

# “The War Still Continues”: The Importance of Positive Validation for Undocumented Community College Students After Trump’s Presidential Victory

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## Abstract

Using the conceptual frameworks of validation theory and socioemotional development, this study investigated undocumented/DACAmented community college students' emotional reactions to Trump's presidential victory and whether educators and/or administrators offered positive validation after the election. The study sheds light on current practices that may exacerbate students' stress or push students to stop out and provides recommendations for educators and administrators to address the needs of undocumented community college students during difficult political times.

## Resumen

Este estudio investigó las reacciones emocionales de estudiantes preparatorianos indocumentados (DACAmentados) a la victoria presidencial de Trump y si los educadores y, o administradores ofrecieron validación después de las elecciones. El estudio iluminó prácticas actuales que pueden exacerbar la tensión en estudiantes o empujar estudiantes a darse de baja, y provee recomendaciones para educadores y administradores que pueden satisfacer las necesidades de estudiantes preparatorianos indocumentados durante tiempos políticos difíciles.

## Keywords

validation theory, socioemotional development, undocumented students, community college, political efficacy, student protests

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## Introduction

On the first week after Donald J. Trump's presidential victory, Efrain<sup>1</sup> walks into my office visibly distraught. He has been my student for 2 years and often comes to me for advice. In our previous conversations, he expressed fear about the possibilities of Donald J. Trump's presidential victory because he is undocumented/DACAmented.<sup>2</sup> Like thousands of students, Efrain was frightened that Trump would keep his campaign promises to eliminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) permit, heighten border patrol security, and increase deportations. Efrain was born in México, came to the United States at a young age, and received a DACA permit under Barack Obama's 2012 DACA policy. The DACA policy allowed students to file applications to receive a permit through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Enforcement Services as long as they did not have a criminal record; the purpose of the DACA permit was to allow students to work while going to school and to provide some relief from deportation (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). According to recent data, over 750,000 undocumented students have applied for a DACA permit (Krogstad, 2017).

Efrain attends a community college because he could not afford to attend a 4-year university and his family depends on him financially. Although data are spotty because many undocumented youth remain in the shadows (Anguiano & Nájera, 2015), some researchers suggest that approximately 200,000 to 225,000 undocumented students are enrolled in higher education institutions (Mulhere, 2015), which increased in comparison with data that pointed to 7,000 to 13,000 undocumented students who enrolled in higher education institutions in 2012 (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012). Additional data illustrate,

About 200,000 to 225,000 undocumented immigrants are enrolled in college, accounting for about two percent of all college students. While approximately 25 to 30% of all 16 to 24 year olds enroll in college, only about 10% of undocumented immigrants ages 16 to 24 appear to do so. When they do, they are more likely to attend 2-year colleges. (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2015, pp. 1-2)

Researchers have noted that community colleges are incredibly important for the protection and advancement of immigrants' education (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009; Terriquez, 2015) and they are a principal "gateway into higher education" for undocumented students (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2012, p. 1). These public institutions are "at the forefront in promoting increased educational access and attainment for undocumented youth" (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2012, p. 3).

Efrain was 1 of 18 students whom I talked to in the first 2 weeks after Trump's presidential victory. Using a conceptual framework of validation theory (Rendón, 1994, 2002) and following studies that look at the socioemotional development of undocumented students (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013; Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010; Santos & Menjivar, 2013), I interviewed undocumented/DACAmented community college students to understand

their emotional reactions and, importantly, to uncover whether educators and/or administration offered positive validation during the tough sociopolitical time in our country. My hope was to shed light on current practices that may exacerbate students' stress or push students to stop out (Terriquez, 2015). Understanding undocumented students' emotional responses during difficult political times is important for their well-being and the nurturance of productive social relationships with allies, non-documented youth, and communities at large (Santos & Menjivar, 2013). I include recommendations for educators and administrators to address the needs of undocumented community college students during difficult political times.

## Validation Theory

Rendón's (1994) validation theory posits that nontraditional, underrepresented, culturally diverse, and marginalized students do not integrate or become involved in college campuses the way that traditional students do. Contra classical student integration, departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987), and involvement (Astin, 1984) models, Rendón's purpose was to promote an understanding of students who do not fit traditional student profiles because they may be from underrepresented backgrounds or cultures, struggling financially, or first-generation college attendees. Tinto (1975, 1987) argued that students more likely remained in school and did not depart if they created social networks and integrated themselves into the social and academic fabrics of educational institutions. The primary criticism of Tinto's research was that it did not look to the unique cultures, relationships, and demographics of Latinxs and other students of color (Deil-Amen, 2011; Torres, 2003, 2006). According to Rendón's (1994, 2002) research, nontraditional students often reported feeling excluded, isolated, or not belonging to mainstream college environments. Rendón Linares and Muñoz (2011) more concretely showed that students flourish in academic environments where educators provide academic and interpersonal validation. Academic validation refers to curriculum and pedagogy that allows students to identify their intellectual strengths as important conduits of knowledge as well as centers on students' needs. Interpersonal validation refers to the social relationships that educators may foster beyond the classroom; these relationships motivate students and show that educators care about them. In particular, validation is important in community college settings for students to feel like they can succeed, a sense of belonging, and culturally affirmed (Rendón, 2002).

Researchers point to a relationship between positive validation and positive emotional well-being. The argument is simple: Positive validation translates into positive emotional well-being because validation requires a holistic understanding and appreciation of a student, which, in turn fosters productive relationship-building and self-confidence (Barnett, 2011; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Invalidation may occur in multiple ways and negatively affects students' comfort and sense of belongingness in school. For example, invalidation may occur when faculty and educators view Latinx students as deficient, or incapable of producing or voicing worthy intellectual opinion (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). The deficit model of thinking about students is rampant in classrooms and institutions that negatively stereotype

nontraditional students as lazy, unintelligent, or incompetent (Gildersleeve, 2011; Zell, 2010). Also, invalidation occurs when faculty appear “unapproachable, inaccessible, and often dehumanizing toward students” (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011, p. 20). Invalidation has very real negative consequences, principally seen in students leaving college (Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003; Nora, 1987; Nora & Crisp, 2009). When students do not feel like they belong, they are more likely to stop out, as is the case with undocumented students (Terriquez, 2015). Positive validation is particularly important for undocumented students’ well-being during tough political periods (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014) and is linked to academic success and resiliency (Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortés, 2009).

## **Socioemotional Development of Undocumented Students**

The study of socioemotional development looks at a person’s changes in emotions, personalities, and relationships in their environments (Pérez, Cortés, et al., 2010). Drawing from Erikson (1982), Pérez, Cortés, et al. (2010) argued that “the socioemotional aspect of an individual focuses on how interactions with others (including family, teachers, peers, and neighbors) and communities trigger anger, anxiety, aggression, assertiveness, depression, fear, joy, optimism, and other emotions” (p. 37). Negative socioemotional development directly negatively affects students’ persistence or retention (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008). One major reason that Latinxs may feel uncomfortable in classroom settings is because of the fear of negative stereotypes, which causes anxiety and leads them to internalize a negative self-image (Steele, 1997). Steele (1997) found that anxiety resulted in decreased test scores and academic performance. Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, and Solorzano (2015) extended Steele’s analysis by explaining that “stereotype threat shows the negative impact of stigmatized psychological pressure to a student’s sense of academic identification and indeed validation” (p. 120). Fundamentally, emotional well-being is critical to learning and building productive relationships with faculty, as well as feeling comfortable in school (Stebbleton & Aleixo, 2015).

The socioemotional development of undocumented students is complex and influenced by environmental factors, such as family obligations, economic difficulties, and acculturation issues, which are exacerbated, magnified, or complicated by their undocumented status. In an early study, Dozier (1993) found that undocumented students’ emotional concerns often revolve around the fear of deportation and, consequently, they face depression and loneliness. Sadly, there is growing consensus that undocumented students face sustained chronic stress (Adames, 2016, p. 4; Gonzales et al., 2013) compounded by their “triple minority status” that includes their “ethnic origin, lack of documentation, and economic disadvantages” (Pérez, Cortés, et al., 2010, p. 39).

Negative socioemotional development negatively affects students’ perceptions of self. Research indicates that undocumented students face “distorted identity formation” (Gonzales et al., 2013, p. 9) as they develop conflictual perceptions of themselves as (non)belonging to the nation-state. In particular, as youth mature into

adulthood, they struggle with “achieving a sense of coherence and continuity, both essential determinants of a healthy identity” (Gonzales et al., 2013, p. 10). They become aware of terms, such as “illegal,” and negative stereotypes in the media and politics that pushes them to internalize a negative identity of themselves. Santos and Menjivar (2013) found that Arizona’s SB 1070 law, an anti-immigration law, negatively affected student’s sense of American identity, which was consequently tied to negative well-being and self-esteem.

Moreover, students often perceive their environments as discriminatory and hostile. From an early age, undocumented students become aware of national and local policies that criminalize them (Pérez, Cortés, et al., 2010). Gonzales and Chavez (2012) explained that the criminalization of undocumented people comes with “psychic costs” (p. 261) because “the sudden awareness of their abject social status [is] often jarring and traumatic” (p. 262). Thus, many undocumented students report living in fear of stereotypes, including the stereotype that they are criminal (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Pérez, Cortés, et al., 2010). Fear of the law and their environments affects students’ academic engagement and involvement in their communities (Santos & Menjivar, 2013). Santos and Menjivar (2013) found that students are less likely to participate in their communities, including to seek health and academic services, because of their fear and distrust of their surroundings.

The study of validation and socioemotional development is urgent in today’s highly contentious political environment. Quantifying a precise number of how many undocumented students attend community colleges is difficult because many remain in the shadows or do not report their status (Anguiano & Nájera, 2015). Some data suggest that approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school with aspirations of receiving a higher education (Jaimes Pérez, 2014; Malik, 2015) and many often navigate to community colleges (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012; Teranishi et al., 2015). Currently, approximately 200,000 to 225,000 undocumented students are enrolled in college, but most studies, particularly studies about socioemotional development, focus on 4-year universities (Mulhere, 2015; Zell, 2010). Two studies looked to the socioemotional effects of Arizona’s SB 1070 law on high school students and children (Jiménez-Silva, Cheatham, & Gomez, 2013; Santos & Menjivar, 2013) but did not closely look at undocumented students in community colleges. Hence, the present study is a snapshot analysis of validation and students’ socioemotional development after Donald J. Trump’s presidential victory in a community college setting.

## Method

I used qualitative interviews for this snapshot study. Snapshot studies happen in short and precise time periods; they are useful when researchers want to collect data during exigent periods (Bradbeer, 2016). Bradbeer (2016) argued, “the intention is to surface themes and directions for further investigation” (p. 85). The biggest limitation to snapshot studies is that they do not study a person’s perceptions or development over time. Interestingly, however, Alshenqeeti (2014) argued that interviews can provide a

“holistic snapshot” because they allow study participants to express themselves, their perceptions of themselves, their environments, and identities (p. 39). Researchers often use qualitative interviews in educational studies about validation (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011) and to understand students’ perceptions of themselves, academic institutions, and social relationships (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### *Procedure*

I received Institutional Review Board approval a few days after Donald J. Trump’s presidential victory because the committee saw the urgency of the study. I utilized face-to-face and over-the-phone interviews. The timing was important. I interviewed students within the first 2 weeks after Trump’s victory to understand their visceral and immediate reactions given that students’ emotional responses were heightened due to the psychologically intense nature of the election (Adames, 2016). Phone interviews are conducive to studies with students who may be weary of research studies (Andrade, 2017).

### *Instrument*

I utilized a qualitative interview protocol with open-ended questions and I recorded the interviews using a voice recorder. The interview protocol was composed of two parts. The first part used a short demographics survey that previous studies used (Andrade, 2017), which asks students to self-identify their gender, age, nationality, and ethnicity. The second part included questions related to the election, including:

1. How did you feel when you saw/heard that Trump won the election?
2. Who did you turn to for emotional support? Why?
3. What recommendations do you have for teachers and administrators to better serve undocumented students?

I wrote the questions with validation and socioemotional development theories in mind; namely, I asked about their emotions, reactions, and recommendations for faculty and administrators that may reveal important validation sites and persons (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Two administrators reviewed the wording of the questions to ensure clarity. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

### *Setting*

The study took place at an urban community college in Southern California. The school is a Hispanic Serving Institution. Recent demographics data reveal that approximately 38% of the students are Hispanic,<sup>3</sup> 28% are White, 16% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 9% are Black.

### *Recruitment and Sample*

Recruiting students during the first 2 weeks after the election was difficult. I emailed students in my former and current courses and I asked faculty, administrators, and

**Table 1.** Participants.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Ethnicity
Claudia	Woman	18-22	México	Hispanic/Latina
Abigail	Woman	18-22	México	Hispanic/Latina
Delilah	Woman	18-22	México	Hispanic/Latina
Damaris	Woman	33+	México	Mexican American
Ana	Woman	18-22	El Salvador	Hispanic/Latina
Maria	Woman	18-22	El Salvador	Hispanic/Latina
Joanna	Woman	18-22	Mongolia	Asian American
Ariel	Woman	18-22	Not specified	Hispanic/Latina
Andrew	Man	18-22	México	Hispanic/Latino
Gabriel	Man	18-22	México	Mexican
Efrain	Man	18-22	México	Mexican
Abraham	Man	23-27	México	Hispanic/Latino
Benjamin	Man	23-27	México	Hispanic/Latino
Daniel	Man	23-27	México	Hispanic/Latino
Elijah	Man	23-27	México	Chicano
Jesus	Man	23-27	México	Mexican
Alexander	Man	18-22	Peru	Hispanic/Latino
Ezekiel	Man	18-22	China	Asian

on-campus programs to ask whether any self-identified undocumented/DACAmented students in their courses desired to participate in the study. I utilized a snowball sampling technique eventually by asking participants to ask their undocumented/DACAmented students to participate in the study.

I interviewed 18 students. A sample size of 18 is adequate given the length and richness of qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2013). The primary goal is to reach saturation, which is the point when participants explain very similar themes or descriptions across their narratives (Creswell & Miller, 2000). When saturation happens, additional participant interviews may not reveal any additional insights. Table 1 lists the participants’ pseudonyms I used to protect their identities, self-identified genders, age ranges, country of origin, and ethnicities. Most participants were born in México and were between the ages of 18 and 22 years during the interview.

*Thematic Analysis*

I transcribed the conversations after the interviews to search for consistent themes using Owen’s (1984) recommendations for thematic analysis, which include the close attention to recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness in the participants’ voices. Recurrence refers to participants’ similar descriptions, repetition is the exact use of specific words or phrases, and forcefulness refers to the intonation and emphasis used during an interview. Creswell and Miller (2000) argued that researchers can ensure validity in their thematic analysis through “validity-as-reflexive-accounting,” which



happens when a researcher frequently reviews the data and themes, and is mindful of the accuracy in their interpretations (p. 125). The goal of a researcher is to be reflexive, to “bracket themselves out,” and to report participants’ descriptions as accurately as possible (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127).

## **Findings**

### *Emotions*

Similar to Efrain’s feelings of fright at the beginning of this article, unsurprisingly, most students described shock, fear, and terror, but what is interesting is the different reasons that they felt fear. Some students were afraid of the political unknown. As Delilah explained, “At first it didn’t feel real and then I started getting scared. I started thinking of the things that could happen.” Similarly, Ariel stated, “I was feeling terrified just wondering what’s going to happen next. And then feeling scared and in a sense numb because you don’t know what’s out there and what’s going to happen.” Other students were afraid of the seemingly apparent racism of the election. Elijah explained,

When I saw the country go red on the map on the Electoral College map, I felt there was a lot of racism. The amount of racism that exists in the United States and how it was going to affect me, my daughter, and my family. I was scared.

Efrain also described that he viewed Trump’s victory as “overt racism from his supporters.” Last, students were afraid for their undocumented family and friends. For example, Maria explained,

I was shocked and mostly worried about my family because of their opinion on [Trump] and his beliefs. Well, they thought that he would not support the Latino community and from what he says, you know, it made it very scary for them.

Students’ narratives suggest that they feared Trump’s victory because of the unknowability of the future and his policies, overt racism, and concern for others.

Despite the immensity of fear and fright, several students described a process of becoming empowered and hopeful. Damaris explained such process succinctly:

I took it personal, I think, and that’s where my emotions of anger came, but it also empowered me to want to know what can we do and feeling a sense of I want to be more involved and be part of a change.

Echoing Damaris’ thoughts, Claudia stated,

I am still numb and confused in general. I am not good with emotions . . . but I have become very empowered to become more educated. That way, if I am scared, I know what I am scared of and what’s my rights, what I can do and protect myself.



Five students described a feeling of empowerment in a similar vein as Damaris and Claudia. Last, Elijah described,

I wanted to do something, talked to my friends, and posted on Facebook to get everyone's emotions. So the next day at school hundreds of people decided to march. Even though I was afraid and scared that I was going to get deported, the people around me gave me hope and encouragement. Even though we lost a battle, the war still continues.

The aforementioned passages suggest that some students went from feeling afraid to feeling empowered and hopeful.

### *Coping*

*Protests/marches.* Ten students indicated that they participated in protests or marches to cope. The majority of students participated in protests/marches on their campus. For example, Maria explained that she stumbled upon a protest at school, which made her feel better. She stated, "I came to the school and saw protests on campus. This told me we are not alone, all across the country. This made me realize not everyone agrees with Trump." Similarly, Abigail described, "We had a healing circle at school. Everyone sharing emotions. I started crying. I haven't cried since." Other students participated in protests/marches off campus. Efrain explained several protests and marches in his community. He stated,

Healing circle with the Brown Berets. In houses, backyards, we talked about marches to let out our anger. We participated in marches and created spaces with people that are like-minded. We need more spaces for people to talk and mourning is valid because people are scared.

*Talking to parents/family.* Seven students identified talking to parents or family as a coping mechanism. Because they were near the students, parents, and family provided emotional relief. As Daniel explained, "I spend the day with my family and didn't talk about anything, but us. We didn't talk about the elections for a period. We just were happy that we were together." Ezekiel stated that talking to his dad calmed him down. His dad told him not to worry about Trump and that "Time will tell." Benjamin described,

I talked to [family] a couple days. My sister got deported and we are taking care of her 4 kids. So having to talk to the kids about the political system and the election. So the sadness was more of a family thing where we had to talk amongst each other and made us feel better.

Although some students saw their parents as extremely helpful, according to Abraham, the parents also sometimes "didn't want to show emotion." Hence, students had to turn to other people.

*Talking to faculty/advisors/counselors.* Five students turned to faculty, four students turned to advisors, and two turned to counselors to cope and for support and relief. Importantly, the 11 students indicated that the faculty, advisors, and counselors were found in safe spaces, such as the Adelante program and another program that specifically assists Latinx and undocumented students. Abraham explained,

Teachers have been supportive. . . . At the rally, I saw a lot of teachers that are non-Hispanic or immigrants and they've been really helpful. I saw that they cared. I have 2 teachers—one Caucasian and one White—they asked me to speak [to them in their office]. Hopefully all teachers could be like that.

Ariel and Delilah both similarly stated that they turned to the club advisors because they “actively support undocumented students.” According to Delilah, the advisors “understand and educate how AB 540 students feel, or understand where they’re coming from to be allies.” The students who turned to counselors indicated that they sought psychological and legal assistance.

*Concerning coping mechanisms.* There were several coping mechanisms that raise alarm. Elijah indicated that he turned to alcohol to cope with the election results; he was well aware that his consumption would negatively affect his academics and relationship with his family and daughter. Joanna admitted coping in negative ways:

I cope with bad news in pretty awful ways, a few friends suggested I could marry them if things ever got that dangerous. I was thinking maybe I should just leave my happy single life behind and marry the next person who seems decent. Maybe I would have a child in order to prevent questions from arising.

Gabriel turned to over eating as a coping mechanism and he “stopped studying” for his classes.

### *Recommendations for Teachers and Administrators*

*Learn about undocumented students.* Consistently, students explained that educators and teachers appeared unfamiliar with the state of being undocumented. In fact, 15 students mentioned that teachers were unfamiliar with undocumented student issues or circumstances. Five students similarly explained that teachers “don’t know,” “don’t put themselves in our shoes,” or are “not considerate of undocumented students” circumstances. Daniel recommended, “I would encourage teachers to do their own research on the facts of what immigration is and how, I believe, it benefits. Listen to the stories of undocumented students if they know anyone.” Gabriel stated, “Teachers need to be aware of what is DACAmented/AB 540 status and some still use the word illegal.” In general, Maria described that teachers must “Be more understanding and mindful that we struggle.” Benjamin added,

What makes me feel better now is that there's people like you doing these studies. The school should try to investigate what we are going through. Understand that these things affect us and academically. Getting to know what our problems are. Just knowing who we are.

**Better classroom practices.** Students also recommended improving classroom practices. The first common recommendation was that professors should provide information in the classroom that could help undocumented students. For example, Gabriel suggested, "Talk to students and connect them to therapists and immigration lawyers." Claudia stated, "Make school help more visible for students and others." Second, students recommended that educators make themselves available and comforting for undocumented students. As Elijah explained,

To provide services, to talk to us and that everything is going to be alright. Be willing to help us and not fail us. A lot of professors tell us to be cool with failing. But we cannot be cool because any time we can be deported. Especially people like me with criminal records. It's not that simple.

Five students similarly explained that faculty should welcome students to help them emotionally cope with the election results. Damaris stated, "Faculty should have voiced in all classes [that they] have open doors policy." Ezekiel added that this could be done through email when he noted, "Message all of us. It's good for students to express their thoughts." Last, Ariel, Delilah, Damaris, Andrew, Claudia all similarly described that professors were not flexible on tests and assignments due times. Lack of flexibility added to students' stress. Interestingly, Ana explained, "Professors, instead of making us feel better, they hurt us."

**Campus protection.** Last, the students recommended several ways for the school to protect undocumented students. First, several students mentioned the need for the school to be a sanctuary school so as to declare to the federal government that they would protect undocumented students against raids and from deportation efforts. Alexander explained, "A sanctuary school. So that they don't transfer records to people that might want them, especially immigration. This would be one of the first steps." Echoing Alexander's recommendation, Jesus stated, "For administrators, I heard that many colleges are doing a sanctuary. That would be good to make us feel safe. But I think undocumented students need help in general and for a long time. This is nothing new." Six students mentioned that the President and administrators should take a stance by publicly promising assistance to undocumented students. Claudia mentioned, "The President should be bold" and Damaris explained, "They have the voice to help us. . . . They will need Hispanics [*sic*] in the future." The third way was to support protest efforts by students on campus. As Abraham stated, "a couple more protests will help those that are having a hard time. If we can have once every week, get their feelings out. Not bottle in emotions. I think they can help." The students recommended that administrators protect them by declaring the school as a sanctuary campus, taking a public stance to protect undocumented students, and allowing protests on campus.

## Discussion

The participants in the study reacted negatively to Trump's presidential victory. They reported feeling intense emotions, such as fear, shock, and sadness because they became incredibly concerned about their futures, families, and their surroundings. There is ample reason to believe that undocumented students face chronic stress throughout their lives as undocumented citizens (Adames, 2016), but this study suggests that episodic periods, such as Trump's presidential election, may magnify, intensify, or heighten negative emotions, such as fear, depression, and anxiety. The socioemotional development of students is deeply negatively affected by crisis periods, such as the passage of anti-immigration legislation (Jiménez-Silva et al., 2013; Santos & Menjivar, 2013) and a presidential election, as is the case of the present study. Trump's presidential victory represents a time of crisis that made students face intensified mental, emotional, and psychological stress, beyond what they already felt as undocumented citizens. Such emotions may perhaps be exacerbated by the fact that students perceived Trump, his election, and supporters as racist. Sustained and heightened chronic stress is concerning because it becomes a reason why students' engagement, comfort, and learning may be negatively affected (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Steele, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008). In fact, multiple students in the present study reported concerning coping mechanisms, including alcohol abuse and stopping out of their studies.

In addition, some educators did not positively validate the lives and experiences of undocumented students and, in some ways, contributed to students' stress. This is concerning because, according to Gándara and Contreras (2009), educational institutions are often the "first response system for any kind of social, medical, or psychological problem or disability" (p. 86). Daily practices, such as the continued use of derogatory language, such as the word "illegal," acting neutral toward the election, or teaching and enforcing assignment deadlines without concern or sensitivity to the seriousness of the election, showed that educators did not care to validate undocumented students' experiences. Continued use of words, such as "illegal," perpetuates the view of immigrants as criminal, which negatively affects students' views of themselves (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013). Because students fear stereotypes and internalize feelings of isolation, criminalization, and stigma (Gonzales et al., 2013), educators do not realize that their language may add to a students' discomfort and distrust of the teacher. Moreover, when a student is undergoing intensified stress, it is unrealistic to expect that they continue their student/academic life normally and to submit their assignments as expected. The sociopolitical environment outside of school seeps into students' academic lives and, consequently, students' fears for their well-being and their families, and of deportation or losing their careers intensifies their discomfort in school. A failure to look at a students' holistic experience with social, academic, political, and economic realities is a sign of invalidation (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). What educators do not realize is that bad classroom practices may negatively affect students' sense of comfort and well-being, as well as their retention, persistence, and learning (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008).

Fortunately, students find self-empowerment and they are pushing us to rethink how institutions engage in campus activism and protest. The students embody a pragmatic

sense of civic engagement as a way to cope with negative emotions and to invigorate a political urgency for activism and protest. They are bringing this revolutionary spirit to campus and they are demanding that educators and administrators join their protests as a means of recognizing undocumented persons' humanity and needs. Thus, the community college grounds become fruitful environments that foster civic engagement for undocumented youth to reclaim their voices, appreciate their cultures, forge new political identities, and engage in a process of humanization (Anguiano & Nájera, 2015; Seif, 2010). Researchers have consistently found that undocumented students often participate in civic engagement activities, such as activism, tutoring, and community service, to cope with socioemotional difficulties (Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortés, 2010). The present study lends support to studies that found that undocumented students find hope and motivation through civic engagement, especially on campus. As Pérez, Cortés, et al. (2010) described, "Civic engagement is an attractive alternative to the frustrating impediments due to their legal marginality. Through civic engagement undocumented students feel that they are contributing members of society" (p. 44). Campuses are important sites of political protest and places where students collectively deal with stress and trauma.

In the process of protest, students turn to advisors and educators as validating agents to protect and welcome such protests as a means of energizing collective emotional release, anger, and love. This study revealed that more and more students turn to faculty, advisors, and counselors for political efficacy, as well as assistance when their parents do not understand their academic experiences, do not show emotions, or are not available (Ceja, 2004). As Rendón Linares and Muñoz (2011) explained, "For many students, [support from educators] was the first time someone had expressed care and concern and the first time someone made them feel that their prior life experiences and knowledge were valuable" (p. 28). Faculty and advisors become critical agents that provide emotional relief and the necessary guidance to deal with academic barriers (Andrade, 2017; Rendón, 2002; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011), as well as for political activism and community organizing. Hence, educators may be important agents that validate students' political efficacy. Educators are faced with an opportunity to protest alongside students to resist oppressive conditions and to provide outlets of collective emotional release to cope with the negative emotions students face. Moreover, counselors, advisers, and administrators have a responsibility to use their institutional resources to bring legal counsel, psychological services, and even participate in protests that make students feel collectively welcomed, affirmed, and valued. Undocumented student groups engage in these contingent protests to challenge nativism and current stereotypes of them as criminals, as well as allowing them to collectively deal with psychic trauma, depression, and fear.

## **Conclusion and Future Research**

Contra a deficit mind-set, this study reveals that undocumented community college students are resilient and incredibly skillful. Despite facing a difficult political climate after Trump's presidential victory, as well as sustained emotional difficulties, they engage in coping mechanisms, such as learning, protesting, and forming strong

communal relationships, which are all emotive, advanced skills based on political awareness and a keen ability to flourish in spaces and with people who positively affirm them. Students' positive socioemotional development happens when they are affirmed by their parents, educators, and support programs (Barnett, 2011; Pérez, Cortés, et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Positive validation must include support for students' political activism and democratic, civic engagement, for students constantly come to school as agents of change, but may choose to depart if educators and administrators exacerbate their stress.

The present study was a snapshot look at undocumented community college students' reactions to Trump's victory. Future studies may engage in longitudinal and quantitative studies to see any changes in students' emotions, self-perceptions, or coping strategies across time. Moreover, studies may expand the sample size to include more undocumented students from different backgrounds or other community colleges. This study was limited by time and availability of student participants, so a future study may compare students' reactions to Trump's presidential victory based on students' country of origin, gender, ethnicity, or ages. The goal of a snapshot study is to reveal important findings in a given sociopolitical crisis moment, but the theorization must continue in the hopes of further assisting undocumented students.

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### **Notes**

1. I used pseudonyms to protect students' identities.
2. Undocumented refers to a student who has no permanent residency, citizenship, or possibly on the path to citizenship. After Obama's 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, students who received a DACA employment permit started self-identifying as DACAmended. In this piece, I use the term undocumented loosely because researchers did not use DACAmended in their studies prior to 2012.
3. Hispanic is the demographics term the institution uses.

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