

Abigail "Aby" Macias '14
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Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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WOMICK: Just really quickly, to get us started, my name is Cally Womick, and I'm here in Rauner Library. Today is Thursday, March 13th, 2014, and it's really, really snowy outside.

MACIAS: [Chuckles.]

WOMICK: So how about you introduce yourself and talk about your life pre-Dartmouth.

MACIAS: My life. Well, my name's Abigail Macias. I'm a '14. My life before Dartmouth. [Chuckles.] I'm originally from Los Angeles, from South-Central L.A.—Watts, to be specific. I lived there until I was 13, and then I moved to Lake Tahoe when I was—yeah, 13, for, like, two years, and then I moved to Reno, Nevada, where I live now. So I guess my life before Dartmouth—it was always a blur. It was never really stable. That's the one thing I always have liked about Dartmouth, that I know, like, I'm gonna have a bed here, I'm gonna have food here, no matter what really happens back home. And that's always been really, like, something to look forward to.

But I would also think that my life before Dartmouth—I really never considered it before coming here. Someone would ask me something, like, "Where do you come from?" And it was only here at Dartmouth, you know, like, people ask you, "Where do you come from?" and all these things because—yeah.

My life before Dartmouth. Yeah, I'd say my life before Dartmouth—it was unstable, not to say that after Dartmouth it is going to be any much better, but I think it's been more or less now coming to terms with the person I've been with the person I want to be, and Dartmouth has provided the place to mediate that, so—yeah.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. What sort of schools did you attend, growing up?

MACIAS: I attended public schools all my life, but I guess when people ask about public schools, you know, they think about inner cities, I guess. I went to schools where students were predominantly Latino, and the majority of them were on free or reduced lunch.

WOMICK: So how did you hear about Dartmouth and decide to come here?

MACIAS: Oh, my God, Dartmouth. This is the running joke in my family. I didn't want to come to Dartmouth. My dream school, growing up in L.A., was USC. To be a Trojan was, like, IT in my family, and we all looked forward to football season. But I didn't get into USC, right? [Chuckles.] But I got into Dartmouth, and the way that happened was that I had ten free application waivers due to being on free and reduced lunch and after applying to nine schools, I could not think of another school I wanted to apply to, so I went through all the schools that, like, didn't require any extra supplements, and Dartmouth was on the list, and was, like, *That looks cool.*

So I applied, and I got in. And then after I got in was when I did more research, and I learned, you know, like, it's an Ivy League school and it's all these other things. And I was, like, *Wow, that's pretty cool.* But it was never something that I knew in the back of my mind, like, *I want to go to an Ivy League school.* Like, not at all. It just happened.

WOMICK: Uh-huh. So how did you decide to come here? Like, getting from, like, not knowing about it at all and applying.

MACIAS: [Chuckles.] Yeah. Just, when the other admission letters started coming in, I compared the financial aid packages right away, and I knew that Dartmouth was it for me, in that sense. But then, when I got my admission letter from Berkeley, I was, like, *Oh, my God, I wanna go to Berkeley so bad!* But, again, it would cost more to go to Berkeley, and, like, just the loan for one year there was what it would cost me to go all four years to Dartmouth and still not accrue as much interest debt as I would have gone there. So that's when I just decided, you know, *I'm just gonna go across country and just risk it. Why not?*

WOMICK: Had you ever been across country?

MACIAS: Oh, no. I think the last time I was in a plane, I think, I was 5, and I went to Mexico with my parents, or 8. But this was the first time I flew alone, and it was terrifying 'cause, you know, to go from one point and then to go to Boston and see the Atlantic and all those things that are really, really overwhelming.

And to come to the wilderness. That was even more terrifying. I was, like, *Oh, my God*. It wasn't pretty. At first it was really quite scary.

WOMICK: Uh-huh. What did your friends and family think about you coming to Dartmouth?

MACIAS: Uh. Hmm. My mom—my family—I know they're very, very proud of me 'cause I was going—you know, like, they came to the United States with the idea that one of us would go to college and, like, fulfill all these things that—you know, people come to America for a better life. But it wasn't really until, like, it hit her that, like, you know, I was gonna leave our home, and I was probably not gonna be the same person that she had raised—I think that's when, like, she started getting more and more scared as the day came that I was going to leave.

It means, I think, more now to her, seeing that, like, one, I haven't changed. But also, you know, like, other people—I guess the people who need to know what Dartmouth is know and the people who don't really need to know, don't know.

As in, you know, like at my mom's job—she works at a retirement home with elderly people, and most of them know what Dartmouth is. So when they, like, see, like, her shirt or something, they go, "Oh, my God, Dartmouth. Who goes to Dartmouth?" And that's usually a really interesting conversation for her because she doesn't know, but through them she's learned that it's a pretty big deal.

So, yeah, so for me, I guess, it provides a validation that my family always wanted but not necessarily needed.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Cool.

So how was your experience first getting to Dartmouth? Like, the first week on the ground here.

MACIAS: Oh man, it sucked. I remember I cried the first day. I cried the first day, and then I had to go to trips the next day, and, like, not that was even better—like, it still sucked. I didn't—I really couldn't connect with the people I was there with. And they tried really hard, my trip leaders, so I really thank them for that, but I could not do it. I could not bring myself to push myself out of my comfort zone. So that was the first week.

But then, like, when I came back from trips I did FYSEP, which is the First-Year Student Enrichment Program, which is a Pre-O program dedicated to helping, you know, first gen students, like, bridge the gap between high school and college. And that was it for me. That was super helpful. I did not feel anymore, like, left out. I felt like these were my people. And they have been my people.

Like, now, we're about to do, like, our closing dinner in a few weeks, like—since freshman year now, and it's been great to have had that. But, yeah. I don't know what it would have been like if I didn't have FYSEP. I think I would have just stayed in my room, probably, not made friends.

WOMICK: Mmm. What about your freshman floor?

MACIAS: Oh. [Chuckles.] You know, it wasn't—they were nice. You know, my freshman floor—they were nice. But I think many of them were really religious, and I am too but not to the point where—like, I'm never gonna be in church, like, every Sunday. Like, that's not me, and I think that's what they expected. So that just set off, like this weird tension of, like, what do you think it means to be a Christian and what doesn't? So after a while, like, I just shut off and didn't spend time with them.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Yeah. So the FYSEP people were your people.

MACIAS: Yeah, for sure.

WOMICK: What sort of things did you all do together?

MACIAS: Oh, man. So besides Pre-O, you know, we went to orientation, and we did lectures together. We did all these things. But there was just some moments where, like, they would, like, take us bowling and do stuff. Like, we went hiking. None of us had gone hiking 'cause most of us are from cities, and we're, like, "What? What is this?"

So it's so funny. You know, like, we think we're so tough, like, coming from Such-and-such place, but then you put us in the wilderness and it's—

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

MACIAS: It's just not, compared to all these other things. So it was that. Like, it was very quick to break down all our barriers that we had put up. And it was also really good about making us identify why, right away, why we came here. And most of us said, you know, like, our families. But, like, FYSEP was really good also about making us realize that we're here for ourselves as well, so we never feel like we have to live up to some, like, unattainable goal. Like, we are doing something for ourselves, and I think that's been really nice to remember at times when it seems super, super overwhelming.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Yeah.

So thinking about the whole of freshman year, —

MACIAS: Yeah.

WOMICK: —what would you say defined that year? Whether it's friends or classes or activities.

MACIAS: Oh, my God. Really? Freshman year? OH my God. I would say it was this girl. Oh, my God. This girl, I remember—I always knew, right?—I guess I knew my sexuality. Like, I knew I wasn't straight and I knew I wasn't, like, a lesbian 'cause I was, like, *I'm into guys. I'm into girls. I'm into people. Like, let's go with that.* But I met this girl who is just—I ca— oh, my God. She was so great. Like, she took the world I knew and made it bigger, you know, and all these things.

But—oh! It was—she was not the nicest person, I guess. You know, when I realized that, like, me not having money

or, like, having some experiences she really wanted in a person were always gonna be the determining factor of her not seeing me the way I saw her. And I think that was really, like, hurtful for me. 'Cause I could get the whole, like, you know, —I mean, even if you told me, like, I'm not attractive, I would have got that. I would have so got that. But then I would be, like, *No, that's not true*. So that was really hurtful, to realize the extent to which, like, my self-worth really was tied to, like, having money for some people. It was really, like, heartbreaking. And that's when I was, like, *Wow, this is a real thing. I cannot extract my, like, lack of capital from my self-worth to some people, and I'm gonna have to get over it right now or else it's gonna break me for the rest of the time I'm here*. So it was that [snaps fingers]. That.

WOMICK: Yeah. So how *did* you work through that?

MACIAS: I went to Brazil. I applied to the Brazil LSA. I went, and it was just the summer to myself, and really cool people, who also just wanted a way to get away from Dartmouth, and we didn't have anything, like, another internship planned for the summer, so we did the LSA. And that was it.

WOMICK: Just on the fly?

MACIAS: Yeah, just on the fly.

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

MACIAS: I mean, the application is super easy, so we just, like, applied. Got in.

WOMICK: Cool. So then going into sophomore year.

MACIAS: Mhmm.

WOMICK: What was sophomore year about?

MACIAS: Figuring out what I really wanted to, like, spend the next four years studying. I came in as an Econ major. I stayed as an Econ major until my sophomore winter, when I realized it was—I dug, you know, the principles of, like, you know, like, how things should work, but I cannot get over the fact that, like, the people I was in class with just were not willing to

work toward those principles. I was, like,—I always thought the economy was just messed up, right? I was, like, *No, it's, like, you guys mess it up. We mess it up.* So once I got that, I was, like, *I cannot put myself through this. I cannot be the investment banker I wanted to be. Like, I'm not gonna fix Wall Street, right?*

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: So I was, like, *What's the next thing that I really love to do?* And I was, like, *Well, I always loved literature, and I always loved the idea that I can, like, command language to the point where I can get to some degree of, like, mutual understanding with other people.* Like, I'd always dug that. I was, like, *Lemme try that again.* So I jumped right back not that, and I loved it. The professor was incredible.

But then it got to the point where I was, like—my friends and other people started asking me, like, “What are you gonna do with an English degree? Like, you came to Dartmouth to, like, spend four years reading?” And I was, like, “Yeah, I did.”

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

MACIAS: So that was really hard, to explain to, like, a lot of people that, you know, I'm not gonna leave Dartmouth with the, like, six-figure salary that you thought I would be or I thought I would be. And, again, realizing that that was for me, carving that place out of Dartmouth for me within the English department was really important for me sophomore year.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: Especially with my other friends 'cause, like, they too were hesitant to take—to do majors like that. Like, many of them became, like, Psych majors or Gov majors, but it's, like, it's not what they're passionate about. And it's, like, I've seen them go through these last few years, like, really, like, hating it. And I was, like,—that's the one thing I've been thankful for. I've never hated my major.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Did you feel like your friend group changed when you changed majors?

MACIAS: No, no. I think they always knew that, like, “Aby, you’re not an Econ person.” Like, “Why are you putting yourself through that?” I was, like, “I don’t know, either. It makes sense. You know, everyone else is an Econ major. Why not me?” And it’s, like, well, now I don’t care. I’m doing this to be happy, not only to be financially stable. That doesn’t scare me, like, what comes after.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: That’s fine.

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

MACIAS: Like right now.

WOMICK: At Dartmouth.

MACIAS: Yeah, yeah.

WOMICK: Yeah. What about junior year?

MACIAS: Junior. Junior year was about—a lot. So my sophomore—so I was on, right, fall all through my freshman summer, and I didn’t take my first break until sophomore spring.

WOMICK: So how many terms on was that?

MACIAS: Yeah, so it was six.

WOMICK: Six?

MACIAS: Yeah, I almost did the suicide seven, and it sucks so bad. So when I went home, I was just ready, right, to, like, just not think. So when I think about sophomore year, I think about that, but I also think about me just wanting to go back home and figure out some things.

And it was during that time that, like, I reconciled with my father. I hadn’t talked to him since, like, maybe junior year, sophomore year of high school? Just ‘cause my parents got divorced. So that was really big for me. And then, you know,

I was on this great high because I was, like, *I talked to my dad. Great. Like, I'm making amends.*

But then I came back sophomore year, and all that just went away, and I was just, like, *I still need to resolve some of the things here at Dartmouth that I left behind.* Like, I'd figured out the whole major thing, but there was still, like, for instance, some moments in class where I would be nervous to speak, and I didn't understand why. I never before, like, was self-conscious about it. Like, I just spoke, and I knew what I was saying merited attention.

But I became very self-conscious in that, about the way I spoke, about the way I dressed, about how I presented myself to some professors who I felt maybe didn't necessarily take me as seriously as some of their other students. So it was growing—it was about that, becoming comfortable again with me, being comfortable with the idea that some people would not always be okay with the fact that I can be, like, *Oh, I love Tupac, but I also love, like, F. Scott Fitzgerald as much as I do these things.* Like, that's okay, and realizing that that's why I am. Like, that's me. Just figuring all those things out.

WOMICK: Wow.

MACIAS: And going to Ghana. Ghana was great.

WOMICK: Tell me about Ghana.

MACIAS: Yeah. Ghana. My winter. I went junior winter. 'Cause I was like, *Never again. I will never be here again for winter.* (But here I am.) But I went, and I was a volunteer teacher. And I normally always taught, like, high school students, but there in Ghana I had to teach second and fourth graders. And that was a trip 'cause I've never—no, I avoid elementary school kids like the plague because they are just too much. But these kids were great.

And I taught English, not, like, you know, like, reinforcing, like, writing skills, but it was, like, getting down to, like, phonics. And, like, you know, *This letter A makes the 'ah' sound,* and just bringing them together, and that was completely different because, like, Dartmouth had never

prepared me for that—right? Nothing prepares you for that. But it's, like,—I remember, like, things—like, *You remember that 20 page paper, Aby? It got done. You know, this will get done.* So I think like, in some way, like, those transferable moments, like, helped me get through it and made me realize that, you know, like, *Wow, I'm really not the person I was when I first came to Dartmouth, and that's good.*

WOMICK: Yeah.

MACIAS: That makes me happy.

WOMICK: Yeah. So did you come straight back to Dartmouth from Ghana?

MACIAS: Mmm...Did I? Yeah, I did. I came straight back.

WOMICK: What was that transition like? They're pretty different places, I would imagine.

MACIAS: Yeah, it was sad. I missed, I guess, all the reflections that the children would give me, but I also just missed—yeah, it was so simple. Like, I would spend all day, like, from seven to, like, five at the school. Then you come home for dinner. You maybe, like, read and shower and go to bed 'cause you're so tired for the next day. And that was it. I didn't have to worry about, like, answering my e-mails or all these things. Yeah, so that was hard.

But it's also just hard to realize—I guess I never thought about my privilege just because I don't think I come—well, I don't come from some, like, from the higher end of the socioeconomic spectrum, but, like, I never thought about, like, me being, like, a lighter -skinned person and what that meant to some people. So it really forced me to reconcile some of those things that I just overlooked. Like colorism within my own family. I was, like, that's not a thing. But, oh, it definitely is a thing. It really is a thing.

WOMICK: Yeah. And so how did all of this come together for senior year?

MACIAS: Yeah, for senior year, senior year. So this past summer, I was in D.C., interning at a nonprofit. And that was nice. That

was really just a summer to myself. I didn't know anyone in the city. I was just with my host family. I met people, which was great. But I knew that, like, I wanted to do a thesis, right? And I was, like, *Okay, the one thing I want to get in senior year. Like, I cannot leave Dartmouth without, like, one, letting them know that, like, I've spent the last three years reading stuff that, like, —it's been great. But I have yet to read a book in which there's someone that looks like me or my family or people that I grew up with.* So I was, like, *If I'm not gonna read it, I have to write this book, and I'm gonna do it.*

But I also knew going into the, like, the department, although it's super, like, moving towards a more progressive state, it's also been very hesitant to allow some projects like that to happen because they don't have the expertise to support you with that, so it's better to just say, like, *No, don't try it and risk failure*, rather than just, like, *Go and try something that we don't already have in the department.*

But my project proposal got approved, thankfully. I'm working on it, and that's been one of the most rewarding things I've done, to know that I came from being so nervous to, like, even speak in class and be, like, *Aw, I don't know what I'm gonna say is gonna make sense, but, like, here, let me say it.* And now I'll just be, like, *No, this is what I'm gonna say, and either you like it, or disagree, or whatever.* And I think that's what a college education is supposed to do—you know, like, give you a disposition to speak and the confidence to know that what you say is gonna mean something, impact something. So it's good. That for me is my senior project. Like, getting a job—yeah, it's gonna happen at some point. But I've just applied for things, and now it's a matter of, like, playing the waiting game.

WOMICK: Yeah, that game.

So looking towards the spring term, what do you expect it to be like or what do you want it to be like?

MACIAS: I expect it to be a super emotional, super charged. Even right now, like, I feel like I go through so many waves of emotion just 'cause even though maybe I'm having the best day, maybe, like, you know, my best friend got rejected from that

grad school program she applied to, so, like, we are all gonna emote 'cause, like, wow.

But also, I guess, coming to terms with, like,—for so long the goal was getting to college, and now I don't know what comes after. That terrifies me so much 'cause it's, like, *All right, I did what my family wanted me to do, but what comes after that?*

But I've realized that I do want to go to grad school. I want to go into a Ph.D. program. When, how—I don't know. But that's something that's in the cards for me. I want to go back to L.A., but I've met someone here now, and I'm just, like,—everything's up in the air again. So it's that.

It's all these feelings that, like, I never thought would happen at Dartmouth, finding friends that would make me want to stay here longer.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

How do you think your upbringing and early years impacted your overall experience here?

MACIAS: Well, for one, like, it definitely—if, like, somebody asked me, like, what I did identify as, I'd be, like, "Oh, I'm Mexican-American, Latina, Chicana." I never had to say that before Dartmouth because it was just a given. You know, you're never forced to, like, play the game of which one is not like the other until you really—which one is not like the other, and that only happened at Dartmouth. So it forced me to, like, become conscious of that fact, that, one, like, *Oh, maybe I am different to some people.*

But also the whole history that comes with, like, my—yeah, with my culture, I guess, with being Mexican, not necessarily taking for granted and not being okay when people, like, you know,—I used to be okay and be, like, "Yeah, like, you know, I come from nothing." And it's, like, no, I *don't* come from nothing. Like, Dartmouth didn't make me something. I was always something. It just made me something different, or influenced the person I was.

So I guess becoming conscious of the narrative that was already behind me and the one that I wanted to make for myself was something that, like, Dartmouth really forced me to do, and really grapple with the fact that, you know, some things—like, when I speak Spanish, how that just alerts some people, and that’s okay. If that makes you uncomfortable, okay. That’s your deal. That’s not my problem.

So I guess that’s what Dartmouth really—really pushes me every day to be uncomfortable and willing to make other people uncomfortable.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Would you say that there have been times here when other people make you feel uncomfortable?

MACIAS: Oh, yeah. Totally, totally. [Chuckles.] My first week—I guess part of the reason—I should elaborate why the first week sucked—was I remember this girl just asked me out of nowhere, like, in Spanish if I had papers. And was, like, “What? What do you mean if I have papers? Like, you mean, like, documentation?” “Like, yeah. Like, ‘cause you’re Mexican.” And I was, like, “What?” I was like, *You don’t ask that!* Like, who asks that? And I just stood there, like, aghast for a good ten minutes until I realized how offended I was and how—I started wondering, like, if there was this big sign on my forehead that said, like, oh, “Undocumented person right here, You know, this way.”

And all these weird things, ‘cause, like, I never thought about myself like that. I was, like, I don’t think I have an accent, for one. So I guess I never thought I had the markers that make me specifically Mexican. Yeah, and when I realized that that was there, I felt really, really bad. I felt ashamed of being Mexican, of being poor, of not having, like, my family’s name on some wall or, like, something. You know, I felt really bad.

And I didn’t understand why I, like, my values were so shot down by that one comment. And for a while, I think I really harbored resentment towards that person. I mean, still, let’s be real. Whenever I see her across campus, I get so angry, ‘cause it’s, like, *For so long you made me feel so less than,*

and you'll never know that. But, you know what? Forget you. You don't matter. You're irrelevant to my life now.

But, yeah, I just think the fact that I don't think people—but why wouldn't they accept me, like, if I'm confident in who I am? I don't know why that upset me so much or why it, like, it hurts me to talk about it. But it's there.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. It's fair for that to be upsetting. Really.

MACIAS: Yeah.

WOMICK: This brings to mind to me a lot of the discussions that I've heard around the Freedom Budget. People are always asking—I guess the top five questions I've heard, you know, why do they want to be called something other than “illegal immigrant?” That just comes up.

MACIAS: Yeah.

WOMICK: I don't know. I think there's a lot of ignorance here surrounding what makes people feel othered that way.

MACIAS: Yeah.

WOMICK: Yeah.

So thinking about Dartmouth as a whole, would you say that there *is* such a thing as a cohesive community here or anything that ties people together?

MACIAS: [Long pause.] Oh, gosh, this is a good question. I guess, yes, ideally, yes because—just because I found my, like, close network, so, like, obviously there's something that pulls us together, and it hasn't been the fact that, you know, like, yes, it does help that we all come from, like, I guess “minority” or whatever backgrounds.

But I think that there's something to be said, like,—there's something to be said for people that, like, even don't come from backgrounds like that, that I've met here, that, you know, like, we've struggled through, like, that 20-page paper together, and through that we found, like, so many other things. And I think there's a commitment to—I don't even

know how to word it, but I really do like to think that most people at Dartmouth understand that, you know, you come here to get the tools you need to go back to some community and address the problems that have been entrenched there for so long. I like to think that's what people come here to do. That's what *I* came here to do. And the people that I've met here are doing that as well. But I know that's not the case, right? But I think that's one thing that I like to think people come here for.

But besides that, I can't think—no. Like, I'm not even gonna say, like, coming together to school in the tundra bonds us because I really don't think that.

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

MACIAS: I've heard that—some people have told me, like, “You know, like, oh, like, you know, we're trudging through the snow together. We're gonna remember this at, like, our fifty year reunion.” I'm, like, *No, I'm not gonna remember that at my fifty year reunion.* Like, I'm just gonna be those moments, like,—yeah, they were, like a lot, but I don't think that was, like, *the*, like, character-building moments that I've had here.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: So—yeah.

WOMICK: What would you say have been the most character-building moments you've had here?

MACIAS: The most character-building moments. [Pause.] I remember...I remember being in one of my English classes. It was a seminar, and we were talking about—for some reason, it was early black American literature, and somehow the discussion turned to Obama and all these other things, and I remember this moment where, like, this guy just belittled me so much for, like, just for being a woman. And I could either, like, have taken it or, whatever, bowed out gracefully, but it was, like,—the professor, looked at me—he was, like, *Are you gonna address this or not? Because I'm not. Like, this is your fight.*

I was, like, —like, *How am I gonna let this boy know that, like, I'm not less than because I don't have a penis?* But I found it—I just, like, boned him in the argument, and it was great. But I guess in that moment, 'cause for so long, when I was growing up in L.A., you know, you do handle things physically. Like, you have a fight, and that's settled. There is no questions asked. It don't—it was hard to be, like, *Oh, words. Okay, use them.* So for me that was a big character-building moment—like, finding new ways to apply everything that I've actually learned here at Dartmouth. And not to say that, like, that form of discourse—I'm gonna privilege it over the other ones I have learned all my life, but there is something to be said to understand that which “others” you, how they “other” you and how to use it against them. Really, I guess—yeah, that was a big moment for me.

WOMICK: And the professor said nothing?

MACIAS: Yeah. No, he didn't say anything.

WOMICK: Wow.

What role do you say you've played in the community here, and what groups you've been a part of and how you've been a part of them?

MACIAS: I've been thinking about that a lot. 'Cause people, like, when they ask me something—or, like, you know, when you apply to things—like, I always, felt like, *Oh, like, at one point I was president of La Alianza Latina*, you know. Because when I first came in here, that was the first immediate community besides FYSEP that I found. That's not to say, —I'm never not gonna say I'm not Latina, but I've found other communities that, like,—other ways that I can be a Latina and find other ways to express that—you know, whether it's through academics, whether it's through other positions, like my internships, the fact that I want to get my Ph.D. in, like, Chicano studies, you know. That, for example, you don't have to go to every party that La Alianza Latina to show that you're with the community. And I felt for so long that that was the way you showed that you were in solidarity with them.

And at times I felt myself at odds with, you know, not being Latina enough or not being brown enough. So for me, if I

were to say my role, I guess it's just, like, expanding that understanding of what it means to be that. 'Cause I can't imagine anybody ever telling me or saying to me, like, "Well, Aby Macias, she doesn't identify Latina." It's like, no, I definitely do, but you're not gonna find me anymore at every single party, at every single pre-game 'cause it's, like, that's just not who I am anymore.

And I think—I don't think I'm the kind of person that takes people's things—or, like, their bullshit too lightly. If I have a problem with you, I'm gonna direct it to you. And whether you like confrontation or not, like, we're gonna have it out right then and there.

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

MACIAS: And I guess that's my role in the community. Like, that's why I think I'm not afraid to be critical or vocal about some things. But that's not to say I'm going to be also super thoughtless. Like, there's a way to go about things. There's a way to make sure that your voice is heard in certain moments rather than others. But, yeah, I guess I'm just not one to be complicit anymore.

WOMICK: Is that something you think you learned at Dartmouth specifically?

MACIAS: Oh, definitely, yeah. I remember there was a time when I would be upset when people would even insinuate that, like,—like, I would get so mad when people talked about, like, things, like, as in socialism and communism and all these other things that, like, would be better for people like me, for being poor. But it's, like, *Oh no, no. Like, Capitalism. Like, there's definitely, like,—if I work hard enough I'm gonna get there.* And it was, like, realizing really about, like, *No. Like, this is not gonna be one way that I'm gonna make it out.*

This was really, really hard for me 'cause it's, like, I've internalized so many of those things. Like, you know, that metaphor—or the idea, like, you know, you pull your bootstraps up or whatever. But it's, like, I never had bootstraps or, like, boots to pull up, so what the fuck am I

gonna do or other people gonna do? It's been really, really hard.

And how uncomfortable I was when things like the Dartmouth Dimensions protest happened, when I was, like, "Why? Why did you have the protest? Why couldn't you do it another way?" It's, like, why not? Go. Do it. If that's what you feel you need to do to get your voice heard, okay. But I guess I realized more of my own biases and fear of retribution rather than recognizing the hurt that so many people have been put here through.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: That was something I realized.

WOMICK: Yeah. I think that's definitely been a resounding theme for a couple of years now: a bunch of people speaking out against the climate that Dartmouth has in general. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MACIAS: Yeah. I'm happy I'm at a point at Dartmouth where I can see these things and understand them and not, like, just be so insular about them and be, like, *No, no, that's not me. I'm just here for my academics*, because I can't imagine that if I talk about, you know, leaving here with the tools I need to enact whatever change I want in my community, like, —that's gonna mean interacting with the people who, like, come from Dartmouth who are gonna be in the, like, key decision-making positions, whether I like it or not. I have to know how they're gonna go about not letting me enact that change. I have to be ready for it.

So I'm happy that that's happening. I'm not gonna be the person that goes, —who calls herself radical. I don't think I'm still there yet. I can't imagine what another system could be or what another role could be like rather than the one I know. But I know it can be better. I'm excited to know that, like, there's people who are willing to, like, put themselves out there, risk everything for some better tomorrow. That's cool.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: 'Cause I'm not there yet, but I hope to one day be.

WOMICK: How do you feel, like, Dartmouth as an institution and the people actually at Dartmouth are responding to the people who are raising concerns?

MACIAS: I think it's like a bad date. I don't—I mean, it's cool. Like, I read how they, the trustees, approved the whole non-tolerance policy in regards to sexual assault. Great. *Great*. But then there's a whole problem of implementation, right? That's as long as, like, let's say you can post bail, you can hire the best lawyer, there are still mechanisms in place that are gonna allow those privileged few, who tend to be, like, the serial rapists, to get by. And I don't think until, one, you address things like—there's something not inherent but there's something already planted in you, whether you're drunk or not, that makes you think that you have a right to assert your will over anybody else's. And that's ingrained in so many other things, entrenched in so many, like, right?—these systems of oppression that we talk about in the abstract term.

And it *is* scary to imagine that, like, you've maybe raised a child that, like, can feel no remorse, no empathy, can look at somebody and, like, submit them to all these things and be, like, *Whatever, like, I deserve this. I can do this*. And I think until we talk about those things, like, I could not care less about your policies. Like, let's talk about that and how, like, I can go to class and sit next to that same person that you're gonna praise for, like, writing—whatever, getting an A on that economics test. But he's probably gonna do so many messed-up things later on.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: Like I don't think people are ready still yet to have that discussion. Like, why not blitz out a list to all of campus of everyone indicted for sexual assault? Like, I would want to know. I would want to know that person sat next to me in class—that person. I don't feel like we should still, like, try to accommodate their, like, moment of weakness or whatever. Like, no, fuck that. You should have known what you were doing all the time.

Even then, if you're sorry, okay, if you really, like—I get it. You got it. But there's nothing to be said for that person that you inflicted that pain upon, and I have a hard time empathizing with those people who hurt them.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: So it's, like,—that's just, like, nn-nn.

WOMICK: So would you say that sexual assault is a huge problem at Dartmouth?

MACIAS: Oh, totally. Totally, totally, totally. But it's, like,—[Pause]. It hurts me to know that the more I realize about Dartmouth—I don't know if I was always blind to it, but, like, you know, the fact that I could always count on my hands, like, all the women—and men and, you know, transgender people who've been assaulted here, to realize that there's something just, like, so insidious about thinking you have a right to these things and these people. I don't know what it is. I don't know where it starts from. I don't know how you can do away with it if it's already so deep in you, and the fact that you can hide it so well. Because you can.

Like, it's not—you know, people always talk about, like, you know, date rape, how those things happen. And it's, like, obviously you thought that person was okay and pretty, like, cool person up until that point, so it's, like, that's terrifying to me.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Yeah.

So with that sort of in mind, do you think there is a type of person who has an easier time fitting in at Dartmouth?

MACIAS: Yeah. I think you don't even have, like,—like, let's say, okay, money is one thing, right? But you can, like, adopt the manners of money. Like, you can buy clothes from certain places. You can speak about certain things. But it's, like, the way you look definitely, I think, like, you know, one, if you're physically fit, right? You probably were, like, maybe, like, a rower or something in college, and that goes to you being—going probably to some prep school in New England where you, like, did all these things. Like, you're used to this

climate. You know, like, you have—you just know the tacit codes that define places like this, and you don't have that much difficulty in like, switching environments, whereas other people who, like, maybe even if you are, like, a white person, but, like, what if you're from, like, rural Montana? I don't know. You're probably—it's not gonna be easy for you, either. Then there's so many things that are embedded within that, that I think—so I don't even know what you call it, class? I think it's the conflation of all these things. But I'm not willing to just say that it's money alone because it's definitely the way you look as well. 'Cause you could be black, you can be Latino, but if you're willing to be, like, *Okay, I'm gonna, like, adopt those ideologies*, you'll be fine.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: But then I don't know how, like, I was in Collis the other day and this boy who's—clearly he's black, right?—he's black—and he's sitting there with what I'm gonna assume, like, white-passing friends, were talking about how, you know, there was an ongoing debate whether Zimmerman was gonna fight, like, DMX. And he was so uncomfortable by it. And, like, the people, his friends were just, like, "But why? Let's talk about it." He was like, "No."

And then this moment's, like,—it was weird 'cause we looked at each other, and it's, like, "*We know why you're uncomfortable. Like, me and my friends at our table, we know why you're uncomfortable. But you won't say it. You won't say that you finally reached that point where you realized, like, race is still a thing and everything you do cannot separate that, and that's unfortunate.*"

But I think, yeah, there's a certain way you can pass, you can get by a Dartmouth if you're willing to go by it.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: If you, for one, want to be in a frat. Cool. Or a sorority. Like, that's one way, right?

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Are you in a frat or sorority?

MACIAS: Nn-nn. No.

WOMICK: Did you ever consider it?

MACIAS: Yeah, yeah. During my sophomore—when I was in Brazil, the girls I went with were talking about doing rush, and they were so cool, right, that, like, I opened myself to the idea of at least doing rush. Like, *Oh, like, there are cool people here. Like, why wouldn't there more cool people to meet during rush, right?* So I did it. I went through it. But then, like, I could not bring myself, you know, to go through, like, the pref thing, the bid night. I was like—I dropped. And then—that was sophomore fall.

In my sophomore winter, I tried rushing the Latina sorority. That one—I just couldn't do it, either. I was, like, *No, this is not me.* And that's when I realized,—I was, like, *It's just not for me. Minority, mainstream, whatever. I just—I can't do it.*

WOMICK: Mm-hm. What about it turned you off?

MACIAS: I didn't like the idea that, like, they had to break me down to build me up. I was, like, *What? No.* Like, why can't you just, like, take what I already am like? We can grow together. Why do you need to break me down? I guess I didn't like that. And I think it goes back to the idea that,—you know, it's like I'd never, like,—if somebody's gonna impose something upon me rather than take what I already have as being worthwhile, I just, no—I'm very, like,—I have a visceral reaction to it.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. What role do you think the Greek community over all plays at Dartmouth?

MACIAS: For me, we often talk about it being very exclusive, right? But I guess it's exclusive if you care about it. For me, like, I probably haven't been to a frat basement since freshman winter, and I've never cared to. Like, that's not something I look forward to. So I guess it's something, like, that you really, really want to be part of, right? Like, it's gonna suck if you're not.

But for me, I think it's, like, a lot of people that I've met when they're not in frat basements are, like,—when they're not drunk in some contexts, they're just awkward. I don't know,

these people have never, like, learned how to, like, say, “Hi. My name is So-and-so.” Like, “What’s your name? What do you like to do?” If—they’ve never understood how to have a basic conversation with human being. It’s, like, so foreign to them that they, like, have to resort to, like, be in a basement where, like, anything goes, I guess.

And for me, I guess,—I come from a culture, you know, where, like, you drink while having a good time, not *to* have a good time. And I think the Greek culture is very *to* have a good time. And why that is, I’m still trying to figure it out.

And also, I don’t know what it is of wanting to always be in some sort of club, right? I really don’t know. It’s, like, whatever. I guess when you’re not, like,—I haven’t been in all my life, so, like, the concept of being out is not, like, foreign or scary to me, whereas for some people, I really think that’s a thing. And I guess they find some sort of, like, validation in them. I’m like, *If that’s what you need, that’s what you’re gonna probably do.*

And whether it’s the Greek system or something, but it’s, like, you’re always gonna find ways to create those same, like, groups, right?

WOMICK: Mm-hm. Did you have any friends who did take part in those houses?

MACIAS: In mainstream rush?

WOMICK: Yeah.

MACIAS: Yeah, totally, they’re part of it. What, houses? Or what?

WOMICK: How did that affect, you know, the years going forward?

MACIAS: I think—yeah, like, right in the beginning, like, it did affect it in the sense that, like, that was their house. You know, like, *Sisters—whoo! Brothers—whoo! I wanna spend all my time with them.* But luckily the people will, like, you know—I guess they were always real. They were very genuine. They, like, realized the problems within it, and have either, one, removed themselves or gone inactive, so not completely remove themselves, right? Or have remained within them

because they still think they can change it in some way. More power to them.

But I think the other people who realize that, like, how— even, like, you know, you're in the sorority system, you still in some way are complicit, you know, in the sexual assault that happens, and it's mostly in fraternities. They've realized that. But I don't know if they're, like, working to address it from the sense of guilt, which I don't think is any better from just, like, saying, like, "Oh, I'm sorry." I can't deal with guilt.

It's hard. Because then you make it about yourself, right? You don't make it about the issue at hand or about the other people who have, like, experienced the negative effects of that. I don't know if they're doing it because of that or because they genuinely care.

So I guess for me, it's, like, I still think they're trying to realize that. Like, for maybe, like, sophomore year, junior year they did a lot of fucked-up shit, and now in senior year it's, like, *Lemme try to make amends for that.*

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: So, like, it's that. And I'm, like, "I can't help you. I wasn't a part of that. I don't know what meetings are like. I don't know what your initiation or your bonding things were like that made you feel like you were so in tune with this person that you've realized now—they're probably a psychopath." I don't know what to do, because I haven't been a part of that.

WOMICK: Mm-hm. So have you seen Dartmouth as a whole or any parts of it change during your time here?

MACIAS: Change. Maybe not parts, but, like, the fact, like,—let's say, like, Dimensions. Like, three years ago, like, one of the key things I remember is, like, meeting someone, some foreign student who was, like a '13 or something, and have it, like, be such a big part of, like, how Dimensions was for me. It's never gonna be like that for someone again. Ever. Just because they've taken that component out. They've taken the sing and song, dancing out. They've added the whole, like, you know, sexual awareness discussion, and it's, like,— I like to think that it's not gonna, like, regress into, like, what

it was and, like, try to, like, cover up Dartmouth's problems. Sing-along songs, great, but also do—maybe a discussion on –isms, all the –isms I think would be great, just 'cause too many people come into here and not have, one, the language to have the discussions but are just,—like, have never been pushed to do so. I think that'd be cool.

So I think that Dartmouth—I could have never have imagined that—I was, like, *Oh, Dartmouth's always gonna be, like, that, just sing-songy, happy place*, and I don't think it's gonna be like that, at least not for now.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: Or at least to people who've been here, like, know that there's always gonna be push back in some way.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

We've already talked about this a little bit, but why don't you really delve into how you think you've changed as a person during your time here.

MACIAS: How have I changed as a person? I think, one, okay, I've become comfortable with my sexuality and not feeling weirded out that, like, I don't have a word for it. It's like I said, right: I like people. And for a while, I felt like [sighs] I could not fit in with my friend circle, like, my guys or my girls, 'cause it's like, *Aby, make up your mind*. And I was, like, *No, like, I don't want to. I don't have to. I'm cool being ambiguous*. So I think that's been really big for me 'cause when I go home now, my family is okay with it, too. And it's been huge for me to not, like, have to compartmentalize parts of my life, which I felt like I had to do before Dartmouth, for afraid of being, like, ashamed or whatever.

I also think I've become more comfortable without, like,—you know, I've been broke my whole life. Like, being broke after Dartmouth—it doesn't scare me. It gives me the freedom to, like, maybe, like, take that, like, writing job I've always wanted to take, maybe get the taco truck that I've always wanted to get and just sell good food to people. Yeah, and getting to that point where it's, like, I know that I have a lot to offer, and in what capacity I offer that, I don't know.

But I couldn't have said that three years ago. I was, like, *No, I need to get a job. I need to, like,*—I needed to be with, like, some Fortune 500 company because that's what success means, and I don't think—I could never go back to that stage in my life, and that makes me so happy, 'cause I feel whole, and I'm excited about life all over again. And I wasn't like that when I came to Dartmouth—I was so scared and so, so worried that I was always gonna mess up. And it's, like, *I'm not gonna mess up. And if I do, okay. Minor bumps in the road. There's so many other things to worry about.*

WOMICK: So thinking about the incoming class of '18s or I guess especially the ones who haven't committed to coming here yet but are considering it, what advice would you give them?

MACIAS: [Chuckles.] Advice? I need to think about that. Besides, like, the most immediate thing that comes to mind is, like, take your swim test as soon as you can, 'cause I just passed it, like, last weekend and it was the best thing ever. I was so terrified that I wasn't gonna graduate.

But I guess I'd also have to say if there's regret I do have at Dartmouth, like, just 'cause, it would have been to, like, maybe not have started, like, my major earlier, for fear of not—my understanding of success aligning with that of the people I came here for.

I wish I would have taken an acting class. I wish I would have taken a painting class. I wish I would have taken a religion class and just allowed myself to explore more intellectual curiosities. I think I'd say just take random courses 'cause distribs, you'll get them out of the way.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: Yeah. Go to grad school, right? I always say those things. Go to grad school somehow.

WOMICK: [Chuckles.]

MACIAS: So that's cool.

WOMICK: Yeah.

So thinking ahead to the future, how do you see yourself being involved with Dartmouth at all in the future, as an alumna?

MACIAS: Yeah. Okay, I want to get my Ph.D., right?

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: But, like, I see myself being a professor, but I don't see myself always teaching at the collegiate level. Like, I want to get a Ph.D. in Chicano Studies because I just want to be an expert in, like, how my background and the changing demographic is gonna impact the United States as a whole, right? That's what I want to do. It gives me an opportunity to just spend six years really studying something that I love so much and reading cool stuff, and I get paid to do it. Psht! I'm all about that.

But I do see myself at some point, you know, going back to Nevada because even if I'm from L.A., like, the most formative experiences that I've had—you know, it was in Nevada that I went to high school, that I had the teachers who told me that, "You can do something, Aby. Go do it." Especially northern Nevada 'cause it's still, like, one of the most underserved regions in the United States.

I'll open my college access program that I want to have, teach there at the high school level 'cause I think there's still a huge gap, teach in a public school and maybe work my way up to become secretary of education for the State of Nevada. That's what my goal would be.

And then getting to that point—you know, like, if I would want to bring more resources to Nevada, you know, you have to, like,—you have to pull your plugs, right? You have to, like, call on Dartmouth—you know, make myself known as, like, some leader in education and be, like,—make Dartmouth want to be like, "Oh, Aby Macias went here," you know. Because what comes with that attention? Donations, all these other things.

So I guess I see myself using Dartmouth insofar as I know it's gonna want to use me.

WOMICK: Mm-hm.

MACIAS: And if they want to pay me to give a lecture, like, by all means I will come.

WOMICK: [Laughs.]

MACIAS: Like, post me up in the Hanover Inn, and I'll come. But I also would want to come because I would want to still be involved in, like, the Latino alumni association, be a part of that. And FYSEP as well.

WOMICK: Is there anything else we haven't talked about that you would like to touch on?

MACIAS: No, I think that's it. There are some things that I didn't think I was gonna touch on. I was, like, *Oh, feelings. There they are.*

WOMICK: Okay. If you're done, I can turn off the tapes.

MACIAS: Okay.

[End of interview.]