

“How Long is it Going to Take for Me to Be Seen as Equal?": Implications of the Current
Political Climate on Immigrant-Origin Youth

By

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Introduction

Despite the “melting pot” narratives that have dominated political discourse in the United States for decades, immigrants—more specifically, immigrants of color—have often been used as convenient scapegoats for institutional failures and shortcomings in times of crises or uncertainty. Indeed, they have been blamed for everything from increased labor competition and rising housing and tax burdens, to increased violence, declining social cohesion and “moral decay” (APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2013; Perkins & Procentese, 2010; Sanchez, 2011). Especially when immigration threatens to upset the White-majority status quo, the backlash is particularly swift (Morey, 2018; Sanchez, 2011). One need not look too far back into U.S. history for political decisions with xenophobic undertones (e.g., Arizona Senate Bill 1070 in 2009)

More recently, the “othering” of immigrants has taken on bolder, more openly racist forms. The 2016 U.S. presidential campaign of Donald Trump and his subsequent presidency tapped into such nativist sentiments, capitalizing on stereotypes of minoritized populations to justify restrictive immigration and refugee resettlement policies, more frequent Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, increased arrests and detainment of non-violent individuals with no criminal backgrounds, heightened border security, and mass deportation (Cowger, Bolter, & Pierce, 2017; Pierce & Selee, 2017; Schochet, 2017). Although the United States’ relationship with immigrant communities has often been tenuous, very few political leaders have espoused incendiary comments to the degree that Trump did on the campaign trail and continues to do in office. For example, at a rally in Youngstown, Ohio in 2017, he made the following comments to the crowd (Abramson, 2017, para. 8):

“One by one, we are finding the illegal gang members, drug dealers, thieves, robbers, criminals, and killers. And we are sending them the hell back home

where they came from...and once they are gone, we will never let them back in...the predators and criminal aliens who poison our communities with drugs and prey on innocent young people...will find no safe haven anywhere in our country..."

The current administration's blatant fear-mongering and dehumanizing rhetoric toward foreign-born populations has cultivated an unprecedented climate of visceral anxiety among immigrant communities, families, and individuals across the country (Roche, Vaquera, White, & Rivera, 2018; Gandara & Ee, 2018). Popular media outlets and advocacy organizations have extensively documented changes in both immigrant and U.S.-born adults' and children's behaviors following the election—increased bullying in schools, workplaces, and public spaces; greater harassment and discrimination on the basis of race or religion; higher levels of anxiety, stress, and other mental health symptoms; decreased school attendance and engagement (Costello, 2016; Rogers et al., 2017). More recently, a small but growing body of empirical literature has provided formal support for such findings (Gandara & Ee, 2018; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). It would be too simple to suggest that the election itself is the root cause of these outcomes. However, there is growing evidence that November 8, 2016 incited change in the United States' sociopolitical climate with concerning downstream effects particularly for already-minoritized individuals, families, and communities.

The present qualitative study explores the "Trump Effect" (the U.S. sociopolitical climate following the election of Donald Trump) and its implications for the daily lives of first- and second-generation immigrant youth. Through in-depth dyadic interviews conducted from a phenomenological lens, it delves deeply into their experiences, emotions, and opinions in an attempt to better understand how sociopolitical events at the national (macro) level have manifested in their routines, worldviews, and interactions with others. Such an investigation is relevant for a number of reasons.

First, young people from immigrant backgrounds—born in foreign countries or born to at least one foreign parent—represent the fastest growing sector of the U.S. population and make up nearly a quarter of its total child population (Hernandez, Denton, & Blanchard, 2011). This equates to almost 17 million youth who are first- or second-generation immigrants (Suarez-Orozco, Motti-Stefanidi, & Katsiaficas, 2018). By 2050, it is predicted that about a third of the U.S. population under 18 years old will be comprised of immigrant youth (Passel, 2011). Given their growing demographic importance, these young people will play an essential role in the country’s political, social, and economic prospects, making their well-being and success in adolescence imperative to the United States’ future endeavors. Efforts to support their growth into well-adjusted, civic-minded adults will only be meaningful and effective if the institutions they interact with (e.g., schools and community organizations) are responsive to their needs and concerns. This necessarily entails *listening* to what they have to say about the present society and conditions in which they live.

Second, immigrant youth must not only face the normative stressors of adolescence which are difficult in and of themselves, but they must also contend with compounding stressors unique to their migration experiences (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011). This includes but is not limited to reconciling trauma and loss (Cleary, Snead, Dietz-Chavez, Rivera & Edberg, 2018), dealing with issues of family separation or the threat of deportation (Gonzales 2011; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Stacciarini, Smith, Garyan, Wiens, & Cottler, 2015); liminal legality (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Marks, McKenna, & Garcia-Coll, 2018; Menjívar, 2006), and negotiating multiple potentially disparate social worlds (Arbona et al., 2010; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Portes & Zhou, 1993). As such, delving deep into *their* lived experiences can add

much needed nuance and cultural specificity to current understandings of adolescent identity development.

Finally, the present generation of immigrant youth have greater access to technology than ever before, with many having around-the-clock access to information and social interaction via the Internet. Such untethered access to new media is a double-edged sword. On one hand, applications like Skype and WhatsApp enable transnational families to maintain and nurture their relationships through more frequent contact (Bacigalupe & Camara, 2011). They also serve as sites of organizing, resistance, and community-building (Jenkins et al., 2016; Seif, 2011). On the other hand, social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter create opportunities for constant exposure to anti-immigrant sociopolitical discourses, harassment, and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, or migration status (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). The rapid-fire nature by which ideas, ideologies, and opinions are disseminated through technologies differentiate the identity formation experiences of today's immigrant youth different from those of generations past. As a result, they bring to the table unique, multidimensional, and complex perspectives on current events that are worthy of deep and focused exploration.

Literature Review

Adolescence and Identity Development

Scholarship suggests that adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by intense changes, not only in youth's physical appearance but also in their cognitive abilities and social behaviors (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). Indeed, this juncture in life has been described by many researchers as a time of identity development and self-exploration in which youth grapple with, categorize, reorganize, and integrate their personal and professional values, beliefs, and identities (Erikson, 1980; Marcia, 1980). At this time, youth also make significant leaps in

attention, memory, and abstraction, slowly transitioning from thinking in absolutes to developing an understanding and acceptance of nuance. It is also in adolescence that youth begin to delve deeply into self-reflection, moving beyond the plain acceptance of externally projected expectations to developing their own goals and expectations of self (Marcia, 1980). Although inherently an internally-focused and individual-level process, identity formation in adolescence is heavily shaped by the social, cultural, and relational contexts across which youth move (Erikson, 1980; Karas & Ciecuch, 2018). Given the various influences and perspectives youth may be striving to reconcile at this time, adolescence can be a period of high stress and psychological vulnerability in which many long-term mental health conditions and risk behaviors first manifest (Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, & Walters, 2005).

For immigrant youth, adolescence may be even more tumultuous for two reasons in particular. First, they must negotiate their place in society and balance two or more, sometimes conflicting, cultures (Berry et al., 2006; Juang et al., 2018). Second, they face unique migration-related obstacles that compound the normative stress associated with this period of life—their own or their family members' legal status, pre or post-migration traumas, acculturative stress, perceived ethnic or racial discrimination (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Coll et al., 1996; Gonzales, Suarez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013; Juang et al., 2018). Although experiences across individuals differ based on their social circumstances, migration typically involves various losses: of extended family connections, peers and friends, social networks and resources, one's sense of "place", and so forth (Juang et al. 2018). Such changes, regardless of whether they are experienced directly or indirectly, can be disruptive to beneficial relationships and critical processes that youth should be developing during this important juncture.

The Sociopolitical Climate and its Implications for Adolescents

As national and global sociopolitical environments become increasingly enmeshed with and manifest in our everyday lives through decisions made or laws passed, there has also been a steady growth in the body of literature seeking to understand the various ways in which they do so for different groups of people—for example, the LGBTQ+ community, women, and so forth (Bialer & McIntosh, 2017; Cohen, 2017; Duarte, 2017; Estes, 2018; Heald, Vida, & Bhugra, 2018; Gervais & Eagan, 2017; Gonzalez, Ramirez, & Galupo, 2018; Maher, Igou, & Van Tilburg, 2018; Markowitz, 2017). Notably, several scholars have chosen to focus their efforts on exploring how sociopolitical climate affects *adolescents* for reasons discussed previously such as the malleability of youth’s worldviews; the emergent nature of their identities; and their growing social and civic consciousness (Dabach, Fones, Merchant, & Kim, 2017; DeJonckheere, Fisher, & Chang, 2018; Kligler-Vilenchik & Literat, 2018; Wray-Lake et al., 2018).

Studies have shown that sociopolitical climate (typically following some catalytic sociopolitical decision or event) can influence several mediators of youth wellness such as civic engagement and political participation, stress and mental health, perceived discrimination and social support, sense of belongingness or purpose, and school functioning, particularly for the sub-populations of youth directly implicated or affected (Eisenberg & Silver, 2011; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Kirshner, 2009; Roberts, Mitchell, Witman, & Taffaro, 2010; Rogers et al., 2017; Santos, Menjivar, & Godfrey, 2013; Santos et al., 2018; Siemons, Raymond-Flesh, Auerswald, & Brindis, 2017; Sirin & Fine, 2007). For example, in their study of Muslim youth identity development following the September 11 terrorist attacks, Sirin and Fine (2007) found that 84.3 percent of participants reported experiences of religious or ethnic discrimination, sometimes on a daily basis. In another study, Siemons and colleagues (2017)

found that the passage of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program had various *positive* implications for its recipients. The young adult participants reported feeling more integrated within U.S. society, having greater structural and social (peer) supports, less stress, and greater hopefulness for future aspirations. In contrast, in their exploration of the effects of Arizona Senate Bill (SB) 1070—which allows law enforcement to check the immigration status of anyone suspected to be in the country without documentation—Santos and colleagues (2013) found a positive association between awareness of the law and 1) immigrant youth’s likelihood to engage in risk behaviors, and 2) immigrant youth’s perceptions of ethnic-based discrimination. A negative linkage between SB1070 awareness and participants’ emotional regulation was also identified and corroborated as being salient, particularly for Latino male students, in a later study (Santos et al., 2018). More recently, there is relatively new research to suggest that the 2016 U.S. presidential election of Donald Trump led to increases in stress, discrimination, and bullying among youth, particularly those belonging to vulnerable or minoritized groups (Huang & Cornell, 2019; Rogers et al., 2017).

The findings of these studies and other similar reports suggest that youth are not insulated from political happenings at the national and state levels. Such critical events and the sociopolitical climates they cultivate have direct implications for youth’s immediate environments, and in turn, their developmental trajectories and outcomes well beyond adolescence. Indeed, the literature seems to suggest that the political is deeply personal, playing a role in shaping how youth view themselves and navigate the world around them.

Immigrant Youth in the Trump Era

Given the incendiary rhetoric toward immigrant communities espoused by then-presidential candidate and now-president Donald Trump, as well as the rapid undoing of Obama

era immigration policies (e.g., slashing refugee resettlement, travel ban, the rescindment of DACA, resuming the deportation of non-criminal individuals), there has been increasing interest around the sociopolitical climate's implications on the well-being of immigrant families and youth in particular. In a report published by the Southern Poverty Law Center immediately following the election, Costello (2016) reported that 80 percent of educators surveyed said that they saw high levels of anxiety among marginalized students, including those from immigrant backgrounds. In the same report, deportation and family separation was cited by over 1000 educators as significant worry for their students that impeded their academic adjustment and self-regulation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2018) also presented concerning findings around school absenteeism, suggesting that some schools reported absences as high as 60 percent due to immigration raids and fears of deportation. Organizational reports like these have been supported by a small but growing body of peer-reviewed literature which has found increased feelings of exclusion, marginalization, anxiety and concern among participants especially around the issues of family separation and potential deportation (Cruz-Nichols, LeBron, & Pedraza, 2018; Wray-Lake et al., 2018).

However, with a few notable exceptions, most of the studies that have sought to better understand the sociopolitical climate's consequences for the well-being of immigrant young people have been conducted mostly with their parents, guardians, and educators (Dreby, 2015; Roche et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2017; Rubio-Hernandez & Ayon, 2016; Zayas et al., 2017). While such accounts are useful, especially in the relative absence of scholarship around the topic, these narratives are of *adults'* perceptions of how immigrant youth are being impacted by the current state of affairs, potentially colored by their own experiences, emotions, and political

stances. True understanding of youth's perspectives on the matter necessitates the incorporation of first-hand accounts from the young people themselves.

Research Questions and Study Aims

There are a number of studies that explore how sociopolitical context shapes immigrants' life-trajectories and well-being (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2011; Araujo & Borrell, 2006; Ayon, Marsiglia, Bermudez-Parsai, 2010; Cobb, Xie, & Sanders, 2016; Hacker, Chu, Arsenault, & Marlin, 2012; Hovey & Magaña, 2000; Joseph, 2011; Tummala-Narra, Inman, & Ettigi, 2011). However, the majority of this research been conducted with adult populations and little speaks directly to and about the experiences, emotions, and opinions of immigrant *youth*. Given this lacuna in the current body of literature, this in-depth qualitative study seeks to: (1) identify their sources of stress and concern, (2) explore the experiences of immigrant youth in the present sociopolitical climate, with an emphasis on how it affects their social and emotional well-being, and (3) give voice to their perspectives and opinions about current events. The key research questions underpinning this study are as follows:

- (1) What stressors, concerns, or worries do immigrant youth experience or have?
- (2) Have immigrant youth been affected by the present sociopolitical climate and if so, in what ways?

Methods

This qualitative, exploratory study is part of an ongoing research effort that is being conducted with the support of a community-based organization (CBO) in Nashville, Tennessee. It draws from data collected through two dyadic interviews with four youth who identified as being immigrants or coming from an immigrant background (Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). Two immigrant youth and the interviewer were present for each interview. At

the time of the interviews, all participants were high school students active in various youth programming initiatives, including the CBO's college access program for first-generation students.

Methodological Framework

The present study was situated within the paradigm of constructivist inquiry, which suggests that reality is subjective, multiple, and context-dependent and therefore best understood qualitatively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This lens was preferred over other, more quantitatively-oriented perspectives for a number of reasons.

First, exploring individuals' perceptions of the sociopolitical climate is a complex endeavor, as it is not only *constantly changing* in response to legislative decisions and current events, but also *experienced differently* by individuals depending on their identity and various social positions—their citizenship status, gender, race, socioeconomic status, disability, and so forth. Therefore, it was essential to operate in a paradigm that acknowledged the fact that “reality” varies from person to person and is constructed by individuals based on their “experience, knowledge, and expectations” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 15).

Second, the nature of the topic is contentious and openly ideological, making it a poor fit for positivist research strategies. Such approaches operate under the assumption that there exists a singular, objective “truth” waiting to be discovered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given the variety of opinions around immigration, it is difficult to envision the possibility of one perspective being definitively “right” or “wrong”. In contrast, constructivist tools (e.g., focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, observations, etc.) are well-suited to the study of value-laden issues, as they allow for rich and nuanced explanations of social phenomena through the standpoint of—and as interpreted by—the participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Finally, it is neither feasible nor desirable to disentangle the components of a person's identity into discrete parts—that all of these aspects intersect to create a unique configuration of privilege or oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). By embracing and accepting ambiguity around specific relationships between factors allowed for vivid illustrations of how *all* of these social locations contributed to participants' narratives. Although it can limit the broader applicability of the findings, there is inherent value in amplifying the complex stories of a few individuals, as the intention of the study was not to identify processes or circumstances that applied to the entire population but rather, to delve deeply into the experiences of a narrow subset of the population in a particular time and context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To account for the complexities surrounding the research topic, the present study was conducted in alignment with psychological phenomenological principles (from here referred to simply as *phenomenology*). Phenomenology is primarily concerned with centering participants' lived experiences and viewpoints, in an effort to “conceptualize the processes and structures of mental life...how situations are meaningfully lived through as they are experienced, with nothing added and nothing subtracted (Giorgi, 2009; Wertz et al., 2011, p. 124). It is comprised of two critical procedures that jointly make up what is known as the *psychological phenomenological reduction*” (Husserl, 1962). This process calls for the researcher to (1) “bracket” or withhold their previously-held scientific assumptions, knowledge, theories, and hypotheses around the topic of interest in order to delve deeply into the participant's *lebenswelt* or “life-world”, and (2) focus on the “lived-through meanings and the subjective performances that subtend human situations” (Giorgi, 2009, 2012; Wertz, 2005). Given its prioritization of participant standpoints and the exploratory nature of the larger research, phenomenology seemed to be the best lens with which to process, analyze, and interpret the data.

Researcher Positionality

Given phenomenology's emphasis on standpoint, it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the kinds of personal subjectivities that have influenced this work. Although I attempted to bracket my preconceptions as much as possible (per the practice of *psychological phenomenological reduction*), I recognize how my subjectivities could have informed the ways in which I interacted with the participants, as well as in how I analyzed and interpreted their stories. I identify as a first-generation immigrant. However, I am by all means incredibly privileged. I migrated to Canada and the United States as the child of highly educated “skilled professionals” who were recruited for their job expertise. I am an Asian (Filipino) woman and often associated with “good” (model minority) as opposed to “bad” immigrant stereotypes. I am currently enrolled in an elite, private, and predominantly-White university, completing a program with a social justice orientation. While in some ways I could be considered an “insider” through the commonalities I shared with my participants, we had very different life-worlds and lived experiences, not to mention a slight generational gap. As such, it was important for me to be mindful of how my ethnic, racial, gender, and sociopolitical identity shaped not only our relationship, but also the overall trajectory of the research.

I was honest with participants about all of these aspects of my identity and life. Having interacted with me on a weekly basis in a programming capacity for months, participants were already familiar with my migration story—how I came to the United States, my own struggles with applying to college, and the experiences that have shaped my identity thus far—and they had shared with me some of theirs. Our familiarity allowed for honesty and vulnerability in our conversations. Since we already had trust between us, participants were very forthcoming, openly emotional, and expressive. Being an insider to their experiences also allowed us to begin

our conversation in a different, perhaps deeper, place than one would normally start with strangers. That being said, my insider status also posed some issues around clarity and the level of detail in their narratives. In a few instances, especially early in our conversations, I noticed that participants would say trail off in their responses with statements like, “You know what it’s like” or “You know how it is”. In these moments, I reminded them that they are the only ones who really know what it is like to be them and gently probed for further elaboration of what they meant. Although being an insider meant that I had to be more vigilant in instances when meanings or definitions were being assumed (by participants or by me), I believe that this work benefitted greatly from and is richer because of the rapport that I had with the youth.

Research Setting

As mentioned previously, this research was conducted in partnership with a community-based organization in Nashville, Tennessee, selected due to its connections with the population of interest and the presence of a college-access program at three different sites intended specifically for first-generation youth from immigrant backgrounds.

In the interest of developing trusting relationships with potential participants, I served as a volunteer program assistant for the college-access program (mostly at one site but doing occasional rotations at others as well). I viewed this approach to field entry as a way to ensure that my presence would not be exploitative or harmful. Aware of the reputation that academia tends to have in vulnerable communities, I made every effort to demonstrate to the youth that I was committed to them as individuals and not just as research participants (Tuck, 2009). After a few months of prolonged engagement, I distributed recruitment materials at all three sites. Despite good responses from youth, time issues and lack of transportation proved to be

significant barriers to participation. The interviews that were successfully scheduled took place in a private space at the host CBO.

Sampling

A purposive sampling framework with the following inclusion criteria was employed to identify and recruit participants for the study: (1) individuals had to be high-school aged youth between 13 and 18 years old, and (2) individuals had to self-identify as being an immigrant or coming from an immigrant background. In the interest of maintaining privacy and minimizing the risk of emotional harm to participants, no requirements or constraints related to race, ethnicity, or immigration status were delineated, as these demographic characteristics are sensitive topics of discussion for some. When such details were divulged, they were done so openly by the participants.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through dyadic (pair) interviews, which allowed for maximum adaptability, and the evaluation and interpretation of paralinguistic cues (emotion, body language, pauses) in addition to participants' comments (Morgan et al., 2013; Morgan, Eliot, Lowe, & Gorman, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although less common than other qualitative methods, dyadic interviewing is particularly fruitful in situations "when the researcher wants both social interaction and depth, when narrative is valued..." (Morgan et al., 2013, p. 1283). Furthermore, given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, conducting the interviews in dyads provided each young person with a familiar peer to help ease their anxieties with being interviewed, with whom they were comfortable sharing their honest thoughts (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016).

The event followed a semi-structured protocol approved by the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board that is outlined in Appendix A. Each dyadic interview was conducted in-person, lasted between 50 to 90 minutes, and audio recorded with permission from participants. All participants presented parent consent forms, as well as signed their own assent form prior to the session.

Study Participants

The four study participants, described in Table 1, were all members of the CBO’s after-school college access program for first-generation students at two different sites. At the time of the interviews, three of the participants were in 11th grade, while one was in the 12th grade; all were 17 years old. Participants were paired according to the site from which they were recruited. Within the pairs, participants were familiar with one another—acquaintances, if not friends—and had well-established rapport. All names and potentially identifying details were changed or omitted in order to protect participants’ privacy.

Table 1. Participant Descriptions

Pseudonym	Description
Flora (Site 1)	A 17-year-old, 12 th grade student who migrated to the United States from Mexico at 11 years old with her parents and sibling; self-identified as being undocumented and Hispanic/Latinx
Pablo (Site 1)	A 17-year-old, 11 th grade student born in the United States, with undocumented parents and siblings from Mexico; self-identified as Hispanic/Latinx
Jessie (Site 2)	A 17-year-old, 11 th grade student who self-identified as Black and the daughter of African (Rwandan) immigrants.
Christian (Site 2)	A 17-year-old, 11 th grade student who self-identified as having Vietnamese immigrant parents.

The participants were relatively homogenous, as is the case with many phenomenological studies (Wertz, 2005). All of the participants were the same age and attended high schools with large, diverse student bodies. All were engaged in various community and political activities and eager to share their opinions about the U.S. sociopolitical climate. All had mentioned participating in social justice and activism efforts for a variety of issues ranging from gender equity, to racial justice, to immigrant rights. Furthermore, all of them, at one point or another, had experienced life in mixed-status family configurations, a situation in which some members of the household have documentation while others do not (Abrego, 2011). However, their stories also diverged in interesting ways—in their migration statuses and those of their families, in their household configurations (e.g., single-parent, dual-parent), and so forth. The ways in which their stories aligned and contrasted served as meaningful entry points for discussing how they have been affected by recent political events.

Data Analysis

Transcription and field notes. At the end of the pair interviews, audio recordings of the sessions were transcribed and uploaded to MaxQDA 2018.1 for analysis (VERBI Software, 2017). In parallel, I also developed a set of field notes which included methodological, theoretical, and personal annotations. These notes were helpful in recollecting the interview events. They also served as a helpful starting point for analyzing the data, as they gave me some ideas of where to begin and particularly intriguing sections of my discussion with the participants during the actual coding process (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Coding. I began the formal coding process by closely reading the transcript without writing any notes, personal memos or codes. This technique is critical to phenomenological

research and is intended to facilitate vivid recollection of the interview experience, as well as mindfulness about recurring themes, terms repeatedly used, and the tone in which certain responses were delivered (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Wertz, 2005). Afterward, I re-read the transcript, noting excerpts I viewed as rich, interesting and significant and identifying meaning units with which to organize the data (Saldana, 2009; Wertz, 2005).

Once I felt confident in my knowledge of the transcripts' contents, I began the iterative coding process using MaxQDA 2018.1 software, taking care to adhere to the principles of psychological phenomenological reduction and focusing on participants' subjective experiences (Giorgi, 2009; VERBI Software, 2017; Wertz, 2005). I employed various codes: *process* codes, in an effort to keep interpretations active and as close to the data as possible (Charmaz, 2006); *in vivo* codes, to preserve participants' meanings and honor their voice (Saldana, 2009), and *versus* codes to identify potential conflicts and indications of tension, injustice, or power differentials (Saldana, 2009). A second round of coding was conducted to help eliminate fringe codes, combine redundant ones, and ultimately re-organize and refine the final themes.

Triangulation. In an effort to center participants' voices in the study and ensure that my interpretations of their responses were accurate reflections of their narratives, I reached out to the youth and asked them to provide a member check on the preliminary findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, given their academic obligations, standardized testing schedules, and an incident in the vicinity of their schools that led the cancellation of programming, I was not successful in soliciting their feedback. Despite this, I sought to triangulate my data in other ways: through de-briefing the emerging themes with peers in the academy; referring back to field notes; by remaining open to negative cases that did not fit the

patterns and explanations I was finding in the data; and by attempting to provide thick descriptions of participants’ statements.

Findings

This study employed a phenomenological framework to gain first-hand insight from immigrant youth around two main questions: 1) What stressors, concerns, or worries do immigrant youth experience or have? 2) Have immigrant youth been affected by the present sociopolitical climate and if so, in what ways? The findings for each question are discussed in subsequent sections; the overarching themes are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Overarching Themes

Theme	Subtheme
Dealing with Pressure and Expectations	Negotiating stereotypes Managing familial expectations
Lacking Supports	Navigating post-secondary education Feeling dismissed
Not Wanting to Be a Burden	Keeping worries to oneself Seeing others struggle
Reacting to the Election	Feeling frustrated Feeling disbelief
Questioning the People Around Them	Feeling judged Feeling uncertain Feeling skeptical
Questioning Themselves	Giving the benefit of the doubt Feeling conflicted
Questioning the Future	Making alternate plans Losing interest Becoming discouraged
Channeling Negativity into Positive Change	Participating in activism Wanting to “do something” Trying to educate others

Question 1: Sources of Stress and Worry for Immigrant Youth

When asked the question, “What stresses you out?”, the youth participants named things that one would expect from anybody of a similar age—managing social pressures and other

people's expectations of success; keeping up with school and planning for the future; and having insufficient supports to achieve their goals. However, the ways in which these stressors manifested in the daily lives of participants were closely tied to their identities as first-generation youth, as children of immigrants, and as members of often-minoritized racial and ethnic communities.

Dealing with pressure and expectations. From our conversations, it became clear that participants were especially concerned about their ability to meet and supersede other people's expectations of them. Throughout the interviews, participants spoke about the burden they felt, especially to live up to their families' aspirations for them. When asked to elaborate on this sense of pressure, both Christian and Jessie spoke about the need to be "successful" in the ways defined by their family members. Christian explained:

I don't really have like, a concern, but I guess like stereotypes is something that is pretty big. Um, like some people...like family members, they expect you not to be a doctor or anything, but to be something up there." Jessie interrupts, "engineer, scientist, lawyer, you know..."

In several instances, the young people alluded to the feeling of *needing* to pay back their families for all of their hard work and sacrifices, as well as to the (perceived) obligation to uplift family members back home by supporting them financially.

[I feel that pressure] A lot...because you know, they came from another country and worked so hard to get here. They always use that excuse, I mean it's not really an excuse, like they deserve the credit but like I don't know...like what if...I don't make them happy? Or like not necessarily *be what they want* but like *be up there* like they want me to. And like will I be a disappointment? And that scares me. – Jessie

...That's...a lot of family members counting on me, not to be like rich or anything but just like, to be successful. But like if I wanted to do something else, you know, they're just going to like, not ever talk to me ever again. That's how it is over there. Like they just call for money...being stable is one thing but being happy is also another thing. And I don't know. Right now, it's just really hard to choose because you want to choose something — like I have two choices, one's money and one's happiness. And it's hard to choose. – Christian

Interestingly, the theme of living up to others' expectations also emerged in the other dyadic interview, albeit with a less personal and more macro-level bent. Whereas Christian and Jessie focused on the stress they internalized from familial expectations, Flora and Pablo discussed the pressure they felt to present themselves in specific ways in order to improve larger society's perceptions of their racial and ethnic communities:

...If they talk to you and you're like one of the few Hispanics they know, they're going to have that view. They're going to use you to represent their whole idea of that group. So it's better for me to present myself in a way where I give them a good impression and that way when they think back, like, "Oh yeah she was Mexican" and...they kind of like, and then they hear like Donald Trump saying "Mexicans are bad" and maybe think, "Well, she was Mexican and she's not really doing all that stuff"...so in a way it's like, I feel like I have to represent the Latino community. – Flora

That's how I always feel. I always feel like I have to represent Hispanics...I feel like I always have to be better than them [his peers in a predominantly White after-school program] in a way, like...they're all really smart and get 32s on their ACT and they all read...they're all like really incredibly smart and I feel like...in a way, I need to go beyond that. Go beyond that and meet their level and like yes, they're in this [academy] and [private school] but I just feel the need to like, be there to show...people and to represent Hispanics that...you know, no it's not just y'all that can do it, we can do it too. – Pablo

Lacking supports. Despite the internal and external pressures, there was consensus among the youth participants that they wanted to do well not only for their families and communities, but also for themselves. They spoke at length about their efforts and struggles to maintain good grades and prepare themselves for higher education, with the primary stressors appearing to be a lack of social capital and information around educational processes compared to their native-born peers, and the absence of certain opportunities due to financial or legal constraints. As first-generation students, participants felt stressed about their lack of access to *specific* knowledge about school and the college-going process in the United States:

For me, I feel like it [the stress of going to college] has stayed continuous but less...support? In a sense? Because like my family didn't go to college, so it's like how are you going to...I

mean they expect me to do all of these great things without kind of giving me any help, and it sucks. – Jessie

I mean, I trust family members but none of them have even made it to high school, so they won't even understand anything that we do or half of the stuff that we go through. – Christian

However, when asked to elaborate on their concerns, it became clear that their stress was not necessarily due to the lack of resources per se (although it was a source of frustration, they seemed to accept that it was simply another hurdle to overcome). Rather, participants were more so upset about the lack of empathy they experienced from family members—and generally the adults around them—when they tried to share their anxieties about school and their higher education options. In addition to and beyond materials and information, what the youth seemed to really want was acknowledgement that what they were going through was indeed challenging and recognition of their efforts:

Like, you know you're a teenager you're not supposed to have this level of stress. I don't know...I feel like they think all we have to deal with is school work. I remember like one time I came home I told my mom "I'm so tired I just want to go to sleep" and she was like, "What are you tired of? You just went to school." And I was like, "Yeah you're right", kind of brushed it off, but it does bother me a little bit. – Flora

That said, participants also expressed feeling stressed by financial barriers to participation in schooling which was more often than not, exacerbated by their own or their parents' precarious migration status. This was especially salient in the case of Flora, who, because she was "completely undocumented, no DACA, no nothing", did not have the same options for financial aid as her resident and citizen peers:

...Like when I got accepted into [school], I did tell them about it, and they were like, "Oh my god I'm so proud", my mom even took pictures and sent it to my dad. But I'm like...in the back of my mind I'm like, "Yeah I got accepted but I don't think I can go there because it's too expensive."

I applied to [scholarship] but they ask you for taxes so it's like, I don't have that. I feel like every time I get a chance to do something there's always something else that's going to block

me from doing it. It's just frustrating to see that you're trying your best and even then it's like, not enough...especially now like my senior year, everyone's like, "Oh you know, you have to do your FAFSA"...all of these scholarships that I would be able to get if I had papers. But I don't. Sometimes I just sit and just like wondering like okay if I had papers...

Not wanting to be a burden. Although they worried about meeting personal, professional, and academic expectations and expressed desire for more support, all of the youth participants stated that they tended to internalize their stressors and keep things to themselves as much as possible. They stated repeatedly that despite the hardships they felt, they did not want to "be a burden" on others or "stress anybody else out with [their] issues", especially their families who they saw as already going through a lot. Pablo explained his hesitation to divulge his stresses, stating:

Like my parents work like...7 to 4, and go back to work at 7 pm until like 11 or 12...so that's kind of like, I feel bad. Their lifestyle...I feel like I shouldn't bother them or ever ask things.

It was evident from our conversations that the youth understood that they *could* reach out to their parents. However, they viewed keeping things to themselves as a way to alleviate some of the stress that their own family members were experiencing, even if it meant holding in and compartmentalizing their own:

They do support me a lot but I don't really tell them...like my dad is in Mexico...like it's relevant for him to know it but he's in Mexico. And uh...like my mom...ever since my dad got deported, she's been, like, depressed? In a way? Like, she's like completely different than she was before...and it's hard because I don't want to worry her more. I don't want to bring her more anxiety...I like to filter the things I let my parents know. I mean, they already have a lot of things to take care of, you know, my dad being in Mexico, my mom trying to like, keep herself together...it's...I just like to keep that separate. – Flora

Question 2: Immigrant Youth and the Post-Trump Election Political Climate

In addition to speaking about the daily hassles they experienced, youth participants also shared in detail how the 2016 U.S. presidential election affected their present dispositions and

future plans. Based on our conversations, youth seemed to view the election of Donald Trump as a significant *turning point*—a paradigm shift that cultivated deep uncertainty around their interactions with the world around them, their understanding of their (and their communities’) position within American society, and their hopes and plans for the future.

Reacting to the election. All of the participants described having a wide range of negatively-valenced emotions in response to the 2016 election, namely shock, sadness, and disbelief that somebody who had been so inflammatory about their communities had risen to such a significant leadership position. Jessie and Christian expressed their disappointment, with the latter sighing, “There was just so much hate going around.” Jessie explained her views, stating, “It’s like...Trump kind of made America hate again...I just felt our fight for equality as humans went back down a notch.” The disbelief was also salient in conversations with Flora and Pablo who also spoke of their frustration and distress:

...I was like okay, you know, I’m going to go to sleep and when I wake up, she’s [Hillary Clinton] going to be president. And so, I woke up and the first thing I did was look at my phone and it said Donald Trump has been elected as the President of the United States and I was just kind of like...I don’t know... I was trying to process it...just sitting on my bed like I can’t believe they actually elected him...after all of the things he said not just about immigrants but about women too... – Flora

I know my dad stayed up like all night to see who finally got elected so like when I woke up like, he was sad, and he went out to the lawn and was kind of standing there wondering about why...like he was so sad. And my sister cried...I don’t know about my brother...but I know my sister cried and I cried. Seeing them sad made me cry...I just like, kept thinking like, “do people really hate us that much?” – Pablo

Interestingly, all of the youth’s initial reactions were largely attempts to process the socioemotional implications of the election on them, their families, and their communities. It is clear from their comments that Trump’s victory felt like a deeply personal attack on various aspects of their identities—their immigration status, their gender, their race and ethnicity. Also

notable in their narratives is the anxiety around their social position and how they would be treated differently given the election's outcome.

Questioning the people around them. As the reality of Trump's presidency began to settle in, participants' shock and frustrations gave way to more complicated feelings of doubt, skepticism, and questioning—particularly around their interactions in and with White, middle- and upper-class society. For example, Flora wondered out loud about the types of opportunities she would be able to access in an environment that was not welcoming toward minorities in general, but especially immigrants. She questioned the idea that she would ever be treated fairly as an undocumented Hispanic-Latinx individual, stating:

I'mma give you an example...African Americans have accomplished so much and like even nowadays they're still not seen as equal, even after all of the things they've done...they've been trying for the past 50 years or probably longer and even nowadays they're still not seen as equal. So how long is it going to take for me to be seen as equal?

She also pointed to Trump's presidency as having heightened her skepticism of White people, something that other participants echoed throughout the discussions:

Yeah it's like, I started off like, 'Yo White people...great!' [Pablo laughs and interjects "Like, I love White people!"] Sometimes they come try our food and it's fun and we all learn about each other but now it's like okay, this person...they might have voted for Trump. Like I think about that a lot! ...When I go downtown and I'm in a place eating or walking around...I wonder how many people here voted for Trump, and then I'm just like...[sigh] – Flora

I feel like in their head, I feel like it can be going different? Like they're not going say anything to you but like in their head they're probably like...[thinking] something negative. – Pablo

Sometimes I can just, I don't know, I'm just doing my job and people are going at me, and I'm like, you know what, like, I know if I were White they would be more like, "Okay let me listen to her", but since I am Black they're like "No, let me just, cuss her out and give her the worst"...and there's people, you can just tell, like if they get upset...you can just tell the difference. They act a certain way when it's me versus like if it's one of my White co-workers next to me and I...I get upset because I see it. They

don't see it, but I see it because I'm like...as a person of color I can just tell. It's different. – Jessie

Within these conversations, none of the youth mentioned specific experiences with discrimination or harassment due to their immigration status, race, or ethnicity; they did not attribute their suspicions to any one incident. Rather, it appears that the sociopolitical climate in general has engrained (or intensified) within them a hyper-awareness of negative discourses regarding race, ethnicity, and immigration which in turn, has led them to more frequently call into question White people's motives, political views, and personal opinions in their interactions.

Questioning themselves. Importantly, while they expressed feelings of skepticism toward White society, participants also noted that they felt conflicted and sometimes even guilty about having such feelings. Often, they sought to qualify their statements and empathize with White people. For example, Christian commented, “Something I did notice is like, a lot of people at our school are picking on White people, calling them Trump supporters and you know, all that stuff.” Youth were adamant that they did not necessarily *want* to question or scrutinize their interactions with White people—that it just happens. They spoke of their attempts to give White people the benefit of the doubt, and the internal turmoil that ensues when they are unable to reconcile their desire to do so with their emotional instincts. This guilt and self-doubt was evident as our conversations progressed, particularly in Flora, who at the beginning, said:

I kinda try to avoid that mentality like you know, all White people are mean. It kinda bothers me when people say that...I like to go downtown a lot right? So I was like “Oh it's so nice to go there” and they're [her classmates] like “Yeah, but don't you feel weird?” and I'm like “No, why?” and they're like “Because there's a bunch of white people...” Like, they—I get it, they're White but it doesn't mean they all support Trump...

Later in the discussion, when she notes that she often wonders “How many of these people voted for Trump?” in predominantly White spaces and that “you can actually see people changing”, she backtracks almost immediately and adds, “maybe it’s not them, maybe it’s *me*, like myself?”.

To this statement, Pablo nods in agreement, saying “I feel like that too! It’s like...our mental—we’re mentally just...it’s mentally us.” He elaborates on his own feelings of guilt for being weary of White people and spaces and sighs, “Sometimes I feel bad because I feel like it’s—this is just all in my head, and I keep telling myself like, *this is just all in my head!*”

The ways in which the youth wrestle with this inner conflict were also demonstrated in another strand of the conversation, about “needing spaces with people who look like you”. In this instance, Pablo talked about his frustration with himself, after feeling upset that he was the only Hispanic-Latinx person in another after-school program he attends. He stammered:

It’s like you notice race so much now...it just started like, not that they were White, but I mean—it is, but it’s not...it’s not...it’s something! It’s more like why am I so annoyed of not seeing Hispanics? You don’t want to be *that* person...you kind of just don’t want to care about your race at times. You just want to accept everyone, but it’s kind of hard...and you can’t...I thought I would be able to...not care that they’re all White, you know, and now...it’s just starting to like, really get to me.

As discussed previously, one of the implications of the current sociopolitical environment on the youth participants has been a burgeoning skepticism toward White people and White society in general. However, guilt and self-doubt accompany their suspicions. They alluded to the emotional toll that their hyper-awareness of race issues takes on them. They *want* to simply be able to see the good in all people. It is this desire that makes it all the more frustrating for them when their first reaction toward certain individuals is a reluctance to trust.

Questioning the future. Over the course of our conversations, all of the participants made references to their own, their families’, and their friends’ future plans and how they have

changed in response to recent political events. They spoke about how the uncertainty around immigration policy has compelled them and their loved ones to reconsider and re-structure their plans for the future, either in anticipation of the worst-case scenario or because the outcomes no longer seemed worth the emotional burden it placed upon their shoulders. For example, when asked about how political events have affected her, Flora who is undocumented, said:

Well there are definitely days where I'm like...I think about my future. And I don't see it in the U.S. anymore...there are days where I'm just like, "You know what, after I graduate I have to leave", I just...I don't think can be in this like, climate for too long because it kind of does get like your spirit down.

Her father, who was deported and now lives in Mexico, has sought to prepare Flora for the possibility that she may not be able to stay given the current political circumstances, and has encouraged her to re-think her plans for the future. She recalls having the following conversation with him:

...When I tell my dad about staying here, like you know, because there are days where I'm like I want to stay...I like living here. And [he says] you can if you want to, but you have to think about the long run. You have to think, you don't have papers, you don't have DACA and they already ended that, and even if you do manage to graduate from college and get your degree...it's going to be hard because you don't have a social security number...and he also tells me that you know, even if you somehow manage to get the job, you can get pulled over one day or you could...like, he just makes it clear that there is an uncertainty that...you can be the best student ever...do your job perfectly but if one day you know, there's an incident and you get deported, it's like, well you have nothing to go back to. It can all be for nothing.

Jessie, Christian, and Pablo did not experience the same kind of upheaval to their future plans as Flora, presumably because they are U.S. citizens, and therefore, their options are not constrained in the same way. However, the three 11th grade students described the behavioral and motivation changes they witnessed in their siblings and peers, especially after the Trump administration's announcement that it planned to end DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood

Arrivals). Jessie and Christian described what they saw after the election among their social circles and close friends:

We've gotten more empty as a school. Or like, the school has become smaller...it's dropped in numbers a lot. Something I have noticed is like, people have lack of motivation because um, they're like, "I'm not going make it to college, they're not going to accept me, I don't have a green card, I don't have nothing" so...they just drop out and...go work with their parents. – Jessie

There are some people that are really smart, and like they don't have a social security number so it's like they...they love school but they don't know what to do afterwards. He has like a 3.5 GPA, he's involved, but he doesn't have anything. And it's hard for him too because you know, he wants to...he's about 18, he wants to go out there, but he can't get a license. – Christian

Similarly, Pablo described what it was like to see his siblings—both undocumented with DACA protections—deal with the fallout of its rescindment. He expressed concern about their futures and went on to describe the attitudinal changes he noticed, especially in his sister, once they received the news that the president had decided to halt the DACA program and limit renewals moving forward:

[She's] like..."There's not even a point in me going to college anymore, it's all just a waste, it's just going to be taken away", and you know I've seen her cry. I don't really talk to my brother as much, but I know he probably cares about it...but my sister just...always complains that...there's no point. And I feel bad because like, "I want you to have a job and do amazing things...but how are you going to..."—like in my head I think, "how are you actually going to do it though?"

Despite the fact that their own motivation and futures have not been directly affected by current events, the three younger participants were deeply worried about the people they loved, becoming emotional when talking about the increasing discouragement and uncertainty they witnessed. In some form or another, they alluded to feeling defeated and hurt for their siblings and friends, who may not be able to live out the futures they planned and wanted for themselves due to political constraints.

Channeling negativity into positive change. There are myriad examples and stories to suggest that the present political environment—marked by rapid legislative changes, increased perceived discrimination, and uncertainty—may have negative implications for the socioemotional well-being of immigrant youth. However, it is worth noting that the participants *also* associated the current political climate with feelings of empowerment, pride in their identities, and a greater desire to be engaged in civic activities. The transformation of negative experiences into positive actions was described by Flora and Pablo respectively, as follows:

There are other days where I'm like, okay, I'm going use all of that hate and kind of channel it positively, you know? Like, they have a stereotype of who I'm supposed to be, I'm going do my best to challenge that and show them otherwise... – Flora

I feel the need to like do something...I don't know. I mean like, advocate and really kind of push for them [his family]...it makes me feel like there's so much change to be done, and I feel like...I want to make some of that change, even if it's the smallest thing I can do. – Pablo

Although the current political climate has challenged their socioemotional wellness, family and community stability, and future plans, all of the youth expressed a desire to fight and advocate for greater inclusivity and equity, choosing to convert their frustrations into small but meaningful steps toward cultivating kind and accepting spaces for all. For them, the election created stress but also much needed urgency around the need to “educate ignorant people because there is so much ignorance” and has established for them a goal to work toward—“convince people to vote!” Despite the hardships imposed by a less-than-receptive political climate, they continue to believe in their ability to transform society. As Jessie put it, “I feel like all the young people...like we can make a change!”

Discussion

Question 1: The Daily Stressors of Immigrant Youth

Overall, findings from this sub-section of the study provide support for the idea that the adolescent development of immigrant youth is influenced, at least in part, by their own migration-related experiences and those of their families. It was not especially surprising that immigrant youth reported everyday stress around social relationships, their academic performance, and future prospects. Indeed, given what we know about the cognitive and psychosocial processes occurring in adolescence, these are the kinds of concerns that one would expect any young person to encounter as they transition into adulthood (Erikson, 1980; Marcia, 1980). However, it was interesting that immigrant youth tended to contextualize their worries and decision-making—about their potential career options, the personas they present in public, and so forth—based on the pressures they felt to live up to certain expectations, be it from their parents, extended family and friends, or society in general. Although it was not clear whether these expectations were explicitly communicated to youth or simply perceived by them, the salience of external social pressures in their narratives highlights a key process in adolescence that immigrant youth may need additional support navigating: building an identity based on their own experiences, skills, values, and goals as opposed to the identifications imposed on them by others in childhood.

Existing literature suggests that healthy identities are developed through questioning, reflection, exploration and prioritization around what is personally meaningful to the individual (Marcia, 1980). As such, practitioners who interact with immigrant youth in supportive or advisory roles may want to develop strategic plans not only around how to encourage youth to engage in this introspective process, but also how to scaffold it such that it does not create family

conflict or psychological distress. For example, practitioners could provide immigrant youth with spaces to voice and reconcile the discrepancies between their personal aspirations and the expectations of others. They could also share healthy and adaptive strategies for coping with stress or social pressures.

Furthermore, it may be helpful for practitioners to account for the centrality of *family* in the lives of the immigrant youth with whom they work. Across interviews, participants continually spoke of their families' sacrifices, hardships, persistence, and work ethic as sources of pride and motivation to succeed. Interestingly however, it is also these family narratives that sometimes dissuaded them from sharing their worries or asking for support from their parents and guardians; participants did not want to add to their family's struggles by vocalizing their stresses and tended to minimize their concerns in relation to what their parents and guardians have endured. Given the complicated nature of the role that family plays in the lives of immigrant youth, practitioners have the potential to serve as critical bridges between these young people and their parents to help both parties communicate with one another more openly, clearly, and empathetically. Perhaps most concretely, school- and community-level practitioners who interact with immigrant youth can fill certain knowledge gaps and serve as direct sources of informational and instrumental support that they may not have access to within their homes and immediate neighborhoods.

One of the main issues participants experienced stress around was having to weave through complex bureaucratic systems—educational, legal, and at times both simultaneously—with limited assistance. As the political climate continues to shift rapidly, it is important for immigrant youth-serving practitioners to be prepared to provide information to these young people and their families about the U.S. educational landscape (college options, financial aid,

DACA and provisions for undocumented or minimally-document students) and political decisions that may affect them and their communities.

Question 2: The Effects of the Present Political Climate on Immigrant Youth

Findings from this sub-section of the study suggest that there is legitimacy to claims presented by both popular media and more recent academic publications regarding the “Trump Effect”—increased anxiety, fears, and feelings of exclusion or discrimination—among immigrant youth (Cruz-Nichols et al., 2018; Costello, 2016; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Indeed, participants reported having elevated feelings of disillusionment, worry, anxiety, and unease immediately following the election of President Trump. They also spoke in great detail about how their behaviors and the nature of their interactions with others, particularly White people, have unintentionally become more guarded, hesitant, and skeptical. These findings may be of particular interest to school and youth-serving practitioners. Given heightened fears around bullying, discrimination, and even potential deportation, leaders of these institutions may want to consider conducting meetings with immigrant youth and their families to affirm their commitment to these young people’s safety and well-being. Furthermore, they should strive to have sufficient capacity and resources to respond to immigrant youth’s needs in case of potentially traumatizing events. It may also be fruitful to develop additional platforms for minoritized students to express their concerns and work through their conflicting emotions, such as school-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or peacemaking circles. In light of heightened marginalization, perceived or directly experienced, having spaces that affirm immigrant students’ identities and cultural heritage may help to improve their sense of self and belonging, in turn protecting their psychological well-being.

That being said, immigrant youth also need instrumental and informational supports to remain focused on their goals in an ever-changing political landscape. Although it is not possible for immigrant youth-serving practitioners to *fix* the problems causing this uncertainty, they can take steps to ensure that their clients are well-informed about all of their possible options in light of it, be it related to citizenship and migration status, school, or work.

Perhaps the most notable and encouraging finding from this sub-section of the study was that in response to the hostile political climate, participants did not simply disengage and isolate themselves from larger society. Instead, participants reported feeling motivated to advocate for their communities and participate in activism. This is consistent with existing literature which suggests that sociopolitical climate and awareness of social injustice can positively mediate minority youth's civic engagement and participation (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer, Rapa, Voight, & McWhirter, 2016; Kirshner, 2009; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). As such, practitioners who work in school and in after-school settings may want to consider facilitating civically-engaged activities and projects that allow immigrant youth to channel their frustrations and anxieties with the status quo into efforts to create meaningful change in their schools and communities.

Strengths and Limitations

This study had various strengths and limitations that are worth noting and should be taken into consideration when interpreting its findings. First, this research was intentional in capturing the narratives of immigrant youth and employed qualitative, phenomenological data collection and analysis techniques in an effort to fully understand participants' perspectives, emotions, and thoughts. This methodological decision lent itself to rich, detailed information and nuanced findings. However, it is important to note that given the small sample size ($n = 4$) and paired-

interview approach, it is unlikely that saturation occurred. This sampling limitation can be attributed to several constraining factors; it may have been that the hostile political climate toward the immigrant community, as well as the requirement of parental consent in order to participate, led to some reluctance to engage. That being said, the objective of the study was not generate *generalizable* findings that would apply to a large population. Rather, it was to elucidate the lived experiences of a specific group in hope to providing insight into their unique life worlds—to share information that would enable readers to walk in the participants’ shoes. Viewed from this vantage point, the study could be considered robust, having achieved the goal of capturing the lived experiences of participants. However, it is also worth noting that this study heavily relied on participants’ memories of the election and various events after it. Therefore, the statements made by participants are subject to recall bias and could have been affected by potential lapses in memory.

Furthermore, I made every effort to develop trust with participants prior to collecting data and, as I have discussed previously, I am also a person of color who identifies as an immigrant. This period of prolonged engagement prior to data collection, as well as having this shared aspect of identity with the participants allowed for us to have an honest and open conversation about their opinions, fears, hopes, and dreams. Whereas researchers who may be considered “outsiders” would likely have had to spend a lot of time building rapport, I believe that being an “insider” in more ways than one enabled the participants and I to delve more deeply into sensitive topics in the short amount of time that we had to talk.

One limitation of being so deeply embedded among participants was that they could have responded to my questions in ways that they thought I wanted to hear although given what they shared I do not believe that to be the case. Another potential concern was that my interpretations

of their narratives could have been shaped too much by my previously-held knowledge of them. However, I was aware of these concerns and tried my best to triangulate the findings in the ways that I could per the practices of phenomenological reduction. Ultimately, I believe that the benefits of knowing the participants prior to collecting data outweighed the potential downsides, though these subjectivities should be taken into account when attempting to draw conclusions from this particular study. Finally, as previously mentioned, efforts to member-check the findings of the study with participants were unsuccessful due to scheduling difficulties. Furthermore, I conducted the study independently, without a research team or others to consult with. However, members of the academic research community, as well as the community partner organization, have generally been receptive to the findings of the study as well as the methods used to capture information.

Implications and Future Directions

This small qualitative phenomenological case study sought to identify ways in which the present sociopolitical environment has affected immigrant youth, paying particular attention to its relational and socioemotional impacts. Although its findings are limited by sample size and context, it touches upon some recurring patterns in immigrant youth process and navigate their ways through less-than-ideal political conditions. It is a small step toward a deeper understanding of the processes by which dramatic societal events influence the life trajectories of this particular population of young people.

The findings of this research suggest that the sociopolitical climate weaves a complex web of feelings for immigrant youth, that can be both beneficial and detrimental to their socioemotional well-being. Taken as a whole, the findings illustrate not only the challenges that immigrant youth face on a daily basis and in the present political climate, but also potential

avenues that practitioners and individuals in leadership positions—from many different disciplines and contexts—can pursue to support their well-being and healthy development. Furthermore, this study demonstrated that contrary to popular belief, immigrant youth are *directly* affected by political goings-on at the national and state levels and have a desire to make changes to the present status quo. Having heard their stake in the matter and the ways in which sociopolitical hostility has manifested in their everyday existence, it is now up to the adults in their lives to respond accordingly, and to be thoughtful in incorporating immigrant youth's voices in their decisions and actions.

From a research perspective, there is still so much to learn and many gaps in knowledge to be filled. Most obviously, quantitative studies could be helpful for generating knowledge that can be more easily applied in diverse settings. For example, researchers could explore the associations between increased ICE presence in cities and variables such as school attendance and mental health among immigrant youth. They could also look into how state and local policies such as sanctuary city ordinances and in-state tuition provisions for undocumented immigrant youth influence opportunity and upward social mobility (e.g. employment and post-secondary education).

The literature base around the Trump Effect would also benefit from additional studies that have more participants from varied backgrounds, as a larger sample size would help to elucidate within- and between-group differences which could potentially be useful in efforts to develop culturally-responsive practitioners and youth programming. For example, researchers could explore the mental health effects of stricter immigration enforcement across different generations of immigrant youth (first vs. second and third) and the amount of time since their arrival to the United States. One could also look at the differences in outcomes (health,

education, etc.) between documented immigrant youth and those without documentation, or even across different ethnicities. If research could help to identify which sub-populations of immigrant youth may be especially affected by current events, it may help practitioners provide more focused interventions, specific to cultural communities.

Furthermore, given the ephemeral nature of government leadership and the upcoming U.S. elections in 2020, it may be of interest to follow up on the various strands of findings identified here. For example, future studies could explore how the outlooks of immigrant youth around the state of affairs and their own futures have changed since 2016; or investigate trajectories of immigrant youth civic engagement since Trump's initial entry into the presidential office.

Future research should also explore this phenomenon on a larger scale, with greater attention paid toward the effects of Trump's presidency on immigrant youth's school and behavioral outcomes, as well as to their long-term social and psychological well-being. For example, one could explore trends in depression, anxiety, and other markers of wellness among immigrant youth following specific policy announcements and decisions, both positive and negative (e.g. after ICE raids, after the passage of in-state tuition legislation). Given the upcoming election in 2020, researchers may also want to consider measuring behavior and mental health outcomes before and after, to determine how the broader social environment might be affecting youth on an individual level.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this work can serve to: (1) inform practitioners' engagement with immigrant youth in educational and community-based settings and (2) compel people in positions of power and influence to make more concerted efforts to incorporate immigrant youth's voices into the decisions that directly impact them, their families, and their communities.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The dyadic interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured manner to maintain flexibility and center issues that are relevant to the participants. Below are questions and probes that I would like to ask. However, I may not ask all of the questions, ask certain questions differently, or ask different questions depending on the responses of the participants.

Introduction.

Good morning and welcome to our discussion. I want to thank you for joining me today. My name is Marianne Zape and I am a PhD student in the Community Research and Action program at Vanderbilt University. As many of you may know, immigration was talked about *a lot* during the election. Since then, several decisions have been made—or are being made—that affect immigrant families across the United States. I know that these events might have, or might be causing stress or worry for some, not just adults, but also young people like yourselves. You were invited to participate in this because you or someone you know come from an immigrant background. I would like to learn about a few things: 1) your thoughts and feelings about this current political climate, 2) your concerns or worries, if any and 3) ways in which adults in your school and your community have been or can be more responsive to them. This focus group will last for about an hour. I want to emphasize the fact that you *do not* have to answer the question if you do not want to, and that you may stop participating or leave at any point. I also want to encourage everyone to keep what is said in this room confidential, meaning that we won't share anyone's names or the comments made here with anybody outside of this group. Like I mentioned earlier, your names won't be used in any written documents and reports; made-up names will be used instead.

I am recording this discussion so that I don't miss any of your comments. If you want to say something but don't want it to be recorded, just let me know.

Ground Rules.

Before we start, I want us to go over some ground rules so that we are all on the same page.

1. There are no wrong answers—everyone here may have a different perspective. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. All of your insights, no matter what you say, will be valuable and helpful to our study.
2. One speaker at a time—please try not to talk over one another, so that we can all hear what everyone is saying clearly.
3. Respect—it is sometimes scary to speak your mind in front of others. Please be mindful of this and be respectful of other participants and what they're saying. Along those same lines, please refrain from using language that might be offensive or hurtful.

Do you have any questions for me before we start? If not, let's begin. Everyone has selected a pseudonym for themselves. Please only refer to one another by these names, so that we can keep what is said here private.

Questions.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself (name/grade/age)
 - a. Probe: What do you like to do for fun? What would you like to do in the future?
2. What do you think of the current U.S. political situation?
 - a. Probe: How has it affected you? Your family? Your friends?
 - b. Probe: How has it affected your school's climate/environment?
3. A lot happened during the presidential campaign and the election. Could you tell me about how you were feeling...
 - a. When the campaign was going on?
 - b. After the election?
 - i. Probe: Why do you think you were feeling that way?
 - ii. Probe: How was this different from how you were feeling before the campaign/election?
4. A lot has happened since then too. How has it been for you since the election?
 - a. Emotionally?
 - b. Socially?
 - i. Probe: Have there been any instances of discrimination/harassment/bullying at school related to your race/ethnicity/immigration status?
 1. Further probe: Have you witnessed others being discriminated against/bullied because of their race/ethnicity/immigration status
 2. Further Probe: How does this make you feel?
 - ii. Probe: Have there been any instances of inclusion or people coming together at school?
 1. Further Probe: How does this make you feel?
 - c. Academically?
5. *[If stress or concern is mentioned]* What types of things did you/do you worry about?
 - i. Probe: Why?
6. *[If stress or concern is mentioned]* What or who has helped ease your worries? What or who has worsened your worries?
 - i. Probe: Why?
7. *[If stress or concern is mentioned]* Who do you tell your worries to?
8. *[If stress or concern is mentioned]* Why do you think someone would or wouldn't want to talk to adults in school or in the community?
 - a. Do you tell adults in school and in the community about your worries?
 - i. Probe: *[If yes]* How have they responded to your worries?
 - ii. Probe: *[If no]* Why not?
9. *[If yes to 8i]* What makes you comfortable talking with adults in school or in the community about what you're feeling or going through?
10. *[If no to 8i]* What do you think would get somebody to talk to adults in school or in the community about what they're feeling or going through?
 - i. Probe: How can they make you more comfortable with approaching them?
 - ii. Probe: How can they improve the services they provide you?
11. What would you like adults in school and in the community to know about you/what it's like to be you?
12. Is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you feel is important to our topic?

Closing Statement.

Thank you all so much for your participation in today's focus group. As a reminder, findings from our discussion today will be written into a report—I will not use your real names. I will also be sharing some *general* information from this session, as well as the other sessions, with the ECA program team at ORG to help them improve their support services. No specific details about who or where the information came from will be shared with them. If you think of any other thoughts, comments, or questions that you would like to share, please contact me at marianne.p.zape@vanderbilt.edu or at 530 933 2806.

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