

# Bad Hombres: Perceived Discrimination, Acculturation, and the Mental Health of Latinxs in a Growing Anti-Immigrant Climate. A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

The presidential election of 2016 brought to the forefront anti-immigrant and nativist ideas which later took the form of policies, memorandums, and laws in the U.S.. Latinxs, especially Latinx migrants from Central and South America, were most targeted by these policies. Research has begun to show that the context of acculturation and, in turn, the level of perceived discrimination might play a key role in how individuals acculturate. This systematic literature review presents findings on the impact that perceived discrimination, especially during and around the last presidential election cycle, has had on the mental health of Latinxs. A synthesis of 10 research articles described evidence that a heightened anti-immigrant climate has negative and deleterious effects on Latinx mental health, especially those with undocumented status. Latinxs of different backgrounds described an increased sense of uncertainty and fear and more depressive symptoms. Those living in states with stricter anti-immigrant policies reported poorer mental health outcomes when compared with those in states with less strict policies. These findings suggest that the current context of anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. might have greater negative effects on the mental health of Latinxs than previously thought. The findings outlined in this review highlight the importance of exploring the impact of discrimination on the lives of Latinxs and other minority populations, especially during the current sociopolitical climate.

*Keywords:* Latinx, U.S., acculturation, perceived discrimination, mental health

The 2016 presidential election in the U.S. generated a great deal of discussion around several issues that each of the major political parties of the U.S. (i.e. Democrats and Republicans) considered to be most important. One of these issues is the topic of immigration, often within the context of “illegal” or undocumented migrants coming across the U.S. border with Mexico. There were calls to build a barrier wall along the border and enact more strict policies and regulations with regard to immigration; in fact, the chant “Build the Wall!” became a slogan at campaign rallies of one of the candidates and later at the Republican National Convention, at times spontaneously turning into “Kill Them All!” chants (Parker et al., 2016).

The 2016 election cycle and ensuing political climate that depicted immigrants from Latin America

as subhuman (Hirschfeld, 2018) has given voice to a rhetoric that disparages Latinxs as well as other cultural/ethnic groups. Latinx immigrants, specifically those from Mexico and Central America, were one of the groups that became a target of criticism, hate speech, and bias by prominent political figures (Vara-Orta, 2018). One of the candidates running for the U.S. presidency, in his running announcement speech, referred to undocumented Mexican immigrants as “rapists” and “criminals” (Kopan, 2016), and later in a presidential debate, used the term “bad hombres” to describe Mexican immigrants, interpreted by many as demeaning (Morno, 2016). These opinions and speeches were broadcasted on most major television networks and shared on many social media platforms, heightening the visibility of these views throughout the country and

the world. The purpose of this study was to explore the relation between acculturation, perceived discrimination, and the mental health of Latinxs within the context of the presidential election of 2016.

### **Latinx**

Latinx is a gender-neutral form of the traditional Latinx/a, which moves beyond the millennial use of Latin@. This term also presupposes intersectionality—in essence, a crossroads that demarcates the process of acculturation and change within and across generations among immigrants from Latin America (Love Ramirez & Blay, 2016). Also, the term is used to challenge power hierarchies within U.S. culture and as a “wink” to a long history of colonialism and conquest that extends beyond our continent. Latinx has become an identifier, especially for newer generations, that seeks to challenge the rigid norm within the Spanish language to apply gender binary form to words; hence, it also provides an alternative that allows for inclusiveness (Love Ramirez & Blay, 2016). Increased immigrant generational growth and diversity language dynamics are pushing for a view of Latinxs that must move away from a single profile or a stereotypical idea of what a Latinx should be (Krogstad, Krogstad et al., 2015). The use of the term Latinx is not devoid of controversy, and many have noted that it is merely a buzzword that fails to explore deeper connotations of the original term within the Spanish language while also violating traditional grammar rules (Scharron-Del Rio & Aja, 2015).

It is important to note that the term Latinx might sometimes be used in a way that includes both immigrants and those born in the U.S. who trace their heritage to Latin American countries; its meaning does not always presuppose that the identified speaks Spanish or even that they were born in another country such as in the case of Puerto Ricans, who

are American citizens. Anglo-White Supremacists have gained a voice on social media and other mass media outlets; therefore, a term that seeks inclusiveness while also affirming an identity might be seen as a response and a more comfortable alternative to calls for separation and expressions of otherness (DeGuzmán, 2017). The term originated and is mainly used in the U.S., yet it is slowly gaining acceptance on social media and research platforms around the world (Scharron-Del Rio & Aja, 2015).

The present study sought to expand the current conversation around migration issues by including the term Latinx in its examination of perceived discrimination and acculturation. Latinxs compose a large, complex, and diverse set of highly heterogeneous individuals and represent a wide range of values, cultural markers, and beliefs. The Latinx population is one of the largest and fastest-growing minority groups in the U.S. (Flores, 2017). Mexican Americans, specifically, make up approximately 63% of the Latinx population in the U.S. (Abraído-Lanza et al., 2016). The U.S. Latinx groups, compared to the other ethnically identified groups, present with greater depression, anxiety, and substance abuse rates while at the same time having the least access to mental health treatment (Flores, 2017). Although there is a movement toward understanding the complexities of Latinx experience, a lack of knowledge and cultural understanding still exists in service providers who work within these communities (Abraído-Lanza et al., 2006).

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation refers specifically to the way(s) in which individuals adapt to a new environment and how they do or do not take on the new values and norms of the receiving culture (Abraído-Lanza et al., 2006). This process is not a rigid, passive one but rather involves a dynamic exchange between the

newly arrived individuals and those from the receiving culture. This exchange is understood today to be originated and influenced by broader social factors (Abraído-Lanza et al., 2006). The exchange between the two cultures involves the immigrant's adoption of some of the most basic values of the larger group, while the larger group creates a sort of "opening" to accommodate, adapt, and meet the needs of the newly arrived.

Within acculturation theory, there are two significant ways of understanding how individuals adapt to a new culture: a unidimensional model, in which an individual learns the new culture while losing the native one or vice-versa, and a bi-dimensional model in which the way an individual becomes involved with the new culture is independent of their affiliation to their native culture (Berry, 1980). This model of acculturation differs from a unidimensional view in that in this model, individuals do not simply become part of the new culture but instead might opt for one or more of several strategies to adapt to such culture. Whether or not individuals become assimilated also depends on the dominant culture and its attitudes toward others (Kymlicka, 1995). Attitudes of both immigrants and those of the receiving culture toward the newly arrived are important when examining the ways in which immigrants adapt. Within Berry's model of acculturation strategies, an individual must decide whether it is of value to maintain their own identity and cultural characteristics, and whether they should maintain a relationship with and adopt the values of the larger, dominant society (Berry, 1997).

Among Latinxs in the U.S., the process of acculturation appears to be marked in general by a preference toward biculturalism, especially for younger generations (Coatsworth et al., 2005; Sullivan et al., 2007). This finding suggests that a bi-dimensional

model might be most appropriate to explain the changes during acculturation for Latinxs who live in the continental U.S. Biculturalism affords individuals an opportunity to relate to both new and native cultural contexts; however, it also generates pressures to conform to expectations determined by receiving or heritage communities (Schwartz et al., 2006). It would appear that individuals who are most assimilated to the receiving culture might experience the least amount of discrimination; however, a social and political climate that portrays Latinxs and their heritage culture as negative might impact the well-being of these individuals. The contexts of reception that an immigrant faces may play an important role in how that immigrant perceives the attitudes of the new culture, further influencing how the immigrant adjusts and thrives within it. Immigration policies and the racial composition of one's neighborhood are two aspects that contribute to immigrants' perceptions of their receiving context (Alegria, 2009; Stevens & Vollebergh, 2008).

### **Perceived Discrimination**

When considering acculturation, Berry and Kalin (1995) posit that certain pre-conditions must be present in society for individuals to integrate into the receiving culture successfully. These include accepting the utility of cultural diversity, low levels of prejudice, and positive mutual attitudes. It follows that individuals might have a harder time adjusting in a society where these pre-conditions are not present. Berry (1980) proposed that when individuals move into a new culture, they adopt one of four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization. These strategies, Berry explains, can also be adopted as attitudes of the dominant culture; that is, the receiving culture might appear to expect all immigrants to become like those in the dominant culture (assimilationist), be willing to accept and incorporate all groups on their own

terms (integrationist), want to segregate (separate) or marginalize groups who might be perceived as unwanted by the receiving culture. A belief that acculturation is, by itself, a distressing process arises from a lack of understanding of other confounding variables such as the effects of perceived discrimination. Several studies have found that perceived discrimination might have more of an impact on the way an individual adjusts to a new culture than acculturation itself (Beiser & Hou, 2006; Gee et al., 2006; Malcarne et al., 2006; Padilla, 1980). Past acculturation research has been inconclusive as to whether greater cultural assimilation leads to less or more perceived discrimination (Aguirre et al., 1989; Floyd & Gramann, 1995; Portes, 1984). These findings highlight the complexity of the acculturation process and its mechanisms.

While it might be difficult to assess how cultural attitudes toward immigrants affect an immigrant's adaptation to the new culture, the immigrant's level of perceived discrimination might be a way of better understanding these processes. Phinney et al. (1998) identified perceived discrimination as an important factor in how immigrants adapt to a new culture. They argued that research related to acculturation should include independent measures of perceived discrimination. Members of stigmatized groups can be negatively affected by many barriers presented in a society that expresses these negative views (Vega et al., 1995). Individuals who self-identify as "Hispanic" have reported perceived discrimination levels similar to those reported by African Americans and higher than White (non-Hispanic) participants (Fisher et al., 2000). Perceived discrimination is one of the stressors associated with an individual's racial/ethnic identity that is not unique to the acculturative process. Members of stigmatized groups also report higher levels of perceived discrimination.

In addition to perceived discrimination, Latinxs who move to the U. S. mainland also experience other stressors. These include separation from family and emotional effects precipitated by their migration's physical and social circumstances (Bostean & Gillespie, 2018). These conditions vary among migrants; however, perceived discrimination appears to have a seminal role in determining acculturation in light of other stress factors.

Past research has not always distinguished between perceived or real discrimination, based on discriminatory events, perhaps because of the difficulties inherent in establishing a mechanism by which this occurs. Nevertheless, there is a difference between discrimination and an immigrant's level of perceived discrimination; the former points to measurable events while the latter deals with an interpretation of the event (Floyd & Gramann, 1995). The adverse effects of this acculturative stressor are experienced regardless of this distinction.

When facing discrimination, migrants can internalize negative perceptions about their ethnic group (Schwartz et al., 2014). Perceived discrimination was shown to be associated with aggression, sadness, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (Lee & Ahn, 2011; Verkuyten, 1998). Finch et al. (2000) found that perceived discrimination stress predicted unique variance in depression levels when demographic factors, acculturation, and socioeconomic status were included in the analysis. Previous research has also implied that students exposed to discrimination based on race or ethnicity are more likely to experience lower self-esteem and lower academic achievement and motivation (Wong et al., 2003). Linked to the experience of perceived discrimination is the concept of internalized oppression/discrimination. In a sample of minority Latinx individuals, internalized oppressions were associ-



ated with psychological distress (Velez et al., 2015). While perceived discrimination might help explain the discriminatory experience of Latinxs who move to the U.S., internalized oppression further develops this understanding by describing how these individuals evaluate their ethnic minority group.

### **The Present Study**

The aforementioned evidence underscores the importance of examining Latinxs' acculturation within the current sociopolitical context. Dialogue by Donald Trump and his administration around Latinxs, specifically Mexican and Central American immigrants, often depicts them as dangerous criminals or "animals" (Hirschfeld, 2018) who threaten the livelihood of well-meaning Americans (Peters, 2018). This type of rhetoric might separate and marginalize these groups. The impact of this rhetoric on the livelihood of Latinxs, especially those who are most marginalized, such as undocumented migrants, is a topic that demands further research. Furthermore, Latinxs' mental health and the adjustment of Latinx migrants to the U.S. culture is a topic that warrants in-depth analysis. Our systematic review of the literature summarizes and synthesizes the existing literature surrounding the relationship between Latinxs' acculturation, perceived discrimination, and mental health within the context of the U.S. presidential election of 2016. We aimed to identify research studies that explored acculturation and perceived discrimination, emphasizing the impact of this relationship on Latinx mental health. While these are two very unique processes, they both contribute to some level of stress that can be detrimental to the individual. While acculturation is a process of adaptation for many Latinx migrants, perceived discrimination may be a concept experienced by the larger Latinx population in a sociopolitical climate that

disparages individuals because of their racial or ethnic identities. Distinct analysis of acculturation and perceived discrimination may help researchers and practitioners better understand the impact of the current sociopolitical context on Latinx mental health. This literature review sets a precedent for future inquiries into the process of acculturation and the impact of the context of reception among the general population of Latinxs who move to the U.S. mainland. By acknowledging the changing nature of dominant national attitudes toward migrants, the study draws from current research models that suggest that acculturation is a complex, multidimensional process that impacts many aspects of the human experience.

### **Method**

A systematic review of peer-reviewed articles was conducted under an *a priori* established search criterion on the Penn State Library's online search database. The search terms were acculturation and perceived discrimination combined with (1) Trump AND Latin\* and (2) Post-Election AND Latin\*. Articles were included if they met the following criteria: were available as full text from the university library service; were published on or after January of 2017; focused on the U.S. Latinx population or included data about this population; focused on acculturation and perceived discrimination; described effects on mental health.

The purpose of this review was to understand the impact that perceived discrimination had on acculturation and the mental health of Latinxs within the framework of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Abstracts were examined for inclusion when they contained the above-referenced keywords. Any article that did not focus or include specific data on Latinx individuals were excluded from the current review. Additionally, articles that did not discuss the

impact of acculturation and perceived discrimination on Latinx mental health or were published before the preset date were excluded. Reference sections were examined for any other articles that may also have met the inclusion criteria. Descriptive information was extracted from each selected article, including the research design, sample characteristics, and study details (mental health measures and main findings; see Table 1).

### **Results**

The two literature searches (1 and 2) generated a total of 255 results, from which 15 articles were selected for in-depth review. Of those 15, 10 were included in this review. The remaining 5 were excluded because they either did not focus on Latinx populations or did not include mental health or well-being measures. Of the 10 studies included in this review, four used quantitative methods, two used mixed-methods, and four used qualitative methods. Six of the studies used interviews as the main form of gathering data and information from participants. Four of the studies used quantitative methods and employed existing datasets. The datasets in two of these studies were created during the U.S. presidential election cycle of 2016. The remaining two studies were included because of the relevance of the information presented, and how they explored the research variables within the context of the 2016 election cycle.

### **Study Characteristics**

While most studies focused on Latinx living in the U.S., not all study authors agreed on what a Latinx definition should be. The definition of Latinx varied from being of Latinx background to having migrated to the U.S. from a Latin country to the most simplistic and perhaps most controversial definition, speaking Spanish. Five of the studies included Latinxs who were undocumented and mostly of Mexican or

Central American origin. Only one study focused on undocumented female immigrants, and one focused on Latinx men who spoke primarily Spanish as their native language. Participants' age varied greatly from elementary school children of Latinx background, college-age Latinx individuals who were covered under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Act (DACA), to unknown individuals of uncertain age who spoke Spanish and conducted searches online. Of note here: not all studies included migrants exclusively, but rather a wider array of Latinxs who had either migrated to the U.S. themselves or whose parents or grandparents had come to the U.S. from a Latin country. While this review intended to focus on migrants, the selected studies were still included because of the relevance of their topic to the theme of this review and because they demonstrated that Latinx is an expanded, inclusive definition of Latin migrant.

### **Measures of Acculturation and Perceived Discrimination**

Only one of the studies included in this review measured acculturation directly; all others either mentioned the process of acculturation or referred to perceived or actual discrimination as a form of acculturative stress. As previously indicated, the context of reception plays a key role in determining how individuals, specifically immigrants, acculturate in their new country. The daily stress that individuals experience as they adapt to the new culture can affect how they access key services such as medical and mental health care, legal representation, or social services (García, 2018; Gomez & Pérez Huber, 2019; Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019).

Eight studies described a heightened sense of fear through self-reports of perceived discrimination or actual, day-to-day microaggressions; this, in turn, generates a sense of hyper-awareness that disrupts

many aspects of the daily lives of immigrants and Latinxs in general (Gomez & Pérez Huber, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2018). Two of the major stressors affecting the health of immigrants in the U.S. are racism and discrimination (Ayon, 2015). Ethnic discrimination, and ensuing microaggressions, can become an acute stressor that activates physiological responses and may have deleterious effects on the mental health of immigrants and minorities (Clark et al., 1999). Across all studies that explored perceived discrimination, or in its most specific form, microaggressions, participants reported an increase in racist or discriminatory events or situations during the 2016 election cycle. In at least two of the studies, participants reported these experiences as ongoing, with no specific change reported since the election of 2016 (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017; Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019).

### **Methods of Data Collection**

While it might be challenging to describe the impact of the 2016 presidential election cycle on the mental health of Latinxs, researchers in these studies have found different ways to assess and quantify some of its effects. Some researchers used interviews to obtain first-hand accounts of the impact of rescinding legal protections for DACA students. Such methods helped various researchers get a more detailed and richer narrative that described what it feels like to live in a state of fear and constant worry. Three of the studies included in this review utilized in-depth interviews as the main method of data gathering. At least three others used first-hand accounts as a complement to quantitative methods of data collection.

In our information age, researchers used a tool as ubiquitous as the internet to quantify the frequency of searches for words related to depression before and after the 2016 election (Krupenkin et al., 2019).

Thus, internet signatures helped researchers conceptualize, or at least approximate, some understanding of the mental health needs of Spanish-speaking individuals. Nevertheless, there are inherent challenges present when understanding how entire communities experience fear in response to a sociopolitical climate. Hence, it follows that asking these questions directly to those affected may be one of the most accurate and valuable ways of understanding this topic.

### **Mental Health and Well-being Outcomes**

Krupenkin et al. (2019) looked at data sets of over 1 million Bing users to find out whether searches on mental health-related terms changed in frequency and content before and after the 2016 election. Among the terms used to assess this change in search trends were “depression,” “anxiety,” “therapy,” “stress,” “suicide/al,” and specific anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medications, as well as their Spanish translations. Spanish searches for these terms were significantly higher after the election than English searches for these terms; this relation was especially significant for the terms “therapy,” “depression,” “anxiety,” “suicide,” and anti-depression/anti-anxiety medications (Krupenkin et al., 2019).

In a separate study of immigrant and refugee mental and physical health, Szaflarski and Bauldry (2019) found that among first-generation migrants, of which Latinxs are a big part, an increase in perceived discrimination was associated with a decrease in mental health. For the social component of acculturation, that is, how individuals create new social networks or expand existing ones, there was a negative correlation between discrimination in general and social support (Szaflarski & Bauldry, 2019). As individuals feel more discriminated against, their social support networks seem to shrink, or at least the

migrant feels as if they do. Within first-generation, undocumented migrants, these effects are evident in their reports of years and sometimes decades without seeing their loved ones in their country of origin. One major consequence of increased policing is family fragmentation, brought about by widespread raids and subsequent deportations (García, 2018). Social support, a protective factor against the deleterious effects of poor mental health, is severely disrupted by the threat of deportation made more urgent by a growing anti-immigrant climate.

Latinxs reported increased feelings of fear and hypervigilance due to increased policing and immigration enforcement (García, 2018; Gomez & Pérez Huber, 2019; Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019). In a period immediately before the presidential election of 2016, an increase in deportations as a result of local and federal collaboration (Secure Communities Program deportations: SComm) was associated with an increase in mental health needs within the same Latinx communities (Cruz Nichols et al., 2019). In fact, living in a state with exclusionary immigration policies was associated with worse mental health outcomes for Latinxs as compared to states with less exclusionary policies; Latinxs living in these states reported a significant increase in psychological distress than non-Latinxs residing in the same states (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017). This finding was congruent to previous literature, noting that Latinxs in these communities reported increased depressive symptoms and drug use (Mann-Jackson et al., 2018). An increase in feelings of fear, stress, defeat, and distrust in public authorities have also been reported in various Latinx communities (Gomez & Pérez Huber, 2019; Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2018). These feelings are amplified by the spike in discriminatory and racist experiences some Latinxs face, such as being threatened with rape (Gómez & Pérez Huber, 2019) or armed

robbery because of one's ethnicity (Mann-Jackson et al., 2018). Such is the reality of many Latinxs living across hundreds of communities in the U.S.

Elementary Latinx students demonstrated ambivalence toward their identity when they favored a toy of a race/ethnicity different from their own, which they saw as more positive than a toy with a similar background as theirs (Nuñez & Meráz García, 2017). These students also perceived a White doll, versus one of Latinx background, as more likely to go to college, be perceived more favorably by teachers, and performing better on tests. The children in this study held high levels of esteem for their gender but not for dolls of their ethnic background (Nuñez & Meráz García, 2017). These findings align with Clark and Clark's (1939), where African American preschool-age children preferred a White doll and attributed more positive qualities to the White doll versus a Black one. DACA students experienced a similar internalized inferiority complex after the rescission announcement by the Trump administration. Researchers reported that these students began to feel that their commentaries on public issues were not valid due to their undocumented status (Gómez & Pérez Huber, 2019; Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019). They became socially isolated and began avoiding public gatherings and social services in their communities (Gómez & Pérez Huber, 2019).

Two of the studies included in this review note the positive effects of living in an anti-immigrant environment. For example, at least two students affected by the ending of DACA reported becoming empowered and more active in their communities (Gomez & Pérez Huber, 2019). Individuals also reported becoming outspoken advocates of immigrant rights and against unfair immigration law enforcement practices (Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019).



**Issues Related to Undocumented Migrants**

The Latinx groups that appear to be most impacted by ongoing discriminatory remarks, a general distrust of immigrants, and immigration policy developments are undocumented migrants, especially women (Garcia, 2018). One specific stressor that impacts communities of undocumented migrant families is the threat of deportation. The sense that at any time law enforcement could process and return one to one's native country acts as an anticipatory stressor (Cruz Nichols et al., 2018). Anticipatory stress can generate fear and anxiety and has negative implications on the mental health of the individuals (Cruz Nichols et al., 2018; Garcia, 2018). These daily stressors can become chronic as they are experienced over a long period of time. Living undocumented in an anti-immigrant climate intensifies the impact of these stressors, as well as the ability of these individuals to live freely and gain access to essential economic and social resources. A group of 30 undocumented Latinx women living in Houston, Texas, reported a sense of loss of control and autonomy and becoming hypervigilant of authorities, at times avoiding leaving their homes for fear of being identified by law enforcement (Garcia, 2018). This fear of public authorities and law enforcement has even more troubling consequences. Women and families who are victims of domestic violence avoid reporting their experiences and risk living in danger with their children (Garcia, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2018). In addition, many women, especially caregivers, experience role disruption by avoiding going to grocery stores, schools, and family doctors (Garcia, 2018). Researchers found that a group of Latinx men living in North Carolina who experienced unfair treatment by authorities and community members felt this bias was due to immigration status, ethnicity, and native language use (Spanish). This treatment was experienced not only

during interactions with law enforcement but also during interactions with local health clinic and grocery store staff and among local service providers (Mann-Jackson et al., 2018).

Deportation threat and deportation itself can have numerous disruptive effects on the lives of undocumented families. Families who face this stressor report a drastic reduction in their social networks, especially because families become fragmented when parents or caregivers are physically removed from the U.S. (Nichols et al., 2018). In addition to this, families also reported experiencing geographic isolation and increased economic uncertainty as they encountered a reduction in job opportunities or exploitative working conditions (Garcia, 2018). The announcement of public policy that reflects a change in legal status can trigger a deportation threat, particularly relevant for those under the DACA program. After a public announcement of rescission of DACA by the Trump administration, individuals covered under the program reported an increase in discriminatory events, as well as social and geographical isolation (Gómez & Pérez Huber, 2019; Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019). One individual experienced increased obstacles to health care and lost her job because of untreated injuries (Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019).

The effect of increased policing, heavy surveillance, and strict immigration rule enforcement extends beyond those undocumented. About 61% of Latinxs report knowing someone who is undocumented, and 36% indicate that they know someone detained or deported (Sanchez et al., 2015). Cruz Nichols et al. (2018) found that individuals who had a personal connection with someone who has been deported were more likely to report increased mental health needs. Seven studies in this review specifically comment and/or examine how specific policies, their

creation, enforcement, or rescinding, affect the lives and well-being of Latinxs. While these findings are salient and consistent, they were not part of the search criteria for this review.

### **Discussion**

This review aimed to explore the relation between Latinxs' perceived discrimination, acculturation, and the effects of living in an increasing anti-immigrant climate on their mental health. Across all ten studies included in this review, the authors noted, in various degrees, the negative effects of perceived and actual discrimination, racist-nativist views, and microaggressions on the mental health of Latinxs.

One way in which researchers assessed this impact was by noticing the increase in mental health-related searches before and after the 2016 presidential election. There was a significantly large increase in the Spanish words for "suicide," "depression," "anxiety," among others, after the 2016 presidential election (Krupenkin et al., 2019). Increased mental health needs were superior among communities of Latinxs who lived in states with more exclusionary immigration policies. As those interviewed in these studies reported, anti-immigrant policies appeared to have the highest impact on their mental health and well-being. From experiences of fear, distrust in authorities, and avoidance of public spaces, to feelings of sadness and anxiety, the adverse effects of these policies and discriminatory encounters are multiple and complex.

A growing anti-immigrant climate that disparages entire groups and communities within the U.S. might have more negative effects than previously thought. Recent policy change seeks to reduce and limit immigrants' rights and increases in immigration law enforcement, contribute to a sense of uncertainty and fear among many Latinxs.

The context of reception has many ways of "communicating" to immigrants and individuals from various minority communities how they will be perceived. Messages disseminate through mainstream media, public announcements, or general day-to-day interactions. One other meaningful way to influence reception context is by enacting and enforcing laws, contouring public policies, and issuing memorandums. It is important to note that immigration policies do not exist in a vacuum, but rather they become entangled as part of the national discourse around immigrants and their contribution, or lack of, to the national identity and U.S. society in general. Gomez and Pérez Huber (2019) use the conceptual framework, racist nativism to inform current beliefs about Latinx immigrants. Through this lens, Latinxs threaten the national identity and the welfare of those perceived as "native" or those commonly referred to as White. The prevailing anti-immigrant climate did not see its birth during the 2016 presidential election. However, there is a growing national discourse around topics such as immigration policies, microaggressions, and discrimination. The development and enforcement of anti-immigrant public policies make it more difficult for Latinxs to live and be well, mentally, and physically. Parallel with the rise in discriminatory policies, Latinx negative portrayal in public media has also increased. In turn, this generates additional psychological distress that could persist a long time after being exposed. In conjunction with negative public interactions and daily microaggressions, this type of exposure might lead to the internalization of racist-nativist views among Latinxs. One such example was observed in elementary-age children and DACAmented students, who experienced a sense of devaluing of their identity and opinions (Núñez & Meráz García, 2017).

It appears that an anti-immigrant climate might be shifting the conversation from acculturation to specific aspects of acculturative stress that more directly shape how immigrants thrive in the U.S.. The negative effects of perceived discrimination and discrimination presented in this review emphasize the urgency to explore this topic. In addition, specific policies emanating from the anti-immigrant sentiment severely disrupt the lives of Latinx individuals, such as the case of DACAmented college students (Gomez & Pérez Huber, 2019; Mallet & García Bedolla, 2019). One population most affected by the growing anti-immigrant climate is undocumented migrants, especially women (see Table 1). This community experienced additional challenges to their daily lives including geographical and social isolation. The effect of adverse physical and social conditions becomes replicated by increased policing, leading to family fragmentation due to deportations and imposed barriers to basic family activities. It is important to note that an increase in anti-immigrant policies and law enforcement affects not only immigrants. Researchers have found a decrease in the health of all Latinx individuals following raids by immigration enforcement (Novak et al., 2017), and the negative effects of deportation are felt by those who have personal connections with the deported, regardless of how long they have been in the U.S. (Ayón et al., 2017).

### **Limitations**

While this review aimed to explore acculturation and perceived discrimination as they relate to the mental health of Latinxs during the presidential election of 2016, our review was limited because only one of the studies included here used a measure of acculturation. Instead, researchers favored a focus on discrimination, which appears to have the most damaging effects on the mental health of Latinxs. Context of reception was identified as a

primary factor impacting migrant acculturation. An increased investigative emphasis is necessary to understand how context and popular attitudes impact immigrants.

One other limitation of this review is that the studies selected for inclusion used a predominance of qualitative research methods. Most studies used in-depth interviews as the primary data-gathering method. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews might be essential in describing first-hand accounts of discrimination and the effects these experiences have on Latinxs. However, other effects on mental health were difficult to measure, such as perceived racist-nativist encounters, the impact of social and geographical isolation, and the daily stresses of living under the threat of deportation.

A third major limitation and one that requires special mention is the ability of this review to conclude causality. None of the studies included here establish a direct causal link between the anti-immigrant context of the 2016 presidential election and poor mental health outcomes in Latinx communities. Other variables are at play in this relationship, and the topics covered here are complex and multi-dimensional. While some of the studies included specific variable measures, others attempted to describe the participants' experience more generally. Given the diversity of Latinxs represented in this review and the paucity of studies, it is challenging to generalize the results to the entire Latinx population.

### **Future Directions**

The use of Latinx Critical Race theory (Gómez & Pérez Huber, 2019) helped researchers capture and describe the experience of living under a political and social climate that disparages and criticizes entire groups of people. Further inquiries should continue using this framework and others such as the

Stress Process Model (García, 2018) to conceptualize and capture Latinx experiences under the Trump administration. These models help to expand our understanding of Latinidad beyond traditional and often stereotypical forms. As presented in this review, Latinxs of all backgrounds are experiencing increased mental health needs during and after the presidential election cycle of 2016. These individuals are not only migrants but the children of these migrants, and second, third, or even fourth generation Latinxs. As shown in one study, Action Research models present an innovative and effective way of capturing the stories of individuals who are usually not included in traditional research (Rodriguez et al., 2018). Such models might be especially effective when used in studies that include Latinx communities who live in semi-segregated urban environments and farming communities of undocumented migrants. These individuals might be less likely to respond to traditional advertisements for research or open the door to strangers. Therefore, researchers must partner with local leaders and service providers to establish a rapport and obtain a richer and more nuanced understanding of migrants' lives and experiences.

The anti-immigrant rhetoric presented and augmented during the election cycle of 2016 negatively impacted Latinxs' mental health and daily living. This effect is most prominent in places where anti-immigrant sentiment translates into heightened law enforcement tactics and local, state, and federal policies, directives, and laws. The negative mental health impacts presented in this review highlight the urgency with which researchers must continue exploring, analyzing, and documenting the experiences of millions of Latinxs living in the U.S.. To do this, researchers may need to depart from their usual modus operandi. This departure may include partnering with local community leaders and social

workers, documenting personal accounts, and recording in-depth interviews to enrich the collected data. Personal accounts often speak of fear, sadness, and despair. They contain words that resonate strongly among policymakers and ultimately help bend the often named "arc of history" toward a more just country for everyone.

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**Table 1**

*Summary of Studies Included in this Review*

Author and Year	Aim	Design	Characteristics of the Sample	MH Outcome Measures	Heightened Sense of Fear Findings	Relevant Findings
Cruz Nichols et al. (2018)	Explore relation between county-level deportations and mental health as well as personal connection with someone who has been deported, perceptions of racialized policing and health outcomes.	Quantitative [Latinx National Health and Immigration Survey (LNHIS), ICE, & SComm deportation data.]	Latinxs living in the U.S. during and post 2016 election. (N=1005)	Self-reported MH needs; Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS)	Increase in hypervigilance around law enforcement and immigration police.	Positive association between SComm deportations and MH needs (period immediately pre-election). Positive association of a personal connection with someone who has been deported and MH needs.
García (2018)	Explore the impact that a threat of deportation has on the stressors faced by undocumented women, as well as whether it intensifies access to resources (physical and social) in an anti-immigrant climate.	Qualitative (Interviews)	Undocumented Mexican immigrant women living in Houston, Texas. (N=30)	Thematic identification in interviews and subsequent focused coding	Increased sense of fear reported in response to the threat of deportation.	Participants actively avoided authorities which limited their access to resources. Family fragmentation and decrease of social relationships. Loss of control and autonomy. Feelings of fear, sadness, and hyper-vigilant mentality.

Gomez & Pérez Huber (2019)	Explore Latinx DACAmented college students' experiences with racist nativist microaggressions within and beyond campus.	Qualitative [In-depth interviews ( <i>Testimonios</i> )]	Latinx college students who obtained legal documentation under DACA program who lived in the U.S. during fall of 2016 (N=10)	Thematic identification based on LatCrit (Latinx Critical Race Theory) model	Fear for one's safety and increased sense of fear reported by participants.	Experiences of racist nativist microaggressions throughout their lifetimes. Increased use of caution for self-disclosure in public settings. Increased sense of fear, anger, avoidance, and frustration. Internalization of racist nativist discourse. Fear of law enforcement. Hyper vigilant/ awareness mentality. Increased sense of empowerment for telling own's story.
Hatzenbuehler et al. (2017)	Evaluate associations between state-level policies and adverse mental health outcomes among Latinxs.	Quantitative [Data from Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)] (2012 dataset)	Latinxs living in 31 states of the U.S. in 2012.	(BRFSS) -mental health question of number of poor mental health days; K6 (six-item indicator of non-specific psychological distress)	Reported psychological distress associated with a sense of constricted opportunities and exclusionary immigration policies.	Living in a state with more exclusionary immigration policies is associated with worse mental health outcomes than those living in states with less exclusionary policies. Increased number of poor mental health days for Latinxs who live in states with more exclusionary policies. Strong relationship between state-level public opinion toward immigration and psychological distress for Latinxs as compared with non-Latinxs living in the same states.



<p>Krupenkin et al. (2019)</p>	<p>Examine changes in mental-health-related searches among Democrats and Republicans. Explore shift in searches among Latinxs.</p>	<p>Quantitative (Data of searches by more than 1 million Bing users before and after the election)</p>	<p>Bings users before and after the 2016 election (1 million). Compared to 300,000 users who answered partisanship question on MSN.com. Latinx/Spanish searches: identify those who searched in Spanish at least once, then examined searches both in English and Spanish by those users.</p>	<p>Searches for mental-health-related keywords and their Spanish translation: depression, anxiety, stress, suicide/ suicidal, therapy; as well as specific anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medication searches. (<i>Control for day of the week, seasonality, age and gender</i>)</p>	<p>Increased stress and depression related searches online were reported by Spanish speakers.</p>	<p>Spanish-speaking Latinxs had clear, significant, and sustained increase in “depression,” “anxiety,” and “therapy” searches. Significant increase in searches post-election of Spanish terms for therapy, suicidal, anxiety, suicide, and specific anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medications.</p>
<p>Mallet &amp; García Bedolla (2019)</p>	<p>Examine the effects of the ending of DACA announcement on the health outcomes of Latinx DACA recipients.</p>	<p>Qualitative (In-depth interviews)</p>	<p>Latinx DACA recipients, 18 and older, living in California at the time of the announcement (N=43)</p>	<p>Coding for 5 main sections: Socioeconomic characteristics, immigration status, current living conditions, social assistance programs, and experiences in those programs.</p>	<p>Fear of deportation reported as a source of emotional distress and poorer self-perceived health.</p>	<p>Individuals reported feelings of uncertainty, avoidance of services such as medical attention, decrease in size of social networks which led to a growing sense of social isolation. Participants also reported increase on instances of discrimination, and internalization of institutionalized racism. Overall increase in stress levels were also reported.</p>

Mann-Jackson et al. (2018)	Explore Latinx men's experiences of discrimination, violence, and immigration enforcement and their effects on their mental health and well-being.	Mixed methods	Latinx men living in North Carolina and who spoke Spanish ( $N = 247$ ).	Items measuring perceived health status, drug and alcohol use, and depressive symptoms (Center of Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale). Thematic identification and coding of in-depth interviews.	Participants reported a state of constant worry and heightened awareness as a result of experiences of violent victimization and discrimination.	Being questioned about immigration status was significantly associated with increased odds of drugs use and clinically significant depressive symptoms. Unfair treatment frequently based on immigration status, race, and language. Discrimination impacts the well-being of Latinx men and their families. Experiences of violent victimization as common among Latinx men. Discrimination at work and within police interactions was found to be most common and difficult to address.
Nuñez & Meráz García (2017)	Assess the perceptions of college and race among Latinx elementary school students.	Qualitative/ Mixed Methods (Rendition of the Clark doll experiment and adding college attainment question) (Scene. 1 had two female dolls, one of Latinx and 1 of White background; Scene. 2 had 1 male and 1 female doll, both of Latinx background)	Latinx children in grades 2nd to 5 <sup>th</sup> . ( $N=35$ ) (14 males and 21 females) Most of the children's parents were first generation Mexican/ Mexican American parents.	Perceptions of self-esteem, race, and success/ college attainment evaluated through questions in the interview for each scenario.		Children selected white doll as "doing better" in school, as well as most liked, and favored by teachers. Majority of children identified with White doll the most, especially males. When both dolls were of Latinx background, female doll was most positively perceived.

<p>Rodriguez et al. (2018)</p>	<p>Explore the effects that current immigration policies have on Latinx families affected by domestic violence.</p>	<p>Qualitative (Participatory Action Research)</p>	<p>Latinx individuals attending the <i>Caminar Latinx</i> program related to domestic violence. (N=18) (10 adults and 8 youth)</p>	<p>Thematic analysis of interviews.</p>	<p>Heightened sense of fear reported by participants related to the threat of deportation and discrimination.</p>	<p>Most participants reported experiencing discrimination and harassment, and in turn felt a sense of dehumanization and humiliation to the word “illegal.” Overall reports of bullying at school and verbal harassment among participants. Decrease in help seeking and overall increase of distrust of authorities and service providers. Experiences of social and economic marginalization were also reported.</p>
<p>Szaflarski &amp; Bauldry (2019)</p>	<p>Examine the effects that perceived discrimination has on immigrant and refugee health and well-being.</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>Data was collected in two waves between 2001 and 2005. N= over 76,000. Over-representation of Latinx individuals in both waves.</p>	<p>Mental component summary of the SF-12v2</p>		<p>Among 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants there was a negative association between perceived discrimination and mental health. No relation found between acculturation level and mental health. Among refugees there was a negative association between perceived discrimination and social support.</p>

*Note.* Abbreviations used: MH= mental health; SComm: (Secure Communities Program) A system used by immigration law enforcement that generates a database where local community governments and agencies can report undocumented immigrants (real or suspected).