of revolutionary magnitude. The epoch of secondary orality introduced technology that allowed for the individual’s “cognitive, moral, and emotional connection” to those from whom he or she would otherwise be isolated (temporally, geographically, or otherwise). This is evident in the phrase “global village” itself, which scales the traditional notion of a tightly-knit social structure (previously contingent on geographical proximity among other factors) to massive proportions. This is the kind of community that Dreamers now navigate.

Remember that individual identity is positioned within the community by way of the collective identity. Dreamers may evoke both identities simultaneously. Their personal statements often begin or end with “I am undocumented” or “I am a Dreamer” (Jenkins et al. 2016, 204; Kim & Shalby). Such identifiers at once distinguish the story as wholly personal and individual, *and* as part of a collective experience. Forthcoming research compares the work of Dreamers to the *testimonio* that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. *Testimonio*, associated most closely with Latin American activism of the time, was a form of storytelling as “witness” or “testimony” to individual experience. It was the expression not just of “a single autonomous account but of a collectively experienced reality” (Zimmerman). This reflects the “mediated relationship between individual experience and collective identity” in the narratives of the Dreamers (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 207).

However, in examining this relationship we must be critical of which individuals compile this collective “whole.” Just how collective can the amalgamation of individual stories truly be? Here, nothing speaks more loudly than the silence from Dreamers with different cultural backgrounds. While DACA protects immigrants of all national origins, the vast majority of Dreamer activists trace cultural roots from Mexico and other Latin American countries. Indeed, it is hard to find a narrative of a Dreamer with a cultural background aside from these. There are

a number of possible suggestions for this seeming lack of representation, aside from the obvious numerical disparity. It could be that these Dreamers “blend in” differently than their Latin American counterparts (i.e. different skin tones, accents). To that point, it could be because different countries have varying access to US citizenship during the immigration process (and therefore provide for a smoother identity transition/articulation). Or, it could be that the individual identities of Dreamers of other descent do not fit the “collective” narrative of the majority, thus begging the question: just how representative is the “collective” experience? This question must be posed to other identity categories as well, like gender, sexual orientation, ability or class.<sup>25</sup> How well are these specific identity categories represented in the portrayal provided by the “whole” of the Dreamer community?<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, there is not space here to delve into these questions to an extent that would do them justice. But they should be kept in mind when considering the identity politics of the Dreamer movement – particularly when making assumptions about the representationality of a collective identity. Nonetheless individuals can stand to benefit greatly by establishing a collective identity and community. For example, communities can act as vital support systems. We have established the caustic nature of current sociopolitical environment in which Dreamers are affectively assaulted. Dreamer narratives are used to “harness the power of collective identity to create vital communities of support for undocumented youth” (Jenkins et al. 2016, 199). An established collective identity is central to the stability of this support system. To this effect, the fact that Dreamer narratives are often referred to as “coming out” stories is decidedly worth noting. “Coming out,” a metaphor born from the LGBTQ+ movement, and has since been co-opted by other organized efforts like fat acceptance and disability rights. Dreamers also borrowed this term, from a movement that is similarly community-oriented. The LGBTQ+ community used “coming out of the closet” to symbolize the revealing of a personal identity. Every individual “coming out” lent strength and support to the growing community, which also employed a sentiment of collective “pride” (as evidence by its international Pride parades). Similarly, the Dreamer movement uses the act of “coming out of the shadows” as an opportunity to gain and lend support to and from other community members. Fostering a collective identity can also “help spur involvement in other forms of activism and collective action, even in the face of personal and political risk” (Jenkins et al. 2016, 199). Thus sharing personal narratives may help sustain political engagement as well.

Dreamers know how to reap the benefits of community through the evocation of collective identity. But their resistance is evident at an even more fundamental level as they use storytelling to challenge notions of the community itself. Dreamers use their narratives to manipulate the idea of nationality, to reveal its contingencies and conditionality, and ultimately to destroy it. Nationalism is a salient form of community identity, dictating the identity

<sup>25</sup> To its credit, the queer Dreamer community has been particularly outspoken in distinguishing the way it is specifically impacted by DACA and recent policy changes. For reference, see Alisha Roacho’s testimony, included in the statements at the beginning of this paper.

<sup>26</sup> Taking this question into consideration, an opportunity for further analysis could be to investigate if and/or how storytelling differs in form, content, and purpose among these identity categories.



boundaries of national origin and citizenship. Thus in its relation to nationality, community is implicated as foundational to the ideology of exclusion.<sup>27</sup> In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson cites social anthropologist Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (Anderson 6). Anderson’s project is to demonstrate the “imagined” nature of national identity. Dreamers take this a step further, asserting the contingent nature of an “imagined” system of exclusionary logic.

To this end, they focus upon the “American” identity group as their belonging to the “American” community is the very one called into question by the exclusionary ideology of Trumpism. However, Dreamers navigate their positionality between multiple national identity categories. Their Otherness is delineated by their belonging to a second national identity group: their country of origin. This second identity can often be forced upon them not only by those who call themselves purebred “Americans,” but also by Dreamers’ parents and families. Although many undocumented youth have no memory of the country they moved from when they were young, it is still an important part of their parents’ identities. Many parents in turn attempt to remind their children of where they came from. An anonymous Dreamer recalls, “I was three when I came to the U.S. I know no other home. Torn between two worlds and not being accepted to a place I call home. The United States has been the hardest struggle of my life” (Kim & Shalby).

We are already familiar with the “third space” that Dreamers create in response to the two options presented to (forced upon) them. But is this third space a community? To an extent, yes. Through the archive of their personal narratives, Dreamers created a space of shared experience and emotion. So to the extent that they employed collective identity, they did indeed foster community. But a qualification must be made here. Anzaldúa’s third space is a deeply personal and individual one. It is fluid. It is not a one-size-fits-all place, accessible to anyone and everyone who “doesn’t fit in.” It is formed in the margins, yes. But it is not a place to which the masses may be relegated. The individual must occupy this space before seeking a communal one. This is why storytelling is such an effective tool for Dreamers. Although all Dreamers seem to identify with their “in-betweenness,” their experiences of this in-betweenness are wholly individual and unique. Thus, each story places its subject in a personal third place. Only when the storyteller has “come out” and taken ownership of their story do they position themselves within a greater community. The story is essential both to maintaining their individuality and articulating a collective identification.

In this way, Dreamers build a community/space from which they may respond to those who attempt to place them elsewhere. Remember, it is not a permanent space. It is a transitional one – a community that serves a purpose, but is as ephemeral as the conditions that were cause for its creation. For the Dreamers, the community is a tool of resistance.

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<sup>27</sup> In this context, nationalism is used only as an example of community, and how Dreamers navigate between multiple communities. Dreamers’ specific manipulation of national and citizenship identity will be further explored later in this chapter.



## Collective Memory & Collective Experience

Collective experience proves a powerful way for Dreamers to dismantle the subject-object identification process and to propose in its place a new and, by Western standards, revolutionary subject-subject identity relationship. One element of collective experience is the collective memory. According to Maurice Halbwachs, memory is an inherently social process of identification. “We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated” (Halbwachs 47, 169). Dreamers use collective memory to draw attention to identity relationships that have forced them into objectivity. They recall this positionality in order to promptly dismantle it. Dreamers then use the collective memory to establish in the present a collective experience, which in turn allows them to explore a new subject-subject relationality premised upon mutual benefit.

Many Dreamer narratives include anecdotes of exclusion or oppression. North Carolina-based youth activist Alicia Torres Don recalls how, following her graduation from university, employers would not accept her nursing degree. This denial of her identity as a “legitimate” scholar, college graduate, and member of the workforce posited her as an objectified *other* in relation to her documented peers. She is confident that her “problems will not be solved by simply going back to where I came from but by staying and fighting for what is right, for justice for our community” (Torres Don). With this, Alicia both challenges the common (ignorant) notion of “returning” to national origin as a legitimate solution to a perceived “problem,” and ties her experience to that of a greater community. After all, “the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other” (Halbwachs 53). Stories like Alicia’s - basic stories of a denial of rights - mark a traumatic history of objectification and *othering*.

Given the ephemerality of the video narrative and its primary outlet of social media, one might be surprised to learn just how integral it is to the experience of collective memory. French historian Pierre Nora suggests that places are often infused with the ethos of memory. These *lieux de mémoire* are characterized as *lieux*, or places, “in three senses of the word – material, symbolic, and functional. Even an apparently purely material site, like an archive, becomes a *lieux de mémoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura” (Nora 19). A place, as characterized by any aspect of the three-fold definition above, may be imbued with collective memory. Nations, which may be considered material, symbolic *and* functional, are particularly subject to the ascription of collective memory(ies). If Dreamers attempted to work within the physical space of the nation – either America or their country of origin – their own collective memory would be mediated by that of the dominant culture. “*Lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs” (Nora 24). Social media does not offer the same materiality, symbolism or functionalism that allows for lasting memory. It *is* controlled by a particular globalist illusion of transcending these categories. In this illusion lies the paradox that despite its own confines, social media offers the impression

that to work within it is to step outside of the limits of place within which one may otherwise be geographically and symbolically bound. Fortunately, this paradox works for the Dreamers in that they aim to occupy a specific space that excludes and in many ways controls social media itself.

Having established a collective memory, and securing a space in which to express it, Dreamers may then address the task of reimagining a subjective relationality through collective experience. In order to explore and begin to reconcile this way of thinking, however, we must first recognize that the subject-object relationship is not an inherently human way of relating, but mostly characteristic of Western ideology. This will require us to revisit the notion that participating in a collective identity threatens one's individuality. In reality, this is a given only insofar as one subscribes particularly to a Western way of thought. On the contrary, as the storytelling traditions of many cultures show, community by no means necessarily equates erasure of individual identity. The Zapatista Movement of the 1990s provides an excellent example of how a community capitalizes upon the coexistence of individual and collective experience in their storytelling and resistance efforts. Indeed, the two may be intimately connected: "one may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories" (Halbwachs 40). By Halbwachs's terms, each is essential for the existence and expression of the other.

Nevertheless, that many theorists are still limited to this Western ideology is worth remembering as we scrutinize the process of subjective identification in terms of the collective experience. For example, Joan Scott in *The Evidence of Experience* posits that, "since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual" (Scott 793). Discourse, she continues, constructs at once a collective experience and individual subjectivity because "subjects are constituted discursively and experience is a linguistic event" (793). By situating collective experience within the expression of language, Scott at once reifies the legitimacy of experience as individual *and* collective and posits a subject-object relationality (as constructed through the notion of language/discourse) that is characteristic of Western ideology.

Dreamers venture a slightly different interpretation. If (as Scott suggests) subjectivity may be constructed through collective identification, then the necessary production of subjectivity through the establishment of another's objectivity (think: Genet's French tourists, Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric, Alicia Torres Don's inability to get a job) may be replaced by a non-violent process that is beneficial to all parties involved. In this capacity communities, instead of erasing individual subjectivity, may be used to establish a subject-subject relationality.

Dreamers thus use the collective experience to demonstrate the potential<sup>28</sup> for mutual benefit in a subject-subject relationship. But what are the grounds upon which they claim this

<sup>28</sup> Only potential here because making this option of subjectivity formation a reality requires buy-in from the other half of the "subject-subject" equation. Because this constituency is secure in its own subjectivity as produced by the traditional Western subject-object identification process, and given the socio-political climate of America today, cooperation is at least for now unlikely. Nonetheless, Dreamers and other marginalized communities may lay the foundation for a subject-subject relationality in hopes that it could one day be possible. And as we will see, they make a compelling case.

mutual benefit? Dreamers' interests are not hard to guess: they would gain legality. But many of their narratives remind that even the most ardently anti-immigration isolationists have much to gain as well. Jesus Contreras reminds us that Dreamers "giv[e] back to the community." One anonymous Dreamer "proudly and wholeheartedly [serves as] the last line of defense in one of the country's highest crime rate cities, Chicago." They pay taxes. They go to school. They volunteer. They are friends, neighbors, and loved ones (BBC News; Kim & Shalby). They foster community that transcends documented status. A *mutual* recognition of mutual benefit could turn away from the subject-object positioning of an ideology of difference and turn toward one of a mutually acknowledged subjectivity. This is a departure from a process that "operates crucially through differentiation; its effect is to constitute subjects as fixed and autonomous, and who are considered reliable sources of a knowledge that comes from access to the real by means of their experience" (Scott 782). Dreamers theorize experience as a "refusal of essentialism" in regards to identity, to what is considered "real," to experience itself (Scott 791). So Dreamers use collective experience as a way of asserting their own subjectivity by positing differentiation not as exclusion but as an equitable, reciprocal recognition of differences. Here, too, we must be wary of invocations of "sameness." They do not assert their subjectivity on the basis of being the same as their documented counterparts. Instead, they use collective identity to position themselves as "reliable sources of a knowledge," a position that concretizes their own autonomy and agency.

### Citizenship Identity

One identity category that has emerged as particularly salient to this discussion is that of citizenship. Previous sections have already suggested that questions of citizenship and what constitutes "belonging" to a nation are central to Dreamers' struggle. The term has surfaced various times throughout this thesis, but has yet to be clearly defined. But let us first endeavor to define citizenship in terms of the nation, to which the former concept is intimately tied. Nation-ness, says Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, is "the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Anderson 3). But nation-ness is also saturated in affective purpose. No wonder, then, that it holds such significance for Dreamers' resistance efforts in what is at once a personal and political issue. Moreover, it has transcended its status as a traditional *ism* to that of an ideology grounded in absolute truth, "Nationalism-with-a-big-N" (5).

Thus by its nature, the task of developing one agreed-upon definition of the nation has proven frustrating and largely fruitless. Anderson himself perhaps does it best, stating that the nation is "an imagined political community"<sup>29</sup> (6). The nation is imagined, he reasons, because "an American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-

<sup>29</sup> Anderson says that the nation is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign – limited because every nation must have boundaries in order for other nations to exist beyond them, and sovereign because sovereignty is the "emblem" of the ability function freely as an independent entity (7). While these elements are certainly central to Anderson's definition, what is most pertinent to our purpose is his categorization of the nation as *imagined* and as a *community*.

odd fellow Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” (26). His characterization of community complements ours as nation is “always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). But perhaps most important to our purpose is the idea that the nation is imagined, and thereby artificial. It creates and is created by nationalism (the ideology), and neither could exist outside of the other. Nationalism, claims Ernest Gellner, is “not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (Anderson 6). Dreamers will capitalize upon this aspect of the definition as they challenge the terms by which they are denied citizenship.

This brings us back to the definition of citizenship. Applying Anderson’s understanding to the sociopolitical context of modern America, we might explain citizenship as one’s perception of belonging to a nation to the extent that they identify with a group of people (with almost all of whom they will never come in direct contact) that they may reasonably identify as a community (in that they experience a level of comradeship affectively, experientially or otherwise). The question becomes, what parameters are used to dictate who has citizenship and who doesn’t? It may seem that we have already laid out the answer to this question here. And Dreamers’ argument is, essentially, that we have. But of course in practice our understanding of the term is imbued with politics, and Anderson’s essentialized definition is not useful to sustain a strong political platform of debate. It still proves valuable, however, in the sense that the nation (and, by extension, citizenship) is first and foremost an imagined political community from which laws regarding legality and illegality are created. In particular, it highlights the circumstances that gave birth to the way we imagine who is part of a nation. This provides the grounds upon which Dreamers may reimagine citizenship as defined by different circumstances. So it is through this politicized framework that we should now turn to view the concept of legality as the main parameter upon which Dreamers are (or, rather, are *not*) granted citizenship.

Legality is expressed materially in documentation, and is often denied on the premise that one instead “belongs” to their country of origin. Thus the question isn’t *whether* one belongs (citizenship is universal), but *where* one belongs. This origin is the factor that distinguishes undocumented folks from their “documented” counterparts. It is why typically isolationist statements like “go back to where you came from!” are used so often as indicators of difference.<sup>30</sup> And by these terms, even DACA does not grant full citizenship rights. It grants only “deferred action,” implying a temporary, qualified citizenship of which one can be stripped at any time.

Here we may draw startlingly similar parallels with the “*Sans-Papiers of Saint-Bernard*,” a group of about 300 refugees in France who occupied the Saint-Bernard Church in Paris in June of 1996. *Sans-Papiers*, which directly translates to “without papers” (read: “undocumented”) is:

<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, the national origins of all other documented citizens (at least those who present as such, based on skin color or otherwise) are somehow conveniently erased as soon as documentation is obtained (or assumed).

A name that undermines dominant ascriptions and categorizations and points to a divided political-existential terrain: a situation of fundamental insecurity of one's own rights and residence. Despite all the human rights declarations, this situation arises from the current circumstances under where the only people who receive even the most basic rights are those who hold 'documents' that confirm them, in the form of appropriate 'papers.' This also means that in whatever way the 'we' of a particular group who holds documents is constituted, a truly democratic form of citizenship can only be realized with *Sans-Papiers* (Balibar 1997).

At an event declaring solidarity with the group of activists seeking French residency, philosopher Étienne Balibar highlighted a few more striking similarities between *Sans-Papiers* and the undocumented youth of the Dreamer movement. Balibar observes the *Sans-Papiers'* refusal of the "clandestineness" ascribed to them," a sentiment akin to Dreamers' refusal to remain "in the shadows." He believes "we" (presumably French citizens *avec-papiers*) "owe them for . . . being seen and heard for what they are: . . . from here and there at the same time" (Balibar 1997). This in-betweenness is easily reminiscent of the third space that Dreamers occupy. By this account, the efforts of *Sans-Papiers* demonstrate the crucial role of "papers" in defining one's citizenship – a role that is essentially analogous to that role which documentation assumes with the Dreamers.

It follows that in much the same way as the *Sans-Papiers* "have demonstrated that the regime of illegality wasn't reformed by the State, but actually created by it" (Balibar 1997), Dreamers' resistance involves revealing the arbitrary nature of this signifier "legality," as represented by documentation. Their aim is to do so by debasing legality as the premise upon which American-ness, even humanity (in terms of rights one is afforded) is mediated.<sup>31</sup> Dreamers thus reject illegality as a valid signifier of citizenship. In its place, they invoke other parameters of citizenship through their storytelling – an effort that has led observers, as we might recall, to claim that these undocumented youth are "American in every sense of the word except legal status" (Jenkins et al. 2016, 193). For example, "their creation and circulation of coming out videos and other public declarations of undocumented identity constitute an enactment of affective citizenship and group belonging that circumvents the law entirely" (Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman 199). Affectivity is presented here as a more valid measure of citizenship than legality. Dreamer narratives also illustrate efforts to "problematize this traditional understanding of citizenship by advancing [the concept of] . . . *Citizenship-as-practice*" (Lundby 217). The concept of *Citizenship-as-practice* suggests that citizenship may reside in the actions we carry out in everyday life. Think: paying taxes, volunteering, supporting families, learning, being socially and politically active and engaged. These are just a sample of the many ways that Dreamers assert their citizenships through storytelling in ways that undermine the (presumed but arbitrary) power of illegality.

<sup>31</sup> Here we might again invoke Derrida as documentation (the embodiment of reasoning, writing) must be undermined and supplemented by the voice (embodied in the narrative, storytelling).

## Participatory Culture of Secondary Orality

In this chapter, we have seen how integral a strong collective identity is to the Dreamer movement. In the final section of this chapter, we will look at how this community is produced in part by the participatory culture of social media that Dreamers utilize. The concept of participatory culture is a central element of new media theory. Coined by Henry Jenkins, Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT, a participatory culture is “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations . . . one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another” (Jenkins et al. 2006, 3). As we will explore, the mechanisms and rhetoric of social media provide the ideal space in which to cultivate a participatory culture.

The participatory nature of secondary orality has often been described in terms of the “opening” of societies. New technologies allow the infiltration of new stories and social understandings into places they were not allowed before:

“Connectedness posed a danger to the preservation of those physical and geographic divisions supporting social distinctions, such as the separation of racial and ethnic neighborhoods, preferred leisure and cultural sites for different classes and social groups, the insulation of traditional rural society from ‘corrupting’ city influences, and the home as private, feminine domain distinct from the masculinized public sphere. Radio’s ‘immateriality’ allowed it to cross these boundaries: allowed ‘race’ music to invade the white middle-class home, vaudeville to compete with opera in the living room, risqué city humor to raise rural eyebrows, salesmen and entertainers to find a place in the family circle” (Hilmes 15).

With these new technologies, geographical and social barriers are more easily transcended. Recall Marshall McLuhan’s “global village.” The dissolving of such barriers is what allows for such a global community to exist. Thus, participatory culture allows Dreamers to expand their community and the reach of their stories.

But what specifically are the mechanisms behind this disassembly and subsequent “opening up” of communities? We see the participatory culture of the Dreamer movement reflected in its participants’ specific use of social media mechanics as well as their general rhetoric. One organizer, Mohammad, calls out the usernames of other movement participants who have already made videos as he encourages others to follow suit. Implicitly referenced is an already established online community of Dreamers (Jenkins et al. 2016, 186). Gabriel issues a similar invitation: “My name is Gabriel, and I am undocumented, and I invite you to come out” (Jenkins et al. 2016, 204). These Dreamer allude to an already established online community as a means of encouraging others to join them.



Their call to participate in the movement extends to the use of social media mechanics as well. A “hashtag” uses the pound sign followed by a word or short phrase and accompanies text captions in various social media outlets. It allows readers to click through to view all posts in that particular outlet that use the same hashtag. Organizers across various movements have co-opted this to encourage movement participation, Dreamers included. Most recently, they have launched the #BringThemHome and #HereToStay social media campaigns. A search of the #HereToStay hashtag on Instagram reveals 130,476 posts. Not only do they provide tangible measures of online networks, but they garner significant public attention and the opportunity for others to voice their support. Among the tweets using the #Dreamers hashtag is one from Apple CEO Tim Cook: “250 of my Apple co-workers are #Dreamers. I stand with them. They deserve our respect as equals and a solution rooted in American values” (Cook, T). Cook capitalizes on his high-profile social media presence and uses the hashtag in order to redirect his audience to the issue at hand. ASU political science student and Dreamer Belén Sisa released a Facebook post in March 2017 using #HereToStay that quickly went viral, and resulted in CNN coverage of her story. Sisa released a photo of herself posing with her completed tax forms coupled with the following caption:

“MYTH BUSTER: I, an undocumented immigrant, just filed my taxes and PAID \$300 to the state of Arizona. I cannot receive financial aid from the state or federal government for school, I cannot benefit from unemployment, a reduced healthcare plan, or a retirement fund. I think I’m a pretty good citizen. Oh and there are MILLIONS just like me who pay into a system they will never receive anything from. Wanna tell me again how I should be deported, contribute nothing and only leech off this country while the 1% wealthiest people in this country steal from you everyday? How about you show me yours Donald J. Trump [tagged]? #HereToStay” (O’Sullivan).

Sisa, whose use of the hashtag established her as a part of a greater community *and* drew attention to the political agenda of her post, also utilizes another mechanism of social media: tagging. Her challenge to Trump employed a feature that allows posters to link directly to the profiles of other people. When Sisa asserted, “How about you show me yours,” she linked Donald Trump’s name directly to his public Facebook profile. This is a powerful statement not necessarily because the message reached Donald Trump himself (though it very well could have with the media coverage that followed), but inasmuch as it asserted a level of visibility and access not generally afforded to marginalized communities like the Dreamers. In this way, Sisa took advantage of social media to illustrate a point that may have packed less of a punch using a different mode of communication. The mechanisms and rhetoric surrounding social media offer a new opportunity for dialogue and interactivity, thus creating space for more inclusive and participatory communities.

Despite the seemingly beneficial results of using social media to disseminate stories, we must still be cognizant of the implications of a technology created on the premise of being



“social.” Let’s take a look at the terminology we use. On Facebook, connecting with someone new is called “friending.” Once connected, no matter how well you may know someone in “real life,” this person can now be found in your “friends” folder. On Instagram, this connection is called “following.” Every account has “followers,” and “follows” other people in return. When someone posts something on Instagram, we “like” it. On Facebook, we have the option to “like” or “love” it (notably, there is no option to “dislike”). These terms are somewhat garish in their clear invocations of positive relationality, inclusion and recognition. However, this effort can turn sour as it may create a false sense of societal inclusivity (or exclusivity) not *at all* grounded in reality (i.e. when you measure your self-worth by your 863 friends on Facebook, or the fact that *only* 200 people liked your last Instagram post). The dangerous blurring of lines between virtual reality and *actual* reality has pushed many users to the point of purchasing “followers” and “likes” (Lieber). In cases like these, what is encouraged and created is far from what might be considered a real, functioning and healthy community. Nonetheless, *when used responsibly* this outlet does have the potential to foster community in a new age of secondary orality.

Finally, it is worth note that time and energy spent fostering communities online can translate into the cultivation of strong and healthy communities offline. Research has found that the presence of a strong collective identity plays an important role in sustaining political engagement. Delgado cites research by Derrick Bell, Bruno Bettelheim and others in his claim that, “the cure” to complacency “is storytelling” (Delgado). Participatory culture is, in essence, a bridge to action. Dreamer activist Nathan seems to agree, finding that:

“Kind of counterintuitively, online is where we really found the ability to personalize the immigrant rights movement. If somebody can see a picture of somebody, hear their story and watch a video of them, they’re much more likely to be able to relate to that person and participate with us” (Jenkins et al. 2016, 208).

Lisa García Bedolla found this to be true in her research of Latinx political participation in Los Angeles and their use of social networks. She found that these networks can create feelings of “bounded solidarity” that encourage individuals to think and act on behalf of a collective (Bedolla). This has been corroborated across other movements and social situations, including studies of the ties between social networks and resilience in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina (Lipsitz 451).

## Conclusion

Storytelling has been an integral part of DACA Dreamer resistance efforts. But how might it be applied to a broader context of social resistance, particularly intersectional efforts? We may find the beginnings of this answer in the work of the Civic Paths research team at University of Southern California. In the conclusion of this thesis we will explore the work and findings of this research team, and how it has cumulated in a phenomenon they call the “civic imagination.” This concept, when contextualized by what we know to be true of the Dreamer movement, will inform our understanding of the potential for future intersectional resistance through storytelling.

Civic Paths was founded in 2009 as an informal group of graduate students and faculty organized by Henry Jenkins, Provost’s Professor of Communication, Journalism, Cinematic Arts, and Education at USC. Since then, it has garnered national attention, published ample research, organized several in-depth community projects (one of which we will be taking a closer look at here), and established a broad online audience and an active in-person membership of about 30 students and faculty (Civic Paths). Civic Paths, established through the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism<sup>32</sup>, “explores continuities between online participatory culture and civic engagement through outreach, creative work, research, and academic inquiry” (Civic Paths). Their research has produced works like one used frequently throughout this thesis, *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*. Their projects include the Civic Imagination Initiative, the Media Activism and Participatory Politics (MAPP) Project, the Civic Learning Project, Imagine 2040 Project & Symposium, and numerous “world-building” workshops.

The Civic Paths team finds itself existing within and responding to the same sociopolitical climate as the DACA Dreamers. The premise of its existence as a community is similarly rooted in a fundamental desire to affect change. But if we are to continue with our analysis of how they, too, can effectively use storytelling in their efforts as resisters and change agents, there is a crucial difference that must be recognized. DACA Dreamers are responding to an *immediate and total* assault on their most basic rights. It is likely that the members of Civic Paths, while certainly grappling with important issues and how to best mobilize youth to respond to them, face less impending and catastrophic personal consequences should their collective efforts fail. This is not to assume the intersections of race, class, nationality, sexuality, gender, or other identity categories at which they might be situated. (Indeed, biographies of members and content contributors reveal a diverse array of identities, stories, and positionalities, many of which *are* threatened by the ideologies and policies of the new administration.) It *does* assume, however, that there is a level of security afforded by the fact that they are working within one of

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<sup>32</sup> It is certainly worth note from what school the funding and interest for this work emerged. It is no small assertion to say that this work is exploratory, indeed revolutionary, about re-envisaging notions of citizenship and civil duty. How interesting that it stems from Annenberg, and not from a school of law or business.

the most prestigious and well-endowed universities in the United States – if not the world. This fact alone grants them a degree of privilege far greater than that afforded to many Dreamers.

### The “Civic Imagination”

Central to the work of Civic Paths is the idea of the “civic imagination.” This is defined as:

“The capacity to imagine alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions; one cannot change the world unless one can imagine what a better world might look like . . . The civic imagination also requires the capacity to see one’s self as a civic agent capable of making change, as part of a larger collective which has shared interests, as an equal participant within a democratic culture, and as empathetic to the plight of others different than one’s self” (Civic Imagination Project).

Here we may begin to unpack the phrase “civic imagination,” and how it hearkens invocations of the “Dreamer.” The word “civic” denotes (as the above definition suggests) a belonging to a collective, or a citizenship. Civic Paths emphasizes that its definition of a civic imagination is “premised on a dynamic understanding of citizenship” (Civic Imagination Project). Particularly in an age of rapidly changing technology, the basic understanding that social processes and identities like citizenship shape and are shaped by this technology is crucial. Civic imaginations are shared imaginations. Civic Paths claims that civic imagining is a crucial process for activism. “For marginalized communities, imagination becomes a necessity when reality does not seem to be offering them much to work with. Therefore, they have to start by first pushing boundaries in their imagination: one has to imagine themselves in a particular space first before they can participate in it” (Civic Imagination Project). This is not an entirely new sentiment. Author Neil Gaiman shared at the 2013 Reading Agency annual lecture,

“We all – adults and children, writers and readers – have an obligation to daydream. We have an obligation to imagine. It is easy to pretend that nobody can change anything, that we are in a world in which society is huge and the individual is less than nothing . . . But the truth is, individuals change their world over and over, individuals make the future, and they do it by imagining that things can be different” (Gaiman).

Contrary to the images that “imagination” may invoke (i.e. daydreaming, or getting lost in one’s thoughts), civic imagination is an active process. It requires intentionality and determination. These are no passive daydreams; they are radical new imaginings for a profoundly different future.

Gaiman says we have “an obligation” to daydream, to imagine. This rhetoric very closely shadows that of the Dreamer movement. The name “Dreamer,” while owing its title in part to the

DREAM Act, as we will recall, held a number of other connotations. Dreamers dare to imagine (to dream) a different future; and unfortunately at this point in political history, their dreams are nothing less than radical. As we will see, their work is much the same as that of Civic Paths. They imagine a different future, and use storytelling to draw it into the realm of reality.

The civic imagination is a collective one. It necessarily resides in the intersectional space, drawing together voices and narratives of all kinds. However, its creators recognize the limitations of this. “A sense of collectivity is a necessary means, part of the mechanism of any civic imagining, but it is not an ethical end. Ethical civic imaginations must be built on the fact that there are and will be important differences between people” (Civic Imagination Project). In this respect, diversity is not a barrier to be overcome but a gift to be recognized and used. The Institute for the Future (IFF) has a similar understanding of what they call the “public imagination.” They stress the need for an imagination that can be shared within and across diverse communities (“Making the Future With Foresight”). Intersectional resistance (here presented in the form of a civic imagination) can be a powerful means of activism that addresses issues on multiple fronts. But this certainly does not mean that we should ignore our differences in order to do so. Indeed, some resistance efforts must necessarily be premised upon difference. The Dreamer movement, for example, derives much of its power by differentiation. Through their stories Dreamers establish their individuality first, then their community – but it is a community that stands on its own and fights for its rights not in spite of its differences but *because* of them. Attempts to subsume their plight into an intersectional effort run the risk of further identity erasure.

While understanding these key differences is crucial, it is not the primary object of this paper to analyze the costs, benefits and conditions of intersectional resistance (questions that indeed merit extensive study of their own). The object is instead to apply our understanding of storytelling to an intersectional example. Civic Paths has spearheaded a number of projects that center on the concept of the civic imagination. We will now turn to one of these projects, Imagine 2040, in order to better understand the role of storytelling in their efforts.

### **Imagine 2040 Project & Symposium**

The seeds of the Imagine 2040 Project were first sown in June 2013, at a “world-building” workshop hosted by Civic Paths. The first of its kind, this workshop worked specifically with the Muslim Youth Group at the Islamic Center of Southern California. The original purpose of the workshop was to use storytelling as a way to engage with political issues that the community faced. However, in planning sessions with leaders from the center it became clear that these youth first needed a space that encouraged “creative collaboration” and “fantasy” before tackling political issues. During the workshop, students worked in groups to “flesh out discrete narratives under their shared world umbrella,” then filmed each story as a news segment. The segments were then collected and together they made up a “Fantasy Newscast” (Civic Imagination Project). This activity encouraged students to dream up wildly imaginative stories,

especially ones that seemed far outside the realm of reality. This primed the group to dream up sociopolitical realities that were similarly beyond realistic probability. The “newscast” introduced the idea that all of these highly individual and unique stories could coexist in one coherent understanding of a “fantasy” world. This, too, inspired further hope for one cohesive future populated by countless understandings, hopes, perspectives and dreams.

Civic Paths built upon this idea of opening up a space for creation, collaboration, and storytelling in a series of other workshops, catering each one to their audience. They started with specific identity groups, like the Muslim Youth Group, and often with storytelling exercises that didn’t seem to directly relate to political activism. But each workshop built a foundation of creativity and imagination that encouraged further applied practice. These “world-building” workshops culminated in the Civic Imagination Initiative, which launched lectures and workshops at the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change (Austria) and the Media & Digital Literacy Academy of Beirut (Lebanon).

Then on November 28, 2016, exactly three weeks after Donald Trump was elected, Civic Paths held its own internal workshop. The workshop was a direct response to the election, the group’s own reaction to what many were asking themselves: what do we do now? In the workshop, group members generated nine themes: race, geography, government, economics, participatory politics, arts, news, healthcare, social justice, tech, education, and the environment. They knew from previous workshops that storytelling could serve as a tool for “fostering civic imagination and inspiring real world change” (Shrestova). Based on their collective understandings of social and political issues in each of the nine categories, the second part of the workshop invited Civic Paths members to contribute their own individual responses to these issues. One group member reflects, “it gave each of us an opportunity to really delve into that positive future vision that we had generated collectively, but in very personal terms” (Shrestova).

This internal workshop was the launchpad the group needed to envision what would become the Imagine 2040 Symposium, hosted at USC on April 7, 2017. The brainchild of Civic Paths, the symposium was co-hosted by the MacArthur Foundation, the USC Collaboration Fund, and the USC Civics and Social Media research groups. It convened scholars, practitioners, and activists from across the United States and Mexico (Peters-Lazaro). Participants started the day with a “world-building” exercise similar to the one in the internal workshop, in which they collectively imagined what kind of world they wanted to live in in 2040. They then engaged in a number of discussion-based exercises and closed the day by outlining what it would take to turn their imaginings into actions. The Imagine 2040 Symposium, and the research and workshops that preceded it, demonstrate perfectly the importance of storytelling in creating a shared vision of the future. Workshop and symposium participants left with a better understanding of how to apply this new imagination process in their respective work and communities.

Storytelling was a crucial element of these radical imaginings. It was the mechanism with which a world in 2040 was brought into existence in 2017. It was the means by which a diverse group of people could foster one collective vision while honoring difference and individuality.

The power of storytelling is again evident in the publication that arose from the internal workshop and symposium. “Imagine Us, 2040” is an online compilation of stories. These stories, building off many of the original nine themes, are stories of hope for the future in spite of the seeming lack thereof that characterizes our world today. Titles of submissions include “Imagining Balanced News,” “Health Care 2040,” “Everyone Can Travel,” “Native Rights 2040,” “Universal Basic Income in 2040” and “In 2040, Picnic in Peace in the Middle East” (Shresthova). Each individual story includes links to literature and organizations related to the topic, giving readers the opportunity to learn more and to get involved. The introduction to the interactive publication offers readers the chance to submit their own stories of what they imagine for the world in 2040.

Storytelling serves as a powerful tool for DACA Dreamers to articulate individual and collective identity, and in turn to rearticulate the conditions of their humanity. In an intersectional resistance effort such as Civic Path’s Imagine 2040 Project and Symposium, storytelling allows for the collective imagining of a better future while acknowledging and celebrating the differences inherent in the individual visions for manifesting that dream. Both cases demonstrate the potential for storytelling to affect real social change. The irony is not lost here: in a world full of fake news, storytelling may just be what saves us.



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