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"No vamos a tapar el sol con un dedo": Maternal Communication Concerning Immigration Status

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This article investigates how first-generation Latina mothers describe the contexts in which they parent their children, and how these contexts affect their decisions to share their immigration stories, including their undocumented status, with their children. Using in-depth phenomenological interviews, I interviewed nine undocumented Latina mothers of primary-school-age children. I found that mothers' perceptions of their identities as undocumented immigrants led them to prioritize protectiveness in their parenting. The mothers describe how the climate engendered by the 2016 U.S. election forced them to use three strategies: namely, speaking about immigration in broad terms, open communication, and avoidance. The article aims to further our understanding of caregiver–child relationships in families impacted by immigration status.

Public Significance Statement
The article furthers our understanding about the mothering decisions of undocumented Latina mothers experiencing intensified enforcement policies and anti-immigrant sentiments. Findings illustrate ways the current political climate has accelerated the development of parent–child communication strategies in mixed-status families and suggests future directions for exploring its impact on children's developmental trajectories.

Keywords: undocumented immigrants, mothers, Hispanic Americans, parent–child communication

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Research has amply demonstrated the importance of ecological stressors, including caregivers' divorce, family poverty, and parental illness, in child development (Ireland & Pakenham, 2010; Kiernan & Mensah, 2009; Lansford, 2009). Recently, scholars have turned their attention to immigration status as a stressor for immigrant families, with clear evidence emerging of the association between parental undocumented status and cognitive, academic, and socioemotional aspects of development from birth to adolescence. This research seeks to further understand the immigrant family experience, and to provide empirical evidence for the impact of parental status on children's outcomes in early childhood (Yoshikawa, 2011), middle childhood (Brabeck & Sibley, 2015), pre- and early adolescence (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010), and young adulthood (Gonzales, 2016). Scholars have also explored the role of structural contexts, including restrictive immigration policies, on power, identity, and relationships within families (Abrego, 2014; Dreby, 2015; Menjívar, Abrego, & Schmalzbauer, 2016).

Consensus exists concerning the detrimental effects of undocumented immigration status, relative to legal permanent resident or citizenship status, on children's outcomes (Yo-

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shikawa, Suarez-Orozco, & Gonzales, 2016). Immigrant primary caregivers[1] are often seen as gatekeepers to young people's awareness of undocumented status. To date, however, only a few studies have asked immigrant parents about how they communicate with their children about immigration issues (Balderas, Delgado-Romero, & Singh, 2016; Lykes, Brabeck, & Hunter, 2013). These studies suggest that parents' decisions to communicate about their undocumented status vary widely and are driven by multiple contextual factors.

In this study, I seek to understand undocumented caregivers' accounts of their experience as caregivers. I discuss how that experience impacts communication with their children, particularly concerning undocumented immigration status. I explore how factors such as caregivers' immigration stories and local, state, and federal immigration policies may have influenced their decisions to discuss their family's immigration status category with children. I also seek to understand undocumented caregivers' immigration stories, and their reflections on their role as caregivers to children in the United States. Although most of the literature on immigrant families, including Lykes et al. (2013) and Balderas et al. (2016), focus on Mexican and Central American-origin families because they represent the highest proportions of Latinx in the United States, this study specifically focuses on generating a more nuanced understanding of the variation within the Latin American immigrant community.

By definition, an undocumented or unauthorized individual does not have legal permission to live or work in the United States. An individual can become undocumented through an unauthorized entry into the United States, through a visa overstay, or through criminal activity prompting the revocation of lawful permanent status (Internal Revenue Service, 2018). Here, I use the term *undocumented* and the term *immigration status* to include the spectrum of immigrant statuses characterizing individuals within and across families.[2]

One aim of this study is to help families and practitioners navigate conversations about immigration status categories with children in U.S. communities. More broadly, this study expands the scope of research on family socialization processes relevant to undocumented status. The findings from this study may also help inform educational initiatives, such as National Immigration Law Center and Center for Law and Social Policy's Protecting Immigrant Families campaign, to protect mixed-status immigrant families (Matthews, Ullrich, & Cervantes, 2018).

Mixed-Status and Undocumented Immigrant Families in the United States

In 2016, the United States had a total immigrant population of 45.1 million, of whom an estimated 10.7 million were considered undocumented or unauthorized (23.7%; Passel & Cohen, 2018; Zong & Batalova, 2017). Approximately 10 million were unauthorized adults and roughly half a million were unauthorized children in 2016 (Passel & Cohen, 2018). Almost 8% of K–12 students in our schools, have at least one parent who is unauthorized, with the majority belonging to families from Latin American countries (Passel & Cohen, 2018). Nine million immigrants are part of "mixed-status" families, defined as a family with at least one unauthorized adult and one U.S.-born child (Taylor, Lopez, Passel, & Motel, 2011).

Researchers have explored how immigration status, particularly parents' undocumented status, impacts the development of children in immigrant families. In a mixed-method longitudinal study of 380 mothers of infants in New York City, Yoshikawa (2011) found mothers' undocumented immigration status negatively impacted their U.S. citizen children's early development. In comparison to children with documented parents, undocumented parents were hesitant to access social service programs for their children. More recently, Brabeck and Sibley (2015) explored social emotional development across a sample of Mexican, Central American, or Dominican Republic families with U.S.-born children between 7 and 10 years old. They found that children of undocumented par-

[1] I use the term *caregivers* deliberately to include all family structures, including those in which family members other than the biological mother or father serve as primary caregivers for children. This is especially salient for the mixed-status immigrant family population because of the prevalence of family separation due to deportation and migration. However, when referencing other research, I will use the term used in each study.

[2] When applicable, I will use the term used in the literature cited.

ents, based on their own and their parents' reports, have higher levels of anxiety compared to children of documented parents.

Drawing on Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) ecological systems theory, Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, and Suárez-Orozco (2011) identified negative and positive factors moderating the influence of parental immigration status on children, such as economic, social, cultural, local, institutional, and familial influences. Dreby (2015) focused on the relationships within Mexican immigrant families in Ohio and New Jersey and found the threat of deportation acts as a moderator in the relationship between immigration policy and its effects on the daily lives of immigrant families. Abrego (2014) focused on the effect of family separation among transnational Salvadoran families. Among other things, she illuminated some of the potential effects of unequal labor opportunities available to men and women once they migrate to the United States on the long-term outcomes of their children left back in El Salvador. Both Abrego and Dreby pointed to the damaging and challenging experiences of immigrant families but also illuminate families' courage in sacrificing the opportunity to witness their children grow up for their children's educational or financial wellbeing.

Besides courage, other positive moderating influences play a role in shaping the effects of familial undocumented immigration status on developmental outcomes. For instance, undocumented caregivers may exhibit numerous strengths and investments in the way they raise their children, such as supporting education by engaging in learning activities with their children (Yoshikawa, 2011). Another key protective factor may be parental communication (Brabeck & Sibley, 2015). Some parents have reported discussing a contingency plan with their children in case of their detention by immigration authorities (Brabeck & Xu, 2010). Given the current sociopolitical context in the United States, there is an added urgency to incorporate new facets of immigrant family life into research designs. However, the field has only recently begun seeking a clearer understanding of how parental communication about immigration status affects children's lives.

Although existing models have deepened the conversation in significant ways, there still exists a gap in our understanding of the variability within Latino cultures. To understand how Latinx immigrant families communicate about the topic of immigration, it is imperative to further explore the influence of contextual factors, such as an individual's country of origin, play in family interactions and child rearing. Equally important is the experiences of migration and premigration through which family members have lived, as well as the details of their immigration narrative caregivers feel are most salient to their parenting context.

This study uses the lens of immigrant caregivers' strengths in the context of their undocumented status because they are usually their children's main source of security and aim to help their child make sense of the world. Lykes et al. (2013) used in-depth interviews and open-ended survey responses to understand, from Latinx immigrant parents, the reasoning behind their decisions to talk with children under the age of 18 about the threat of deportation. They found that "parents' awareness of and sensitivities to their roles as parents, gendered expectations for family, understandings of what is age appropriate for their children to know, and the desire to protect both themselves and their children from an unsettling reality" influenced such decisions (p. 141). In the second study pertaining to parent–child communication about immigration status, Balderas et al. (2016) collected data through focus groups with 12 Latinx parents with children under 18 years old. They found that some parents told their children about their (parents') undocumented immigration status because of external circumstances or emotional difficulties, but others chose to remain silent about the issue to protect their children. I extend this area of research by exploring caregivers' decisions to communicate (or not communicate) about immigration status with their children, and their reasoning.

Disclosure in Caregiver Socialization of Children

Because of the paucity of research examining the manner in which young people learn about immigration status, it is helpful to understand the literature in other fields studying the ways in which children and adolescents learn about life-changing information. The disclosure of parental illness and divorce has parallels to the disclosure of undocumented status. Barnes et al. (2000) studied mothers diagnosed with breast cancer and found that many women reported

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that they would have benefited from a health professional's support in preparing them to communicate their diagnosis to their school-aged child(ren). Rosenheim and Reicher (1985) compared the anxiety levels of children age 6–16 who had been informed about parent's terminal illness to children who had not been informed. They found that the anxiety levels of informed children were significantly lower. Similarly, a study of adult children of divorced parents highlighted the importance of parents' inviting questions from their children (Gumina, 2009). Open parent–child open communication also assists in the grieving process of young people (Field, Tzadikario, Pel, & Ret, 2014; Nelson, Sloper, Charlton, & While, 1994; Rosenheim & Reicher, 1985). For undocumented caregivers, the decision to communicate may be more complex since undocumented caregivers may have options to shield their children from the impact of immigration status and thus may choose not to disclose. In other words, in the case of parental illness or divorce, there are implications on a child's life that are difficult to evade and easy to observe while a child in a mixed-status home may not necessarily notice the implications of undocumented status on their lives in the short-term. Nevertheless, with recent federal immigration enforcement policies, the topic of undocumented immigration poses a unique type of danger for parents because disclosing status in any way could expose their children and make them vulnerable.

Research on racial and ethnic socialization, which focuses on the ways in which parents of color explicitly or implicitly transmit their views about the world to their children, may also shed light on the phenomena of caregiver–child communication about undocumented status (Hughes et al., 2006). This body of research has studied parental practices used by African American, Latino/a, and Asian families to promote and preserve their children's cultural identity and racial/ethnic confidence (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge Freeman, 2010). This literature has highlighted cultural socialization, or parents' efforts to promote their ethnicity by communicating about the family's heritage (Hughes, 2003). Some parents use the practice of preparation for bias to make their children aware of and prepare them to cope with discrimination (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006).

An important consideration in these partially overlapping bodies of scholarship is the distinction between illegality and race/ethnicity. The former is a legal construct that can change overnight based on factors such as sociopolitical context, whereas the latter relies on relatively more fixed characteristics that are more likely to be considered part of a family's heritage (De Genova, 2002). Both undocumented and documented parents of color may have a history of discriminatory experiences, but undocumented caregivers may fall within a spectrum of awareness about the legal intricacies of immigration status. Given that many factors about legality are also dependent on the changing sociopolitical context, we must explore the potential dimensions of understanding held by undocumented caregivers. Studies such as this one, which delve deeper into the experience of a particular geographical and time context are helpful in expanding our knowledge about mixed-status immigrant families.

Because different types of immigration status depend on definitions and policies imposed by those in power (De Genova, 2002), there may be variation in the challenges faced by adults when explaining the intricacies of illegality to their children. This is particularly true if adults understand the implications of immigration status categories to varying degrees. In addition, caregivers are not always in control of their children's awareness of immigration status—while undocumented immigration status is not technically observable by children, certain cues in their home, media, school, and peer environments may spark the process of meaning-making without caregivers' awareness (Lykes et al., 2013). It is therefore important to explore the differences and similarities in caregivers' perception of their individual immigrant experiences, their caregiver role, their parent–child relationship, and communication strategies. For children, as Suárez-Orozco and colleagues (2010) noted, middle childhood is a developmental stage at which "cognitive skills and perspective taking have developed to a point where some children may now have become aware of the legal status of their parents" (p. 452). During these years, issues of social comparison also become salient, as capacities for social cognition and understanding of hierarchy and discrimination expand (e.g., Ruble, Eisenberg, & Higgins, 1994).

Thus, I seek to answer the following research questions: How do first-generation Latina mothers describe the contexts in which they parent their children, and how do these contexts affect their decisions to share with children their stories of immigration and undocumented status?

> Sub-Question 1: What are the universalities (common experiences) and particularities (unique experiences) that these women perceive as shaping the context in which they make decisions about mothering?
>
> Sub-Question 2: What particular factors affect their decisions about disclosing their immigration stories to their children, including their undocumented status, in the context of their mothering?

The findings may further our understanding of caregiver–child relationships in families impacted by immigration status, with applications for practitioners and family school partnerships.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of undocumented Latina mothers of primary-school-age children. They were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling from three Catholic parishes and a social service organization in one city. Immigrant families from a wide spectrum of socioeconomic status and nationalities attend these institutions and/or receive services from these organizations. As an active member of the immigrant community in the site of study, I have made a concerted effort across time to build and nurture a network of relationships through the school district, community organizations, clergy, and community collaboratives. Before beginning the recruitment process, I met with church parish and social service organization leaders to discuss the purpose and interview design of the study. These individuals in turn shared information about the study with potential participants, using an informational flyer in Spanish approved by the ethics committee at my academic institution.

An initial screening process ascertained that each participant (a) was a caregiver to at least one child between the ages of six and 12 and (b) was born in Mexico, Central, or South America. The screening process used Perreira et al.'s (2008) survey-based approach to assessing undocumented status, which asked whether potential participants had (a) U.S. citizenship, (b) a Legal Permanent Resident Card (green card), or (c) any type of visa authorizing them to reside or work in the United States. If the caregiver possessed none of these, I explained the purpose of the study, interview details, and reviewed informed consent.

The resulting sample consists of nine Latina undocumented biological mothers living in a small city adjacent to a large metropolitan area in the northeast United States. These mothers lived in a state with one of the widest income gaps in the country, but with some of the most inclusive immigrant integration policies. In the past two decades, there has been a dramatic increase in immigrants settling in this city, possibly as a result of its proximity to a major port of entry (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010). The U.S. Census Bureau reports the city's poverty rate is under 10% with a quarter of its population identifying as Hispanic. This reflects the economic and racial-ethnic disparities these mothers and their families navigate along with their immigration status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

All of the mothers in the sample were undocumented at the time of their interviews and their countries of origin (COO) represented Guatemala ($n = 3$), Honduras ($n = 4$), Costa Rica ($n = 1$), and Venezuela ($n = 1$). Four of the mothers entered the United States without inspection (EWI) at the Mexico–U.S. border, while the remaining five entered the United States with a tourist visa and became undocumented once their visa expired (see Table 1 for detailed demographic characteristics). Seven mothers had children who were U.S.-citizens, whereas four of the mothers had at least one child who was a non-U.S. citizen. Each individual interviewee received a $10 gift card per interview to a local grocery store to compensate for their time, resulting in $30 per interviewee. These incentives were given at the end of each completed interview.

Data Collection

At the time of recruitment, participants heard the study was about "the experiences of immigrant caregivers from Latin America, who are raising at least one child between 6–12 years old, with the aim of exploring their experiences as caregivers in the United States." Once inter-

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Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Mother	Length of time in United States (years)	Age		Children		Family immigration status	Employment status at interview
		Interview	Migration	Total	Age 6–12		
Elena	5	25	20	3	1	Mixed-status	PT employed
Nicole	13	28	15	4	4	Mixed-status	FT student
Luciana	1.5	29	27	2	1	Mixed-status	FT employed
Katherine	1	33	32	1	1	All undocumented	PT employed
Eva	14	37	21	2	2	Mixed-status	FT employed
Juliet	22	37	15	2	1	Mixed-status	FT employed
Sofia	17	38	22	2	1	Mixed-status	PT employed
Cecilia	1.5	39	37	3	2	All undocumented	FT employed
Aurora	23	44	21	2	1	Mixed-status	FT employed

Note. PT = part-time; FT = full-time. All names are pseudonyms.

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ested caregivers contacted me, I verbally explained my goals. If participants were interested, I proceeded to screen for eligibility.

If the caregiver met the eligibility criteria and agreed to participate, a date and location was set for the first interview. All interviews took place at a location of the caregiver's choosing, as long as it provided privacy. All of the mothers chose to conduct interviews in their homes. Several measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of the women, such as avoiding a paper trail. All contact and identifiable information was kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's office. At the first interview, I reviewed the informed consent with each mother again, after which I asked mothers to provide verbal consent if they wished to proceed. Mothers were never asked to provide written consent in order to avoid having their identifiable information documented, since immigration enforcement authorities could then request it.

I conducted three separate interviews with each caregiver in Spanish (approximately 90 min each), all within the span of a month. Conducting more than one interview allowed me to do member checks with each participant to make sure I captured mothers' experiences appropriately. These interviews focused on (a) the mothers' life story, (b) current caregiver experience, and (c) reflections on the meaning of their current experience as a caregiver, respectively (Seidman, 2006). For the life history, I asked mothers to provide information about their immigrant experience from the time they were in their COO until the present day in the United States, or how they became undocumented in the United States. The questions within this interview were open-ended and covered topics related to family, education, self-identity, and social identity. Although the majority of the mothers belonged to mixed-status families, all of them were undocumented and thus had experienced migrating to the United States. Therefore, when designing the study, I relied on Perez Foster's (2005) stages of perimigration: premigration, migration, resettlement, and settling in. Although Perez Foster informed my own perspective of how to understand an individuals' migration story, I focused on each mother's understanding of the boundaries of their immigration story. For instance, some of the mothers considered the beginning of their immigration stories to be their departures for the journey to the U.S.–Mexico border. In these instances, I still asked about their experience in their COO before migrating, but I did not consider that period as part of their perceived immigration stories.

The second interview focused on mothers' typical daily experience as caregivers to their child(ren). The third interview asked mothers to reflect on the meaning of their experience as a whole. In other words, what does it mean to the participant to be a caregiver to a child in the United States? How does each participant make sense of this experience? This is where the interview delved deeper into the details of communicating immigration status to their children based on their life histories and the current context in which they live. The duration of the three-interview series allowed for the construction of trust within a short period of time and helped to prevent respondent fatigue. To account for the

sociopolitical context during data analysis, I conducted the three-interview series for each mother within the same 3-month period in the summer of 2017.

Data Analysis

Immediately following each interview, I wrote field notes to document my initial observations about salient aspects of the interview, such as the researcher–participant rapport, setting of the interview, my and the participant's emotional state, and potential themes of the interview. Once I concluded the series of interviews with each participant, but before transcription of the audio recordings, I wrote listening notes with preliminary themes, my positionality, quotations of interest, and comments. These notes informed the development of the codebook by providing context for the interview data. I prepared audio recordings for transcription by changing my and the participant's voice. On a rolling basis, the deidentified audio recordings from each interview were transcribed through a transcription service. I then removed all proper names and identifying details such as neighborhoods, street names, places of worship, and work from the transcribed files.

I borrowed from Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) discussion of bricolage as an analytical approach, in which qualitative researchers use various strategies to pursue their inquiry. For instance, because of the political implications of this work, I sought to present mothers' data as a montage, or as a sequence with a "clearly defined sense of urgency and complexity" (p. 5). A constructivist approach allowed me to stay consistent with understanding reality as subjective. Under the umbrella of constructivism, grounded theory coding led me to first analyze the data independent of existing frameworks (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Considering the myriad influences involved in mothers' experiences, I drew on various disciplines (i.e., psychology and sociology) and theories (e.g., stages of perimigration and ecological systems). Lastly, bricolage encourages the continuous reassessment of the relationship between my interview protocols and analysis.

I did all the coding using NVivo (Version 11; QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). The first phase of coding aimed to understand my emerging data and consisted of open coding two randomly selected mothers' set of interviews (Glaser, 1978). I read each transcript thoroughly and generated codes based on both the section of the interview (life history, current experience, or reflection) and relevance to the central research question (respondent's understanding of their experience as a caregiver and the influence of immigration status on the relationship and communication with their child). Because of the data's explorative nature, I remained open to all theoretical possibilities and analyzed while allowing both deviations and confirmations of past findings across the literature to emerge equally (Charmaz, 2006). Based on the codes from this preliminary phase, I continued to the second phase of coding—focused coding. Here, I generated clusters of open codes, which resulted in thematic code families. I documented the rationale for these clusters and categories in a code book, which I then applied to the remaining sets of interviews. Throughout this process, I continuously and iteratively compared the interview data within each mother, across mothers, and with the codes (Charmaz, 2006).

The analytical phase allowed me to map the correspondence between the data I had generated and my original research questions (see Tables 2 and 3). I drew from the theoretical conclusions (i.e., literature on open communication in parent–child communication helped generate the "open communication" code) of research in related fields as I progressed through this stage. To assist my analysis at this stage, I conducted theoretical coding in the form of visual diagramming (Lofland & Lofland, 2006). This phase of inclusive integration (Weiss, 1994) using concept charts and flowcharts helped determine the story represented in the data and "render[ed] the data meaningful" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 168). Throughout the phases of coding, I wrote analytical memos to organize emergent themes, record my rationale for code families, and connect emergent themes to theory (Maxwell, 2005; Saldaña, 2011).

The analytical memos helped me reflect on how my lived experience, preconceived notions, and hidden assumptions were interacting and influencing my analysis. These memos served as another tool for the development of my codebook and were not included in the

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Table 2
Evidence of Emergent Themes for Research Sub-Question 1

Emergent themes	Selected related focused codes	Selected related open codes	Related interview questions for theme
Mothering in the context of undocumented status			
Educación Latina (universality)	Focus on teaching values	Instilling altruism Teaching resourcefulness Teaching children to be precavidos (cautious)	In a few words, how would you describe yourself as a caregiver? (Interview 2)
	Purpose as mothers	Transmitting good values Teaching children to be good people Describing themselves as luchadoras (fighters) Describing themselves as hardworking Wanting children to contribute positively to the United States	How do you think your best friend/partner/family member would describe you as a mother? (Interview 2)
Prioritizing protectiveness	Guiding principles of mothering	Identifying as a protective mother Identifying as a disciplinarian Identifying as a perfectionist Focusing on protecting children from anti-immigrant sentiment	What are your concerns as a mother today? (Interview 2) In what ways does immigration impact your relationship with your child? (Interview 2)
	Affection as protection	Describing oneself as affectionate Wanting to overprotect by coddling Providing affection to compensate for potential deportation Helping children understand risks of deportation/family separation	What do you think you spend the most amount of time thinking about as caregiver to each of your children? (Interview 2)
	Socialization as protection	Disciplining children so they do not act out Teaching children to stay under the radar	

resulting analysis for this article. Seeking to challenge potential misinterpretation of the data, I presented anonymous transcribed excerpts along with analytical memos elaborating on my codebook to a writing group and research lab team. For instance, because of my personal experience speaking with the mothers and growing up in a similar family context, it was helpful to hear from other researchers that the connection between the mothers' focus on perfectionism and protectiveness needed to be made more explicit when presenting that section of my results. Having other researchers review the raw data and my analytical memos helped me examine my positionality.

Results

Throughout our interviews, mothers had opportunities to reflect on their experiences before and after becoming mothers, both in isolation from and in relation to their immigration story. Although the mothers in this study all identified as undocumented because they did not have legal permission to live and work in the United States at the time of their interview, they all felt a sense of belonging in the United States to varying degrees. They often described their family members' immigration status as legal if their children, partners, or other relatives were born in the United States, had work permits (i.e., DACA), or had recently migrated with a tourist visa. The variation in mothers' understanding of undocumented immigrations status had implications for my thematic analysis because it influenced mothers' perception of their immigration stories. For instance, some mothers who had migrated with a tourist visa experienced a period of time during which they were in the United States legally and then became undocumented once their visas expired.

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Table 3
Evidence of Emergent Themes for Research Sub-Question 2

Emergent themes	Selected related focused codes	Selected related open codes	Related interview questions for theme
External forces that demand action			
Climate of hatred	45 terrorizing the world	Seeing racism flourish	How would you describe your experience of being undocumented in the United States? (Interview 3)
		45 engendering hatred	
		Witnessing/experiencing discrimination based on skin color	
		Being the target of fear (families)	How does the current political context impact the way you think about parenting? (Interview 3)
	Increased sense of protectiveness because of 45	Feeling *aterrorizada* (terrorized or terrified)	
Increased questioning from children	Children's questioning about 45	Family discussing presidential campaign	In your conversations with each of your children, what type of questions do your children ask you these days? (Interview 2)
		Family discussing election results	
		Children asking about media comments	
		Children asking about conversations in school about 45	What are the most common topics you and your children talk about? (Interview 2)
	Children's questions about detention/deportation	Questioning about potential risk of family separation	
Traveling as a trigger	Children's questions stemming from their observations about traveling	Children asking about visiting family in COO	Have you talked to your children about your immigration status? (Interview 3)
		Children asking about going on vacation	
		Children asking about other family members traveling	
		Children noticing difference markers based on travel	
		Experiencing death of family member in COO	
		Experiencing death/deportation of a family member	
	Discussions about family circumstances related to traveling	Chaperoning opportunities through school	
Choosing the best form of protection for their children			
Mother–child communication strategies	Speaking about immigration in broad terms	Using broader terms for younger children	From what you've shared with me, what parts of your experience do you consider to be important to share with your children? (Interview 3)
		Avoiding having to worry children	
		Talking to strangers	
		Teaching not opening the door to strangers	

Note. COO = countries of origin.

Below, I first show the women's perceived undocumented immigrant identity, including how they see their roles and purposes as parents. Through a strengths-based lens, I will share how mothers' perceived identities shape the ways in which they raise their children, with a shared emphasis on protectiveness. In the second part, I discuss how mothers' responses to external factors affect their decisions to disclose their immigration stories and undocumented status.

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Mothering in the Context of Undocumented Status

Significant commonalities emerged in the women's accounts of their approaches to mothering. For example, Sofia states that her goal is for her children to be "hombres y mujeres de bien/people of good." To achieve this, all of the mothers focused on values, such as altruism, hard work, resourcefulness, and cautiousness. This inculcation of values was part of the educación they provided for their children, or the instilling of character values separate but complimentary to these parents' encouragement of education through schooling (Valdés, 1996). Aurora expressed her wish "that they [daughters] are respectful—respect, kindness—that they learn to defend whomever it is . . . In itself, it's like *la educación*—honesty" (emphasis added). The value of hard work emerged frequently in mother's comments as well. Two mothers mentioned taking their children to clean houses and one explained that she was treating her daughter as an apprentice as she began to plan her own business. Several mothers described themselves as luchadoras, or fighters, which they connected to being trabajadoras, or hardworking. Six of the mothers responded "to never give up" in response to the question, "which strength of yours do you want to transmit to your children?"

In the current political context, the mothers understood these values as essential to protect their children because they could facilitate their children's contributions to U.S. society. As a whole, the mothers explained their choice to prioritize protectiveness in the context of educación.

Prioritizing protectiveness. The mothers' responses revealed the role of protectiveness, perfectionism, rigor, and discipline as guiding principles. Juliet and Eva were typical in this respect. Juliet remarked:

> [I'm] very perfectionist, I demand a lot from them. Affectionate, obviously when you have to be affectionate . . . [immigration policy] does influence, because it gives a lot of fear. In other words, I do not know what is going to happen. You do not see if one day they will stop you, just because of the policies that exist. [You] feel the insecurity because before—two years ago—I went out and didn't feel uncomfortable. Now I see a checkpoint, even if they are only checking seatbelts and I get nervous. I do not know what will happen, and immediately I start thinking, "Who is going to pick up my daughters at school?" Or, "who is going to keep them in case I can't?" . . . I'm always fighting for their rights . . . so it's sad to think who will defend them when I will not be able to.

Juliet spoke about her perfectionism in the context of the fear and risk of deportation. She ties her perfectionism to her future-oriented strategies to protect her daughters. Eva has a similar but distinct approach:

> I coddle them a lot, my daughters. I am very overprotective . . . As a mother, I think my concern is for the day that, God forbid, I'm separated from them. I think that's my worry as a mother. The fact that you're in a country that isn't yours, the deportations that are around the corner . . . apart from being immigrants, being an undocumented person, the fact that tomorrow I'll be grabbed . . . because they will not have them as prisoners like they'll have me, but [I think about the] the time they'll [daughters] be alone. All of that I think about . . . I live it.

The looming possibility of family separation also plagues Eva's perspective on protecting her daughters. Like Juliet, she thinks ahead to her daughters' needs in case they are separated from their mother. Both Juliet and Eva prioritize their children's safety because they understand the risks their families face in the current enforcement climate. The differences in their responses highlight the diversity in manifestations of the same goal that undocumented immigrant mothers may exhibit.

Like these two women, many of the mothers seemed to operate under the belief that their children required protection because they were children, the anti-immigrant sentiment that plagued their families, and the perpetual risk of deportation. Mothers believed that they, and their partners if they had one, carried the main responsibility for providing that safety. Cecilia described herself as "Strict, very attached to the things of God, very upright, very upright . . . You have to correct them . . . Of course, without going beyond the limits. But, I have to put them back on track so that they can be good people." Cecilia's focus on strictness was a result of both her strong adherence to her Catholicism and having recently become a single parent. It is possible that her husband's sudden and violent death also informed her urgency to keep her children safe. Although it is difficult to untangle the different components of Cecilia's story, her account reflects the multiple struggles that an undocumented immigrant mother may undergo.

The theme of finding a balance between protecting their children and not "suffocating

them" appeared in some mothers' responses as well. Mothers spoke about showing their children cariño, or affection, but always in connection to preparing their children for the world in a more structured way. In the context of mothering in the United States, mothers prioritized their children's socialization so that they would understand the risks of being immigrant children (i.e., sharing who the children's legal guardian would be in case of family separation).

"Las cosas se fueron dando": External Forces That Demand Action

I now turn to the particular factors affecting mothers' decision to disclose their immigration stories, including their undocumented status.

Climate of hatred. The mothers I interviewed identified an increased climate of hatred resulting from the 45th U.S. president's campaign, election, and presidency. Although xenophobia and increased family separation due to deportation did not start happening under the current administration, the mothers understood that their families were being targeted. Sofia began to speak to her children about being more cautious:

> Well, I tell them, "try not to get involved in any problem and also always be aware of what is happening around you," because as I said last time I am very afraid of what may happen in the schools or anywhere, there's a lot of evil now and . . . and I think it's because of this man [45th president] that he's been in charge of sowing a lot of hatred against us. And unfortunately, because of our appearance, we tend to be the target of many perverse people.

Three of the mothers described feeling *aterrorizadas* (terrorized or terrified):

> Current policy. Well, this gentleman president terrorizes all humanity, because [it's] not only the country, [he] terrorizes all humanity. So . . . my daughters, I tell them "look at that nice guy we have as president. Study, be presidents please. Help people." So, I do not know, we take it as a joke, many times, but yes, I tell them because of people like that there is a lot of discrimination, a lot of racism, and that is not good . . . it is a bad model.

Eva's use of humor may be one way that she coped with her feelings of terror, suggestive of a strategy for the conversations she wanted to have with her daughters. In an extension of mothers' focus on educación Latina, Sofia, Eva, and Aurora recognized that the climate of hatred they were witnessing stemmed from the 45th president and it made them intensify the messages about values they shared with their children. As mothers focused on their children's security, they dealt with the president's presence in their daily lives by making him a model of disrespect and hatred and encouraging their children to act differently by modeling kindness and respect.

All of the mothers expressed a desire to protect their children from the short- and long-term implications of their family members' undocumented status. This is illustrated by Juliet, who before the presidential campaign avoided talking to her children about matters related to her undocumented status. She shared that if it were up to her, she would not speak about it to them:

> I always tell her [daughter] that nothing is happening, that we aren't going over there [Guatemala]. But since her dad is Mexican, she always thinks and says "So where will we go? To Mexico or to Guatemala?" And I tell her, "We won't go to Guatemala" . . . she's not very convinced . . . she says, "But I want to stay with both of you. I don't want to separate from either of you." She talks about it like we're talking now . . . sometimes she pretends nothing is happening, like it's a game . . . but I think she's pretending not to take it seriously because it scares her . . . You have to talk to them, yes. Because they are already beginning to ask questions, then I cannot remain quiet, I think I have to have an answer . . . I think if you shut up it's worse, because other children are coming and they're going to tell you, and they're going to give you the wrong information.

Juliet admits, "Because those are issues that up until now, for example, many people didn't even know about. I never mention any of that, because it's a subject that *I* do not like" (emphasis added). Like other mothers in the sample, Juliet understood the recent political spotlight on immigration as a factor that forced her to be ready with answers to her children's questions.

Increased questioning from children. It was a challenge for mothers to simultaneously navigate how to deal with the disappointment of the elections and help their children process the event. Nicole, whose children were 6, 8, 10, and 12 years old at the time of our interviews, perceived this presidential campaign and election as unique because even her two youngest children had questions and fears about its potential impact on their family. Nicole and her partner had to think about the best way to approach conversations with their children in the context of detention and deportation. This re-

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sulting conversation with their children focused on questions about their country of origin, their immigration documents, and practical lessons, such as the necessity of opening the door only to familiar individuals. Here, Nicole recalled her 8-year-old son's reaction to the results of the 45th presidential election, "So he reacted right then and there and said, 'So if a police officer stops you and you have to go to Honduras, what will happen to us? Where will we live? Who are we going to stay with?'"

Her children's questions after the results of the campaign and election illuminated how much her children had internalized from their environment. Nicole noted the lack of preparation time she and her partner had to prepare an appropriate answer.

In the case of Eva, her daughters immediately asked if their parents would be deported as a result of the new president: "When they came from school, it was, 'Mami, the man won,' 'Yes,' 'What's going to happen?' 'Well, nothing' 'But he's going to grab you and he's going to send you . . . are they going to separate us?'" Her daughters participated in dual-language school programs; the majority of their classmates came from mixed-status families. Eva realized the children had been talking among themselves about their parents, sharing who was undocumented and who could be deported. Her daughters' questions made Eva perceive that "it was eating away at their [daughters'] brain—they were frightened by the fact that they were going to be left alone." Like Nicole and Eva, several mothers understood their children's questions as evidence of their children's awareness of their undocumented status and their children's focus on potential parent–child separation. Mothers' recollections of their children's questions may hint at the fact that children awaken most immediately to the reality of undocumented status in terms of fearing separation from their loved ones rather than through a direct experience with legal barriers, such as earning money or accessing education.

Traveling as a trigger. Several of the mothers volunteered how their children's observations about who could travel in their family left the mothers little choice but to share aspects of their immigration story and their undocumented status with their children. This was true for mothers who had children across a range of ages (between 6 and 12 years old). For younger children within this range, family members' inability to travel back home to their countries of origin was a point of confusion and a motivation to gain a deeper understanding. Some mothers also mentioned children's questions about travel within the United States:

> They know that dad and mom cannot travel far from where they live for the same fear that they [children] will be left alone. So, they are aware that we sacrifice a trip to the beach 6 hours away for the same fear that they'll [ICE] detain us. They understand a lot about not having papers and that we cannot travel. – Eva

> "Why can't you be a chaperone? Why can't you drive to the field trip? Why can't you go with me to this place?" . . . [my daughters] ask me why we do not go on vacation, because she wants to go to California, she wants to travel there. But, I'm afraid to say that I'll go on a plane, because I never know what is going to happen. Immigration is always there more than anywhere else. So, that's why I said, "I can't travel." – Juliet

Eva and Juliet highlighted their children's awareness of travel as an indicator of difference within their family. They shared their children's questions about travel in relation to the risk of deportation. This suggests that perhaps children's understanding of their family's undocumented status might stem from the relationship between the inability to travel and the possibility of family separation as a result of enforcement. Other mothers gave examples of their children's questions about travel outside the United States, specifically related to their country of origin:

> They [the children] are aware that if we go back it is because we lost the visa . . . they would ask me if for their vacation—that's why—they could go over there [Honduras] to see their father's family. – Cecilia

> Yes, he knows, because he asks me, "mom we can go to Honduras?" But he wants to go for the weekend, nothing more according to him, and return. So then I explain that if we leave, we cannot come back, because the visa ended. – Luciana

Once again, Cecilia and Luciana's comments showed how their children's questions hint at the connection between their family's freedom to travel and their immigration status, which led the mothers to explain matters of immigration policy with their children.

It is difficult to untangle mothers' observations of traveling as a trigger for their children's questions from the climate of fear caused by the

recent enforcement climate. Sofia's recollection of a conversation with her son illustrates this:

> They have an uncle who travels. And then they say, "Why can't you [Sofia] travel?" They also had an uncle who was deported and . . . it'll be about nine years ago. He [son] was very small . . . and then there came many questions . . . "Why did they do that to uncle? Why did they send him away?" Then we explained to him that, well, to be in this country you have to have . . . you have to enter, well, legally. Have a permit to be here. But unfortunately, we're forced to come and violate the law because . . . there is no way in our countries for them to help us. Nor here when we enter. I say to them . . . if in our country there were the opportunities that there are here, we'd never come.

Based on his age and his cognitive capacities, it makes sense for Sofia's 12-year old son to make the connection between an uncle who travels for leisure and an uncle who travels as a result of deportation. That comparison led Sofia to explain immigration policy to her son, including the push and pull factors of migration. More specific examples of children's questions provided by mothers included a child's desire to visit the family's COO or a desire to visit a sick family member who needed help in the COO. Often, children's questions about travel led parents to explain the details of their undocumented immigration status and its limitations.

Choosing the Best Form of Protection for Their Children

Although Eva and her husband had a plan for custody of their children in case of deportation, they decided to wait to share it with their 9- and 11-year-old daughters until they were older to avoid causing them anxiety. However, they felt obligated to tell their daughters the truth after the girls began asking questions about the presidential election. She and her husband openly communicated with their daughters about their immigration story, including their undocumented status, and framed it as a part of the family's story. They chose to use photographs to create a positive atmosphere that resisted any notion of shame or fear:

> It's not that it's taboo. It's not something that "Oh, what fear." No, it's normal. That's why I'm telling you, it's in the air, it's in the news, it's on the radio, in the schools, their classmates. *No vamos a tapar el sol con un dedo/*we are not going to hide the sun with a finger. No, we do not think "Oh, how scary", or "what are they going to think" No. It is not that "Oh, we are here suffering" No . . . we came because it is a future for us, for those who stayed behind, for them who are here. It's not like "Oh, yes, did we suffer?" No, it's a story and how we've lived it.

In preparing her daughters for potential bias, Eva bases the conversation on the themes of hope, progress, and pride in her immigration story. Despite being forced to share her immigration story with her children before she felt ready to do so, Eva was able to communicate her immigration story and undocumented status to her daughters in a manner that exhibited courage and drew on the family's sense of solidarity.

The tension between protecting their children from stress while giving them the information they needed to know compelled mothers to develop new communication strategies. Katherine, for instance, remarked with respect to the task of telling her 6-year-old son about their immigration status that, "I think yes, he has to know, he has to know it . . . but right now, like I told you, he wouldn't understand it . . . it would cause curiosity or anxiety. But of course he has to know it." Similarly, Nicole expressed that she is, "Always looking for a way to impart news but [in a way] that will not affect them at the end of the day—that they don't get sad or start crying or won't want to do anything for that reason."

Mothers also wanted to protect their children by equipping them for the worst. Although Nicole wanted to protect her children from emotional harm, she also felt the pull to protect them with the truth:

> That's what worries me. Am I doing the wrong thing? And what if they are not prepared because I didn't want to distress them? And [in the process of] not stressing them out, they suffer a trauma that will do them much more harm? . . . That they have to see me being arrested, taken away, and that they're brought to another place . . . it's like an explosion in their minds.

Below, I present findings that summarize three ways mothers in the sample described navigating the tension of being protective while also taking into consideration their children's developmental needs and capacities.

Speaking about immigration in broad terms. With younger children (approximately 6–10 years old) and consistent with mothers' understanding of their child's cognitive development and emotional maturity, mothers tended to talk about their immigration stories and their undocumented status in broad terms. Mothers

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spoke in general terms to their younger children about the implications of their undocumented status, reporting that avoiding the specific details helped them prevent children's worry. For instance, instead of telling her 6-year-old daughter that she could not open the door to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials, Aurora told her to never open the door to strangers. She also taught her daughter what information not to share with strangers, but she did not explain why. Nicole spoke about approaching her communication with her children similarly:

> So what I do is that right now, I've talked to them in general. I tell them "you cannot be giving information to people you do not know, that if your mother has a license or if your father does not have a license, or if we have papers or do not have papers."

Even when sharing information in a general way, the mothers' protectiveness still played a role. Consider Nicole's description of why she chose to focus on the topic of family unity rather than the risk of family separation when sharing immigration policy news with her children: "We give them like general news, the consequences [detention and deportation] that could happen but that they do not have to worry, that we are always going to be together. So they kind of stay with the mentality of being united."

In this example, Nicole focused on protecting her children from the emotional toll that her undocumented immigration status might cause them if it were presented as the possibility of parent–child separation. She felt that the news would be less scary if she talked about it in relation to family unity; perhaps she believed that the idea of staying together reinforced a sense of security.

A few of the mothers had children with significant gaps in age between them. Their experiences provided an interesting distinction between communicating with children at different developmental stages. Juliet, a mother of an 8-year old and an 18-year old, compared her experience with both daughters:

> It depends on age, because in other words, the youngest it's just that I'm missing a piece of paper, and . . . "why do not you travel?" It's that I'm missing a piece of paper, I do not have a piece of paper that I need. "Oh yes, but I have it, my sister says. And why don't you get it?" Oh because I need such and such . . . then—I try to talk to her [8-year-old] so she does not realize, either, what is really happening.

Juliet socializes her 8-year-old in a way that provided the truth but left out details. In contrast, Juliet describes her 18-year-old daughter as "more wise," which meant she could be "more open" with her. This distinction illuminated the way she balances different degrees of communication with each daughter.

Open communication about undocumented status. Juliet's approach with her oldest daughter exemplifies the strategy of open communication that many of the mothers in the sample embraced as their primary approach to talking with their children about immigration and undocumented status. This is especially the case for children between 6 and 12 years old who migrated themselves. Elena, for instance, observed that her 6-year-old undocumented daughter, Josefina "still does not understand that her little brother and sister were born here . . . that they're from here, that they can go there [Honduras] and come again. . . Because she says to me, 'Mom, how many years has Sammy [3-year old] been here?' And I tell her, 'he doesn't have years here — he was born here.'" Elena went on to say that as Josefina "begins understanding because she grows more, she'll ask more questions and will see everything. So I think as she asks me, I'll tell her about things exactly as they are . . . always tell them [children], when you want to ask me something . . . always ask me, do not stay with the doubt."

In addition to choosing to openly communicate with their children, a few mothers described this strategy as a way to not lie to their children. When asked why she thought it was important to be honest with her children who were 9, 12, and 17 years old at the time we spoke, Cecilia responds,

> Because I cannot lie to them. A lie is going to lead me to another, and another and another and then who is going to look bad? I do not cover anything . . . Never lie . . . always tell the truth and tell them what the situation is . . . they know that we are [here] illegally, they know that if tomorrow something happens, we're leaving, right? And that everything that has happened in Honduras, or what happened, they know, that if we have to return, we would return.

Thus, open communication also contributed to Cecilia's aim of teaching her children to do the right thing. It is important to note that all three of Cecilia's children migrated to the United States with her after their father's death 1.5 years ago, at the ages of 15, 10, and 7. From

the moment that they arrived in the United States with a tourist visa, Cecilia and her children spoke about the consequences of overstaying a visa. This included the risk of deportation and having to go back home. Thus, the children were aware of their impending undocumented status as soon as they arrived in the United States. However, there were also mothers who used open communication with their U.S.-citizen children who were 11- and 12-years old. Aurora noted that although she does not speak about the details of her undocumented status with her youngest (age 6), she communicates with her oldest (age 21).

> No, with the oldest yes, 100% steeped in and aware of everything, because she is already aware. In fact, she knows that when she turns 21 we will try to legalize the papers. And as for that, she is aware of everything, and is aware of the limitations of her mother, and of the family itself, because there are limitations at the family level.

Aurora mentioned that her oldest daughter is privy to the details of her mother's undocumented status because she could play an important role in the future resolution of her illegality. Aurora referenced current immigration law, which would allow her daughter to petition for her mother's legal permanent residency once she turns 21.

Avoidance. Some mothers' communication strategies centered around avoidance, which often arose from fear. These mothers did not want to face the pain associated with undocumented immigration. Others did not know how to tell their children about their status in a way that did not cause harm, and some were unsure as to whether their younger children had the capacity to keep secrets. Juliet, who sometimes spoke to her youngest daughter in broad terms and to her oldest daughter in detail about her immigration status, admitted that at other times she just avoided the topic of deportation altogether:

> Why do not I want to think about that part? It's something that scares me very much . . . I just do not want to touch the subject because it terrifies me. It's something I wouldn't know what to do if it happens. So, I've always thought that when you say it . . . I always think, "This is not going to happen." I do not mention it to them so that they are calm too. Because the little one worries a lot. So, I do not want to . . . I do not touch the subject so she doesn't worry. So I tell them, but I do not tell them the reason and the fear that I have.

Juliet also illustrated the lack of clarity that many of the mothers felt in trying to figure out, moment to moment, the best approach to communicate with their children about their undocumented situation. She expressed a wish to avoid the subject because it causes fear, while still sharing some information, absent the scariest details.

Mothers who had younger children were most aware of the risk of harm when it came to this developmental stage. They were also aware that their young children (age 6 or 7) may not have begun to notice familial indicators of difference. Elena said that her 6-year-old daughter had not asked her, "What are papers, mommy?" yet, which was a relief, because Elena was not sure how she would answer that question. In addition, two mothers expressed anxiety that their daughter and son would be unable to keep their mother's status to themselves at school. When I asked Katherine what capacity she thought her son should have before she would want to talk to him more about her undocumented status, she said,

> A bit more of maturity . . . He's thinking about trains, cartoons, piñatas. His world revolves, justifiably, around all that. He'll get scared because if we get scared, he'll get scared. It's about having a bit of understanding about the situation we're in . . . if ICE came now, he would talk to them about the piñata he's going to break apart. On the other hand, if he has a higher level of maturity, I know that he'll be able to keep quiet, not talk, or anything like that.

As is evident from these findings, there is a significant amount of pressure felt by these mothers around how to communicate with their children about their immigration stories, including their undocumented status. The mothers display thoughtful decision-making processes as they consider the ethical and developmental implications of communicating this topic to their children. They are also acutely aware of the risks attached to their decisions as a result of the climate of intensified anti-immigrant sentiment. Although this climate complicates their decisions, these mothers ultimately exhibit tremendous courage in finding ways to honor their children's developmental and cultural needs. Their use of communication strategies that strengthen family bonds and the trust in their mother–child relationships may also promote resilience.

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Discussion and Conclusion

The pervasive presence of immigration policy in the lives of mixed-status families calls for a deeper understanding of its impact on families, particularly on caregiver–child relationships. This is especially true during these unprecedented times in which mixed-status and undocumented families are experiencing an intense climate of fear. This study focused on understanding the experience of nine women from Central and South America living in the northeast United States, whose context as undocumented immigrant mothers could not be untangled from the broader societal context of immigration policy. These mothers' accounts further our understanding of the developmental trajectory and role of caregiver–child relationships in mixed-status families. Their experiences contribute foundational knowledge to the expanding field of immigrant family studies and provide a view into the variation among Latinx undocumented immigrants in particular. The mothers describe the climate of fear which they believe has been encouraged by the current U.S. president. Their perceptions provide a glimpse into the consequences of the current administration's hyper focus on portraying all Latinx immigrants homogenously (Flynn, 2018). The women share some aspects of their experience as mothers, but they differ in their experience as Latinas and as immigrants.

Throughout this project, I sought to understand caregivers' accounts of the meaning of their experience as undocumented caregivers and how it impacts their relationship and communication with their children, particularly concerning immigration status. Although socialization on the particular topic of immigration status occurs in the context of more general parenting and parent–child communication styles, I focused on the specific topic of immigration status to provide a more in-depth account of the mothers' experiences. Future work should explore how these findings build upon the literature on Latinx families' parental control in their communication about immigration status (see Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). Although the sample size of the study could also be seen as a limitation, the three-part interview series conducted with each woman allowed for deep explorations of their experiences. These findings illuminate just a fragment of the experience of this group of mothers and should not be used to speak to the experience of all undocumented mothers in the United States.

In light of Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) emphasis on process, person, context, and time in bioecological systems theory, we can see that the findings here illustrate important considerations for the proximal processes between mothers and children in immigrant families that shape development. Their theory helps us to understand that, with respect to the experiences of the mothers in this sample, development occurs through reciprocal conversations between mother and children about immigration status, and that such conversations must take place frequently over a period of time. Mothers suggest the conversations they have had and continue to have with their children have become more complex due to the current environment, in which children are coming home with more questions about immigration status and immigration. Further exploration of mother–child interaction in mixed-status and undocumented families is needed to understand how children's changing developmental capacities affect the complexity of these interactions. My findings indicate that mothers' perceptions of children's developmental capacities at different ages impacts the degree to which they share details about their immigration status.

The findings in this article should prompt the field to consider potential sources of influence upon the relationship between parental immigration status and children's development. The mothers in this study described perceived contextual factors at all ecological levels, both in their own and their children's interactions with their environments. As primary caregivers to children to between the ages of 6 and 12 years old, they shared an aim of instilling values through educación Latina that would help their children become positive contributors to U.S. society. The fulfillment of this aim entailed preparing their children for success through hard work and teaching them to be cautious in the face of anti-immigrant sentiments. Although mothers demonstrated their commitments to this priority in various ways, many of them prioritized protectiveness in their parenting, which is consistent with Lykes et al. (2013) and Balderas et al. (2016)'s findings about disclosing immigration status to children. Their shared aim as mothers is an example of a change to the

proximal processes around immigration status with their children as a result of the sentiments they observed in their environment.

Reminiscent of the accounts of African American and Latino parents who prepare their children for bias in the racial and ethnic socialization literature, the mothers in this study show that socialization processes may look different in the face of the risk of family separation due to immigration enforcement (Burton et al., 2010; Hughes et al., 2006). Mothers' accounts of coddling their children versus strictly parenting them serve as two protective strategies. Their use of contrasting strategies in their mother–child relationships supports recent calls for more culturally sensitive understandings of parenting styles. The findings in this study provide evidence of the potential bidirectionality between children and parents when looking at parenting styles. Displaying what Smetana (2017) described as child effects on parenting styles, the mothers here highlight the impact of children's questions on their decisions about which communication strategies to employ and their focus on protectiveness as a strategy. Smetana also called for developing greater specificity in the way we understand the authoritative parenting in specific contexts. It may be that in the context of undocumented immigrant mothers' strategies—which may entail being affectionate at times and being overprotective at other times—authoritative parenting is effective and adaptive for children. As a result of the volatile manner in which immigration enforcement impacts mixed-status families today, constantly shifting parenting strategies may be the new normal.

Mothers spoke not only about their identities, but also the climate of hatred after the 2016 presidential campaign and election as factors that shaped decisions about protecting their children. Out of their sense of a duty to protect their children, and in light of their children's attempts to make sense of the information presented to them in schools and communities, these mothers felt compelled to disclose their undocumented immigration statuses and stories with their children before they were ready to do so. The three strategies the mothers in the sample described—speaking about immigration in broad terms, open communication, and avoidance—suggest a nuanced awareness of their children's developmental stages, as mentioned in previous literature (Balderas et al., 2016; Lykes et al., 2013). Mothers used these strategies within and across their mother–child relationships.

One of the main factors they considered was how much their children could understand, and what might frighten their children. Some mothers spoke in broad terms with their young children and employed open communication with their older children. These strategies were nuanced in the sense that mothers carefully thought about which approach to take when presenting the truth to different children, all the while balancing other priorities, such as maintaining family unity in the face of threatened separation. These mothers' experiences with their children's curiosity about travel illuminate how the topic of immigration status permeates everyday life. For instance, children asked about their mothers' ability to travel from the United States to their country of origin, but also locally to the beach, on a field trip, or on vacation. The ability to travel served as an indicator of difference for children, with some asking questions about their family's ability to travel compared to other family members or friends.

For mixed-status families, the threat of family separation has reached all corners of their daily lives as a result of the heightened focus on immigration law enforcement. It is important to note that during the Obama presidency, the number of deportations rose from those of the Bush administration, even after Obama's 2014 announcement in which he prioritized the removal of criminals rather than separating families for minor offenses (e.g., Golash-Boza, 2012; The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2014). Still, the memorandum released by the current administration's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in early 2017 expanded the criteria for enforcement of immigration laws beyond those who had committed major and minor criminal offenses. Not only did this document call for the hiring of 10,000 ICE officers "expeditiously" but it also called for the removal of individuals who "have abused any program related to receipt of public benefits" or if "in the judgment of an immigration officer, otherwise pose a risk to public safety or natural security" (Executive Office of the President, 2017, p. 2). This level of heightened enforcement has implications for the degree to which families participate in their community; some places have even seen a decline in

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school attendance following local raids (Blitzer, 2017). We need to ask whether caregivers' choices in talking to their children about being undocumented are changing in response to these developments. For instance, whereas the immigrant community may have previously considered certain spaces (such as airports or government buildings) to be dangerous, they must now, in the current enforcement, consider all spaces, even parking lots, to be unsafe (Shapiro, 2017). Mixed-status family members and caregivers may be forced into conversations with their children to prepare their children for the possibility of removal in the middle of an ordinary day, without in-depth preparation.

This exploratory study points to the need for further research, especially studies considering the voice of children and adults alike. Ideally, such research will generate a more nuanced understanding of the role of various personal characteristics in this proximal process, and the spectrum of developmental impacts that this process may have. On a policy-level, these findings suggest that any decision made about immigration policy on a societal level trickles down to the individual level and can have challenging consequences in the daily lives of U.S. families. The findings presented here may also help families and practitioners understand how to navigate difficult conversations about immigration status with children in U.S. communities. Taken together with future research, the experiences of these mothers may ultimately help scholars to shape partnerships between schools and families, to better support students, and to set the foundation for educational campaigns in immigrant communities seeking to practice self-advocacy and empowerment.

Resumen

Este artículo investiga cómo las madres latinas de primera generación describen el contexto en el que crían a sus hijos y cómo este contexto afecta su decisión de compartir su historia de inmigración, incluyendo su estado indocumentado, con sus hijos. Utilizando entrevistas fenomenológicas en profundidad, entrevisté a nueve madres latinas indocumentadas de niños en edad escolar primaria. Descubrí que las percepciones de las madres sobre su identidad como madres inmigrantes indocumentadas las llevaron a priorizar la protección en la crianza. Estas madres describen cómo las elecciones estadounidenses del 2016 y el clima de odio que generó las obligaron a utilizar tres estrategias particulares: hablar sobre inmigración en términos generales, comunicación abierta, y evitación. Las descripciones de estas madres amplían nuestra comprensión de la trayectoria de desarrollo humano y el papel de las relaciones cuidador-niño en familias afectadas por la categoría de estatus migratorio.

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