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The Birth of the DREAMer

Before 2001, "DREAMers" did not exist as a political group. There were hundreds and thousands undocumented youths facing a unique set of problems resulting from their position of being "in-between" countries.[1] As children, they went to school in the United States, played in the streets, watched television, rooted for their home teams, navigated fashions, and developed aspirations to move on to bigger and better things. They absorbed the feelings, dispositions, tastes, and values of America through the everyday interactions that made up their childhood.[2] They were certainly immigrants, but most felt and knew themselves to be of this country. This feeling of being home in the United States, of being "normal" Americans, was disrupted as the children transitioned into early adulthood and tried to pursue activities like applying for a driver's license, opening a bank account, looking for a job, and submitting college applications.[3] Each of these activities required demonstrating proof of residency, a process that precipitated difficult and recurrent discoveries that they did not formally belong in this country. One youth described this type of experience:

> I came to the US when I was six, but I didn't know about my status until I was seventeen. My senior year at high school I tried applying for the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid], and that's when my parents

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> finally had to tell me about the lack of the social [social security number]. I didn't really have an idea. I had no idea what was going on. I had no idea why it was happening to me. There was this overwhelming feeling of being so alone and so, like just "aarrrgh." All of your hopes and dreams are being taken away for no particular reason, and you can't know who to blame. There is nobody to blame and there is nobody you can appeal to. It's just this whole sense of being lost, inside and out. You are so lost. I was so lost. I was really just going through the motions. I was seventeen years old, and I ended up in that space, and I don't know. It just happened.[4]

In addition to being cast out of the national community, the "hopes and dreams" that many grew up with were suddenly "taken away." This sudden experience produces a trauma and consciousness that is shared by many undocumented youth and that is different from immigrants who migrated to the United States as adults.[5]

These common experiences have made undocumented youths a sociologically distinct group of immigrants, but they did not exist as a political group before the 2000s. There were no labels to mark the group's political existence ("DREAMers"), there were no common arguments and stories to express a singular political voice, and there was no infrastructure to foster political connections and consciousness between dispersed youth. There had been several campaigns to win in-state tuition for undocumented youths in the 1990s, but these campaigns were mostly led by state legislators, administrators, and rights associations. Undocumented youths only played residual roles within them.[6] Their nonexistence as a political group at the start of the decade stands in sharp contrast with their major political presence after 2010 when DREAMers emerged as a central player in immigration debates and became a driving force of the immigrant rights movement.

This remarkable development over such a short period of time stems from early efforts to pass the national DREAM Act. During the early 2000s the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) and Center for Community Change played instrumental roles in raising the issue in Congress, developing a strategy to push for the DREAM Act, crafting a representation of undocumented youths and their cause, and representing them directly to political officials. Given the lack of experience

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of undocumented youths in national-level activism, immigrant rights associations possessed the resources needed to transform the grievances of undocumented youths into a legitimate political voice in the public sphere.

Operating in a rather hostile and xenophobic environment, the leading associations of the early DREAM campaigns needed to craft representations of undocumented youths that would convince liberal and conservative audiences alike. They stressed the youths' deep cultural and social ties to the United States and their ongoing contributions to the country. By representing them as virtuous Americans, immigrant youths would be transformed from threats to the national community into sources of economic, civic, and moral rejuvenation. Although this strategy was successful in building public and political support, activists and advocates confronted a new dilemma because of it. By stressing the attributes, such as cultural assimilation and being college students, that made undocumented students into "good" and deserving immigrants, those who failed to possess these same attributes were by default less deserving. Crafting a compelling message was extremely important, but developing a method to "stay on message" was just as important. The leading associations also developed an infrastructure to train and discipline undocumented youth activists to stay on message in the public arena. These training sessions helped inculcate youth activists into the DREAMer discourse and shape their views and feelings concerning their undocumented status and their position in the country.

The process described here helped transform thousands of different undocumented students into the political group of the DREAMer.[7] It was a group that bore a common label, infrastructure, and goals, but it was also a group with common subjective and emotional dispositions. As individual youths became DREAMers, their common subjectivities, identity, and emotions fueled commitment to their cause.

Undocumented Youths as the Exceptional Immigrant

The large immigrant rights demonstrations in 1994 were a messaging debacle. In the demonstrations against California's punitive Proposition 187, marchers carried flags from Mexico, Central America, and

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other immigrant-sending countries. To the immigrant rights activists the display of flags was empowering and reinforced their ties to one another. But to their opponents, the flags were seen as defiantly foreign.[8] Anti-immigrant forces used images from these demonstrations to bolster their arguments that immigrants represented an existential threat to the country. Having learned the lessons from these demonstrations, immigrant rights advocates looked to craft a message in the 2000s that stressed assimilation over distinction and conformity over difference. American flags were now widely disseminated at public demonstrations and flags from other countries were pushed out of sight. The move to embrace American symbols and silence displays of foreignness and otherness has been a central plank of the movement's representational strategy.

This strategy has strongly influenced how national immigrant rights associations represented undocumented youths and their cause. Lead organizations believed that if they were to gain support from conservative and liberal publics alike, they needed to establish a direct connection between undocumented youths and core American values. The authors of the original piece of federal legislation developed the DREAM acronym (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) to create a direct connection between the cause and core national values associated with the American dream. Rather than being a foreign threat to the country, these immigrants were presented as the exact opposite: extensions of the country's core historical values and a force of national reinvigoration.

The immigrant rights associations leading the DREAM campaign crafted a discourse of undocumented youths that rested on three main themes. These themes have intersected to form the "master frame" through which undocumented youths and their cause would be represented in the public sphere for years to come.[9]

First, it has been important to embrace American symbols and mark the group's distance from foreign symbols. One DREAM activist remarks on the importance of American symbols in representing themselves and the cause, observing, "We have brought in the Statue of Liberty into the recent campaign. Why? Because this is important to remind people what we stand for as a country."[10] They not only stressed

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national symbols like flags and the Statue of Liberty but also national values. Another DREAMer adds, "The key values that we stressed were fairness, hard work, and self-determination. Those are our key values that we always try to come back to. Like, 'The DREAM Act is a policy that supports fairness and rewards hard work.' These are key American values. We were talking about the values that this policy supports."[11] The emphasis on national symbols and values has been aimed at winning over the support of a broad and sometimes hostile public. "Yeah, that whole spiel about being 'good Americans' is strategic messaging.[12] The aim of it all is to gain support from people in conservative places."[13] The flip side of stressing national conformity is to stress distance with "foreign" symbols:

> *That is something we all agree on. You can never have a Mexican flag waving at your rally.* One time we said, "Hey, wouldn't it be cool to have a rally showing our different flags, you know, flags from Mexico, Korea, Honduras, etc." But then we said, "No, we have to be careful because we're in Orange County [a very conservative area of southern California] and people are going to take it the wrong way." *We thought it would be nice to celebrate the fact that we are from all over the world but we didn't want to risk it.*[14]

Stressing the qualities that make these youths wholly "American" requires the use of overt national symbols (for example, flags, statues of liberty, graduation gowns, and so on) and rhetoric. Demonstrating national belonging has also encouraged the display of tastes, dispositions, tacit knowledge, and accents that would be considered distinctly American by natives. They have been shown to engage in the same activities, eat the same foods, cheer the same sports teams, and embrace the same aspirations as any other American in their peer group. They are cheerleaders, they love the Lakers, they speak perfect English, and they dream of becoming middle class, just like any "normal" person. By stressing their American cultural attributes, they demonstrate that they have internalized American values and that these values are inscribed in bodily dispositions. To use Norbert Elias's term, they have deployed their "national habitus" in strategically purposeful ways.[15] For many early supporters of the DREAM Act, their qualities as "de facto" Americans made the youths exceptional and deserving an exemption from the country's ex-

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clusionary immigration laws. "These children are de facto Americans but their hopes are being dashed on a daily basis."[16] Demonstrating national identification has been a means for this "other" to reveal its "normalness" and common humanity with the native. It allows them to present themselves not as breaking with or "threatening" the norms of the country but ensuring continuity.

Second, in addition to stressing the attributes that make undocumented students "normal" Americans, DREAM advocates have also drawn attention to their most exceptional qualities. They are indeed "normal" American kids, but they are also the "best and the brightest" of their generation. The former director of the California Dream Network explained:

> This message comes from the facts because that is their experience. Many of these students are going to school and succeeding in spite of terrible barriers. The only strategic part is that we have focused on the crème de la crème, the top students, the 4.3, the valedictorian. We have always been intentional of choosing the best story, the most easily understood story, the most emotionally convincing story. So, we have always been intentional but that story also runs true: young person comes, realizes they are undocumented, faces terrible constraints but does good anyway because those are the things their parents taught them.[17]

The image of the straight-A immigrant student rebuts the stereotype of immigrant youths as deviant and delinquent. Moreover, because these students are the "best and the brightest," they stand to make an important contribution to the country. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has drawn on this line to justify his support of the DREAM Act. "The students who earn legal status through the DREAM Act will make our country more competitive economically, spurring job creation, contributing to our tax base, and strengthening communities."[18]

Third, the stigma of illegality has long been used by anti-immigrant groups to undermine the legitimacy of immigrant rights claims. DREAM advocates and supporters have sought to cleanse youths of this stigma by absolving them from the "guilt" of having broken the law. The youths cannot be considered fully "illegal." They did not "choose" to cross the border and therefore cannot be held accountable for breaking

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the law. A DREAMer in the 2007 campaign argued, "I didn't ask to come here, I was brought here. With kids like me, you're truncating their future."[19] The phrase, "no fault of their own" became a standard talking point used by DREAM Act advocates in various campaigns. This talking point has resonated widely with the media and national politicians. "The bill could pass the Senate because it is intended to benefit young people who grow up in the United States and are illegal immigrants as a result of decisions by their parents."[20] This theme has shown to be extremely resilient and continues to be used by leading officials and politicians supporting the DREAM Act. The secretary of homeland security reiterated this point in her support of the DREAM Act in 2010. "The students who would gain legal status under the bill have no fault for being here in the United States because they were brought here when they were children by their parents."[21] Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid employed a similar argument to voice his support of the bill: "If there is a bipartisan bill that makes sense for our country economically, from a national security perspective and one that reflects American values, it is the DREAM Act. This bill will give children brought illegally to this country at no fault of their own the chance to earn legal status."[22] Another DREAM Act supporter, the president of Arizona State University, argued that passing the act would be a way for these youths to vindicate their "innocence": "There are thousands and thousands of students who were successful in public school, who did everything right and didn't do anything wrong on their own. *The bill is their pathway to innocence.*"[23]

These themes highlight the attributes that make this group exceptional and deserving of legalization. By countering stereotypes, the themes cleanse the youths of the three main stigmas attributed to undocumented immigrants. The undocumented youths are normal Americans (and not irreducibly foreign), the best and brightest (and not free-riding welfare cheats or terrorizing gang members), and bear no fault for their immigration status (and not truly "illegal"). One longtime activist notes, "Everything is pretty clear-cut. We know what we need to say and we need a solid image. We're basically debunking all the stereotypes, promoting ourselves as people with good character—to counter all the bad stereotypes of immigrants. You don't want to give the media any reason to be against us."[24] While these themes structure the representations

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of undocumented youths, advocates transmit variants of these themes through an emotionally compelling "storyline."[25] The storyline maintains that undocumented youths were brought to the country as children (no fault of their own), learned to become good and hardworking Americans, have overcome major barriers in the pursuit of the American dream, and were now not allowed to realize the dream because of their immigration status. By connecting the personal difficulties of individuals to a very public storyline, activists have been able to articulate their argument in an emotionally compelling way.

This representation has been crafted for the primary purpose of producing an exceptionally good front stage persona of undocumented youth in an inhospitable political environment.[26] The more the campaign sought to convince conservatives in hostile areas of the country, the greater the need for clear, simple, and sympathetic representation of these youths and their cause. A former organizer of United We Dream notes:

> Yeah, we need to stick to the DREAM Act talking points that have been in place for ten years. You know, no fault of their own, best equipped, positive for the economy, and of course the pro-America thing. You have to say these things because we are trying to reach people in Iowa, Missouri, Utah, and North Carolina. If you want to reach these people, you have to stick close to these talking points because they work really well with people in these places.[27]

Producing a good front-stage persona of the DREAMer also requires silencing utterances, acts, and symbols that would raise doubts about their legal innocence, contributions to the country, or loyalty to America. The backstage complications and identities of *real* immigrant youths, their complicated national loyalties, sexualities, conduct, and so on, could not be allowed to seep onto the public stage because they would complicate the core message and imperil the cause.

After establishing youths as an exceptional and deserving group of immigrants, advocates argue that it would be an injustice to deny them the right to stay, live, and thrive in the country. They have done everything right and played by the rules. In spite of their efforts to overcome enormous hurdles and be good and contributing members of society, they are denied the legal right to stay in the country. The DREAM Act is about fairness and justice because it provides people who have fulfilled

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their part of the bargain an equal chance to realize the American dream. Denying these exceptional youths, these de facto Americans, the right to stay in the country would not only be a profound injustice but it would also be moral lapse of the country. President Obama drew on this argument to express his support of the DREAM Act: "It is heartbreaking. That can't be who we are. To have kids, our kids, classmates of our children, who are suddenly under this shadow of fear, through no fault of their own."[28] What makes the case of these youths morally shocking for President Obama is that these are "our kids" who are forced to live in the "shadows of fear" due to factors that are "no fault of their own."[29]

DREAM advocates have not only won over strong supporters among traditional allies, but they have also won over the support of some traditional adversaries. As a candidate in the 2008 Republican presidential primaries, former Governor Mike Huckabee spoke sympathetically of the youths and their cause, "In all due respect, we're a better country than to punish children for what their parents did."[30] Even more telling, the director of the anti-immigrant association Numbers USA was willing to cede ground when it came to undocumented students, saying, "I could support legal status for some young immigrant students. However, I would do so only if Congress eliminates the current immigration system based on family ties and imposed mandatory electronic verification of immigration status for all workers."[31] During the 2012 Republican presidential primaries, Governor Rick Perry justified Texas's policy of granting in-state tuition to undocumented youths on moral grounds: "If you say that we should not educate children who have come into our state for no other reason than they have been brought there by no fault of their own, I don't think you have a heart."[32] The effort to create a compelling representation of the youths as exceptional immigrants has in fact swayed some leading conservative figures to recognize the attributes that make them deserving of an exemption from restrictive immigration laws.

Differentiating Between "Good" and "Bad" Immigrants

The representation of undocumented youths and their cause has presented advocates and DREAMers with an important dilemma.

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Stressing the attributes (normal Americans, best and the brightest, no fault of their own) that made undocumented youths into exceptional immigrants who deserve legalization helped make their cause a legitimate political issue. However, those not possessing such attributes (for example, unassimilated, recent arrivals, adults, poor and low skilled, "criminals") could be seen as less exceptional and therefore less deserving of legalization. Moreover, demonstrating belonging in America has been coupled with efforts to distance themselves from the stigmas associated with the general immigrant population. The process of de-stigmatizing undocumented youths has therefore contributed to differentiating between "deserving" and "undeserving" immigrants.

The representation of undocumented youths has rested on the effort to stress the group's assimilation into the American value system and its break from the cultural and moral worlds of sending countries. During the 2007 campaign, one DREAM activist noted, "All I'm hearing now is that I'm Colombian, but I've never really been there. I have no memories of the country where I was born and I do not speak articulate Spanish. They are taking me from my home in America and sending me to a dangerous country that I don't even know."[33] Arguments like these have stressed that youths are wholly assimilated and that the countries of their parents are as foreign and other to them as they are to any "normal" American. The director of United We Dream maintained, "Maybe our parents feel like immigrants, but we feel like Americans because we have been raised here on American values."[34] Differentiating youths from the countries of parents helps reinforce a message of national conformity, but it also reinforces dominant representations of these places and their peoples as other, foreign, and incongruent with the American value system.

DREAM Act advocates have also sought to cleanse undocumented youths of the stigma of "illegality." They have argued that youths cannot be held accountable for their legal status because they did not choose to migrate to the country. However, in making such an argument, the assumption is that those who made the "choice" (parents) are culpable for crossing the border and staying in the country "illegally." Claiming

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innocence for youths has inadvertently come at the cost of attributing guilt to parents. This has allowed youths to be cleansed of the stigma of illegality, but it has also reinforced the stigma for parents. The double-edged nature of this rhetoric has continuously been reflected in public expressions of support by liberal political officials:

- ''It's [current immigration law] penalizing children for *mistakes* that were made by their parents."[35]
- "It's unfair to make these young people pay for the *sins* of their parents."[36]
- "The bill could pass the Senate because it is intended to benefit young people who grow up in the United States and are *illegal immigrants as a result of decisions by their parents.*"[37]

On Senator Richard Durbin's web site, a link prompted undocumented youths to submit their stories as part of the broader campaign to pass the DREAM Act. The link stated, "The DREAM Act would allow a select group of immigrant students with great potential to contribute more fully to America. *These young people were brought to the U.S. as children and should not be punished for their parents' mistakes.* If you are an undocumented student that the DREAM Act would help, I hope you will share your story with me."[38] This request for stories also provides youths with a model to structure their own personal narratives. This double-edged rhetoric has also resonated with media supporters. Lawrence Downes, a frequent editorial contributor to the *New York Times*, provided the following sympathetic portrait of an undocumented youth: "Ms. Veliz is here illegally, *but not by choice*. She arrived from Mexico with her parents in 1993 on a tourist visa. She was eight. She had never lived in the United States before but has lived nowhere else since. By all detectable measures, she is an American, a Texan."[39] Thus, the assertion of innocence for undocumented children and youths has been coupled with the attribution of guilt for parents.

The discursive differences drawn between deserving and less deserving immigrants plays into the categories used by policymakers to decide where to draw the line between legalizable and unlegalizable immigrants. They employ these categories to inform where to draw the real line between immigrants who deserve legalization and those who

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deserve deportation. In an early statement of support for the DREAM Act, Senator Richard Durbin argued that it would help the government to better distinguish between good immigrants and criminals: "We have to distinguish between those who would do us harm and those who came to our country to pursue the American dream and are contributing members of our society."[40] Six years later, Janet Napolitano used a similar argument: "Passing the DREAM Act would help immigration authorities focus their resources on deporting dangerous criminals."[41] Support for devising a path to citizenship for "good" immigrants (youths) has therefore been justified on the grounds that it enhances government capacities to direct its resources against truly threatening immigrants.

Most of the leading DREAMers have been conscious of the dilemma posed by this discourse and have found no easy way to resolve it. The former director of the California Dream Network remarked, "It perpetuates the good immigrants and the bad immigrants, and that the good immigrants are the ones who look like me and talk like me. And the bad immigrants are ones who don't know the language and choose not to learn it."[42] Most DREAMers place responsibility for this dilemma on the national rights associations and politicians, which developed the messaging strategy of the early campaigns. One prominent DREAM activist notes, "Painting us as the good immigrant has not necessarily been a positive thing. We were painted that way by people who were working hard to pass the DREAM Act but not necessarily the DREAMers themselves."[43] Another DREAMer goes on to note, "We noticed that at the federal level, politicians, activists, and national organizations highlighted those students at the top, the cream of the crop but they forget that there are more students at the bottom than at the top."[44] The former director of the California Dream Network nuances these assertions by stressing that the strategy emerged at an early phase when immigrant rights leaders were uncertain of what they were doing and cautious about the hostility facing all undocumented immigrants in the country. "Much of this was a reflection of the early strategies. It was all very new to talk about these things. In this context it was important to cover all your bases, to show this top student, let them know that we're not what they think."[45]

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Since 2010, there have been concerted efforts to rectify the problems associated with the past discursive strategy. "Now, when we come up with messages, we try to highlight everything, the many different realities of undocumented students. We try not to highlight only one section of the reality and generalize from that."[46] Describing the complex and messy lives of youths generates a more realistic representation, but it is a representation that is less compelling than one highlighting the few attributes ("one section of the reality") that make these youths exceptional. The image of the good immigrant that was constructed in the earlier period is reinforced by the media's strong preference for the more traditional representation of the DREAMer. "It's an old strategy and it just stuck because the media likes it and wants it. This is a good thing because we get our message out there and people like what we present. But, it's not good because it doesn't leave room for anything else. If we try to veer from the message and present something else, the media will say, 'Oh, can we just talk to a real DREAMer?'"[47] By "real," the journalist implies the sympathetic public figure (de facto American, best and brightest, innocent) crafted in the earlier mobilization cycle. When DREAMers deviate from the script and assert a more accurate portrait of their lives and struggles, the media loses interest and pushes them back into the public and front-stage persona. The master frame used to represent immigrants in the early cycle of mobilization has constrained the messages and representations of a newer generation of activists and advocates. This newer generation finds itself bound in a particular discursive path that contributes to the reproduction of the themes and their associated dilemmas.

Controlling the Message and Messenger

The ability of rights associations and DREAMers to forge an effective political voice has depended on generating a compelling message, but equally, it has depended on controlling the ways in which thousands of diverse activists and advocates talk about the cause in the public sphere. Sticking to the talking points has been just as important as the talking points themselves. Poorly disciplined activists produce a cacophony of different utterances, acts, and performances in the public sphere. The

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general public would more likely see this as the "noise" of a threatening foreign mob than a compelling and legitimate "voice" from a deserving group of immigrants.[48] The importance of message control encouraged the leading associations to build an infrastructure to discipline how thousands of activists across the country have talked and represented the struggle.

Prominent national associations like National Immigration Law Center and the Center for Community Change helped form a network of DREAM-friendly associations called the "United We Dream Coalition" in 2007. This coalition was made up of youth activists and immigrant rights leaders seeking to pass the DREAM Act as part of Comprehensive Immigration Reform. Participants in this coalition and its follow-up organization, United We Dream, connected through weekly conference calls to discuss the political and messaging strategies of the campaign. After failing to pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2007, rights associations and youth activists developed a permanent organization to support the youth component of the struggle. United We Dream has played an important role in controlling the DREAM message. It served as a site where national rights associations worked with youths to produce core messages. Professional communications experts working for national associations helped create compelling frames and stories that resonated with politicians, the public, and the media. They knew how to tap core values, convey values through convincing frames, identify strategic targets, and modulate arguments for different audiences. Through their good relations with influential journalists and producers covering immigration issues, they also enjoyed access to local and national print, radio, and television media. They used this access to put stories "out there" and frame the ways in which these stories were told in the media. These communications experts possessed a unique set of resources that allowed them to exert a degree of control in shaping the message and representations of the DREAM campaign. United We Dream not only was a center for producing messages, but also it became a central training center for activists around the country. It attracted talented youth activists to its Washington, DC, office for workshops and internships. These DREAM activists were trained in the nuts and bolts of producing effective messages and running campaigns. Once youths were provided

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with extensive training, they were expected to go back to their home organizations and diffuse these skills to local activists. Lastly, United We Dream also reached outside of their office in Washington, DC, In addition to holding regular retreats and conventions for DREAMers nationwide, the organization sent staff and interns from the central office to perform training sessions across the country.[49] This national reach made it an important node for producing and diffusing the DREAM message across activist networks.

State and local DREAMer organizations also arose during this time, connecting up to and complementing the work of United We Dream. The Center for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) spearheaded one of the most prominent and well-developed of these organizations. CHIRLA was a member of the national Reform Immigration for America (RIFA) and an ally of the leading immigrant rights associations. In 2007, CHIRLA initiated an effort to integrate A.B. 540 groups (college-based support groups for undocumented students in California) into a single statewide network. The California Dream Network played a similar role as United We Dream, but the organization was more formal, centralized, and vertically integrated. The organization was made up of three regions—Northern, Central, and Southern California—with each region connecting most of the A.B. 540 groups in their respective areas. Each region selected a steering committee of three representatives, and they coordinated activities and discussions with the network director, a paid employee of CHIRLA.

To ensure the autonomy of the campus organizations and the Network from CHIRLA, a measure was introduced into the network's by-laws to guarantee autonomy in decisions concerning strategies, campaigns, and actions. The network director's role was not to impose the "CHIRLA-line" in a top-down fashion but to use information provided by CHIRLA to help inform the network's actions, messages, and campaigns. The director functioned as a mediator and broker between the needs of the network and CHIRLA:

> We are Network organizers but we are also CHIRLA staff. CHIRLA as a larger organization has needs. This is a 50/50 responsibility. So, let's say the Network develops a strategy and message that differs from CHIRLA, then I

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> have to be the bridge between both. I'll say to CHIRLA, "Well, the students say this." And then I'll go to the Network and say, "Hey, CHIRLA staff thinks this." You try to maintain a neutral ground but at a certain point you have to take a position on these matters and try to find a solution.[50]

Another one of the founding members of the network stressed the ambivalent nature of this relation. CHIRLA intended to create an autonomous political space for undocumented youths, but it would also benefit from its control over one of the largest networks of DREAMers in the country. "Even though their [CHIRLA] intention was the right one, to create a space for all these groups to talk to each other, they were also smart. Providing that space for the youth to talk to one another would provide them with some control over it. So whenever a bigger campaign was initiated, they would be the ones able to move a statewide youth network to do the work and get the message out there."[51] As political officials sought out DREAMers for events and campaigns, CHIRLA became the "go-to" organization within the immigrant rights community. "People [politicians] come down to find the student groups because they knew that the student groups were a good media sell and they were good organizers. They were just vying for that grassroots base."[52] CHIRLA was able to enhance its power in the field of immigration politics by becoming the gatekeeper to one of the country's largest grassroots networks of DREAMers.

The California Dream Network and CHIRLA worked with national associations to produce messages, and these messages were diffused through the network's statewide infrastructure. Message diffusion was performed through bimonthly meetings (telephone and in-person) between the network director and regional steering committees. Workshops, regional summits, and retreats have become very important methods to diffuse the messages and messaging frames to individual DREAMers across the state. These events assembled individuals from different communities and backgrounds and provided them intensive training in messaging. Training in "storytelling" has been a particularly important part of these events.[53] Immigrant rights advocates have long understood that the most effective method to deliver a message to the general public was through a morally compelling story.[54] This

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understanding of the unique power of the story strongly informed the messaging strategy of the DREAM campaign. "We tell them that storytelling is the most important way of getting our message across, in organizing, lobbying, in media outreach, in everything."[55]

A good story depends on a person's abilities to blend their own compelling life histories with the generic narrative employed by the campaign. The generic narrative stresses several main points: the hardships facing them as children, their abilities to overcome difficult barriers and continue to strive for the American dream, and the burdens posed on them by an unjust, immoral, and broken immigration system. Placing one's personal life within this general narrative structure enables the DREAMers to convey their message in a morally and emotionally compelling way to the general public. For new recruits, telling a compelling story has not been natural. The personal peculiarities of one's real life have tempted most new recruits to veer "off-message" or to personalize the story too much. This has required intensive and ongoing training in storytelling. "We've gone through several trainings. Your story has to show how this legislation will benefit you personally, how it will benefit others in your community, and how it will benefit the country. Now, when people ask me how to write their story, I say to include something about themselves but also tie it to everybody. Don't personalize it too much."[56] Another DREAMer confirmed the importance of training sessions for telling a good story: "This is a training that we provide. We tell them how to tell their story in a compelling way. How to connect it to the national level, how to connect it not only to their own personal problems but also to society as a whole."[57] After new recruits develop stories with the right balance of the personal and general, they perform their stories repeatedly to their fellow DREAMers. These sessions allow DREAMers to comment on each other's stories and share techniques in crafting and performing stories. One veteran DREAMer recounts the importance of training sessions in constructing his story:

> For me, the members at that time really empowered me too—because I didn't even know how to tell my story. There was no beginning or middle or end for me. And so, through them I was able to structure my story, and be able to tell it. Within a few months, I was empowered to share my story,

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> not only here, but also publicly. For me, that became very real. Once I began sharing my story, it became something else. I was ready to be involved, to risk more than I thought I could risk.[58]

Through a process of telling and retelling their stories to one another, newly recruited DREAMers have internalized the general narrative into their own thinking and feelings about their lives as undocumented youths in the country. This enabled them to become highly effective and committed deliverers of the DREAM message in the public sphere.

Following these training sessions, DREAMers have been expected to return to their local colleges to diffuse the messages and messaging skills to members of their local campus support groups. Having acquired the message and skills, they are expected to impart these skills on to new recruits coming up through local campus organizations. More experienced members of the network have also visited campus groups and provided additional training and support. For example, one DREAMer recounts:

> *Interviewer*: And learning storytelling has occurred through workshops on campus?
>
> *DREAMer*: Yeah. We had an organizer come to one of our meetings to talk about how storytelling is done, and then after he explained what the story was, we then went ahead with one-on-one trainings.[59]

Well-trained activists with the network visited localized campus groups and trained new recruits to employ the generic discourse of the DREAM campaign in compelling ways.

Making the DREAMer Through Networks

The formal infrastructure created by United We Dream and state and local-level organizations like the California Dream Network has also helped expand the social networks of DREAMers. These organizations created real spaces, such as support groups, retreats, meetings, conventions, and so forth, where undocumented youths could connect to others like themselves, discover commonalities, and apply the DREAM

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discourse to interpret their common realities. By connecting individuals to a broad and supportive community, these networking spaces create nurturing environments that enable individual youths to "come out" about their status in public and begin to think of themselves as DREAMers.

Networking spaces have provided opportunities for emotionally intensive exchanges between youth activists. These have been important moments in which youths share the trauma of discovering their status, the shame and stigma associated with it, and the countless barriers they face. At its regular retreats and workshops, California Dream Network has consistently organized "ice breakers" and other emotionally intensive activities. These exercises have been described by participants as "therapy sessions" because they provide participants a safe space to share their stories and feelings with others. One member of the California Dream Network described an activity:

> We have a training called "Step Up to the Line." This training helps students see their differences but also their similarities. Sometimes we say, "Step up to the line if you have a family member who is currently in the process of deportation." So we do those trainings to highlight the fact that everyone is in the same boat and that all of us are being affected by the broken immigration system. That allows them to open up and see the human aspect and connect emotionally to other people.[60]

Lead organizers therefore built connections between individual youths by revealing commonalities through emotionally intensive exercises and activities.

For most participants, these sessions were the first times they spoke openly about their undocumented status in public. While many youths have been quite apprehensive about this, they learned that they could trust other participants to validate their feelings, fears, and hopes. One DREAMer recounts her first experience in a student meeting:

> I was so scared but I did it—I don't know why I would ever do it. Just being in those spaces and meeting people, and *feeling like it was okay to be me* and it was okay to be involved, it wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. I felt good. I saw that my status didn't need to limit me in the ways that I thought

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> it would. And it didn't need to stop me. It didn't mean that everybody would hate me or would want to stop me from doing things. *It was the opposite: I was doing things because of my status. I was giving a speech in front of people and they were all, happy for me, supporting me. I think feeling that really helped me a lot.*[61]

The group provided this youth with a safe and supportive space to come to terms with her newly discovered status. This was an important and cathartic moment. The support provided by this group of undocumented youth made it possible for her to be herself ("feeling like it was okay to be me") and to view her status as a source of empowerment and not just a stigma and constraint ("I was doing things because of my status").

These intensive interactions have infused participating DREAMers with high levels of "emotional energy,"[62] which has helped reinforce commitment to one another and to the general movement. One DREAMer describes how attending California Dream Network retreats made him feel "pumped up" and more dedicated to the cause: "We encourage new members to go to the retreats so they come back pumped. This happens very often and that is how I got more involved in the movement. I was a member of my campus group. Then I went to a retreat; I got very pumped up and got much more involved in the community."[63] When asked why the retreat pumped him up, the respondent stressed the importance of developing connections to other people like himself: "You see that you are not just working by yourself on your college campus. There are people in Santa Barbara or Berkeley who are going through the same struggles. You realize that you are not alone and that if you bring more people on board, you can make bigger changes. We learn that we are not alone and this pumps us up to keep up with the struggle."

Emotionally intensive interactions harness strong bonds between DREAMers, but these emotional interactions also facilitate their abilities to internalize the discourse and develop a political and social identity as a DREAMer:

> It's like when I had a gay friend tell me "it's like coming out of the closet"—to say you're undocumented is a really big thing. But as they become more involved in the movement, they eventually embrace it—not all of them, but the majority of them embrace their identity. They realize that "undocumented" is just an imposed identity by the Government, and that is not who

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> they are—that they are human beings and they shouldn't be afraid of saying that they are undocumented. They are students and human beings. I think this process takes months, years. But they eventually get to that point where they don't feel afraid of saying, "I am an immigrant from this country. This is my culture and this is who I am."[64]

Some undocumented students had been active in politics before entering college, but few had developed a distinctive political identity on the basis of their undocumented status. Emotionally intensive workshop, retreats, parties, and "coming-out" events have fostered collective recognition of themselves as undocumented students with politically distinctive goals, needs, and cultures.

Geographical proximity has allowed DREAMers in the same city to sustain their contacts through regular meetings and socializing events. In the Los Angeles area, CHIRLA has become a regular meeting point for DREAMers across Southern California. Network members from metropolitan Los Angeles gather there regularly to work, socialize, and address issues about various campaigns. The organization has a formal meeting space for the DREAMers and work cubicles for activists spending the day at the office. Geographical proximity has also enabled the DREAMers to connect to one another through social events like parties, fundraisers, and informal leisure activities. While these activities have often been fun and social, they have also played an important role in strengthening bonds between activists and commitments to one another and the struggle. One DREAMer remarks on the importance of these socializing events

DREAMer: At the end of every event we decide, "Okay, let's organize a social party at someone's house," and that helps us to keep developing the relationships. So, I think our lives revolve around having fun too, not only organizing but also spending time with friends. That is another critical component.

Interviewer: Do these kinds of relations help your organizing work?

DREAMer: Yeah, definitely. I have been able to develop very personal relationships where they trust me, where I trust them, and where if I ever need something from them, they show up.

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> And they do the same thing with their own members. And when we say, "We're having a fund-raising party at someone's house and we need people to show up," I just call them and they say, "Oh don't worry: we'll be there."[65]

Interactions in intimate spaces of daily life (CHIRLA office, campus clubs, parties, events, and so on) have functioned as moments where activists share their fears with one another, celebrate accomplishments, reinforce their belief that their cause is just and right, and express doubts about their situations and concerns over the movement's direction. These face-to-face interactions foster feelings of trust in other DREAMers and emotional commitment to their general cause.

The Internet has also been an important medium for producing and sustaining social networks. Facebook, Twitter, web sites, online petitions, and blogs have connected individuals. The Internet has provided a straightforward means to transmit basic information concerning campaigns, scholarships, and options for undocumented youths. Web sites, blogs, and social media have become important sources to diffuse the messages and talking points of the movement across the country. Highly frequented web sites employ standard frames, talking points, and sound bites. The web site of United We Dream, for instance, employs a tight narrative to describe the situation of undocumented youth. It also provides activists with scripts and talking points to address the media, legislators, and members of the public.[66] In addition to transmitting messages and information, social media tools have been instrumental in coordinating meetings between the leading DREAMers. One member of the network's steering committee discussed the centrality of this function:

> I have brought up many tools to help the Steering Members organize the Network more efficiently. The use of technology is our most important tool—we use Facebook, Gmail, Yahoo, and Google groups and also Wiggio. Wiggio is very important: imagine Facebook, Twitter, Gmail, Skype combined. It helps small groups to facilitate and collaborate. It's a really powerful and useful tool. We've been using Wiggio and Gmail as one of our primary tools to organize, and it has proven extremely useful and effective.[67]

In addition to coordinating meetings, social media services like Twitter,

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Facebook, and blogs provide DREAMers opportunities to discuss the arguments, messages, and symbols generated by the leading activists of the movement. When messages or arguments are posted to Facebook, for instance, DREAMers have the opportunity to assess, critique, or support them. Participating in these constant online deliberations concerning messages and strategies, DREAMers remain engulfed in the movement in their everyday worlds. Their online social experience becomes consumed by DREAM talk and exchanges. The boundary between the private world of youths and the public world of the DREAMer breaks down as the activist is constantly enmeshed in dialogue and exchanges over what it means to be a DREAMer.

Online and offline networks are strategic mechanisms for socializing new activists into the discourses of the DREAM mobilization. They learn the discourse, assess the meaning and value of particular messages, and come to understand their own particular circumstances through the narrative structure and themes of the movement. They learn not only to speak the language of the movement but also to feel the language.[68] An organizer from the California Dream Network remarked:

> I knew my status was a really big obstacle, but I never felt comfortable saying that I was undocumented. But then after becoming involved in IDEAS [his campus support group] and the California Dream Network, I think *it changed the way I think and the way I see life*. Eventually, in less than a year, I saw the whole picture and I became extremely involved. *Building those relationships with other students, listening and hearing what they had to say about their own personal experience—it took time*.[69]

The process of becoming a DREAMer has therefore been as much an intellectual process as it is has been an emotional and social one. Networking spaces functioned to support youths negotiate and undergo their complicated struggles of coming to political terms with their immigration status.[70]

Spreading the DREAM Across Public Arenas

The organizations and social networks have helped connect scattered campus-based groups to one another and bring dispersed youths

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into the public sphere. As new recruits have been taken from their private worlds and brought into the public sphere, this organizational and social infrastructure has provided them with the discourse and training to present their arguments for rights in a disciplined and consistent fashion:

> Before we [his campus support group] joined the network, we thought about messaging but not strategically. We just focused at the campus level; we were basically living in a bubble. When we became part of the California Dream Network, it just opened doors and helped us see the larger picture. *So now when we talk about messaging, we see the California Dream Network, we get updates from the network, we decide what we should be doing, what we should be saying.*[71]

These experiences have trained DREAMers to become disciplined messengers in different public arenas, for example, schools, campuses, public meetings, media, and so forth. Armed with a tight message and excellent training in message delivery, DREAMers entered their public worlds and worked to shape ideas and gain support within them. DREAMers have been quite effective in penetrating and framing their message to the English- and Spanish-speaking media. They have also been extremely effective in penetrating the smaller and more obscure arenas that constitute public life.

DREAMers have targeted college campuses. They have used their messaging skills to recruit supporters among campus administrators and faculty; to enter public debate through tabling, participating in campus-based forums, and writing letters to campus-based newspapers; and to recruit new undocumented students. When informal campus groups have gained sufficient levels of support, many have gone on to establish charters and become formal student organizations. The formalization of support groups has permitted access to institutional resources and support from colleges and universities, including money, office space, technology, organizational assistance, and public space. Access to these resources enhanced their abilities to strengthen their public presence on these college campuses. This has by no means been an easy process and often involves protracted conflict with a range of hostile campus-based adversaries, such as conservative clubs, students, administrators, and faculty.

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Campus-based DREAMers in California have also advanced their struggle off campus. They have spent much of their time visiting community meetings, public events, churches, and schools to tell their story. Direct communication to local audiences increases support and draws in recruits and allies to the struggle. By telling their compelling stories at different community events, DREAMers can also shape local narratives and the ways the public thinks about DREAMers and their cause. High schools have also been an important part of outreach efforts. DREAM activists use their personal relations with old teachers, counselors, and administrators to gain access to high schools. They visit their former schools, talk to teachers and counselors, tell their stories to the students, and provide important information concerning the possibilities of attending community college and university. UCLA's campus-based group IDEAS, which had been an important affiliate of the California Dream Network, has developed one of the most sophisticated outreach strategies in the country:

> First it started with the same schools that we went to. Even until today, when new students come, we encourage them to go back to their schools and give workshops in their schools—even giving information if they don't feel comfortable giving a workshop. We will go with them. And I think that is the encouragement that a lot of our members feel. It's not just that they should go do it, but "we'll go with you to do those workshops." We also have a Counselor's Conference, and so outside of helping students with recognizing that they can continue going to school, we also acknowledge that a lot of the times there needs to be a systematic change with how things are run in the school district. So we also target counselors. This past year we had over one hundred counselors from LAUSD [Los Angeles Unified School District] and the OC [Orange County] school district come to UCLA. We gave them a workshop on what it means to be undocumented students and what it is that they can tell their students. We don't tell them to tell the students that everything is going to be perfect, but to tell them that it's possible.[72]

Each contact with high school students, counselors, teachers, and administrators has provided another opportunity for DREAMers to retell their stories to familiar and new audiences. This has influenced the ways in which school personnel and students think, perceive, and talk

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about these youths. It has also provided undocumented high school students important support to know that there are many other people in their situation, there is no shame in being undocumented, and there are still ways to achieve their dreams in spite of their legal status. Spreading the DREAM message through these highly localized public arenas has therefore influenced the identities and aspirations of undocumented high school youth; provided counselors, teachers, and administrators the language and information to support these youth; and served to recruit students, teachers, and counselors into the general struggle.

The infrastructure used to produce and diffuse the messages therefore enabled leaders and activists to achieve a high degree of messaging control. The experience and cultural resources of the leading immigrant rights associations enabled them to retain control over how messages were produced and expressed publicly. They used their central position within the infrastructure to produce messages and diffuse those messages to state and local organizations across the country. This downward diffusion process enabled the leaders to retain a certain degree of control over how DREAMers thought and talked about their struggles nationwide. It also allowed leaders to penetrate and influence the discourses in highly localized and scattered public arenas around the country (campuses, schools, churches, community organizations, local media markets, and so on). The process of downward diffusion largely rested on the constant training of undocumented youth in the art of effective messaging, with many DREAMers being directly or indirectly trained to become well-disciplined messengers. By training students to play these roles, they have gained the capacities to frame the ways in which people on their campuses, communities, cities, states, and country have thought about the DREAM Act and the injustices facing undocumented youth.

The training of DREAMers also imparted cultural and symbolic resources away from the leaders and to the newly activated DREAMers. The DREAMers have learned how to construct effective messages, transmit these messages to the media and other important publics, and use language and symbols in highly effective ways. In a very short period of time, these inexperienced youths acquired the cultural and symbolic capital to make them highly skilled and professionalized activists in their own right. Soon, they would become less dependent on the immigrant

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rights associations to construct and spread their messages, becoming leaders of their own movement in both name and deed.

The DREAM Act arose as a central issue during the presidential election in 2012. Both Barack Obama and Mitt Romney expressed their admiration for this group of immigrants and provided different ideas to resolve problems concerning their status. While the Republican candidate advocated the hard-line of no exemptions for any undocumented immigrants during the primaries, he shifted to a more mainstream position of supporting some kind of exemption for this group during the general elections. Considering that this political group of immigrants simply did not exist twelve years before, their emergence as a central figure in national immigration debates is a remarkable feat.

The process of constructing this group involved creating an effective message and social and organizational infrastructure. This not only gave the group a public presence, but also it provided opportunities for undocumented youths to connect to one another and become acquainted with the discourses framing the group in the public sphere. By being brought in through these networks, they became familiar with the language of the DREAM campaign, using the language and stories to construct their own political subjectivities and identities. Through such a process, individual undocumented youths became a political group of DREAMers, with common ways of performing, feeling, and expressing themselves in the public sphere. Such a process empowered the group to become an important force in national immigration politics, but it also planted countless splits in the group. These splits would quickly grow into gaping cleavages between the different individuals, organizations, and factions making up the DREAMers. Cleavages posed important risks to their struggle and to the broader immigrant rights movement while at the same time introducing new opportunities for the evolution of both.

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