

**Examining Racist Nativist Microaggressions  
On DACAmented College Students in the Trump Era**

Valerie Gomez  
*University of California, Irvine*

Lindsay Pérez Huber  
*California State University, Long Beach*

**Abstract**

Within public discourses of immigration, immigrant Communities of Color are increasingly targeted by expressions of racist nativism—a form of racism that has historically targeted Latinx communities that is based upon real or perceived immigrant status that in turn, assigns a foreign identity that justifies subordinating practices and policies. Beginning with his presidential campaign, Donald Trump has advanced racist nativist discourse that framed undocumented Latinx immigrants as “invaders” and “criminals.” This paper examines how these discourses impact Latinx DACAmented college students through their experiences with racist nativist microaggressions within and beyond their college campuses. Findings indicate these students are targeted by this type of microaggression, shaped by the anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx political discourses that the Trump administration advocates. Analysis of 10 in-depth interviews with Latinx DACAmented college students reveals that as a result of Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric, students are becoming more fearful and uncertain of their future. Even still, we found students felt empowered to resist this racism, remain resilient, and maintain a sense of hope.

I just feel that it's scary in a way that so many people came out of their shell. Now all of a sudden if you're racist and you have something on your mind you're just going to say it. They don't really care about considering other people's feelings or anything. Maybe it's for the simple fact that Trump did it. Maybe they think, he can do it, and he is our president.

–Leticia<sup>1</sup>, undocumented college student

## Introduction

Since his presidential campaign, Donald Trump has framed undocumented Latinx immigrants as “criminals” and “invaders” who are responsible for the economic decline of the country and a threat to national security.<sup>2</sup> In September 2017, the Trump administration announced it would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, one that allowed undocumented youth (many of whom are college students and graduates) to apply for temporary protection from deportation and the right to work in the U.S. In May of 2018, the administration unveiled a zero-tolerance policy that mandated the prosecution of every individual who entered the U.S. illegally, as a migrant caravan approached the U.S.-Mexico border, many Central Americans seeking asylum to escape the violence and death that threatened their livelihood at home (Morrissey, 2018). Many have described the policy as creating a “humanitarian” crisis as the children of many migrant parents entering the U.S. were taken away from their parents and sent to separate detention centers, often hundreds of miles away (Carcamo and Repard 2018; Jordan 2018).

The administration's inhumane immigration policies continue to propagate fear and trauma among immigrant communities across the U.S.<sup>3</sup> In addition, research has shown that the inhumane perspectives and white supremacist ideologies that undergird the administration's stance on immigration have led to “a discursive opening for others with similar beliefs to...reinforce racist nativism, creating a space to more comfortably preform white supremacy” (Pérez Huber 2016, 241). Indeed, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has found that hate crimes have significantly increased since the presidential elections of 2016. The UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) found Students of Color report more hostile public schooling environments and increased negative socio-emotional and academic outcomes as a result of the current political discourse (Rogers et. al. 2017).

This paper will examine how the current anti-immigrant political discourse has manifested in the lives of DACAmented Latinx college students. We begin by providing a brief overview of the DACA program and how the program has benefited its recipients, like those who participated in this study. DACA has provided thousands of undocumented individuals with access to work permits that have allowed recipients to work legally in the country. While DACA afforded recipients a sense of security, the future of DACA under the Trump administration remains uncertain. Then, we outline the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks and methodology.

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<sup>1</sup> pseudonym

<sup>2</sup> Trump, Donald. 2015. “Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech” *TIME*, July 16, 2015. <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>

<sup>3</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, as of June 23, 2018 over 2,000 separated minors were being housed in U.S. Health and Human Services funded facilities (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018).

This study utilizes a racist nativist framework to examine how racist nativist microaggressions impact the experiences of DACAmented Latinx college students. In the context of the Trump presidency, our analysis illustrates how racist nativist microaggressions have become more commonplace within and outside of higher education spaces. We conclude with a discussion of the findings that highlight how undocumented Latinx students are affected by, and respond to, racist nativist microaggressions.

### **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**

On June 15, 2012, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), under executive action of President Barack Obama, announced the DACA program. The program allowed certain undocumented people who meet specific requirements for eligibility to receive a temporary two-year work authorization and defer deportation removal. Some requirements set by U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) for those seeking consideration of DACA were that they arrived in the U.S. before 16 years of age, had continuously resided in the U.S. since arrival, and were under the age of 31 by June 15, 2012 (U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement 2018).<sup>4</sup> To be eligible, an applicant must also have been enrolled in school, graduated high school (or earned a GED), or have been an “honorably discharged veteran” of the U.S. military. Furthermore, applicants could not have been convicted of a felony or any significant misdemeanors.

The DACA program was in effect for five years until it was rescinded on September 5, 2017 under the direction of President Donald Trump. The most recent data published in July 2018 by the USCIS shows that there had been just over 800,000 applicants approved under the DACA program while it was in effect (USCIS 2018). Since DACA was rescinded, there have been multiple lawsuits challenging the Trump administration’s actions to halt the program. The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) reports that lawsuits in the federal courts of California, New York, Maryland and Washington D.C. have enabled DACA renewals to continue for those who had already been approved under the program, and currently ensure that USCIS will not share DACA recipients’ private information for enforcement purposes (NILC 2018). However, USCIS is no longer accepting new DACA applications.

During the time DACA was implemented, research had found that it produced positive outcomes in the lives of those who received approval. For example, González and Terriquez (2013) found that the majority of DACA recipients were able to obtain employment and driver’s licenses, half opened bank accounts, and a large share were able to open lines of credit. Similarly, Amuedo-Dorantes and Antman (2017) found that DACA significantly impacted the likelihood that DACA recipients would make the transition from schooling and into the labor market. Overall, DACA had been found to increase educational and occupational outcomes of its recipients (Pérez Huber 2015). Despite the empirical data that showed its positive impacts, the fate of DACA recipients remains uncertain.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was originally theorized in the legal field to examine how law and policy structure racial inequality into U.S. social institutions to reproduce institutional racism and “maintain the legacies of white supremacy and related systems of accumulated privi-

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<sup>4</sup> DACA eligibility requirements remain on the USCIS website as “archived content,” and are currently available for reference purposes.

lege” (Montoya and Valdes 2008). Scholars extended CRT into the field of Education, as a theoretical framework that examines the ways People of Color experience and resist racism and structural oppression within and beyond educational institutions. CRT’s five central tenets focus on the intersectionality of race and racism in the experiences of People of Color, challenge dominant, deficit ideologies that pervade beliefs about Communities of Color, and encourage an interdisciplinary approach to undertaking Critical Race analyses. Finally, an overarching goal of CRT is social justice for Communities of Color (Solorzano 1998). As an extension of CRT, Latinx Critical Theory<sup>5</sup> (LatCrit) provides “a more focused lens for researchers to examine the experiences of Latina/o communities” (Pérez Huber and Cueva 2012, 393). LatCrit examines issues unique to the Latinx communities including immigration, ethnicity, culture, language, phenotype, and sexuality (Solorzano and Bernal 2001). Through a LatCrit analysis, scholars developed the conceptual framework of racist nativism.

As a conceptual framework, racist nativism is historically situated and examines how Latinx communities have come to be perceived as non-native, and thus, not belonging to the construct of an “American” identity. It is a tool that examines how the intersection of race and immigration status impacts the lives of Latinx communities in the United States (Pérez Huber, 2009). Pérez Huber, Benavides Lopez, Malagón, Vélez & Solorzano (2008) define racist nativism as:

The assigning of values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is to be perceived white, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the right of whites, or the natives, to dominance. (43)

In the current moment, racist nativism informs dominant beliefs about Latinx immigrants as a perceived threat to “American” identity, national security, and the economic welfare of those perceived to be “native,” historically constructed as whites (Johnson 1997). In this study we utilize racist nativism to illustrate how racist nativist microaggressions impact the experiences of Latinx DACAmented college students.

## **Racial Microaggressions and Racist Nativist Microaggressions**

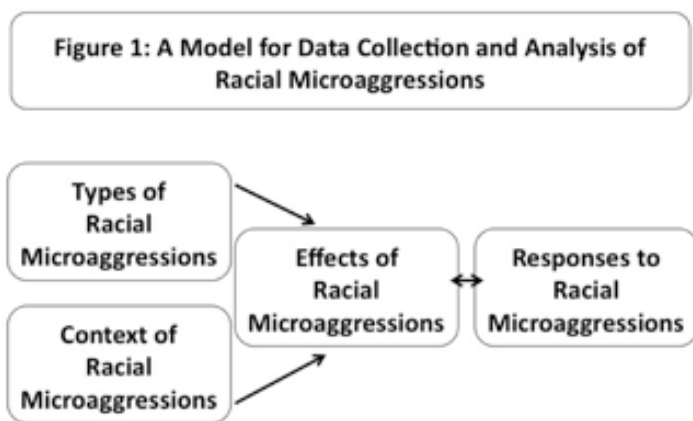
Racial microaggressions is a concept grounded in more than four decades of scholarly research. The term was first coined in 1970 by Harvard psychiatrist Chester Pierce to describe the “subtle and stunning” forms of racism encountered by People of Color (Profit, Mino, and Pierce 2000, 265). Pierce developed the concept of racial microaggressions from his research that examined the effects of extreme environments on human physiological and psychological well-being. Pierce argued that the subtle racism African Americans experienced in their daily environments caused traumatic stress over time that took a toll on one’s physical and mental health (Profit, Mino, and Pierce 2000).

Racial microaggressions have been further theorized in Education using a CRT framework. Solorzano and Pérez Huber (2015b) explain racial microaggressions are a form of systemic racism that (a) are verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out automatically or unconsciously; (b) are based on a Person of Color’s race, gender, class,

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<sup>5</sup> Latinx Critical Theory (LatCrit) has been changed here from the original “Latina/o Critical Theory” to remain consistent with the term *Latinx* we use throughout this paper.

sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and c) are cumulative—taking a physiological, psychological, and academic toll on those targeted by them. This definition extends the research of Chester Pierce to articulate some of the critical elements of racial microaggressions, as experienced by People of Color. Important to note is that the study of racial microaggressions from a CRT perspective is different than other approaches. For example, the study of racial microaggressions in counseling psychology focuses much analysis on how the unconscious participation in microaggressions is harmful to whites, or, the perpetrators of racial microaggressions (Sue 2010). The study of racial microaggressions from a CRT perspective focuses analysis on how People of Color are targeted by racial microaggressions and how they impact these communities over time. In fact, CRT scholars in Education have developed a model to examine these dynamics (Kohli and Solorzano 2012; Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2015a; Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2015b).



According to the figure there are:

1. Types of Racial Microaggressions—How one is targeted by microaggressions (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, class, language, sexuality, immigration status, phenotype, accent or surname).
2. Context of Racial Microaggressions—Where the microaggression occurs (e.g. in schools, stores, doctor’s offices, business meetings, on the street)
3. Effects of Racial Microaggressions—The physical, emotional and psychological consequences of microaggressions (e.g. self-doubt, anger, stress, racial battle fatigue, poor academic performance, poor health outcomes).
4. Responses to Racial Microaggressions—How the individual responds to interpersonal and institutional racial microaggressions (e.g. denial, self-policing, proving them wrong, resistance, counterspaces).

This study examines one type of racial microaggressions in the higher education experiences of Latinx DACAmented college students—racist nativist microaggressions. Racist nativist microaggressions examine the specific intersections of race/ethnicity and immigration status (real or perceived) that contribute to discursive constructions of Latinx people as non-native to the U.S., and justify their perceived subordinate status. These types of microaggressions are systemic,

everyday forms of racist nativism directed toward People of Color automatically and unconsciously (Pérez Huber 2011). In the lives of the DACAmented students in this study, racist nativist microaggressions are used to explain the daily subjugation encountered within and outside of the university context.

## Methodology and Data

*Testimonio* as a methodological approach guided by a CRT theoretical framework was utilized in this study. *Testimonio* originates in Latin American human rights struggles as a tool to uncover, give voice to, and empower communities subjected to violence and oppression (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2012). *Testimonio* differs from other qualitative research methods (i.e. oral histories) in that it “challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance” (Delgado Bernal, et al. 2012, 563). *Testimonio* allows individuals to share their experiences of oppression and resistance and can function as a form of healing. It values the experiential knowledge of People and Communities of Color and challenges ideas of who can be holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, et al. 2012). Based on collaborative efforts with her research participants, Pérez Huber (2009) further theorizes *testimonio* as “a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist, injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (644). The process of *testimonio* is a collaborative effort that exposes the oppressive realities of our communities and empowers the witness and *testimonialista*<sup>6</sup> to find their shared humanity.

Using a purposeful sampling method, ten interviews were conducted with ten self-identified Latinx DACAmented college students in the fall of 2016. At the time of the interview, each of the students were enrolled full-time at a University of California (UC) campus or at a California State University (CSU) campus and had been approved under the DACA program. Participants’ academic standing ranged from first-year students to seniors who were completing their fifth year at university. The majority of the participants identified Mexico as their country of birth and indicated that their native language was Spanish. The interviews explored the students’ migration stories, collegiate experiences, experiences with racism and discrimination, and their reactions to the anti-immigrant rhetoric employed by Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential election. The data was analyzed by utilizing a CRT lens to uncover thematic categories that revealed their experiences with racist nativist microaggressions (Patton 1990). Prior to engaging in the preliminary data analysis process, copies of the interview transcriptions were shared with each of the participants to ensure that their stories were represented accurately. Data analysis occurred in two stages: preliminary themes emerged from the data and themes central to LatCrit such as race, immigration status, language, and phenotype were intentionally foregrounded. Preliminary findings were also shared with the participants in an effort to receive feedback and to engage the participants in the research process.

## Findings

In the following sections we provide the findings that emerged from the participants’ *testimonios* and foreground the participants’ experiences with racist nativist microaggressions, before and after the 2016 presidential election. We utilize the types, contexts, effects, and responses

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<sup>6</sup> Person giving their testimonio.

model (Figure 1) to analyze the racial microaggressions participants experienced, while using a racist nativism lens. Here, we explain our findings that illustrate the multiple ways DACAmented Latinx college students experience and respond to racist nativist microaggressions.

### **Racist Nativist Microaggressions**

As we described earlier, types and context are two foundational components of racial microaggressions. In this section, we show the ways that participants were targeted by racist nativist microaggressions, as a type of racial microaggression (see Figure 1). Participants primarily described this type of racial microaggressions as verbal, with perpetrators who were often university staff and politicians. The context in which the participants experienced racist nativist microaggressions also varied, happening mostly in school settings, but also included other contexts, such as public space. Throughout their *testimonios*, the participants recalled constantly experiencing racist nativist microaggressions throughout their lifetimes beginning in childhood to the present day.

Brenda, an undocumented student studying political science and Chicano/Latino studies, remembered the first interaction that she had with a staff member after she was admitted to university. She explained

When I got accepted to [this university], I called financial aid because I had some questions and I was like, ‘Is there anything else I could do?’ and the lady was like, ‘No, there isn’t.’ I was asking about loans, and at that point undocumented students still couldn’t get loans from the university itself. The lady was like, ‘Honestly, you should be grateful because people like you shouldn’t even be getting money in the first place.’

Brenda remembered feeling caught off guard by the financial aid administrator’s response. She was so shocked that she immediately hung up. After reflecting on the incident, Brenda felt angry and confused about how an individual who does not support undocumented students could be employed at an educational institution that claims to value diversity. Many of the participants noted that while they have experienced various racial incidents throughout their lives, Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy has created an environment in which people feel more comfortable vocalizing their racist nativist beliefs.

Alejandra, an undocumented student who was born in Mexico and arrived in the U.S. when she was three years old, was studying biomedical and clinical engineering at the time of her interview. She described feeling shocked about the anti-immigrant rhetoric present throughout the 2016 presidential race.

I think I was one of those people that believed, yes, there was still racism but it wasn’t as bad as a few years ago. But after all of this [the elections], you realize, no, this is just as bad as a few years ago. Regardless of the Civil Rights Movement and all of the other progress we’ve made so far, racism is deeply embedded in this country. It was just hidden under fear. Now that Trump has opened that window, a lot of people have taken that as an opportunity to express and open up just how bad this situation really is. The fact that this country is still deeply racist, it shocks me because we are taught in school that [racism] is bad.

Alejandra explained that her views about race and racism in the post-Civil Rights era were challenged by recent incidents targeting immigrant Communities of Color. The public rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric has made her more aware of the systemic racism that is deeply embedded in U.S. society. Like Alejandra, another participant, Margarita (a freshman studying Language, Culture, and Society) believed that Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric encouraged others to be more vocal about their racism and bigotry. Margarita described an incident that occurred the night of the election while her and her friends (all Latinas) gathered outside of their residence halls. She shared,

We heard, 'We're going to rape you, shut up.' It was coming from the third floor of [a residence hall]. It was all the students who were gathered and they were all Republicans and they were screaming at us. I also started hearing people on the sides saying, 'We're going to build the wall. We're going to build the wall. Yes, Donald Trump! Make America Great.' They kept chanting.

In this account, Margarita explains how she was targeted by violent and explicit threats of sexual assault by her male white peers in her dorm, as they celebrated Trump's election. It was clear from the celebratory context of Margarita's experience, that the threats made by these male students were certainly influenced by the election that had happened that night. What is most shocking is that these male students felt it appropriate to make this threat in public space, where such a threat could be considered the ultimate form of raced and gendered subjugation when directed to Margarita, an immigrant female woman. This example shows how intersectionality emerges in the ways that Women of Color are targeted by racist nativist microaggressions.

Maritza, an undocumented student who immigrated from Mexico to the U.S. when she was eleven years old, also discussed the various racist nativist comments she heard throughout the presidential race. She explained, "Something I hear a lot is 'oh, Mexicans are here and immigrants are here because they want to take the Americans' jobs or the U.S. citizens, their jobs. That's not really true. If anything, we are earning jobs because they're well deserved, not because they're for free.'" Maritza described hearing various statements throughout the presidential race about undocumented Mexican immigrants stealing jobs from U.S. citizens. She challenged those false assumptions by arguing that undocumented Mexican immigrants are hardworking and are hired based on their skill set.

### **Effects of Racist Nativist Microaggressions**

Another component of the racial microaggressions model is the physiological and psychological effects of racial microaggressions (see Figure 1). This study found that exposure to racist nativist microaggressions impacted the participants in various ways. While many of the participants shared being more cautious in public settings, having a sense of fear, and feeling defeated, others shared feeling empowered to tell their stories and to pursue their academic and career goals. Kimberly, a junior studying mathematics and linguistics, explains how the contemporary anti-immigrant climate has made her more cautious about sharing her undocumented status with others.

I know a lot of people who are undocumented have come out of the shadows and have become very vocal about their own struggles and maybe that's the way to go. I think after

the elections I found myself in that place too, where it's like you have to speak, you have to speak. The media is telling you to do that and deep inside you know that you have to. But then yes, there is just this fear that you don't want to be targeted because you don't have—right now with DACA you do but then if its taken away then you don't have any sort of protection.

Kimberly explained that although many undocumented immigrant youth had become more vocal and open about their undocumented status she felt conflicted about sharing her own struggles. After the presidential election, Kimberly began to feel empowered to speak out about her status but feared being targeted. Despite feeling some sense of protection by having DACA, the uncertainty of the program informed her decision to remain “in the shadows”.

Like Kimberly, Alejandra also shared feeling a sense of fear as a result of the contemporary anti-immigrant climate. She explains,

Sometimes, I am afraid and my mom is definitely a lot more afraid. Every time I go out, she's like, 'just be careful. Don't do anything that will draw attention to you. Just stay hidden.' I don't really like that. I don't want to live in fear but I know she has a point. She was like that before because of my DACA; she was afraid I was going to lose it. Now the fear's growing and I know that every time I walk out of the house, she sees the possibility that I might not return or that they might not be there when I come back.

Alejandra explains that Trump's threats to eliminate the DACA program throughout his presidential campaign and his subsequent election created a climate of fear for her and her mother. Alejandra's mother constantly cautioned Alejandra to remain hidden by not drawing attention to herself in public spaces. Despite the protection from deportation that the DACA program provided Alejandra, Alejandra still feared being deported and separated from her family. This was a common theme among the participants. Many of them lived in constant fear of deportation and were reminded of their vulnerability every time they left the safety of their homes.

In addition to the sense of fear many of the participants experienced, participants also shared feeling angry and frustrated about the messages they heard. Veronica, a junior studying political science and sociology, explained the frustration she felt:

It angers you and it frustrates you and it makes you want to just give up sometimes. Because you're just like, well they think I'm already a criminal. Or they think that I'm just not going to make it that far. But then you go back and you're like no, it's better to prove them otherwise.

Veronica was an excellent student who excelled academically. Her academic and professional goals included pursuing a law degree and becoming an immigration attorney. She explained that sometimes the constant anti-immigrant messages were so overwhelming that she felt like giving up. However, instead of giving up, she transformed her frustration and anger into motivation to succeed and prove that undocumented immigrants are more than criminals.

Brenda, who at the time of the interview was an intern for a political campaign and had aspirations of becoming a politician, explained that she was initially apprehensive about taking classes that explored Latinx issues. She explained, “I always avoided classes that had to do with Latino politics because it just brings up weird stuff for me. I personally feel like if stuff about

immigration comes up, I don't feel like my points are valid because I am undocumented so I'm too close to it. I'm obviously incredibly biased.” Brenda had developed internalized beliefs about that her commentary on undocumented issues were not valid because of her undocumented status. She continued to explain that the anti-immigrant rhetoric throughout the presidential race informed her decision to add a second major in Chicano/Latino studies.

I feel if it hadn't been for this, I wouldn't have done Chicano/Latino Studies. But I felt I needed to understand my history and the Latino community's history and background in order to understand why we are the way we are now. And I feel it's really helped but if it hadn't been for the elections I wouldn't have done Chicano/Latino Studies.

Brenda explained that before the presidential race, she was not aware of the various issues impacting the Latinx undocumented immigrant community. When she began hearing racist nativist comments targeting Latinx immigrants she was prompted to learn about the community by taking Chicano/Latino studies courses and ultimately adding it as second major.

An, a senior who was studying international relations and anthropology, explained that she had not processed her emotions as they related to the current anti-immigrant climate. She explained:

To be honest with you I haven't really dealt with [my emotions]. I put them aside and I was more focused on what's next, how can I help, what's going to be the plan of action. I don't want to focus on me personally because -- I don't know what to feel or think. I just-- I haven't really dealt with it. I was just angry and disappointed, but I didn't want to feel anything else beyond that. Because I was scared of what I was going to dig into. Even now I just don't want to go in to those emotions because I feel like that's not going to be helpful. What's going to help is try to have a plan or help others.

An was afraid of what she would encounter if she allowed herself to process her emotions. Instead, she focused her energy on creating a plan of action through her involvement as a member of the undocumented student club on her campus.

### **Responses to Racist Nativist Microaggressions**

Throughout their *testimonios*, the participants also described how they responded to racist nativist microaggressions. While many of the participants shared feelings of fear, anger, and empowerment, they also shared how they challenged racist nativist microaggressions. Many of the participants turned to protests as a form of activism and resistance. Although DACA granted the participants a sense of protection, few of the participants ever felt comfortable speaking out about their undocumented status. As a result of the anti-immigrant climate, Veronica explained that she no longer wanted to remain silent about her undocumented immigrant status. She shared, “There comes a point where you can't just stay quiet anymore.” Veronica no longer wanted to allow fear to dictate how she made meaning of her identity. Instead, she wanted to become an advocate for herself and the undocumented immigrant community. She continued, “It just makes me want to go out there and be like, hey, I'm undocumented and I'm nothing like what [Donald Trump] is saying.” The 2016 presidential race added a new dimension to the experiences of the participants.

Earlier, Margarita explained an incident that occurred the night of the election in which a group of male republican students who proudly supported Donald Trump threatened Margarita and her group of friends with rape. That same night, Margarita participated in her first protest. She recalled, “It was a peaceful protest...and we kind of like felt strength in the whole entire protest. But me as an undocumented student, it's my first official protest so I felt fear. What's going to happen, if people start doing stuff, what's going to happen?” The night of the presidential election, Margarita and her friends formed a large crowd outside of their residence halls that developed into a protest. Margarita remembered feeling conflicted about her participation. Initially she felt strong and powerful but then she began to think about her safety and about what her parents would think. She continued:

Then I started getting scared because my mom and dad never want me to be at a protest. I was like what are my parents going to say? I called them later. I was so scared like what's going to happen? My mom was like ‘*que bueno hija que estas bien y que estabas ayi por nosotros*<sup>7</sup>.’ Wow, that felt amazing.

Soon after the protest concluded, Margarita hesitantly called her parents to tell them about her participation. Margarita was happily surprised when her mom thanked her for advocating for immigrant rights and their family. Like Margarita, Brenda also shared becoming more empowered and developing a sense of activism. She explained, “I go to rallies or I try to. I've been to a couple this - I've been to three this year. So, whenever they have rallies, I try to go to rallies to show my support.” Brenda's activism is new and was spurred by the recent political climate.

While many of the participants described developing a sense of empowerment and a desire to be more vocal about their undocumented status, others were less willing to become involved in protests. Leticia, a senior studying liberal studies and Spanish who immigrated to the U.S. when she was 9 months old, explained that she refused to participate in public demonstrations for fear of being arrested or harmed by counter-protesters. Instead, she explained, “I can prove them wrong by even going to school. We're not all uneducated. We're not all rapists, all lazy people, not going to school, only taking their money, kind of thing. I'm here, living on my own. Nobody's helping me.” Leticia underscored the fact that she has worked since she was fourteen years old picking strawberries to help support her family. She considers herself a hard worker and prides herself in not taking assistance from others. She moved thousands of miles away from her home to pursue a college degree and maintained two jobs to support herself and to send money back home to her mother and her younger brother.

Alejandra, whose sense of safety is confined to her home, also discussed being cautious about attending demonstrations. She shared:

I remember there was this one rally a few years ago in LA. It was a really big protest that I really wanted to be a part of. But it was during school and my mom was afraid because there had been previous rallies that week and cops showed up and stuff. My dad was able to participate in it and I was able to watch them on TV because the news stations went out there as well.

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<sup>7</sup> “I am glad that you are safe and that you were fighting for us.”

Alejandra has never participated in a protest and does not see herself doing so in the future. Instead, she combats racist nativism by focusing on her academics. She continued, “If I can’t participate and protest I can fight it through continuing with my education and not letting it affect me negatively.”

## Conclusion

In this paper, we utilized racist nativism and racial microaggressions to examine the ways DACAmented Latinx college students are targeted by everyday racism. The experiences of these students also revealed that the racist nativism that Donald Trump has, and continues to profess has certainly influenced the way these students were targeted by racist nativist microaggressions. The findings also showed that they anti-immigrant political discourse has exacerbated the participants’ sense of fear and uncertainty. While some examples provided by the participants can be influenced by long-standing deficit and racist perceptions of Latinx immigrants, it is clear that their experiences with racism was shaped by the election of Trump.

The participants’ *testimonios* also revealed the various effects these racist nativist microaggressions had on the participants. As they shared in their *testimonios*, many participants became emotionally distraught as they recounted experiences with discrimination based on their race and immigration status. These findings highlight the trauma caused by racism. The *testimonios* also revealed that the participants became hyper-aware of how others perceived them, reflecting racist nativist perceptions that pervaded the anti-immigrant political discourse. Indeed, these findings provide insight into the ways that undocumented students are targeted by a form of racism that their U.S. born peers may also encounter when racialized as immigrant (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). However, DACAmented (and undocumented) communities face potential consequences of their status, and uncertain futures, and particularly in this political moment. Finally, the data shows the ways that these students responded to the racist nativist microaggressions they encountered, some developing a sense of empowerment to pursue their academic and professional goals and prove the racist views of immigrants wrong. Others were empowered become involved in the immigrant rights movement and engage in activism to directly challenge anti-immigrant discourses.

Solorzano & Yosso (2002) describe majoritarian stories as stories rooted in racial privilege that “privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (28). One can then characterize the majoritarian stories about undocumented Latinx communities as racist nativist majoritarian stories that employ the same privileges, while also assigning the privilege of unquestioned nativeness. In response to the racist nativist majoritarian stories, the participants were determined to create counternarratives of undocumented immigrants by excelling academically and achieving their professional goals. Delgado (1989) argues that the process of counter-storytelling has two primary functions. First, it can be a process of self-preservation and healing for members of out-groups and second, it “emboldens the hearer, who may have had the same thoughts and experiences the storyteller describes, but hesitated to give them voice” (2437). Not only do counter-stories challenge dominant ideologies but they are also a tool for resistance and survival (Delgado 1989). In this study, the participants’ *testimonios* served as counternarratives that challenge racist nativist perceptions of Latinx immigrants in the United States.

Since the time of the interviews, numerous events targeting Latinx communities have unfolded throughout the U.S. In May 2018, a U.S. Border Patrol agent in Montana detained two

women, both U.S. citizens, for speaking Spanish at a gas station (Silva 2018). That same month, a video surfaced of a white man in New York threatening to call Immigration and Customs Enforcement after he heard two women speaking Spanish at a restaurant (Karimi and Levinson 2018). These events highlight how racist nativism disrupts and endangers the daily lives of People of Color. Future research should examine the emotional well-being of undocumented students and the effects of racist nativist microaggressions on People of Color generally, and Latinx undocumented communities specifically. Despite the participants' pervasive experiences with racist nativist microaggressions, the participants maintained a sense of hope as they navigated anti-immigrant climates on their campuses and in public space. Maintaining hope allowed the participants to see beyond their current circumstances and mediated their concerns of the Trump presidency. Hope enabled the students to develop a high sense of optimism in themselves and in their futures despite the uncertainty of DACA. While the participants acknowledged the legal barriers that undocumented immigrants encounter, hope transformed their ability to see new opportunities and possibilities for the future.

Alejandra concluded her *testimonio* with this:

I think people should be valued by the amount of dedication they put into something, by their human qualities, not by anything else. And I think it's a bittersweet moment for all of us, for our communities. But my message is of hope. And I think we'll find a way to make it through these four years.

Indeed, Alejandra reminds us that hope is what moves forward a more just future for us all.

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