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"People Show Up In Different Ways": DACA Recipients' Everyday Activism in a Time of Heightened Immigration-Related Insecurity

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Abstract

Undocumented young adults have emerged as a coherent political group, forging a large-scale social movement and helping push forward 19 state-level tuition equity laws and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012. Yet DACA recipients' status became endangered when President Trump rescinded DACA in September 2017, necessitating even more innovative strategies for contesting their exclusion. Drawing from research conducted in Maryland since 2016, I chronicle DACA recipients' trajectories of political engagement. Though some have participated consistently in public forms of collective action, many never have or have declined in participation due to political apathy, the intense need to protect their identities, and very-real fears about being exposed or deported. Yet these young adults have cultivated complementary forms of *everyday* activism, operating outside traditional modalities and spaces of political engagement through acts of resistance carried out in everyday life. I contend that against the backdrop of the repressive state in the Trump era, the everyday activism of DACA recipients complements more normative and overt forms of collective action. Everyday activism raises interesting questions about the nature of activism itself, including the extent to which it must be collective, organized, and public, and its place in social justice movements more broadly.

Keywords

Immigrant young adults; DACA; DREAMers; activism; political engagement

When I first met her in June 2016, Camila had just started working at an immigrant-rights organization outside of Washington, D.C. as a youth organizer, her first professional job since she became work authorized through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012. Camila had grown quite accustomed to telling her own DACA story for her job, a big change from earlier in her life. As she reflected, "I used to be very quiet about it in school…my friends didn't even know about my status. But the people like me who are leaders in the movement, that's what has inspired me and that's why I am more outspoken

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now." Camila has, in turn, inspired the youth with whom she works, saying, "When I asked [them] why they keep coming to my meetings, they said, 'It's because you showed us to love the movement!' That makes me proud of the work I do!"

Camila was devastated when DACA was rescinded on September 5, 2017. Yet she forged ahead, participating in a series of youth-led actions in Washington, D.C. throughout the fall and winter, including the January 2018 action to pressure Congress about DACA that led to the government shutdown. She recounted that the shutdown "felt like victory"; however, when the government quickly re-opened without any resolution for DACA recipients, Camila recalled, "I experienced my first ever anxiety attack. I was by myself and I didn't know what to do. I remember panting and I felt like I couldn't breathe. I started thinking, 'What's going to happen to me? I don't want to go back.'" Within the next few days, she was asked to do a media interview, a common practice for her organization. She said, "I remember they asked me and usually I never refuse. That day I refused. I stayed quiet and just tried not to think about what's going to happen next."

Camila is one of nearly 2 million members of the undocumented 1.5 generation—young adults who were born abroad, but migrated to the United States as children and came of age in U.S. schools and communities (Burciaga and Martinez 2017). As they grappled with the implications of their status, many of these young adults forged a youth-led movement initially known as the DREAMers that has markedly transformed strategies of state-oriented activism (Harris et al. 2010) and, indeed, the immigration debate itself (Nicholls 2013). In the subsequent decade, undocumented youth activists emerged as a coherent political group with a network of organizations to sustain their cause and clear arguments, messages, and rhetoric to represent them in the public sphere (Nicholls 2013:2). Their efforts have also been quite effective at the state legislative level, with 19 states passing tuition equity laws (American Immigration Council 2019).

Though federal legislation addressing their situation has remained elusive, Obama created DACA by Executive Order in 2012 in part as a response to activists' organizing efforts (Bloemraad and Voss 2019, 8; Terriquez 2017). DACA provides work authorization and protection from deportation for qualifying young adults; it is a temporary status that must be renewed every two years through an extensive and expensive application process. Nearly 800,000 DACA recipients have derived numerous benefits from their status related to school, work, financial security, health and well-being, and family life (American Immigration Council 2019; Wong et al. 2019). However, their status became jeopardized when Trump rescinded DACA on September 5, 2017. After a series of lawsuits challenging the rescission, the U.S. Supreme Court took up the case in November 2019 and blocked the Trump Administration's attempt to dismantle the program in June 2020 on the grounds that it did not provide proper legal justification. Yet even with the affirmative Supreme Court decision, DACA recipients continue to exist in a state of liminal legality (Menjívar 2006), undergirded by temporal uncertainty given their time-limited status and uncertain future (Coutin et al. 2017). Beyond rescinding DACA, the Trump administration has aggressively targeted all immigrants through executive orders, policy and rule changes, and evolving enforcement protocols. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is taking an "indiscriminate, aggressive enforcement approach" that has created new categories

of individuals vulnerable to encounters, arrest, and potential deportation (Cantor et al. 2019), including DACA recipients (Ballesteros 2019) and perhaps even in retaliation for their activism (Queally 2018).

There is an urgent need to understand the implications of the post-Obama sociopolitical climate for immigrant communities (Terriquez 2017:333). This article does so by describing DACA recipients' trajectories of political engagement; though some have participated consistently in community-based organizations and collective political action, many have never done so or have declined in participation over time. Further, despite not participating in more normative forms of activism like protests (Marquez-Benitez and Pallares 2016:14), many DACA recipients are engaged in forms of everyday activism, operating outside traditional spaces of political engagement through acts of resistance carried out in everyday life (Harris et al. 2010:10). Everyday activism raises interesting questions about the nature of activism itself, including the extent to which it must be collective, organized, and public to be regarded as such. I contend that against the backdrop of the repressive state in the Trump era, the everyday activism of DACA recipients complements more normative and overt forms of collective action in contributing to the larger political project of fighting for immigrant rights and social justice. As Gutmann (1993:77) points out, overt and covert forms of resistance must be examined in conjunction, as they can "occur together, alternate, and transform themselves into each other."

Background and Literature

Undocumented Young Adults and the DREAMer Social Movement

Undocumented young adults are unconventional political actors with complex political subjectivities, defying many standard expectations about social movement participants (Nicholls 2013:9). For one, they make claims on the state as legitimate political subjects with rights despite not being official members (Dowling and Inda 2013:27). Their active engagement is also notable compared to the lower participation and apathy of young adults generally (Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011; Pallares and Flores-González 2011:170; Terriquez 2017:315). The rise of the DREAMer movement is unusual because it emerged in a hostile immigrant context, which typically results in immigrants avoiding the public sphere (Nicholls 2013, 8). Yet undocumented young adults have "unapologetically" staked public claims on belonging (Abrego 2011), emerging as a "politically identifiable group with a legitimate and identifiable voice" (Nicholls 2013:9–10; Patler 2018:99).

The roots of the movement trace back to the first Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act introduced in Congress in August 2001. Since then, at least 10 versions of the act have been introduced with strong bipartisan support each time; yet none have ultimately passed (American Immigration Council 2019). When the original federal DREAM Act was introduced, undocumented youth did not yet exist as an organized political group on the national stage (Nicholls 2013:1–2). However, in 2001, youth and their allies were already busily engaged in successful state-level legislative campaigns in California and Texas pushing for undocumented students to be classified as state residents for tuition purposes (Negrón-Gonzales 2014:262).

The DREAMer movement scaled up as part of the broader immigrant rights movement (Nicholls 2013:7), which coalesced around the 2006 protests, which at the time were the largest mass mobilizations on any topic since the 1970s, with an estimated 3.5 to 5.1 million participants nationwide (Zavella 2011:ix). The protests served as a crystallizing moment in the political socialization of a million youth from immigrant families, many of whom had never before been politically active (Getrich 2019, 2008; Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee 2011:27; Wong et al. 2019:3). After the protests, comprehensive immigration reform stalled after several failed legislative attempts. In a context in which few political opportunities existed, national immigrant rights associations decided that DREAMers were a vehicle to keep pushing the struggle for immigrant rights forward (Abrego 2018:193; Nicholls 2013:7; Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 2014).

After the DREAM Act once again failed to pass in December 2010, dealing a devastating blow to young activists, they retooled and started more strongly asserting autonomy and control over their place within the larger movement (Abrego 2018:193; Marquez Benitez and Pallares 2016:14; Nicholls 2013:7; Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 2014:288). Youth challenged the hegemonic frames of deservingness and worthiness that dominated policy debates and the media and rejected the criminalization of their parents by emphasizing the shared vulnerability of the undocumented community (Marquez-Benitez and Pallares 2016:19, 22; Nájera 2016). Activists organized “coming out of the shadows” campaigns to combat the social stigma of undocumented status, while simultaneously calling attention to their intersectional identities (Bloemraad and Voss 2019; Mora et al. 2018:10; Seif 2014). These shifts in frames led many activists to reject the DREAMer label itself. During this time, social media also emerged as a critical platform for asserting autonomy and controlling messaging (Mora et al. 2018; Valdivia 2019; Wong et al. 2019).

Young adults’ participation in the movement has frequently been mediated by community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide important resource infrastructure (Mora et al. 2018) and impart knowledge and skills that facilitate youth’s engagement in political activity (Terriquez 2017:317; Wong et al. 2019:3). Regional networks of CBOs flourished in relatively welcoming local contexts like California (Nicholls 2013; Terriquez et al. 2018:265) and Illinois (Marquez-Benitez and Pallares 2016; Mena Robles and Gomberg-Muñoz 2016; Seif 2014; Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 2014) and laid the groundwork for the establishment of national “beltway” organizations based in Washington, D.C. like United We Dream (Marquez-Benitez and Pallares 2016; Nicholls 2013:107). As the 2012 election loomed, United We Dream and its affiliates shifted efforts towards gaining “administrative relief” for “low-priority” immigrants like undocumented young adults through waves of coordinated actions designed to pressure Obama, capitalizing on the centrality of the Latinx vote (Nicholls 2013:153). By June 15, 2012, the Obama administration announced the new Executive Order, DACA, which clearly mirrored the language and arguments of young activists (Wong et al. 2019).

Activists’ claims-making strategies have evolved in alignment with new political realities (Gomberg-Muñoz and Nussbaum-Barberena 2014; Heredia 2016), shifting from targeting the policy arena through mass mobilizations, lobbying, teach-ins, and rallies to more overt acts of civil disobedience and protest (Burciaga and Martinez 2017:454; Negrón-

Gonzales 2014:262). Youth openly disclose their undocumented status (Wong et al. 2019:3) and risk deportation (Negrón-Gonzales 2014:263; Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 2014) as explicitly political acts. They also carry out non-staged acts of civil disobedience at sites of enforcement like detention and processing centers (Marquez-Benitez and Pallares 2016:16–17). These newer forms of high-risk activism are designed precisely to expose the violence of the state (Heredia 2016; Marquez-Benitez and Pallares 2016:17; Mora et al. 2018:4) inflicted through criminalizing practices like border policing and interior enforcement (Dowling and Inda 2013; Heyman 2014). Indeed, state repression has become a powerful force in shaping the movement, particularly during the Trump era (Bloemraad and Voss 2019:14). After the DACA rescission, undocumented youth activism only intensified and took on a new sense of urgency.

Complementary Strategies of Everyday Activism

Despite the growing visibility of the movement, not all of the two million undocumented young adults nationwide participate in these public forms of activism. Nevertheless, as Mendes and Chang (2019:60) point out, a lack of publicness does not equate to a lack of activism. Rather, many who do not fit the prototypical “daring” (Nuñez-Janes and Ovalle 2016:190) or “fierce” (Mendes and Chang 2019:61) activist profile may be engaged in complementary forms of resistance in everyday life. Scott (1985) argued that everyday forms of resistance have often been overlooked with the predominant focus on organized rebellions and collective actions. Everyday forms of resistance are typically more hidden or disguised, individual, and not politically articulated (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:2). Yet they can be activated to resist structures of power without engaging in direct confrontation (Scott 1985:137) as oppressed groups are able to carve out modes of resistance in social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above (Scott 1990:118). These “free spaces” are instead defined by their roots in community and rich networks of daily life (Zepeda-Millán 2016:277).

Activism itself is conventionally linked to the public, explicit, explosive, and sometimes even glamorous elements of political life, set apart from the mundane, routine, and hidden or unnoticed aspects of the everyday (Pink 2012:4). Mansbridge (2013) defines everyday activism as “actions in everyday life that are not necessarily coordinated with the actions of others, but are nonetheless caused, inspired, or encourage by a social movement and consciously intended to change others’ ideas or behavior in directions advocated by the movement.” Magaña (2016) seeks to disrupt the temporal and spatial boundaries of social movements by demonstrating how youth activists practice everyday activism in constructing youth counter-spaces in Oaxaca City, Mexico. Rodriguez and Ward (2018) highlight Black women leaders’ struggle for spatial justice in the urban U.S. South, examining the intersection of race and space.

Expanding the boundaries of political participation is particularly important for young adults, who have their own forms of political expression that fall outside of the mainstream (Harris and Roose 2018). The everyday spaces where young adults stake belonging consist of schools, workplaces, and sporting events, where locally focused practices like volunteering and getting involved in local causes can serve as vehicles for promoting civic

engagement (Harris and Roose 2018; Vega 2012). Harris and Roose (2018:237) underscore the centrality of interrogating these strategies and spaces in particular for those who are alienated from formal mechanisms of political engagement.

As one such group, undocumented young adults have cultivated "safe" or "counter" spaces on university campuses that have allowed them to find emotional support, share information about resources, and build social solidarity (Nájera 2020, 2015; Valdivia 2019; Yosso et al. 2009). Some of these spaces have even become institutionalized through the public endorsement and financial support of university administrators (Nájera 2020:15). Nuñez-Janes and Ovalle (2016:191) chronicle how undocumented college students in Texas forged their own "organic activism" through the practice of *acompañamiento* (accompaniment) by drawing on their shared knowledge and lived experiences to forge a collective consciousness. Creating and sustaining this youth-led group has allowed them to transform oppression into resistance by taking action in their communities.

Indeed, these campus groups are often politicized, providing undocumented young adults the space to nurture political engagement given their limited opportunities for conventional civic acts like voting or serving on juries (Gonzales 2008; Nájera 2020:2; Nájera 2015:37). Nájera (2015:36) highlights how members of a campus-based California undocumented student advocacy group teach the general public about undocumented people through public *testimonio* (sharing one's story) and instructing other members of the undocumented community on how to access rights and resources. Campus spaces, then, can serve as incubators for public pedagogy as a form of everyday activism (Nájera 2015). Yet college campuses are not insulated from the broader sociopolitical climate. Nuñez-Janes and Ovalle (2016:197) chronicle the adaptations Texas student activists have made to their strategies and actions over time, while Najera (2020:12) documents how the election of Trump in 2016 destabilized the security that California students had cultivated in a welcoming state and campus context, corroding their safe space.

Yet not all undocumented young adults come to their everyday activism on college campuses or by way of collective action. Mendes and Chang (2019:61) note that many immigrant young adults manifest their activism in less obvious ways. I have likewise found that some young adults' activism is "quieter" (Getrich 2019), complementing more public and collective forms of anti-state activism (Harris et al. 2010:10). Indeed, young adults have had to cultivate more innovative strategies of for engaging politically precisely due to repressive state actions (Heredia 2016; Mora et al. 2018:4). These more overt and covert forms of activism should not be viewed in isolation or opposition, but rather as coexisting in relation to each other (Gutmann 1993:77).

METHODS

This article draws from research starting in 2016 conducted with DACA recipients in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area with residents of the two most populous Maryland counties (Montgomery and Prince George's) adjacent to the city. Maryland has been characterized as a DACA-"friendly" state (Henderson 2014), due to its passage of a state DREAM Act ensuring tuition equity for undocumented students in 2012 (Senate Bill 167)

and practice of allowing undocumented immigrants to access driver's licenses since 2013 (Senate Bill 715). Many young adults participated in campaigns supporting these bills during their adolescence. Another unique feature of the local landscape is the proximity of Washington, D.C., where many national organizations are based, offering easier access to large-scale actions. Yet Maryland's proximity to the seat of the federal government also serves as a potential source of anxiety, especially given that ICE enforcement has recently increased markedly in the region.

Since 2016, I have led a research team carrying out research with DACA recipients (Burdette et al. 2019; Getrich et al. 2019; Getrich and Ortez-Rivera 2018). We initially recruited participants through several approaches, including via research team members' networks, youth-focused CBOs, and a local DREAMer social media group and then utilized a snowball sample. We conducted research in two phases: from January-December 2016 (when the DACA program was fully intact under Obama) and from September 2017-July 2018 (after the DACA rescission announcement under Trump). Phase I consisted of interviews and questionnaires carried out with 30 DACA recipients hailing from 13 different countries of origin (grouped regionally, 15 from Central America, 7 from South America, 3 from Mexico, 3 from Asia, and 2 from Africa). Phase II consisted of follow-up interviews and questionnaires with 25 original participants, and formation of community advisory board (CAB) that has met bi-annually since August 2017 to help interpret findings and guide future research. I have also engaged in participant observation alongside immigrant young adults, including participating in protests in support of DACA and immigrant rights.

RESULTS

DACA recipients' political engagement has shifted over time and in response to developments in their lives as well as the broader sociopolitical climate. Participants described their political engagement spanning several distinct periods: before they received DACA (pre-2012), while the program was fully in tact (between 2012–2017), and since the rescission announcement (September 2017-present). I describe their trajectories of activism, highlighting their early involvement in CBOs, changing patterns of political participation, and emergent forms of everyday activism.

Early Involvement in CBO-Based Activism

Maryland is home to many long-established CBOs focused on immigrant rights and youth development that have afforded local young adults with unique opportunities for political engagement. As teenagers, five participants had become active members of CBOs' youth programs and credited those organizations with affirmatively impacting their experiences coming of age without papers. Pau, who came from El Salvador when she was 10, shared, "In tenth grade, I started volunteering at [organization name], so I became a lot more aware. We were very involved with the DREAM Act, doing marches and getting students together to go to Capitol Hill, meeting with potential donors, and stuff like that." Pau reflected on the CBOs' impact on her, stating, "It was a big help. For us to get to share our stories and for people to actually see how important of a role we play…was just really amazing. It played a very positive role in my life for sure." In high school, Pau became a youth leader in the

program and led an 80-student walkout from her school to downtown D.C. to participate in a march in the leadup to DACA in 2012. As a college student, Pau started her own 501(c)(3) non-profit organization to provide student loans to undocumented students.

Although Pau never formally worked for a CBO, five participants were employed by them in 2016. Indeed, gaining DACA status had enabled several to parlay unpaid internships at these CBOs into full-time paid employment with benefits. Laura, originally from Mexico, described this trajectory, saying, “I started as an intern, and then I just became a volunteer. I remember my former supervisor and the committee organizer person told me to come in for a meeting, and when I sat down, they were like, ‘We’ve seen your work ethic. We want to bring you in—not as an intern but as a full-time staff.’ I was just so thrilled!” These paid positions are unique employment pathways for DACA recipients and are certainly testament to their political power. By 2018, Laura had started a job at another organization that enabled her to more explicitly engage in political advocacy, explaining, “After the election, everything changed. I was like, ‘How can I get more involved? How do I make a change?’ I need to be able to tell my families to speak up, to raise their voices.” Like many immigrant young adults nationwide, Laura’s activism and employment are deeply intertwined.

The majority of participants, however, were not as politically involved, either before or immediately after receiving DACA. Several had processed their DACA applications at a CBO, but did not get involved in the organization. It is worth noting, however, that most of these CBOs were tailored to local Latinx communities. Some participants noted that their communities lacked comparable organizations, such as Annisa, who came from Malaysia at age 4, who stated, “non-Latino undocumented people are kind of like an invisible group. We’re very overlooked.” None of the five participants from Asian and African countries of origin was involved with a CBO (or even campus group) or had taken part in any organized collective action.

Changing Patterns of Political Participation

By 2017–18, participants described experiencing more logistical challenges to their political participation. As Elisa, originally from Honduras, shared, “Before I used to do a lot of those events. Since I was 14, I would go and participate. I love participating in them because it makes me feel good about myself and I know how it helps. Even if it’s just a little bit, I know that it helps.” By 2018, Elisa lamented, “No, I haven’t really been now. It’s mostly because I had a baby and I can’t really go any more because he’s too little. But I really wanted to participate—to be honest, I really did.” Elisa and others noted that “adulting” infringed on their activism and made it more challenging to maintain their previous level of participation.

Yet I found that factors beyond life course transitions more profoundly shaped participants’ political participation. When I got coffee with Pau right after the rescission announcement in September 2017, I asked her if she had gone to the student-led action on campus. She shrugged her shoulders and said, “I don’t have time for that right now. I had class that morning and had to get to work.” I was surprised at Pau’s response given how politically active she had always been. In January 2018, right after the government shutdown over DACA, I pushed Pau a bit more on what had changed. She revealed that she had grown

frustrated with the movement, saying, “I feel like a lot of the groups are doing very similar things, but nobody wants to just come together. Why don’t you just bring the vision and work together?” Indeed, the sheer number of organizations in the D.C. Metro region and their duplicative efforts caused her frustration. Pau also felt broadly disheartened, explaining, “I know there is power in the people and [value in] just getting our faces out there and showing that, you know, we are real people. But, at the end of the day, they ended DACA. What are we going to do? No matter what we do, they don’t care about us. So at this point, I’m like, yeah, they just don’t care.”

Angélica, originally from Honduras, also found herself retreating. Like Camila, she worked for a CBO and frequently shared her story publicly. But as she described in June 2018, “I turned down an interview and just told her ‘I’m not in the mental state to actually speak very publicly right now.’ I just had to take a break because it was too much for me to handle. I honestly felt scared because I was feeling way too exposed.” Instead of being an empowering act that provided validation and fostered social support (Gomberg-Muñoz 2016:759), sharing her story was negatively impacting her mental health. Beyond that, Angélica noted, “I shared my story at a gala once. As I was practicing for it, every time I had to repeat it, it no longer felt like my story anymore.” Angélica’s retreat from sharing her story can be read, in part, as an act of resistance to the commodification of it for the benefit of an unknown audience.

Angélica’s sister, Lola, also had a negative experience sharing her story, recalling,

> [My sister] asked me if I wanted to do an interview about DACA. And I was like, yeah, I want more people to know about it. After, the reporter was like, ‘I may need your number just to clarify a few details,’ and I was like, ‘That’s fine.’ But she just kept harassing my phone, calling and texting me when I was in class. She went through my LinkedIn and said I was lying about my name. She was like, ‘Send me a picture of your license.’ I was like, No, you’re crazy!’ It definitely made me more cautious on who I speak to.

Because of this incident, Lola revealed, she’s choosing “to stay in my safety bubble” by protecting her story. Lola’s brother Luis noted the implications of her identity being public, saying, “the worst-case scenario is someone sees this information and has bad intentions with it. That puts [her] at risk, but also the whole family…including our other family members who are not documented. It’s a chain reaction really that we don’t ever want to happen.”

Annisa also had an experience that left her and her family feeling exposed. She attended a CBO’s informational session in the aftermath of the recession. Next thing she knew, her picture was on the front page of a newspaper; as she recalled, “It didn’t have my name on it, but there was my face front and center. It was really annoying because when I was there, I thought it was a very safe space. I was the one that stood out, the only non-Hispanic there, so they wanted to highlight me. But I already told one of the people who asked ahead of time that I didn’t want to be interviewed because my family is very careful in this area.” The next day, Annisa received a call from her mother, recalling “She was panicking, because she’s the one who found out. Someone from my community recognized me…her friend sent

it in a group chat. My mother was so scared." Annisa's picture was used without her explicit permission, putting not only her but potentially her family at risk.

This fear of exposure—or worse, being detained or deported—has made many DACA recipients understandably selective about their activism. Brandon, originally from Mexico, discussed his conflict, saying,

> You definitely think, 'I should be out there fighting the fight.' But when you get into the politics side of it, it gets very scary. I was at a training one time and this nurse was like, 'You guys need to go out and protest more because the system is set up to leave minorities behind.' And I'm just sitting there thinking, 'if I was to be that radical, I would be deported.' And I wanted to say something, to be like 'Some of us don't have the privilege of getting arrested and then being here to tell the tale.' I'm honestly scared of going there and outing myself. But at the same time I feel like I'm being a bit of a hypocrite because I always encourage us as minorities to be at the forefront.

Although many participants had long histories of involvement in the movement, a range of different influences have altered their participation over time. For some, adult responsibilities have made participation prohibitive, while for others, negative experiences telling their stories forced them to retreat "into their safety bubbles," as Lola phrased it. Whereas telling one's story became a powerful act both before and after DACA began, it has become fraught under Trump. Yet even within this context, undocumented youth activists are not retreating from activism altogether, but rather are exerting control over the terms of their political engagement.

Emergent Forms of Everyday Activism

Although some DACA recipients may be eschewing public activism, a complementary set of more informal and localized participatory practices have emerged (Harris et al. 2010:22). As Lola shared in talking through her own guilt about not being more involved, "People show up in different ways. That's what my boyfriend said. He's like, 'A lot of people are protesting on your behalf right now. Don't feel bad about it.' He was like, 'Just keep doing what you're doing. That's how you're fighting your battle.'" Indeed, DACA recipients are "showing up" in ways that operate in alignment and support of the broader movement, underscoring the adaptive nature of undocumented young adults' political engagement strategies (Mena Robles and Gomberg-Muñoz 2016:53).

Some individuals felt compelled to engage in these actions for the first time, never having spoken publicly about DACA before. Several talked about classrooms as particularly ripe spaces for raising consciousness about DACA. John, originally from China, has found that a lot of his peers have misconceptions about DACA, which he attributes in part to the media. Post-rescission, he says, "I try to share [about my status] as much as possible. I feel like I did to some degree before, but it's more frequent right now because more people are aware about DACA now and they ask questions." John has capitalized on increased awareness about DACA that grew precisely because of its endangerment. He noted that he felt a particular responsibility to interrupt his fellow students' ideas about DACA, saying, "A lot of people just straight-up call DACA recipients Mexican. And I think letting those

people know that there are other people too diminishes the racism value of saying something like that. And then I see them thinking…'Wait a minute, he's a DACA recipient, and he's Asian…' You can see them thinking, and that's already half the work done." Through his actions, John is setting the terms of his mode of engagement surrounding DACA. In this classroom space, he is actually the one doing the teaching about undocumented immigrants and race (Nájera 2016:36–37).

Madeline, originally from Senegal, also found herself acting on a "teachable moment" on campus. While going into the library in October 2017, she spotted a flyer for an event about fake news that had a cartoon graphic of an alien ship landing, saying that 3 million aliens voted in the election. As she relayed,

> [The flyer] was on the stand when you walk in the library. I looked at it and didn't really think much of it, because it was like 9:30 a.m. So then I go upstairs, I get right out of the elevator and there's another flyer. I was just like, 'No, I don't need this. Why?' Then I went to the lab to use a computer, and there it was on the library home page on the news slider. It was everywhere, and I just felt the need to say something because I thought it was insensitive to us.

Madeline found the contact information for the event's organizer and headed right to her office. Unable to find her, she instead sent an email explaining why the flyer was offensive, tying her comments to the political climate and the particularly painful timing of the flyer related to the DACA rescission. I was taken aback by Madeline's actions, mostly because when I first met her in 2016, she had told me that she did not commonly disclose her status and was not politically active. Yet something had changed for Madeline. Shortly after the incident, she relayed, "A year ago, I wouldn't have done that. Because I haven't been really vocal in regards to DACA and DREAMers. I don't go to the protests or things like that. I just decided I can just walk by the poster and say that I don't like it, or I can send an email to somebody and let them know why I don't like it and hopefully next time, another DACA person or immigrant won't have to feel the way I did." Taking action in this way was quite satisfying for Madeline; as she reflected, "It felt good. I was proud of myself because I thought it should have been said and I know that there are other people that aren't going to necessarily say something."

While John and Madeline's everyday activism originated from defensive acts on campus, some participants became more proactive in raising consciousness about DACA in other spaces. Although Rebeca, originally from Argentina, had historically been guarded about her status, experiencing it as a form of stigma (Abrego 2011), the shift in political climate prompted her to be more open about it, especially at work. As she explained, "Most of my coworkers at the hospital know that I have DACA because I posted something about DACA on Facebook. They asked me, 'So, what's DACA?' because many people didn't know. So, it was also like a way for me to bring awareness about it." Rebeca has been pleasantly surprised at the response, noting, "I actually get a lot of comments and private messages. Because people know more about it now, they can support it more too." While posting on Facebook is not inherently an act of resistance, if situated in the larger sociopolitical context, it can be read as a political act (Pink 2012:3).

Other DACA recipients have truly embraced “quieter” forms of activism through their work, leveraging their social and political capital as brokers in their communities (Getrich 2019). Santiago works with youth, many of them undocumented, as a case manager at a CBO. He has been able to direct them to resources, explaining, “I’m part of a committee that gives scholarship to low-income youth. This is one of the scholarships I try to refer a lot of my students to when I know they’re undocumented since they accept students regardless of legal status. Since I received it, I became part of the alumni committee. So I’m putting my energies into that.” Santiago’s commentary underscores that he does not distinguish between those who are undocumented and those who have DACA.

Angélica, who also works at a youth-oriented CBO, helped youth fill out their initial DACA applications. As she said, “I have my application on my computer, just in case if I need to go back and see how I did it. And, it’s very good, because I am able to help these kids.” She prided herself on being able to “pick up on little clues” that her students might be undocumented (like making up excuses about why they delayed getting a driver’s license) and might be able to benefit from DACA. As Angélica noted, she would frame it as, “‘Are you by any chance struggling like I am?’ Then I share my experience, and then that would get them to be like, “[Gasp]. Me too. I thought I was alone.” Though she is deeply committed to providing this form of assistance, she does so outside of the scope of her day-to-day work responsibilities.

In fact, Angélica has noted the dearth of legal services available at her organization, saying, “We don’t have a lot of immigration assistance even though we see a lot of clients and families that need it. One of the things I was able to push forward was getting accredited to be able to provide some legal assistance. I did the class and passed the test, and now I’m able to provide legal advice. I’ve been advocating more in that sense.” Importantly, Angélica’s advocacy work is with mixed-status families (like her own) and is focused on improving the lives of all members regardless of their status. Angélica reflected, “It’s so much better because I feel I’m directly able to impact versus if I go to a rally, I’m just one more person in a big group. If I’m doing more of the hands-on work, I’m directly providing services and bringing resources. I was able to hold two different clinics for unaccompanied minors and another that was safety planning for families in case of deportation. That was completely new to [the organization]. That’s been my method of activism.”

Discussion and Conclusion

The undocumented youth movement has been characterized by overt acts of political resistance and coordinated political action as young activists have gained social visibility and political legitimacy. In response to the increasing forms of insecurity they face due to Trump’s immigration actions and Congressional inaction, many youth nationwide are participating in amplified forms of high-risk activism (Burciaga and Martinez 2017:456). As Bloemraad and Voss (2019:8) note, the story of the contemporary immigrant rights movement is one “engaged in fierce rear-guard action.”

However, undocumented youth activism is not monolithic (Burciaga and Martinez 2017:455), as DACA recipients’ “methods of activism” continue to evolve in the Trump

era. Many DACA recipients are not taking part in public, organized collective actions or have participated less in them over time due to disenchantment with political apathy, the intense need to protect their identities and set the terms by which they share their stories, and very-real fears about being exposed or deported. Even telling one's story has transformed from being empowering to risky, as Camila, Angélica, and Lola all discovered. The stakes have become too high for many undocumented young adults, as Brandon astutely noted, especially in light of increased mental health vulnerabilities due to their prolonged status uncertainty.

Yet even though they are not politically engaged in a normative sense, DACA recipients are cultivating forms of everyday activism to contest their social exclusion. As Mendes and Chang (2019:73) argue, we must expand our notions of activism to include these more unorthodox manifestations of agency. As everyday activists, DACA recipients are seizing opportunities to educate about immigration in interactions with peers, co-workers, and strangers. These smaller-scale actions in everyday spaces have allowed some of them to engage politically surrounding DACA for the first time. These actions are targeted outside of the policy arena, which limits their potential impact on legislative change. Yet they are nonetheless impactful in cultivating citizen allies who support comprehensive immigration reform (Nájera 2015:36) and moving public opinion progressively in support of them, an important social movement outcome (Bloemraad and Voss 2019:6; Mora et al. 2018:11). The movement has also unquestionably benefitted from young adults' leveraging of their navigational capital (Nájera 2015:38) as brokers in service to their communities who help members access rights and resources (Getrich 2019; Mora et al. 2018:7; Nájera 2015:36).

Given the intensifying anti-immigrant policies and unpredictable enforcement practices of the Trump era, it is essential that applied anthropologists identify practical ways of supporting "anxious, undocumented, and afraid" young adults (Mendes and Chang 2019:74; see also Duncan et al. 2018 and Yarris et al. 2017). This effort unquestionably involves staying informed about immigration-related news, understanding and contesting institutional policies and practices, and identifying resources and key supporters in campus settings (Mendes and Chang 2019:74). Scholars working with immigrant rights and youth development CBOs have also called for deeper investment in these important incubators of political engagement (Terriquez 2017; Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 2014).

While these steps are essential, our engagement must also necessarily involve moving beyond organizational spaces to understand more about undocumented young adults' everyday activism. We need to broaden the purview of what we regard as being activist and be conscientious about how to amplify young adults' everyday activism. As Nuñez-Janes and Ovalle (2016:199) point out, being an effective advocate involves learning *from* undocumented young adults as a critical component of supporting them. Understanding more about these expansive spheres of action is essential beyond just the undocumented immigrant rights movement, as social justice movements related to racial justice and LGBTQIA rights are also contending with new forms of injustice under Trump and are also necessarily innovating in strategies. Youth activists have very publicly commanded attention to structural dimensions of inequality that unite these movements, underscoring that intersectionality can be an effective collective action frame and motivate broader

solidarity (Terriquez et al. 2018; Valdivia 2019), which has unequivocally been on display during the large-scale and ongoing public protests for racial justice in 2020. However, activists like Pau and Brandon are also engaged in this intersectional activism in everyday life, yet we know much less about these types of actions across movements.

It is essential that we understand more about the adaptations that young adult activists make in their political engagement strategies (Gomberg-Muñoz and Nussbaum-Barberena 2014; Mena Robles and Gomberg-Muñoz 2016). Their strategies will continue to necessitate innovation in response to the 2020 election and in alignment with changing policies and sociopolitical realities. The history of the undocumented youth movement demonstrates that it is dynamic and flexible in response to broader political developments and the agency asserted by its participants. However, in addition to higher-profile coordinated political actions, everyday life is a critical site for locating creative forms of political participation that work in conjunction with more conventional forms of activism as overlapping pathways for forging social change (Harris and Roose 2018).

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