

Seizing the Circumstances: Adult Reflections on Parental Deportation

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### ABSTRACT

Currently there are 4.5 million U.S.-born children with at least one undocumented parent who are at risk of being deported (Passel & Cohn, 2011). The sudden loss caused by parental deportation destabilizes families and causes emotional distress, conduct issues, and academic decline in children (Dreby, 2012). Given the negative impact that deportation has on children and the recent increase of immigration efforts under the current administration (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018), this study aimed to explore the long-term impacts of deportation on Latino children. This study used an interpretive phenomenological approach and retrospective interviews to gain understanding of how adults who experienced parental deportation as children made meaning of their experiences over time. Ten Latino adults who had a parent deported when they were between the ages of 7 and 17 were interviewed in depth about their parent's deportation, the long-term impact on their families and childhood, and how they made sense of those experiences as adults. Findings suggest that adults who have had a parent deported during childhood experienced long-term loss throughout their childhood, noticed their parent's absence more as they got older, and felt a lack of guidance while growing up. Participants who were misinformed about what happened to their parents reported having more difficulty coping with the situation. While some participants reported depression, anxiety or misconduct in childhood, positive beliefs about the experience emerged from the data that demonstrated resiliency. Implications for clinical practice and intervention are discussed. Researchers also make recommendations for future research.

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### GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Currently there are 4.5 million U.S.-born children with at least one undocumented parent who are at risk of being deported back to their country of origin (Passel & Cohn, 2011). The sudden loss caused by parental deportation destabilizes families and causes emotional distress, conduct issues, and academic decline in children (Dreby, 2012). Given the negative impact that deportation has on children and the recent increase of immigration efforts under the current administration (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018), this study aimed to explore the long-term impacts of deportation on Latino children. Ten Latino adults who had a parent deported when they were between the ages of 7 and 17 were interviewed in depth about their parent's deportation, the long-term impact on their families and childhood, and how they made sense of those experiences as adults. Adults in the study experienced long-term loss throughout their childhood, noticed their parent's absence more as they got older, and felt a lack of guidance while growing up. Participants who were misinformed about what happened to their parents reported having more difficulty coping with the situation. While some participants reported depression, anxiety or misconduct in childhood, many developed beliefs about the experience that helped them find meaning and move forward after the loss. The findings of this study contribute to current literature by focusing on the long-term impact of parental deportation and the impact of family dynamics on children's perceptions.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

**The Problem and Its Setting**

Citizen children with undocumented Latino parents are marginalized by their parents 'illegal' status in this country, and are constantly threatened by their deportability. The risk alone can cause high stress and anxiety (Brabek & Sibley, 2015; Dreby, 2012), but is offset by the support and structure of an intact family (Landsdale, Hardie, Oropesa, & Hillemeier, 2015). Once deportation or detention forces families to separate, children lose the support and stability of their family structure at the same time as losing their parent (Dreby, 2012).

These forced separations cause economic and relational disruptions in families (Dreby, 2012) and are linked to negative mental health symptoms, behavioral problems, and academic decline in children (Allen, Cisneros, & Tellez, 2013; Brabek & Xu, 2010; Dreby, 2012). However, knowing the psychological and behavioral problems that these children may develop (Allen et al, 2013; Capps & Fix, 2013; Brabek & Xu, 2010; Zayas, Aguilar-Axiola, Yoo, & Rey, 2015) does not give any insight into what helps them move forward. What is missing in the literature is an understanding of what remaining family members can do to ease the transition for children and help them make sense of what happened over time. More research is needed to understand what helps children feel supported through this period of instability, and what it is like for them to grow up with a deported parent. The current study utilizes Latino adult narratives to retrospectively explore their childhood experiences of family changes during and after parental deportation, their experiences growing up with a deported parent, and how they make sense of their experiences as adults. These questions were explored with the purpose of identifying factors that contributed to childhood resiliency after parental deportation.

### **Children's Experiences in the Context of Latino Families**

It is important to examine children's experiences in the context of their families because children make sense of what happens through family interactions and shared experiences (Walsh, 2016). Families are in charge of how much information they share, whether children are permitted to discuss the situation or ask questions, and how acceptable their grief-related emotions are (Philbin & Ayon, 2016; Walsh, 2016). Relational processes such as family cohesiveness, flexibility, and communication patterns influence how families are able to accomplish core family functions that affect children (Walsh, 2006).

It is especially important to look at changes in Latino families because of the importance that is placed on it. The Latino value of familism encompasses the characteristics of loyalty, solidarity and interdependence (Falicov, 2005; Parra-Cardona, Bullock, Imig, Villarruel, & Gold, 2006).). Latinos internalize a sense of obligation and responsibility towards family members that makes them more likely to put the needs of the family before the needs of the individual. Research has repeatedly found family cohesion and familial support to be strong protective factors against poor psychological, academic, and behavioral outcomes for U.S.-born Latino youth (Pagan-Rivera & DePaulo, 2013; Cavazos et al., 2010; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013; Ai, Weiss, & Fincham, 2014; Bacio, Mays, & Lau, 2013; Campa, 2013). Since parental deportation disrupts a child's sense of family unity and availability of support, it is important to understand how these changes affect children as they grow up, and how they make sense of it as adults.

### **Deportation Policy and Demographics**

There are currently an estimated 11.3 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015). This includes people that entered the country

without legal documents or overstayed their visas. Four out of five undocumented immigrants are Latino (Passel & Cohn, 2011) and the majority of deported immigrants are Latino men (Golash-Boza & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013). Between 2003 and 2013, ninety-one percent of the 3.7 million undocumented immigrants that were deported were from Mexico and Central American countries (Rosenblum and McCabe, 2014). This means that a disproportionate amount of Latino children are being separated from their parents. With anti-immigrant sentiment on the rise and an increase in immigration enforcement efforts, the amount of deportation-related separations are likely to increase at rapid rates (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Mathews, 2018).

**History of immigration policy.** Policy changes enacted in 1996 marked the beginning of the federal government scaling up efforts to detain and deport undocumented individuals (Hagan, Eschbach, & Rodriguez, 2008). Two pieces of legislation, the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (ATEDP), and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) changed how unauthorized immigration was handled. The ATEDP authorized expedited removal of noncitizens and aggravated felons, allowing deportations without a formal hearing. The IIRIRA further increased the amount of people who could be deported without due process by expanding the definition of “aggravated felony” to include some misdemeanors, such as forgery, shoplifting and drunk driving. It also made it more difficult for judges to use discretionary authority to cancel a deportation (Hagan, Eschbach, & Rodriguez, 2008). In the four years after those laws passed, deportations jumped from a steady 50,000 removals per year to nearly 200,000 per year (Massey & Pren, 2012).

In late 2001, after the 9/11 terrorists attacks and alongside rising anti-immigrant sentiment, the USA Patriot Act was passed. This law dramatically increased the number of immigrant arrests and removals again by increasing funding for surveillance and deportation of

foreigners, and associating interior deportations with national security. Soon afterwards Congress established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2003, creating the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, which is responsible for border enforcement, and the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), an investigative branch responsible for identifying, arresting, and removing dangerous immigrants and undocumented immigrants from the interior of the country (Hagan, Eschbach, & Rodriguez, 2008). In just five years, border agents rose from 10,000 to 17,000, and the amount of ICE agents doubled to 5,000 (Chishti, Pierce, & Bolter, January 2017).

By 2010, just nine years after the act passed, interior deportations had doubled from 200,000 a year to nearly 400,000 (Massey & Pren, 2012), reaching a record high in 2013 (Chishti, Pierce, & Bolter, January 2017). Between 2009 and 2013, studies estimate that half a million children experienced the apprehension, detention and deportation of a parent (Capps, Koball, Campatella, Perreira, Hooker, & Pedroza, 2015), and approximately 90,000 parents were deported per year (Wessler, 2012).

Immigrant advocates criticized Obama for not doing enough to curb deportations, giving him the nickname of “Deporter in Chief” (Gonzales-Barrera & Krogstad, 2014). Despite the criticism, there was a decrease in work raids and a shift in enforcement priorities under the Obama Administration. In 2010 an internal DHS memo ordered agency officials to focus on deporting criminals and allowed agents to use discretion, when making decisions to place people in deportation proceedings, such as considering whether people had children (Morton, 2011). In 2013, ICE issued the “parental interest directive” that allowed detained parents to participate in welfare proceedings and make arrangements for their children, and then in November of 2014 Obama officially changed enforcement priorities to focus on people with serious criminal

convictions and border apprehensions (Rosenblum, 2015). Obama also created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program through an executive order in 2012, qualifying unauthorized immigrants brought to the United States as children to apply for work authorization and temporary protection against removal. Obama attempted to expand DACA in November 2014, by introducing the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program. The program would have provided up to 4 million people with temporary protection from deportation and eligibility for work authorization. However, its implementation was blocked in court and never passed (Chishti & Hipsman, 2016, Capps, Fix, & Zong, 2016). Overall, deportation rates began declining after Obama changed enforcement priorities. In addition, DACA recipients no longer had to worry about the possibility of deportation, had better educational and work opportunities, and went on to establish their own families without fear.

**Current immigration policy and political climate.** Ever since Trump took office in January of 2017, there has been an increase in immigration enforcement and fewer protections for vulnerable populations (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018). Anti-immigrant sentiment increased while Trump was on the campaign trail in 2016, where he used racially charged rhetoric, described undocumented immigrants as criminals and rapists, and vowed to end DACA and deport all 11 million undocumented immigrants (Chishti, Pierce, & Bolter, 2016). In the first month of his presidency, Trump issued two executive orders that shifted immigration enforcement and priorities. The first order increased the number of undocumented immigrants that could be targeted for removal by expanding the definition of “criminal alien” to include anyone who is in the country without documentation. The second called for tripling the number of officers available for immigration enforcement and stripping federal funding from “sanctuary

cities” that do not cooperate with federal immigration authorities (National Immigration Law Center, 2017, February 24). It also broadened priorities for removal, so that it no longer distinguishes between different types of immigration cases. This change limits agents’ abilities to use prosecutorial discretion, an option that previously allowed agents to avoid prosecuting long-term, non-criminal immigrants and instead focus their resources on higher priority cases. From the time these changes occurred in 2016, the amount of arrests in the community for immigrants without a criminal record has increased 146% (Cervantes, Ullrich, Matthews, March 2018). Whereas before people with removal orders could stay as long as they checked in with ICE officials every six months to a year, now people are afraid to show up to their check-ins because there is a greater likelihood that they will be deported. On September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Trump also announced that he was terminating the DACA program, creating insecurity about the future for nearly 690,000 DACA recipients (Lopez & Krogstad, 2017). Parents are experiencing increased stress and uncertainty over what will happen and have started isolating themselves and avoiding public places. Children also fear that their parents will be taken away and have started reacting with aggression, separation anxiety, and withdrawal (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Mathhews, 2018).

### **Significance**

Nearly two thirds of undocumented immigrants have lived in the U.S. for at least a decade (Passel et al, 2014) and approximately 73% of them have children born in the U.S. (Delva, Horner, Sanders, Martinez, Lopez, & Doering-White, 2013; Zayas & Bradlee, 2014). This means that around 4.5 million U.S. citizen children (Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon, & Rey, 2015; Passel & Cohn, 2011; Passel et al., 2014) are at risk of being separated from a parent due to deportation. When a parent is deported, most families decide to remain in the United States over relocating to their home countries to reunite with that parent (Migration Policy Institute,

Koball, Capps, Perreira, Campatella, Hooker, Pedroza, & Huerta, 2015). This means that many citizen children are growing up with fragmented families and long-distant parents. With deportation policies currently undergoing a shift under the new Trump administration and the expanded deportation criteria, we can expect an increase in parental deportations in the coming years (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Parental deportation is considered a traumatic event with documented negative emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes in children (Brabek, Lykes & Hershberg, 2011; Capps et al, 2007; Chaudry, Capps, Pedroza, Castañeda, Santos & Scott, 2010; Gulbas, Zayas, Szlyk, Aguilar-Axiola, & Natera, 2016). In order to understand the context of these outcomes, we must understand how children experience their family changes during and after parental deportation, and how they experience growing up with a deported parent. Limited research has examined this experience from the point of view of adults who experienced parental deportation as children or explored how they made meaning of their experiences over time (Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa & Tseng, 2015). Identifying which perceptual and family processes youth perceive as beneficial after the deportation of a parent can aid in the development of helpful programs and policies (Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, & Tseng, 2015). By exploring adult reflections of their families after deportation and throughout their lives, this study hopes to give researchers insight into childhood resiliency and the long-term effects of parental deportation.

### **Rationale**

This study explores adult reflections on their childhood experiences of parental deportation and changes in family processes. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized to analyze in-depth retrospective meaning-making narratives of adult children who lost a parent to deportation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Interpretive Phenomenology is

used to explore participants' experiences during childhood and the meaning they attach to it as adults (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It also left room for narrative themes to be interpreted through the lens of existing theories if appropriate. A retrospective approach enabled the researcher to capture how participants made sense of their past experiences and gave voice to a disenfranchised group.

### **Theoretical Framework: Resilience through Ambiguous Loss**

The ambiguous loss theory describes a family loss that is unclear and “defies resolution” (Boss, 2006) and has been used to understand loss to deportation (Brabek & Hunter, 2014). In ambiguous loss, a family member may be physically absent but psychologically present (such as when a family member is incarcerated), or may be physically present but psychologically absent (such as when a family member has dementia). Ambiguous loss is different from ordinary loss because it is less clear, more confusing and unverified. Unlike ordinary loss, ambiguous loss is not recognized by the community and has no formalized rituals of support. There is no finality to the loss so there is no closure. Unsure of whether the loss is permanent or temporary, family members are left within a “paradox of absence and presence” that makes it difficult to move on or construct meaning out of what has happened (Boss, 2006, 2007, 2016).

Perceptions of the ambiguous loss by individual family members may be incongruent, causing confusion about who is in or out of the family system (Boss & Greenberg, 1984). This boundary ambiguity can cause a lack of clarity than can be paralyzing for family members, preventing them from making decisions or readjusting their family roles and relationships in reaction to the absence. High degrees of this boundary ambiguity are related to systemic and relational immobilization as well as psychological problems (Boss, 1999; Boss, 2006).

Ambiguous loss is considered an ongoing external stressor that “blocks coping and understanding” and has no resolution (Boss, 2006). Resiliency through ambiguous loss is related to having a perceptual shift that “restores relations, meaning, and hope” (Boss, 2007).

Six cyclical and overlapping processes have been found to promote resiliency through ambiguous loss: finding meaning, tempering mastery, reconstructing identity, normalizing ambivalence, revising attachment, and discovering hope (Boss, 2006). These processes are related to finding ways of tolerating the ambiguity and are influenced by cultural beliefs and values. Many of these processes occur over time and are collectively constructed by family members, highlighting the important role that families play in children’s perceptions of parental deportation. The following section will go through each one by one.

**Finding meaning.** Finding Meaning through ambiguous loss involves being able to make sense out of tragedies. According to Boss (2006), resiliency cannot exist without meaning. Meanings are created through family interactions and shared experiences, arise from spoken and unspoken norms, and impact how members organize and respond to crisis situations (Walsh, 2016). Through interactions, families can help children shift from frozen confusion, self-blame, guilt, or resentment to finding meaning and hope.

**Tempering mastery.** Tempering mastery refers to accepting what one can and cannot control. Ambiguous circumstances can lead to helplessness when people dwell over not having options or control over a situation. Resiliency is related to increasing the ability to live without knowing or fixing, accepting what will not change, and reinterpreting an unchangeable situation.

**Reconstructing identity.** Reconstructing identity is the process people go through when they redefine their personal and family identities and roles. Ambiguous loss disrupts family functioning by confusing roles, altering routines and rituals, and blurring relationship boundaries.

Boss describes identity confusion as a “normal response to an abnormal situation” (Boss, 2006, p. 116). Resiliency has to do with revising internal perceptions about identity.

**Normalizing ambivalence.** Normalizing ambivalence involves acknowledging conflicting feelings and emotions. This is difficult if families do not talk about their feelings surrounding an ambiguous loss. Children that are worried about upsetting other family members might isolate in their grief by hiding or distorting their feelings (Walsh, 2016). Resiliency is related to understanding that emotional ambivalence is a normal reaction to ambiguous loss.

**Revise attachment.** Revising attachment has to do with having a “perceptual shift in the relationship” in order to accept the paradox of a person’s absence and presence (Boss, 2006, p. 164). Unhealthy reactions to ambiguous loss involve denying a person’s absence, acting as if nothing has changed, refusing to think about the missing person, or thinking about the missing person all the time. A healthy way of adapting to a missing attachment is to “gradually disconnect” while simultaneously connecting to available and caring people. (Boss, 2006, p. 166).

**Discovering hope.** The above tasks all relate to discovering hope for the future, which Boss says cannot exist without finding meaning. Discovering hope allows people to reshape their narratives around ambiguous loss. Hope also needs to be reconstructed at different life cycle phases as people mature or form new relationships (Boss, 2006).

### **Purpose of the Study**

From the theoretical perspective of ambiguous loss, the uncertainty surrounding parental loss due to deportation creates long-term confusion that makes it difficult to know when or how to grieve (Boss, 1999). According to Pauline Boss (2006), resiliency is achieved by making meaning of an ambiguous situation, and that meaning making is influenced by how the family

organizes and communicates around an ambiguous loss. By exploring how adult children experience their parent's deportation and continual absence over time, as well as their experience of how their family reorganizes, this study hopes to give researchers insight into childhood resiliency through ambiguous loss. This study hopes to address gaps in the literature, which focuses mostly on deficits and negative outcomes, and rarely gives voice to the child's perspective. Even though this study is retrospective, it gives adults the opportunity to reflect on what they might have found helpful as children.

### **Research Questions**

This study uses an interpretive phenomenological approach to gain understanding of the experience and meaning-making of Latinos who grew up with a deported parent. A retrospective approach will allow adults to reflect on their experiences of their families as children. This study will explore two research questions:

- 1) What are the childhood experiences of Latinos who had a parent deported?
  - a. What was their experience of their family during and after their parent's deportation?
  - b. What was it like growing up with a deported parent?
- 2) How do Latinos make sense of the experience as adults?

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

**Undocumented Status**

Having an undocumented parent affects the mental health and development of children even before deportation (Delva, Horner, Martinez, Sanders, Lopez, & Doering-White, 2013; Perreira and Ornelas 2011; Sullivan and Rehm 2005; Yoshikawa and Kalil 2011). Anti-immigrant laws restrict undocumented parents' access to stable employment, healthcare, adequate housing, and social services, causing their children to be disadvantaged and marginalized (Berk & Schur, 2001; Hall & Greenman, 2013; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). Without a social security number parents are unable to work legally and cannot get a driver's license in some states, limiting their economic opportunities and mobility. These barriers force people to tolerate low pay, long hours, and unfair treatment (Brabek et al, 2011; Enriquez, 2015). It also makes it more likely for them to experience economic hardship and live in poverty. About 75 percent of children with an undocumented parent live in households with incomes that would qualify for reduced lunch (Capps, Fix, & Jong, 2016). Mistrust of institutions prevents many parents from accessing resources that could alleviate some of their economic burdens or from enrolling in programs that could improve their children's development (Yoshikawa, 2011; Heyman, Nuñez, & Talavera, 2009). This suspicion is illustrated in a survey of 143 Latino immigrants, where 40% thought they would be deported if they went to a social or government agency (Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, & Spitznagel, 2007).

Mixed status families live in fear of their lives changing drastically from one day to the next. Parents and children live in a constant state of hypervigilance over the possibility of being suddenly separated from a family member (DeGenova, 2002; Salas, Ayon, and Gurrola, 2013). For example, two thirds of undocumented immigrants in a national survey worried (some or a

lot) that they or someone they know would be deported (Pew Research Center, 2017). Some undocumented parents transmit their anxieties to their children by emphasizing the dangerous consequences of immigration policies and their fear of separation (Lykes, Brabek, & Hunter, 2013; Enriquez, 2015). This uncertainty usually extends to children regardless of whether parents have explicitly discussed it with them. Children pick up on their parents' anxiety (Yoshikawa; 2011) and/or hear about deportation practices through school, television, peers, extended family members, and the internet (Lykes, Brabek, & Hunter, 2013). A focus group with Mexican parents and youth revealed that anti-immigrant sentiment and policies made them feel imprisoned, stressed, depressed, afraid, and powerless (Salas, Ayon, & Gurrola, 2013). Children expressed fears that their parents would not come home after work and said their concerns interfered with their abilities to focus in school (Salas, Ayon, & Gurrola, 2013).

Though community supports, including neighborhood and church membership, peer groups, and schools, have been identified as resiliency factors for immigrant Latino families (Hull et al.; Thompson & Gurney, 2003), undocumented families sometimes withdraw from these support systems out of fear of deportation (Menjivar, 2011). For example, one fourth of 101 Latino immigrants in Arizona reported limiting their participation in the community after changes in immigrant enforcement laws (Quiroga, Medina & Glick, 2014). They continued to report that having to avoid public spaces made them feel less free and more socially isolated.

The chronic dread of detention and deportation affects family relationships by increasing overall stress levels (Chavez, Lopez, Englebrecht, Viramontez, & Anguiano, 2012). In a study of 132 Latino parents, two thirds reported that the existence of deportation negatively impacted how they and their child felt, and about half said that it negatively affected their relationship with their child (Brabek & Xu, 2010). Parents in a study of Central American families also reported

that the daily uncertainty of what would happen had a psychological toll on them. Some said that their anger and sadness made them more reactive and irritable with their children, and that their children were able to pick up on their emotional states (Brabek, Lykes, & Hershberg, 2011).

Some children experience confusion about the risks of being undocumented or belonging to a mixed-status family. Children often conflate the word ‘immigrant’ with illegality and criminality, and confuse police officers with ICE officials (Dreby, 2012b). Lack of clarity and information from parents contributes to this confusion. Among 50 undocumented Latino parents that participated in a study, 49% reported not communicating with their children about the possibility of detention and deportation (Lykes, Brabek & Hunter, 2013). Lykes and colleagues (2013) speculated that some parents avoided talking to their children as a way of avoiding the reality of their situation. Parents said they avoided communication because they did not want to worry their children, did not think they would understand, or did not know what to say. Other parents choose to shield their children from immigration policies by filtering information or providing inaccurate information (Dreby, 2012; Lykes et al., 2013; Philbin & Ayon, 2016). For example, parents interviewed by Philbin & Ayon (2016) reassured their children that they were safe and emphasized the belief that they are in God’s hands.

Parents who choose to prepare their children for the possibility of deportation do so by explaining their rights, preparing paperwork and finances, and discussing plans for deportation (Philbin & Ayon, 2016). But even when parents decide to directly discuss plans for deportation, children might disagree with their intent to reunite in their country of origin or stay separated (Enriquez, 2015; Horner, Sanders, Martinez, Doering-White, & Delva, 2014). Out of 29 undocumented parents interviewed about the effects of immigration laws on their family, only

four had definitive plans to take their children with them if deported, and were unsure of how to explain this to their children (Enriquez, 2015).

### **Stigma and Marginalization**

The stigma and discrimination surrounding undocumented status (Dreby, 2012) also impacts families and children. In a study on Latino experiences of anti-immigration sentiment in Arizona, one fourth of the 101 respondents said that the climate was damaging to their dignity (Szkupinski Quiroga, Medina & Glick, 2014). There is also some evidence that when parents experience the stress of discrimination, it can indirectly influence their children's behaviors (Gassman-Pines, 2015).

Most Latino youth are aware that deportation is a targeted practice against Latinos (Horner, Sanders, Martinez, Doering-White, Lopez, & Delva, 2014), and are at risk of internalizing their marginalization. One study found that children whose parents are undergoing removal proceedings were more likely to report negative self-esteem than their unaffected peers (Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon, & Rey, 2015). Young Mexican children interviewed about immigration enforcement practices felt that being an immigrant was negative, and did not want everyone to know that their parents were immigrants (Dreby, 2012). Out of 110 children interviewed, only 25 said they were proud of being immigrants. Children that are ashamed of their heritage (Dreby, 2012b) miss out on the benefits of Latino ethnic pride, which is linked to positive psychological and cognitive developments (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Interviews of youth experiences of parental detention and deportation revealed one thirteen-year old girl's narrative of "confronting unjust systems for hard-working U.S.-based migrants" (Hershberg & Lykes, 2013). She felt that it was "unfair" to hold her stepfather in the same place as criminals and that it was "racist." The awareness of her family's legal vulnerability and minority status in

the U.S. combined with her beliefs that the system was unjust influenced her perception of the deportation.

### **Ambiguous Loss in Children of Deported Parents**

Literature suggests that losing a parent to deportation could be considered an ambiguous loss (Brabek, Lykes, & Hunter, 2014). A few unpublished dissertations exploring the experience of parental deportation in children have found themes of ambiguous loss (Espinoza, 2015; Gonzales, 2015; Flores, 2011). Espinoza's (2015) dissertation on adult children of deported parents identified ambiguous loss as one of four themes in the qualitative data. All participants described some level of confusion and ambiguity, with the ambivalence persisting for many as they got older (Espinoza, 2015). Flores' (2011) dissertation on the retrospective experiences of adult children of deported parents found evidence of ambiguous loss and of family members influencing their perceptions of the loss. Participants felt confused, had difficulty achieving closure, and shared feelings of not being allowed to talk about what happened. This led to those children experiencing loneliness as they moved through their loss without adult support. Another dissertation interviewed school-aged children who had had a parent deported within the last three years (Gonzales, 2015). Many of them reported feeling shocked and confused following their parent's deportation. They said they received limited or delayed explanations from remaining caregivers about what had happened, which influenced the way they made meaning of the separation. This points to the important role that remaining caregivers play in helping children find meaning through ambiguous loss.

Other published articles have found instances of ambiguous loss without labeling them as such. For example, Dreby (2015) found that for some children the most distressing aspect of parental deportation was the insecurity surrounding what would happen. Another qualitative

study found that families struggled to discuss the aftermath of a deportation openly with one another, resulting in each of them having to cope with confusion and sadness individually (Gonzales & Consoli, 2012). Brabek, Lykes, & Hershberg (2011) also found that Guatemalan and Salvadorian parents that were under direct and indirect threats of deportation felt anxiety, sadness, fear, and uncertainty that affected how they interacted with their children.

What is not addressed in these studies is what factors helped them make meaning out of their experiences. Themes like shame and inability to trust others seem related to their ability to move forward, but there is no explicit link made in these studies (Espinoza, 2015). Further investigation is needed to understand what children perceived as supportive after parental deportation, and what helped them make sense of their experience as adults.

### **Properties of Ambiguous Loss in Transnational Families**

Perceptions around ambiguous loss have been explored in depth among voluntary transnational families (Falicov, 2005; Solheim, Zaid & Ballard, 2016). Transnational families refer to families that “retain their sense of collectivity and kinship in spite of being spread across multiple nations.” (Baldassar, Baldock, and Wilding, 2007, p. 13). Though deported families are a type of transnational family, their circumstances are unique because they are forced to separate. The circumstance surrounding an ambiguous loss likely influences how these families and children experience and perceive the family member’s absence (Boss & Carnes, 2012). Because of this, many of the findings on ambiguous loss in transnational families may not apply to deported families.

A current review of literature that uses the ambiguous loss lens for voluntary transnational families, revealed three unique properties of ambiguous loss in this population: agency and the choice to separate, mix of costs and benefits associated with the separation, and

ability to maintain connection with family members (Solheim & Ballard, 2016). This section will look at how these properties differ in families dealing with deportation.

**Agency and the choice to separate.** The most obvious distinction between voluntary transnational families and families who have had a member forcibly deported is being able to choose to separate (Solheim & Ballard, 2016). Having a sense of agency throughout the decision-making process gives family members a level of control that varies based on economic circumstance and life cycle stage. For example, immigrants with greater economic means can find comfort in their ability to travel home for deaths or special occasions or pay for family members to visit them (Falicov, 2002). In contrast, parents that have been deported are prohibited from returning between five years and life (Immigration and Naturalization Act of 2006). The remaining parent might also be undocumented, hindering their ability to visit once they are apart (Brabek, Lykes & Hershberg, 2011). Parents also differ in their abilities to prepare and involve their children in making decisions to separate.

**Mix of costs and benefits associated with the separation.** Voluntary transnational families gain meaning through the pairing of sacrifice and struggle (Solheim, Zaid & Ballard, 2016). Perceiving their losses as worthwhile sacrifices allows them to feel a sense of pride and purpose in their struggle (Solheim, Zaid & Ballard, 2016). However, the detention and deportation process is paired with shame, discrimination, and misinformation (Dreby, 2012; Ayon, Becerra, Gurrola, Salas, Krysik, Gerdes, & Segal, 2011). This can complicate meaning making for children, who may experience confusion about whether their parent is a criminal, how to deal with the stigma and whether to keep it a secret from other people (Brabeck, Lykes & Hunter, 2014). A study on the deportation experiences and depression of citizen children found

that many children felt unable to communicate with friends about their situation (Gulbas, Zayas, Zoon, Szlyk, Aguilar-Gaxiola, & Natera, 2016).

Voluntary families usually separate to achieve goals of safety, financial stability, and/or reunification (Solheim, Zaid and Ballard, 2016). Concrete benefits such as greater economic opportunities make separation more bearable. In contrast, families that are separated through deportation rarely experience any financial benefits. Sudden deportations give families little time to arrange their finances, and places added economic strain (Dreby, 2012). With the loss of the deported family member's income, members are left scrambling to pay bills, get a second job, relocate to less expensive housing, and arrange for child care (Dreby 2012, Chaudry et al., 2010). In addition to lost income, they have to pay expensive legal fees and immigration bonds, that can cost up to \$20,000 (Chaudry et al, 2010), and often have the added responsibility or desire to send remittances to the deported parent (Sanchez, 2016, Dreby, 2012, Escobar, Falconier, Muruthi, in press). Such concrete, cumulative stressors places added strains on remaining family members resources, makes them less available to children, and likely adds to their overall sense of ambiguity and loss.

**Ability to maintain connection with family members.** Finally, Solheim & Ballard (2016) found that regular contact with family members minimized boundary ambiguity for transnational families. Yet the ability to maintain connection with family members might look different in families dealing with deportation versus voluntary transnationalism. Staying in touch is hindered by detention, immigration status, parents desire to shield children from the truth, and avoidance due to a deported parent's inability to meet role expectations (Dreby, 2006; Dreby, 2010; Lykes et al, 2013). Visiting parents in detention might be difficult if they are placed in a

facility that is far from their home (McLeigh, 2010) or if the remaining parent is also unauthorized (Brabeck et al., 2011).

### **Deported Member Experiences**

Detained or deported parents have to deal with their own traumas and losses that influence how they are able to relate to their children. They must make sense of their experiences of discrimination and detention, come to terms with their change in functional roles as spouse and parent, and accept the challenges in providing emotionally and financially for their family (Brotherton & Barrios, 2011; Dreby, 2006; Dreby, 2010, Dreby 2012a, 2012b). In a study of 50 adults who were deported to the Dominican Republic, participants reported feeling abandoned and estranged, as well as depressed and suicidal when they had spouses and children in the U.S. (Brotherton & Barrios, 2009). Most of them were traumatized by how they were treated by the U.S. government and had trouble finding jobs due to the stigma of having been deported. Dreby (2010) also found that fathers who were unable able to provide economically felt “emasculated” and did not keep in contact with their children.

### **The Impact of Deportation on Children and their Families**

The process of having a parent detained can be traumatic for children since it often occurs suddenly, unexpectedly, and for seemingly arbitrary reasons. Home immigration raids often happen in the early morning or in the middle of the night, where children witness their parents being handcuffed or with guns pointed at them (Ice Workplace Raids, 2008; Salas, Ayón, & Gurrola, 2013, Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, & Tseng, 2015). Children whose parents are detained at work raids or at traffic stops often find out after they don't get picked up from school or their parents don't come home that night (Chaudry, Capps, Pedroza, Castañeda, Santos, & Scott, 2010) and can go days without information about their parents (Androff et al, 2011,

Brabek, Lykes & Hunter, 2014). Children are left wondering what happened to their parents, are unclear about whether or not they will be coming back, and are rarely given the opportunity to say goodbye (Brabek et al., 2011; Brabek et al., 2014). Once parents are in detention, it may take weeks or months before their case is heard, after which it takes an average of 600 days for the case to be resolved (Urban Institute Report, Capps et al., 2015). Even after they are deported, parents may intend to reenter the country illegally. A 2016 study with Salvadorian deportees found that the majority of those with dependent children in the United States intended to re-migrate (Cardoso, Hamilton, Rodriguez, Eschbach & Hagan, 2016). These ambiguous circumstances may leave some children with a lingering hope for reunification, influencing their ability to move forward.

Detention or deportation of a parent destabilizes families and their patterns of functioning. Roles are confused, routines and rituals are altered, and relationship boundaries are blurred as the family scrambles to fill in for the missing parent (Dreby, 2012). Older siblings may be relied on to take care of younger siblings as the remaining parent is forced to get another job or work longer hours to make ends meet (Derby, 2012). Parental supervision and involvement, which is tied to resilience in Latino children (Blanco-Vega, Castro-Olivo, & Merrell, 2008), usually decreases as the remaining parent takes on more responsibilities to fill in for the missing parent (Dreby, 2012).

After deportation, families are transformed from a two-parent household to a single parent household overnight. The immediate changes in income frequently result in housing instability, causing children to experience even more changes and unpredictability. Of the 16 families Dreby (2012) interviewed that were impacted by detention and deportation, all of them

had difficulty paying the rent afterwards. One of the interviewees reported moving eight times in the three years after her husband's deportation.

These abrupt changes can have significant emotional and behavioral consequences on children. The effects, including fear and anxiety, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, increased crying, and clingy behavior begin when parents are first detained and continue as children await the outcome of the deportation proceedings (Capps et al., 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010; Brabek et al., 2011; Gulbas et al., 2016). Though some of the acute symptoms diminish over time, many children develop separation anxiety, depression, and conduct problems (Zayas, 2015). Children who witness their parents arrest have more extreme behavioral and psychological changes (Chaudry et al, 2010, Rojas-Flores, Clements, Koo & London, 2016).

Family perceptions about the deportation likely influence how they explain the situation to their children and how they help them make sense of it. In a qualitative study of eight mother's experiences of their partner's deportation, mothers expressed regrets about immigration, feeling like deportation could have been avoided, and feeling that they were no longer a family (Escobar, Falconier, Muruthi, in press). Some mothers balanced the negative perceptions with positive perceptions, such as the belief that "things happen for a reason" and by focusing on opportunities for growth. Other perceptions that were related to healthy adaptation were having a hopeful, optimistic orientation towards the future, believing in god and being able to accept that the worst has passed. Again, what is missing from the literature is the child's perspective. Some of those beliefs could be helpful to the parents, but not shared with their children, or they could be interpreted as unhelpful from the child's point of view. More research is needed to understand how adults remember perceiving their family changes as children, what it was like growing up with a deported parent, and how they make sense of it all as adults.

## CHAPTER III: METHODS

### **Design of the Study**

This study employed a phenomenological research designs, which was intended to incorporate individual experiences into a collective, lived experience regarding this specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenologies do so by describing what the participants have in common through the telling of their shared experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Interpretive phenomenology differs in that it balances phenomenological description with researcher interpretation, acknowledging that the researcher's own conceptions are necessary to make sense of the participant's experiences (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). Interpretive phenomenology requires that researchers gain a close understanding of the participant's personal experiences during the initial textual analysis, and then permits further layers of interpretation to draw on theoretical ideas if the "data invites it" (Finlay, 2011, p. 141). This approach is appropriate because it focuses on finding meaning in participant's experiences without making assumptions, while leaving room for it to be related back to ambiguous loss theory if the data fit. Since ambiguous loss creates a perceptual experience that exists phenomenologically (Boss, 2007) and is expected to evolve across the lifespan, it makes sense to use a retrospective perspective with interpretive phenomenological approach to explore those perceptions.

### **Participants**

Ten participants were recruited from various cities in the United States, including Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Participation requirements included (a) Identifying as Latino, (b) having had a parent deported when they were between the ages of 6 and 17, (c) be between the ages of 18 and 34, and (d) speaking English. Being school aged at the time a parent was deported was chosen because those ages are key times of emotional and

cognitive development. Participants would have been old enough to remember what happened but young enough to still rely on their family's support in regulating their emotions (Collins, 1984). The adult age range was chosen to ensure that the deportation happened after 2001 (after the USA Patriot Act passed) to ensure consistency of political context. Participants were excluded if their parent reentered the country less than four years after being deported to increase consistency in experiences across participants.

Individuals were recruited using purposive criterion and snowball sampling techniques through local advocacy groups, Latino community centers, mental health providers, immigration lawyers, and universities. I distributed emails to listserves (Appendix A) connected to the Community Initiative for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement and National Latino Psychological Association. I also posted on Craigslist sites in cities that have high Latino populations, including Chicago, San Diego, New Jersey, and Houston, and screened those participants to ensure that they met criteria.

In-depth interviews were conducted with ten adults who identified as Latino and had a parent deported when they were between the ages of 7 and 16 years old (Table 1). Two people were excluded after being interviewed because they did not fit criteria. Participants identified as Mexican (5), Peruvian (1), Venezuelan (1), Columbian (1), Dominican (1), and Cuban (1). Three of those participants identified as being "half black." Six of the participants were male and four were female. Four participants had their mother deported, four had their father deported, and two participants had both parents deported at the same time.

Six participants stayed in the same home with another parent after their parent was deported and four moved in with other family members. The amount of contact the children had with their parent afterwards ranged from no contact to frequent phone calls and visits (Table 2).

Four participants never saw their parent again, and two participants had parents that were able to return to the United States after several years. Eight participants had at some or completed college education, one had high school education, and one had completed a master's degree. The majority of the participants described themselves as Catholic or Christian (7) and only two participants said they were atheist or had no religion. A detailed chart of demographics can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1:** *Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Age during interview	Parent Deported	Age Parent Deported	Country	Religion	Education
Victoria	Female	26	Dad	13	Peru	Catholic	Masters
Laura	Female	19	Mom	9	Mexico	Atheist	In College
Daniel	Male	24	Mom	14	Venezuela	Pentecostal	Bachelors
Sofia	Female	23	Mom	11	Mexico	None	Bachelor
David	Male	30	Dad	16	Dominican Republic	Christian	Bachelors
Felipe	Male	21	Dad	11	Mexico	Catholic	In College
Tomas	Male	25	Both	7	Cuba	Catholic	Associates
Emma	Female	28	Dad	16	Mexico	Christian	Bachelors
Luis	Male	19	Mom	9	Mexico	Christian	In College
Samuel	Male	32	Both	13	Columbia	Catholic	High School

### Procedures

Prior to recruitment, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board. Once it was approved, I began recruiting participants by sending out flyers, emails and internet postings. This study used purposive criterion sampling, so all participants had to meet pre-established criteria and were screened over the phone or through email to make sure they qualified. Some of the

interviews were done through skype but the majority of the interviews occurred over the phone if that was the participant's stated preference. I emailed the consent form ahead of time and informed them that the interview would last between one and two hours. I asked them to email back a signed consent form, but also gave them the option to give verbal consent before starting. Most participants chose to give their verbal consent. Before the interview started, I reviewed the consent form, answered any questions they had, reminded them that sensitive material would be discussed, and made it clear that they could choose not to answer certain questions or to end the interview at any time. Participants were also told that it was normal and acceptable if they got emotional and that they could be referred to community resources if they wanted to process difficult emotions that came up during the interview. Before recording anything, I asked for verbal consent, and then made it explicit that the recording was starting. After the interview I asked them their preferred way to receive the \$50 compensation, and mailed it or sent it that day. The recordings were transferred to a secure computer file and then deleted from the digital recorder. The digital audio files were saved until they could be transcribed verbatim. Once the recordings were transcribed, they were deleted permanently. All identifying information was removed from the transcriptions and each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

### **Instruments**

**Demographic information.** Participants were asked demographic questions, including age, gender, nationality, religion, number of years living in the U.S., how old they were when their parent was deported, how long their parent was detained before being deported, and the quality of their relationship before separation (Appendix A).

**Interview.** The interviews were semi-structured with a series of open-ended questions and probes used as needed to encourage participants to elaborate on their answers (Appendix B).

This allowed me to gain a rich understanding of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Questions were related to how they experienced their parents detention and deportation process, how they experiences their family after their parent was deported and over time, and what it was like to grow up with a deported parent. Questions related to resiliency were included in each section, such as "What or who helped you the most during this initial period?" "In hindsight, what do you wish people would have done to help you through these changes?" and "What has this experience taught you?"

### **Reliability and Validity**

To ensure reliability and validity, triangulation was used throughout the research process. Triangulation refers to having more than one person code the transcripts independently and checking for intercoder agreement (Padgett, 2008). My thesis chair, Dr. Bertranna Muruthi, independently coded two transcripts and then compared codes. I coded the rest of the transcripts once it was determined that my chair and I were finding similar codes. Validity was established by using peer debriefing with Dr. Muruthi throughout the coding process. She asked questions about methods, meanings and interpretations as a way of providing an external check of the research process to minimize bias (Padgett, 2008).

Since I was the primary coder, I engaged in the process of bracketing as a way of minimizing personal assumptions and biases before analyzing the data. This involved acknowledging thoughts and experiences about the phenomenon I was exploring (Padgett, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). In this case, it was important to acknowledge my opinions and personal connection to Latinos, deportation, undocumented status, and discrimination. As an Ecuadorian-American woman, family therapist (in training), and daughter of a social worker, I have beliefs and values that could influence my perception of the phenomenon I am studying. My mother was

fortunate enough to be able to emigrate legally from Ecuador, yet she still experienced subtle and overt discrimination and prejudice. She was insulted when she first came here for having an accent and people often make assumptions about her intellect and capabilities. Since she was a Spanish-speaking social worker who understood the system, Latinos in her social network and the community turned to her for unofficial help whenever newcomers arrived. She helped many undocumented Latinos navigate American systems, adjust to the culture, and settle in to their new lives. I grew up knowing most of those Latino families, hearing about their valid reasons for coming to U.S., and watching them strive to create a better life here. I think of how happy those families are to be together, and how much their worlds would be shattered if they were forced to separate. The fear of deportation casts a cloud over their every day sense of security and emotional well being, sparking a strong sense of social justice in me.

I am also a family therapist in training, which gives me a deeper understanding of the importance of family relationships on a child's developing sense of self, and how damaging ruptures in attachment relationships can be. As a Latina, I am aware of how much family is valued and emphasized in the Latino culture, and how intricately family it is tied to a Latino person's sense of identity.

It is important to acknowledge that my interest in this issue is related to a social justice lens and my desire to help those who have been dealt fewer opportunities and privileges. I think that the criminalization of undocumented status is unjust and promotes discrimination. I think that the forced separation of families through deportation is a preventable tragedy. I think that the policies that lead to fragmented families are short-sighted and do not consider the ripple effects that result from the traumas they cause. It was important to acknowledge those biases so that I

would not project those views or any other emotional reactions onto my participants, and so that I would not assume that they felt the same way.

It was also important to acknowledge that I had previously conceptualized the deportation experience through the ambiguous loss framework. I made my best attempt to put those assumptions and thoughts aside in order to develop questions that were not leading and to code transcripts without bias. I attempted to minimize bias by remaining reflexive throughout the research process, including monitoring my emotional responses to participants' stories and interpretations of their transcripts. I used memos to track my responses and used these memos during analyses to prevent my views from influencing findings. I also debriefed with my chair throughout the research-writing process.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of interview transcripts was conducted using interpretive phenomenological analysis procedures (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Eatough, 2007). After all of the digital files were transcribed, transcripts were read and reread. After getting an impression of each story, I noted initial observations of the semantic content before developing emergent themes. After that connections among those emerging themes were integrated and grouped. Once all the interviews had been read and coded with an open mind, I looked for patterns across interviews and created overarching themes. The final step involved deepening the analysis by "importing other theories as a lens through which to view the analysis" (Finlay, 2011).

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

**Findings**

This study explored the experience of adults who had a parent deported when they were children. I attempted to capture how participants experienced their parent's deportation as children, how it affected them throughout their childhood, and how it is currently affecting them as adults. Statements reported by five or more participants was considered a theme. The data were organized into 11 themes. Four themes were related to the initial experience of having a parent deported in childhood: Initial reactions to the deportation, family influenced child perceptions, negative experiences with the community, and child coping. Three themes were related to participants' experiences of their family after the deportation: family reorganization, family communication processes, and long-term effects of deportation. Four themes were related to reflecting as an adult: effects on interpersonal relationships as an adult, positive perceptions when looking back, things that could have helped me, and what I want children going through this to know. Table 2 provides contextual information about each participant, including what they knew about their parent's deportation, how much contact they had after, and whether their parent returned.

**Table 2:** *Participant Contextual Information*

Participant	What child knew about parent's deportation	Child Present during arrest?	Length of Detainment	Chance to say goodbye?	Contact after	Parent returned?
Victoria	Father detained for a DUI, avoided court dates, turned himself in	No	Few days	Yes	Head from him 6 months later Did not talk for 10 years Never saw him again	No
Laura	Child got home from school and mother was gone	No	Few months	Visited in detention	Visited the first summer Went up to 6 months with no phone contact	No

Participant	What child knew about parent's deportation	Child Present during arrest?	Length of Detainment	Chance to say goodbye?	Contact after	Parent returned?
Daniel	Child got home from school and mother was gone	No	2.5 months	No	Heard from her a year and a half later Never saw her again Never said goodbye	No
Sofia	Parent went in for immigration interview	No	3 days	Visited in detention	Spent summers with her Spoke two times a week until college	Yes – 11 years later (age 22)
David	Father got in verbal disagreement, cops were called	No	Several months	Visited in detention	Never saw him again Did not really keep in touch	No
Felipe	Child saw ICE officers take his father	Yes	8 months	Visited in detention	Spoke once a week but felt shallow	Yes – 4 years later (age 15)
Tomas	Parents arrested at work	No	1 month	Visited in detention	Heard for the first time a few years later Never saw them again Told them he didn't want a relationship when he was in high school	No
Emma	Parent pulled over while driving	No	Few weeks	Visited in detention	Talked every day on the phone Visited him often, including first summer	No
Luis	Mom never came home	No	Few weeks	No	Heard from mom the first time a year later Phone calls/letters/skype/visits	No
Samuel	Parents detained at the airport	Yes	1 month	Visited in detention	Visited during the holidays Cut off contact when he was in trouble and later reconnected	No

### **Initial Reactions to the Deportation**

Participants reported going through a range of emotions when they first found out about the deportation as children. The sudden separation from their parent caused some participants to feel confusion, uncertainty, and fear of the unknown, as well as grief over their parent's absence and feelings of loneliness. Many reported thinking that their parent would come back and felt that what was happening was unfair.

**This makes no sense.** All participants reacted with some level of confusion and uncertainty, either because they were missing details or they did not understand why their parent had to leave. They struggled to make sense of what was happening, why it was happening, and what the future would look like. Emma reported:

My understanding of it was that they were going to send him back and he was going to have to live over there and I was going to be here, so how are we going to see each other and how are we going to hang out and spend time like we always did in the past?....At first it just didn't make any sense to me and I'm just like, "Why is this happening? Why? Why? Why are they doing this to him?"

David struggled to understand the legal system and worried about what would happen:

I didn't really understand – you know, how can they send him back when he's been – he's done everything, he's been a good citizen here and you've got a family so how can they separate him from us when we – that's my dad, we need him, what are we supposed to do without him?

Participants also felt confused about whether their parents had done something wrong. Felipe reported:

I just kind of was like so confused and had no idea as to why – if he didn't do anything wrong, he didn't commit a crime... only bad guys go to jail and stuff, and to me my father was never a bad guy.”

Not knowing what would happen led some participants to feel worried about the future and what would happen to them. Samuel, who reported having both parents detained at once, said:

I was lost, I told you, I was lost...I don't know where I'm going, you know what I mean, because that was more of the emotional part where I kind of started getting nervous, stressed out about it.

Sofia reported, “It was very unknown. I didn't know what was going to happen. I was scared. I was worried.” Luis, who said his father kept changing his explanation about why his mother did not come home reported:

I just kind of felt left out. I was scared. I really was scared. I didn't know what to do. I was afraid...I thought something happened to her. I thought she was kidnapped or something you know because I didn't – I stopped believing my father because I knew he was lying to me, which was true. Yeah. I was just really confused, lost, just out of place everywhere.

**Loss.** All participants reported sensing their parent's absence after they were detained or deported. Emma said, “I just remember being so sad and just like – I don't know, I felt like somebody died or something.” Laura described, “Everything moved a little slower not having my mom in the household.” Victoria expressed a sense of disbelief:

I remember thinking about it when I was in school, like I'd be in class and my mind was somewhere else just thinking like, “Wow, my dad's gone. He's not coming back.”

Participants also mourned the way their family used to be. David reported:

I was used to coming home and having dinner with my mom and my dad and my brother and whatnot and so it kind of – as the day would get kind of closer to the end, the school day or whatever, that’s when it would kind of – when I would think about it more because I knew that I was going home and I knew that my dad of course wasn’t going to be there and that was a big change for me....Him not being there, it was just kind of like an empty feeling, it was just not even close to being the same.

**Believed parent was coming back.** Six participants said they did not realize initially that their parents would not be coming back. They thought it was a temporary situation that would work itself out or that the adults could fix. David, whose father was detained for eight months before being deported, said:

I didn’t think that it was going to lead to him leaving, I thought it was just going to be something that kind of blew over and that he would get out of it.

After his father was deported, David reported having to process his father’s absence differently:

So I kind of – I was used to him not being there but I thought that there was – she was going to be able to work some kind of magic and that he was going to return and when that didn’t happen, that was of course – that was a huge blow.

Participants varied in how long it took them to understand the permanence of the situation. Sofia reported thinking that her mom would be back within six months, and then a year, and then 5 years. She explained:

I honestly thought that my mom was going to be back very soon, like within six months, and I was like counting. I took out my planner at the time and I was like, “I’ll go visit her this weekend and this weekend and then we’ll spend this holiday with her and she’ll be

back by then.” So I didn’t – I kept on thinking that it was going to be a short-term thing, short-term and I was kind of really just trying to focus on the end point.

Daniel, who reported not being able to say goodbye and never seeing his mother again, said:

I didn’t think that she was going to be leaving us physically and completely... I never thought they were just going to be – that would be it, like she was going to actually leave our lives.

Tomas, who reported not hearing from his parents at all until a few years later, described his initial understanding of why his parents left:

I thought they were getting a better job or something or they're actually – they got a new job at a company. That’s what I thought or something. But yeah, I mean I was just kind of clueless. And I mean what can I say after that I never really saw them again.

**Felt alone.** Five participants reported feeling alone in their experience, or as though no one was there for them. Daniel shared what it was like after he was separated from his little sisters:

That’s when I really did start to feel like my mom was gone because when I saw my little sisters they reminded me of my mom. So when they weren’t around it was like, well, now I’m all alone. I mean, I’ve got my aunties and my cousins, but ultimately no one – you know.

Felipe shared, “I didn’t have very many friends in elementary school and going into middle school is hard because I didn’t – nobody was really there and I felt like nobody understood.” He went on to explain:

I just remember feeling very, very, very, very alone and my mom wasn't there, my dad wasn't there, by that time my little sister had gone to bed so I felt alone and often through like the rest of that year I just felt absolutely like no one was there.

Tomas described feeling excluded from the rest of the world, "Anywhere I went, I felt like I was left out because everyone else had parents to talk to."

**Sense of injustice.** Five participants reported feeling that the separation was unfair.

Laura said:

I felt a sense of unfairness. I think that's something a nine year old – I think that's something that a nine year old could comprehend – of something not being fair or something not being okay, or like kind of questioning like, "Why? Why is that okay? That's not how it should be."

Many felt angry at the country and the systems that allowed them to be separated from their parent. Emma said:

I kind of felt angry at our country. I couldn't – I was angry because I felt like, okay, this man is a good man, he's hard working, he takes care of his kids, why is he being put in this situation? I felt resentful about it.

Felipe shared a similar sentiment:

I as a kid just thought that that's very – it was unfair, that it was just – like why? I just remember living here in the United States all my life and how is it fair if my father has been here all my life? Like he's been here such a long time, why wouldn't he be able to work?

### **Family Influenced Child's Perceptions**

Participants identified ways that their families influenced their initial emotional reactions to their parent's deportation. Family communication about the deportation and family reaction to the deportation either exacerbated or soothed children's reactions. Participants identified positive communication about their parent to be helpful, and reported that negative experiences with the community intensified their reactions.

**Family controlled information about deportation.** Participants discussed how they felt about how their parents explained what was happening when their parents were deported. Two subthemes emerged from this category:

*Child felt in the loop.* Four participants said that their family members clearly explained the situation and the facts surrounding the deportation. Samuel reported on his experience with his uncle after both of his parents were deported:

He came and picked me up and kind of explained the situation to me. He was cool and honest about it, so I mean – he let me know what was going on. But he didn't know either. Nobody really knew what was going on until a few days later...

I mean he was honest about it. He didn't try to hide shit. He was just real cool about it. So that was real – that was really nice to hear that. It was really relieving.

Sofia described how her father broke the news about her mother's deportation:

They kind of really laid out the facts as to why my family was separated and why we were going to endure the separation as opposed to other people or families who sometimes reunite in a different country or something. But they kind of just really told me that this is why we're going through this and we're going to just do it.

Laura reported constantly being "in the mix of the conversation":

They would talk about it. I would be in the room. So I guess it could have just been assumed that I was okay or that I understood what was going on, because I was always there when they would talk about things, just how she was doing or us visiting her or things like that.

***Details were withheld.*** Six participants reported receiving unclear, false, or misleading explanations about what happened to their deported parent. Some participants said that their parents explained what was going on but were unclear or ambiguous about the facts. Victoria said that her father did not initially explain that he was being deported:

As he was saying his goodbyes, he shared with me that he was going back to Peru and I was quiet because I didn't understand. I was like, "Well when are you coming back?" or like, "Why?" He told me he wasn't coming back... Eventually, within the next couple of weeks, my mom just told me, "Hey, your dad got to Peru." But in my mind, I already knew what that meant, like he wasn't coming back. And that's when I understood it was because he was deported, that he wasn't – it wasn't just like a vacation, you know?

Daniel says he was never given a clear explanation about what happened, and was given different information by different people.

My dad was very hush hush about everything. He didn't get into the logistics of everything... He sat me down and he was like, "Well, your mom had to leave because she's not from this country originally"... "She's going to be gone for a while," and that was about it... So until this day I don't know exactly why they (INS) were called or what happened. At one point I actually thought my dad did it just so he could be free and do his own thing again.

Two participants reported being lied to about what happened and finding out the truth a few years later. This is illustrated by the following quote from Luis:

He said that my mom was just – she was just going to go visit family back home and she'll be back, but I was wondering why she wouldn't tell me that, you know? But yeah, he kept on telling me that for the longest time and then he switched. He told me something else, and then he kept on lying to me...I knew something was up and I didn't know who to talk to. My brothers wouldn't tell me anything, my father didn't tell me anything...Then my brother finally told me after a while. It was probably like a year and a half later or something. But yeah, that she was deported.

Participants who were given ambiguous explanations reported feeling confused, but participants who were lied to discussed feeling angry and betrayed. Some made up their own explanations for what was going on that were worse than what had actually happened. This is illustrated by the following quote by Luis, who reported finding out the truth a year and a half later:

I thought my father was cheating on my mom – that he was having an affair, like with my stepmom... I thought there was something going on because my father was lying to me about it. That isn't what it really was, but that's what I thought so I was angry for him a while and I thought he kind of betrayed my family.... I was pretty angry with him for a long time. I wouldn't even talk to him for the longest time because he lied to me.

Tomas, who reported being given different information by different people, said:

It's not more that I was angry, it was more that I was confused. Does that make sense like that? I didn't know what was going on really and it felt like I was lied to a lot, so it felt like I was cheated out on this so it was just kind of tough.

Overall, participants who said that they felt in the loop about what was happening when their parent was being deported appreciated the straightforward communication and felt relieved and included. Participants who were not informed of the details reported feeling left out, further confused, and sometimes angry and deceived. Participants who had less information reported coming up with their own explanations about what happened, which were often worse than what had actually happened.

**Family emotional reaction.** Seven participants reported that their reactions were influenced by the reaction of the family members around them. Some participants felt that the adults were too nonchalant, which made them unsure of how to react. Daniel reported:

I kind of didn't trust the adults on my dad's side besides my auntie that much. I kind of felt like everyone was being too....They didn't seem to be emotionally invested about the situation like I think they should have been....I didn't get that vibe from them like, you know, "This is so wrong. We have to do whatever we can to keep her here." It was very mellow. Everything was very mellow and laidback for me. It was just too mellow and laidback actually.

Several participants reported getting emotional when they saw their parents react emotionally.

Laura explained:

What I reacted to more was like seeing my grandmother very emotional about the situation. I think that's what I understood the most and that's what kind of pushed me towards understanding the gravity of the situation, understanding how serious it was.

Sofia reported:

Initially I asked, I was like, "What do you mean? Where is she going? Why is she going?" and that's when my dad got emotional so then I knew something – I knew it was

like bad. I knew it wasn't good. So that's when I started getting hysterically crying and I was sad and angry.... It was traumatizing too seeing my dad get emotional for the first time ever as a child.

Felipe said, "I was very sad because you never want to see a parent crying. I was very – I didn't know how to help." Several participants shared feeling calmer when the people around them were calm or trying to help. Luis reported, "I trusted my brothers because I saw that my brothers were okay so I'm going to be okay because they never cried or anything." Laura described what it felt like to be around her family:

I guess on a very basic level I could understand that they were trying to help and so I guess that was more – as far as reaction, I guess that would be more calming. You know what I mean? To an, "Okay, well I see that they're trying to do something. Maybe she is coming home or she'll be able to move back."

David shared how his deported father's advice impacted him after his father was deported:

I remember him just telling me whatever happens to make sure that I take care of the family. That was something that I really kind of held on to, was him telling me to be the man of the family if he's not going to be around. That he was counting on me to really make up for his absence and making sure that I do the right thing. That I don't give my mom a hard time because it's already hard enough on her as it is, and that I needed to grow up, and I probably needed to step up and be a man so I did. That was something that despite being obviously very emotional and upset about it, that was something that kind of clicked with me. That I needed to really – I needed to kind of like grow up faster.

**Family provided reassurance.** Five participants reported that having an adult who was positive and who reassured them about their parent's safety and wellbeing was helpful. This is illustrated in Daniel's quote about his aunt:

She would call and say, you know, "I'm just calling to check on my nephew. How are you doing baby boo?" That's what she would call me, baby boo, and, "How you doing? I want you to know everything is alright. It's not your fault things happen. Just let the adults handle it and you just be a child." She would always say, "Just be a child. Have fun, go out with your friends, play basketball"... I'm getting emotional just thinking about it, yeah, I don't know where I would be without her.

They also wanted to hear that things would be okay and that their parent would be safe. Emma described how her mother reassured her when her father was deported:

My mom is really positive so she's always like, "He's going to be fine. He knows how to take care of himself. Your grandma will take you to see him. You guys will still see each other and you'll talk often." And so she just always tries to make me feel better no matter what the situation is.

Emma went on to explain that her father was "really, really depressed in the beginning", and that she did not know that because "he just put up a front so that I would be okay." In hindsight she reported, "I think that was best for me at the time because I would have probably not been okay if I thought he wasn't okay." David reported feeling comforted by his grandmother and reassured about his father's well-being:

She would talk with me and would say stuff like, "God has a plan," or "God works in mysterious ways." So this is – "Something good is going to come out of it and there's a

reason why this is happening.” So the talking about God, I think that was something that I wanted to hear.

I just remember them saying that he was going to be fine. That was constantly what they told me, that he was going to be fine back there you know of course. And they told me not to worry about him and everything, just make sure that I'm doing the things here that I need to be doing, and that he's fine. That's his country, he knows it, there's nothing that's going to happen to him. It's just we're just going to have to get used to being separate from each other.

Overall, participants reported on how their perceptions were influenced by the amount of information they were given, how their family members reacted to the situation, and how much reassurance they received. Participants discussed how those factors affected the level of confusion and fear that they felt during this initial period. Participants reported feeling calmer when their parents were honest, straightforward, taking charge of the situation, and reassuring them that their parent would be safe. More ambiguity and a lack of emotional investment created suspicion and mistrust.

### **Negative Experiences with the Community**

Five participants described having negative experiences with the community that influenced how they reacted to their parent's absence. Samuel reported being separated from his parents at the airport and interrogated for several hours:

I got angry, you know, because I couldn't see my folks. I was like crying when I think now more of confusion then. You know? I didn't know what was up. I was just like, “Whoa. Why I am here and what's going on with my family, you know?.... Nobody explained to me exactly what was going on.

Sofia reported having an unhelpful experience with a counselor who was unsure of how to interact with her:

I still remember because of what the person had said. It was like, “I don’t really know what to say to you in this situation. There's nothing I can do to help you.” Like, “There's nothing I can do to give you what you want,” because obviously I want my mom back and nobody could do anything. So she kind of just handed me a tissue and was like, “It’s okay. It’s going to be okay.” So that was kind of like rough too, like having somebody try – I guess wanting to help but not really knowing how to interact with me.

She went on to describe what bothered her about lawyers and other adults she interacted with:

I feel like when I was younger I definitely felt like there was a sense of like either like somebody feeling pity for you and somebody really trying to just understand your emotions, which I took as two different things. I didn’t like it when people kind of just went like, “Oh no, the poor child, how will she ever make it?”

Three participants talked about feeling defensive about their parents at school and with other people. Daniel reported people teasing him at school:

That probably was the biggest hard part for me because everybody was gossiping about my mom. Some people were saying she was a drug dealer... Someone said that my mom was part of like a prostitution ring. I mean, it was really hard for me as far as the rumors go.

Overall participants reported that negative interactions with people in the community, including school peers, counselors, lawyers, and officials exacerbated their already difficult situation, and made them feel worse or more confused.

### **Child Coping**

Participants reported coping in a variety of helpful and unhelpful ways. Some children coped by isolating themselves, becoming angry with other people, internalizing and externalizing their feelings, or avoiding their emotions. Others reacted by distracting themselves with school and activities, relying on others for support, or turning to god.

**Isolation or withdrawal.** Some participants reported isolating themselves from their families, keeping their feelings to themselves, and hiding what was happening from people at school. Felipe reported:

I honestly had nobody to talk to. The only person I brought it up to was one of my best friends from elementary school. He was my age. He...told me not to talk about what was going on because he was very afraid.

I was very reserved. I kept to myself a lot more. I didn't share my emotions. I wasn't as outgoing or wanted to go out as much or – I just kind of fell back and was in my own world.

Daniel also reported being afraid of seeking support:

They had counselors for me, but I really didn't know them, so I didn't feel comfortable discussing it because I felt as though if I said something wrong that maybe they'll come and take me and my sisters.

Sofia initially kept her experiences quiet at school because she was embarrassed. She explains:

During that age I didn't want to tell anybody. I didn't want people to judge me or to think, "Oh, your mom did something bad. That's why this is happening to you." So I wasn't really vocal with anybody. I really tried not to let a lot of people know because it was – I felt like it was one of my weak points.

However, this period of isolation did not last forever. She described the following about becoming more vocal:

Being able to go to school with my friend who started to know more about my personal life, I was able to kind of like breathe and relax a little bit. And they knew too that certain things would trigger me in the sense of like emotionally, like on mother's day and stuff like that or if we were talking about family in the class environment. So that was very helpful on their behalf, being able to just kind of support me, kind of gave me the emotional support that I didn't have in those first – prior to that time.

**Anger and lashing out.** Seven participants reported feeling angry, either initially or over time. They were angry at their situation, angry for being lied to, angry at their confusion, and angry with their family members for various reasons. David reported feeling angry overall:

I remember just being really angry. I remember people telling me about how my whole kind of like – my demeanor or whatever changed, my attitude because I was kind of like a happy-go-lucky person before that. I was positive. I never – you wouldn't see anything really bother me or really get to me. I was like probably the brightest spirit amongst my friends and really amongst most people I know and then it kind of changed after that. And I just had a lot, a lot of anger in me and I didn't really know who to necessarily direct it to beyond anybody who really got on my nerves or something, I was ready to fight them.

Tomas reported feeling angry that his parents did not keep in touch:

After a few years I didn't hear anything from them and they're all of a sudden, like in junior high school, they started sending me cards and money and shit. Things like this and you know what, when that happened I felt angry. I felt anger. I felt like – yeah, I

think that's probably why I got into trouble then too, you know? Like, why they all of a sudden they show up now?

Sofia talked about how her anger impacted her relationship with her brother and father:

I would get very frustrated when everybody would suggest to sit down and eat or to go do something in a public setting. Because I guess my frustration was just me being upset with the situation. Like I didn't want to enjoy it when my mom wasn't there, so I would definitely put up a fight against it.

**Internalizing and externalizing.** Seven participants reported either internalizing or externalizing their emotions initially or over time, and attributed those problems to the deportation of their parent. Internalizing behaviors included becoming depressed or anxious, while externalizing included acting out aggressively or using substances. Many participants exhibited both at different periods of time. David described how he reacted once his father was officially deported several months after being detained:

A lot of my friends, I stopped hanging out with them. Some completely and then others much less than I had before, and I wanted to just really be to myself. And I didn't really – I just remember not really having – not really being into anything. I wasn't into eating, I wasn't into playing sports, listening to music. I was just – I wanted to just really just sleep a lot and just be – kind of just be alone.

Luis, who reported feeling scared, angry, and mistrustful of his father for lying about what had happened, described the impact it had on him:

I felt betrayed and lied to... After a while it was really bad. I was kind of depressed for a while and I wouldn't eat anything. I had an eating disorder. They diagnosed me with PTSD. It was horrible.

Four participants reported engaging in destructive behaviors, such as getting into fights, missing school, lying to their parents, and getting suspended. They varied in when their behaviors started and how long the behavior lasted. David, who reported initially falling into a depression, said he started getting into trouble the first year after his father's deportation:

My grades kind of went down for a period after that and probably for that – mostly that year. That was definitely my worst year and I remember getting – I remember I did get into a couple of fights with people. And I remember I even had someone who kind of made fun of the situation and that was one of the fights I got into.

Tomas and Samuel reported getting into trouble a few years after their parents were deported.

Tomas reported getting into trouble initially and later falling into a depression:

I was a troublemaker for a while. I think they put me – I got suspended a few times.

Yeah, but I don't know. I just – when I got into high school I started getting better, doing better, but then again, I fell into a depression for a while for like a year or two. It was really hard.

Samuel, who reported becoming addicted to drugs and going in and out of juvenile detention facilities in high school said:

I don't know, I was kind of a little bit angry and at the same time confused. And you know I just... I'm a teenager growing up on the south side of Chicago so you're going to get into – you're going to run into trouble.

**Avoidance.** Five participants reported using avoidance as a tool to manage their emotions that sometimes turned into denial. They reported suppressing their emotions, pushing away sadness, and denying what was happening. Laura reported:

As time went on I kind of – I would say ignored the feeling or I guess ignored the sadness or I didn't want to think about it. So I think pushing it away was kind of how I adjusted. Because that's kind of – it's kind of the only way I think you, or at least in my opinion, that you can deal with it, simply because it's such an overwhelming feeling of helplessness that I guess even as a kid, I mean, I'm sure I didn't recognize it as this but it can kind of consume you if you get too caught up in it.

David talked about how he went about denying reality:

I wanted to just hear what I wanted to hear. So anybody that gave me the type of, you know, feedback or whatever that I wanted to hear, I kind of tried to take that in. And anything else like with my mom, what she would – she would try and make me be somewhat realistic in terms of the possibility and the actuality that it was going to happen and I tried to just block that out.

**Distraction.** Six participants reported using distraction as a way of managing the loss.

They described focusing on school, keeping themselves busy with activities and extracurriculars, and spending time with friends. Laura reported:

As a kid I loved going to school. I think that's what helped me keep my mind off of things going on at home. I participated in a lot of activities and organizations after school.

David reported distracting himself with future goals:

If there was one thing that I did kind of look forward to, it was school and going off to college and the stuff, you know? I was hearing from other people about how much fun that it is so I felt like that might be – that might be something that would kind of lift my spirits. Just being able to go and then just have that college experience, that was something that I think was a positive.

**Relied on others.** Eight participants specifically mentioned relying on social support to get through this experience. When asked what helped them the most during the initial period, almost every participant mentioned a family member or some other form of social support.

Felipe reported:

I just remember my little sister just being there for me because we were both going through the same thing, and us realizing that we're going through the same thing helped me cope a lot.

Many participants had one key person they relied on, but others had mentors or friends that supported them. Tomas reported:

The members of the church, even some of the teachers like when I was starting sports and my coaches, they helped me out a lot when I was in junior high school and high school....They paid special attention to me. Not because I was talented physically, but just because they knew what I was going through....It motivated me because they believed in me so it made it a lot different...just made things comforting I guess.

He went on to say:

I think that kind of helped me get through it. If it wasn't for them, I don't think I would have survived this far. I probably would have gotten into a lot of crazier stuff. Like I don't know, I probably would have been – I don't know, it could have been worse for me.

David, who reported falling into a period of depression, explained what partially helped him out of it, “I met a new girl during that period after he had gotten deported and she was – I would probably say she was probably the one little bright spot for me at that time.” He also explained his attempt to cope with the loss by seeking other sources of support:

It has been something that has been like an emptiness. A part of me that kind of was lost and since then I've kind of like tried to search for other ways to make up for it. Even – trying to even seek a relationship with other people who are older that I could go to that I looked at kind of like as mentors for guidance.

**Belief in god.** Faith was identified by many as something that helped them cope and carried them through this situation. Praying and believing in god helped them hold on to hope and believe that things would work out in the end. It helped them believe that something good would come out of the situation. Emma said the following about her faith:

I feel like that helped me get through it. And just kind of knowing that God is going to protect him, and keep him safe, and eventually he'll be able to come home. Like I always had the hope that he would be able to come home.

However, two people identified this being something that allowed them to hold on to false hope and stay in denial about what was happening. Daniel said:

I was praying a lot more, yep. Saying things like bargaining. You know how people bargain with God? Like “If you can do this for me, God, I promise I won't ask for anything at Christmas.”

David reported:

In my mind I just – I prayed, of course. I prayed constantly, “Please make sure everything works out for my dad, he gets to stay here,” and I really thought that going to church and praying about it and asking God about it, I really thought that everything was going to work out, was going to work out. And I didn't think – not until really – I didn't think that I was – you know, that my dad was going to leave.

Overall, participants reported utilizing a mix of helpful and unhelpful coping methods to manage their emotions related to their parent's deportation. Most participants mentioned how other people, including family members, friends, church members, and mentors helped them feel comforted, supported, and less alone. Some said that they felt as though that support was the main thing that helped them through that difficult period of their lives. However, fear, anger, and intense sadness led to people withdrawing socially, isolating themselves, or lashing out at other people, which interfered with their ability to access that connection and support.

### **Family Reorganization**

Participants reported different ways that their family reorganized after their parent was deported. Some family processes included reallocating resources, seeking support from church, having another family member step in as surrogate parent and giving children more responsibilities. Many participants reported having a disruption of routines and rituals in response to their parent being deported.

**Reallocation of family resources.** Six participants described how their family redistributed their resources by switching living arrangements, picking up second jobs, and relying on extended family members for emotional and logistical support. Laura described:

Beforehand it was like, you know, everyone was able – everyone had their own job and their own little life so they didn't have to worry about taking care of other people's kids or even thinking about these things.... Then once everything kind of fell apart everyone had to pull their own weight and help out.

Laura described how after a period of time:

I ended up moving in with my father because my aunt and my grandma just couldn't do it by themselves anymore... I think the best way that they could kind of keep everything

together for them without destroying all of these family relationships was to just separate us and try and get everything else back on track.

Several other participants reported switching their living arrangement multiple times. Daniel reported living with his grandparents initially and then changing a few months later:

Me and my sisters totally went different ways, my younger sisters went to completely stay with my grandparents and I actually went to stay with my aunt and my other cousins on my dad's side.

**Sought support from church.** Five participants said that their families used church as a resource. They used it for social, financial, recreational and logistical support. Church members helped with food, gave them rides, looked after them when their parents were working, and provided mentorship. Laura reported:

My family started maybe attending church a little bit more...that was one of the ways also that my family would get food to my mother and to my uncle.

Felipe reported:

The only thing I really remember was becoming a lot closer with the church, especially when we needed help, my mom needed help at one point and we asked the church for help and they were all very supportive because most of the members in the community that were Catholic were Hispanic and they were affected – lots of families were affected so there were lots of people that knew what we were going through.

**Increased responsibility and independence.** Five participants said that they had more responsibilities or independence after their parent(s) were deported. Several participants described having to step in to take care of more household responsibilities and their younger

siblings. David reported his initial reaction to the increase in responsibilities after his father was deported:

I was so used to him doing so much for me and helping me out so much so I kind of like – I felt like it was something that was just being thrown on me out of nowhere but gradually I think as time kind of went by, I kind of embraced the idea that him not being there meant that I had to step it up.

He went on to explain how his responsibilities changed:

Well after he left then I really became like even responsible for my brother, I think that was probably the biggest thing. He's younger than me so I kind of looked after him more and I tried to really be strict and kind of be the same way that my dad was with us and with him. I tried to then really kind of like be his dad.

Felipe described a similar scenario:

I had to take – like make sure my little sister made it home from school, make sure she was eating, I had to like – because my mom wasn't around, I had to – I don't know, grow up a lot faster.

Sofia also explained her shift in responsibilities:

I think my dad definitely started to depend more on me so that kind of just made me – not – I wouldn't say it pressured me into still being responsible, but I definitely knew that the expectations were raised still, I had to live up to those expectations and they would continue to be raised. I had to be responsible for not only myself but for my brother as well, so that was definitely really a shift from being – I guess I kind of always tell people that like my childhood ended earlier in that sense because I didn't – I had more things to

focus on rather than just going and playing outside or going to school, it was like I need to focus on these other two individuals.

**Surrogate parent.** Five participants described becoming closer to another family member after their parent was deported and embracing them as a parental figure. Laura described:

I would say that I actually got closer with my aunt because I ended up moving in with her after all of this happened, she became more like my mother to me, my second mother...I guess it was just easier to I guess bond with her more in a sense than try to push her away because I knew she was so close to my mother.

Samuel shared a similar sentiment:

I just thank my uncle for always helping me out so for sure, he was always there for me...I always say my uncle is like my father, you know what I mean, he's like the father that I never had I always say.

Daniel said about adjusting to his mother's absence:

I don't think I ever really adjusted to it to be honest with you, but I came to accept it. I think I came to accept it by replacing her with my Auntie, I'm going to be honest with you.

He expressed his gratitude for having his aunt, saying:

If I didn't have her around I think I might have ended up doing things that I could never recover from, like maybe selling drugs or going down the wrong path, hanging with the wrong crew and stuff like that.

**Disruption of routines and rituals.** Most participants described a change in rituals and routines. Daniel described how different his life felt after his living situation changed the second time and he was separated from his sisters:

They were kind of the light at the end of the day and once they moved with my grandparents and I was sharing a room with one of my cousins at my aunt's house, that's when things really started hitting me at night. It was like, "Wow, this is really something. My mom really ain't coming back. I'm really going to be – not an orphan, but I'm really going to be that cousin that stays with another family member."

David described a shift in a family ritual, "We generally would have Sunday dinner together where it would be like mostly the whole family would have dinner...and that stopped." Felipe described holidays after his father was deported:

They were pretty terrible and they almost became nonexistent, like my birthday wasn't really celebrated anymore. Christmas was always just kind of really, really hard. And it was like that every year....The harder ones were definitely Christmas and my birthday because it just kind of didn't feel like there was something to celebrate about.

Sofia reported how she felt during holidays after her mother was deported:

I felt lost, my dad felt lost, we didn't know what to really do. You don't want to celebrate when you're going through a situation like this ....it wasn't a time of celebration, it was a very sad occasion. We didn't – we didn't do anything. We didn't put up a tree or – so it was just like a regular day, we just woke up and that was it, it just continued.

Sofia reported that this continued throughout her childhood, her feeling as though she did not want to enjoy things that her mother could not enjoy:

There were a lot of things that I chose not to do because I didn't think it was fair. Like I said holidays, we never really celebrated them, never really did anything big. Birthdays, same thing. Didn't really celebrate them. And I chose not to celebrate them because I don't – I still – up to this day I do not think it's fair to celebrate it when my mom's not here.

Overall, participant's families reorganized by redistributing their resources within the family, using church as a practical resource, and putting more responsibilities on them to take care of household responsibilities. Many described having an aunt, uncle, or other family member step in as a parental figure, which made them feel supported and cared about. The participants who were given additional responsibilities were the ones who did not have a surrogate parent step in. Participants also talked about how their routines, rituals, and ways of connecting as a family changed or became nonexistent.

### **Family Communication Processes**

Participants reported how their family interactions changed after having a parent deported. Some reported an increase in family conflict while others experienced more distance and separation from family members. They also reported on how their relationship changed with their deported parent, with some being able to maintain a connection and others feeling disconnected or never speaking with their parents again. Throughout these changes, many participants reported that their family did not talk about them or address their feelings about it. In hindsight, some participants reported wishing they could have talked about their feelings with someone, and that their parents had been more straightforward about the details of their parents deportation and likelihood that they could return.

**Changed family interactions.** Nine participants reported a change in family interactions, either through increased family conflict or feeling more distant and disconnected.

***Increased family conflict.*** Five participants reported that family members took their frustrations out on one another after their parent was deported. David said there was an increase in conflict in his extended family:

So it was a lot of... arguing and that was something that just didn't happen before...and some of the arguing was over – because of his absence, and so that created problems with him not being there and that was where the frustration came from.

Conflicts between immediate family members arose for various reasons, including intolerance for other people's reactions to the loss or misinterpreting people's motives. David described feeling frustrated at his mother because he did not want to hear the truth about his father's deportation:

I was kind of mad at my mom when she would be honest with me and tell me that because that's just something that I didn't want to hear and I thought that she was just being negative or something that she wanted to have happen, so it was frustrating, it was really frustrating.

Sofia worried that her brother and father were not keeping in touch with her mother enough after she was deported. She said:

I don't want to say I like lashed out at them, but I would...vocalize it a lot and kind of pick at them and be like why aren't you doing – do you not care? I would definitely start questioning them...I was like annoyed with them, I would definitely not interact with them the same, I would kind of be kind of standoffish because I felt like they were ignoring our mom.

Conflict also arose over changes in roles. David described what happened when he stepped into a fatherly role for his younger brother, “At first we were at each other’s throats and stuff because he didn’t want to respect my authority because he didn’t think that he had to.”

*Family felt more distant and separate.* Four participants described less unity and togetherness in their family after their parent was deported. Daniel, who was separated from his sisters and moved in with his aunt, described how his relationship changed with his father:

My dad became a lot more distant with us, he really did put the childrearing into my grandparents’ and my auntie’s hands. We talked less and less and the only time I would see him was when we would come over and get money for what we needed for school.

Felipe said, “we never really had my mom around either” and “it’s like I lost my dad about the same time I lost my mom.” He also described his relationship with his sister becoming “almost nonexistent afterwards” and said that the deportation “just kind of pushed (his brother) a little bit further away.” He described:

It was very separated, like there was – everybody was very on their own, they were just – I don't know, there's a word I'm trying to find, but everybody was very acclimated, very on their own. I don't know, the family was very broken apart.

Emma described feeling more distant from her extended family:

I feel like I wasn’t as connected with everyone after he left if that makes any sense. When he was here, I was with him all the time and he was my connection to the rest of the family... I just feel like after he left I kind of got disconnected from the family, not that I never saw them, just it wasn’t – things weren’t the same.

**Relationship changes with deported parent.** Half of the participants reported staying in contact with their parent after they were deported, while the other half reported feeling disconnected or having no contact afterwards.

***Stayed involved and connected.*** Five participants reported staying in close contact with their deported parent. They communicated through skype, through phone calls, letters, and visits. Luis reported, “She definitely played like a very pivotal role in my life and she still is.” Samuel shared a similar sentiment:

Family is family forever, you know what I'm saying, so they're my blood even though my mom and pops had to depart from me but they're still my mom and dad to this day so it's all good.

Some people put significant effort into staying in touch and did not want their parent to feel neglected. Sofia said:

My biggest fear throughout this process regarding that question was making sure that I always had that connection with her, I did not want to ever feel like I couldn't – like I wasn't making an effort to still maintain that strong connection with her.

Not having their parent present whenever they wanted also changed their relationships. Laura said:

I think it made me appreciate my mother more. A lot of the time when I am with my mother I know it's not for an extended period of time so I think that has made us, I would say, closer.

***Disconnected.*** Five participants reported losing touch with or becoming emotionally distant from their deported parent, mostly because the parent did not reach out. Daniel said:

I hate to say it, but I was emotionally checked out with my mom, I don't – by me not being part of her life, emotionally we weren't registering with each other anymore.

Felipe described feeling “disconnected” from his father, explaining:

It was like one of those things where it's kind of just when you talk to a relative that you don't really talk to, like a grandparent or something...like hi, how's it going, how have you been, how's life, and then that was it. It wasn't a very close conversation...just to see how they're doing, make sure you're alive and then that's that.

Participants differed in how they interpreted their parent's distance. Two participants reported feeling angry or resentful when their parents reached out after long stretches of time. This is illustrated in the following quote by Tomas:

After a few years I didn't hear anything from them and they're all of a sudden, like in junior high school, they started sending me card and money and shit, things like this and you know what, when that happened I felt angry.

David seemed to interpret his father's distance with more understanding of his perspective:

He didn't really kind of maybe reach out like I thought he would have and just kind of – he became kind of just distant. I know he didn't really mean it, I know he's just kind of sad that he couldn't be with us.

**No discussion of changes.** Throughout all these family changes, six participants said that their family did not talk directly about what was happening or their feelings about it. Felipe said:

My older sister was always, always, always gone and it was very like trying to pretend everything was normal when we all kind of like knew it wasn't.

Sofia said that her family avoided doing family-oriented stuff after her mother was deported but never explicitly spoke about it. She explains, “I know we all felt it because we all did not like

doing that” and “I just feel like we all didn’t like it. It just felt weird.... It was unsaid.” She also described holding back her feelings about what was happening:

A lot of the emotions that I wanted to express, I did not express them just because I knew that if I were to express them then my brother would probably do the same and then my dad and it was just like I didn’t want to – I wanted to lift them rather than kind of repeat the same emotions that they were feeling.

This seemed especially highlighted during the holidays, which many participants described as being different and strange. Felipe said that he did not bring up his feelings about the holidays to his mother because it “wouldn't be fair to her because she was going through the same thing.”

### **Long Term Effects**

Participants reported feeling loss throughout their childhood, and that they felt the loss more as they got older. They reported being aware of a lack of guidance and support as they grew up.

**Long-term loss.** All participants reported feeling of sense loss throughout their childhood, about their parents, about their families, and about missed moments or what could have been. Some participants described feeling a constant undercurrent of loss throughout their childhood. This is illustrated by the following quote by Sofia:

It’s like, no matter how happy I could have been, there was always that thought in the back of my head like my mom’s not here. So it’s like a little gray cloud is like following you the entire time, the entire absence.

During major events, birthdays and holidays, participants expressed feeling the loss more deeply.

Emma reported:

I did have that little thing in the back of my head that felt like something was missing, and of course it was him and I definitely thought about it a lot before. Like I can't believe I'm actually graduating and he's not going to be here. He's been here for everything important in my life. So it was sad, it was really sad.

Participants who visited their parents shared a sense of having to re-experience the loss every time they separated. Sofia described:

Even when I went back that summer in June, I was happy initially probably for the first couple of days, but then the reality comes back and then you're like, regardless of whether or not you're here for a month or two months, she's not coming back.

Victoria, who was not close with her father reported:

I think my dad was deported and I didn't have that father figure, who knows what our relationship could have evolved into as I've gotten older if he was in the same state or country. But we didn't have that, I guess, that availability or that wasn't an even an option.

**Reaction changed as they got older.** Six participants reported that their parent's deportation hit them harder a year or two after it happened. Some participants described having a delayed reaction to the separation. Samuel reported:

I was a little happy at first, I could do whatever I wanted to do, and you know I could bring my friends over and you know it was cool, I could sleep over, they could sleep over, it was really fun. But like I said, I started to get into trouble and I sort of missed them after a while, after that first year I was like, "Man, this is not cool."

Laura described becoming more aware of the significance of her mother's absence:

It didn't hit me as hard until I got a little bit older when I couldn't, I guess, you know like have – I guess experience things with my mother as I got older, but definitely I could say that it was noticeable as I aged that she wasn't around anymore.

Tomas described how his experience caught up to him in the following quote:

Elementary was more like just keeping my mind occupied by getting into trouble, anything that would kind of like take my mind off of it, you know? And I think it kind of caught on later on, like I told you in high school, I really started getting like really – I didn't get into trouble, but I just felt like – it kind of hit me in high school, that's when I kind of felt the depression, I had anxiety for a little bit.

**Lack of guidance.** Five participants said that they felt a lack of guidance and support while growing up. They felt that they had to figure things out on their own and had no one to teach them about certain areas of life. Samuel, who had both of his parents deported said:

I didn't really have – I don't know, you know, didn't have attention, didn't have much guidance. Nobody to kind of look up to for stuff.

This seemed especially highlighted during puberty. Felipe reported:

The middle school years were definitely the hardest because of growing up <Inaudible> the most crucial years where like you – I start figuring out who you want to be and I was just on my – left alone... like when I was with girls or anything like, I couldn't – my father wasn't there so it was kind of just like lots of figuring out everything on my own.

Sofia described what it was like for her to not have her mother while she went through puberty:

Since I was the only girl in the family that was a very big – like I hated that because during the age when you go through all these changes and stuff, I didn't have a female there for me. My aunt was there but I couldn't – it's not the same as having a parent – like

my mom. I didn't feel comfortable talking about certain things with my dad or with my aunt because they're – it felt weird, so that was a really big gap that I also had, having to basically adapt to all of these changes that I was going through emotionally and physically and stuff without a female there.

Overall, participants described feeling a sense of loss throughout their childhood, and struggling with their parent's absence more as time went on and during major transitions. They described feeling alone and not having anyone to look up to or turn to. For those who visited their parents, they described re-experiencing the loss every time they separated and feeling frustrated that this was something that they had to keep dealing with.

### **Effect on Interpersonal Relationships as Adults**

Five participants said that their childhood experiences of having a parent deported impact how they behave in relationships as adults. They said it has made them more cautious, more reserved, and less trusting of new relationships. Daniel reported:

I think it made me not trust – not to say women per se, but just not trust people as much because I don't think they're going to be dependable or be around.

They also identified wanting to protect themselves and limit the amount of disappointment that they experience. David reported the following about new relationships:

It's always in the back of my head that it might be something that doesn't last, or there might be something that causes us to separate.

It'll come to a point where we're getting close and I'll kind of like maybe kind of want to like back off somewhat or kind of like slow things down because I don't want to get too close or comfortable with them because I'm always – there's the fear that it might be something that causes disappointment down the road.

Laura reported her hesitance in relationships:

I think it's affected me in a way where I don't want to get close to someone because I don't want to – I mean, in the event of a breakup or a separation, it's like I don't want to have to go through re-suppressing all of those emotions again.

### **Positive Perceptions When Looking Back**

Participants reported having some positive perceptions emerge from their experiences of growing up with a deported parent. Several participants reported developing an understanding of why their family members behaved the way they did and many reached a level of acceptance for what happened. Others experienced an increased appreciation for what they have and felt that the experience made them stronger. Many felt increased motivation to succeed and developed a desire to make a difference in social issues.

**“I get it.”** Eight participants expressed some level of understanding of why their family members behaved the way they did. Even when the participants said those responses were harmful or unhelpful when they were children, they were able to see the positive intentions. They understood that their parents were trying to be helpful or protect them. Tomas reported:

To be honest, my grandma like never said anything. I mean, she always kept it vague, I know my grandma, it's the way she is. She never told me what was going – but you know what, now I understand. It's cool, I get it. It's not – she didn't lie to me in any way, I don't feel – I mean, I was confused, I was misled, a lot of misconceptions, but like I just felt like – I get it, she was just looking out for me, she was trying to protect me so I understand.

Victoria, whose mother did not encourage her staying in touch with her father, reported:

I feel like she was also trying to protect me at the same time and like she's always tried to like not necessarily have me have this like – it's not that she got in the way of the relationship, but she would share things with me about my dad that gave him this negative image. And like I get it because she wants to be honest with me and know that I'm not going into my dad thinking I'm like, oh, he's this great, wonderful dad.

David explained his lack of contact with his deported father by saying:

It didn't seem like he really made as much of an effort as I thought he would once he was there...but I don't think it wasn't meant to be towards me, I think it was just this is just what was going on with him...I could see it when I visited him before he got deported that he was just not the same, that something had kind of just killed his spirit and I think that's what affected him...it's just not even worth maybe making the effort because it's going to cause more pain knowing that he's somewhere completely far away.

**Acceptance.** Five participants talked about feeling a level of acceptance of the situation and their experiences as adults. They identified the passing of time, forgiveness, having a better understanding of what happened, and being able to visit their parents as factors. Tomas reported struggling to accept his reality for a period of time before coming to terms with it:

I kind of always felt like I was living in denial a little bit. It helped me initially but after a while it just kind of – it burned and kept burning and burning to the point where there was nothing left, you know I just kind of gave in, I realized – I came to the conclusion that this is my reality and I have to accept it.

Part of what was getting in the way of his acceptance was blame. He explained the following about his parents:

I used to blame them, but I don't do that anymore. I have a thing that like – you know, everybody is responsible for their own actions. Everyone is responsible for their own way of life and their destiny. I kind of figured out, yeah, I was dealt these cards, but fuck, I've got to roll with it, you know what I mean, there's nothing much I can do to it.

Felipe reported not regretting his experiences and what he has learned from them:

Instead of wondering what would have happened if my dad would have been here during those years, I always think like, okay, this is what came of it and I'm happy where I am now, it's not like a regret. I wish it wouldn't have happened, but at the same time, it is what it is and... I'm okay with it now.

Samuel also reported accepting his situation and his lack of control over it:

If my parents were still there, no, we'd be cool, but they weren't so you know – yeah. It would have been easier for them to kind of support me during those times or I wouldn't have gotten caught up in all that shit, but I did and that's just the way it is, and you know it's life, right?

**Increased Appreciation.** Six participants expressed having a greater appreciation for what they have after going through this experience. They expressed feeling fortunate, blessed, and thankful for certain aspects of their lives. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

*David:* I think it has taught me if there is any kind of positive or silver lining, I think it has taught me that you know as bad as something is and how you might feel about it, there is always something to gain from it so I do try and somewhat maybe see the – see the blessing in disguise of something.

*Samuel:* When I look back, I think those things made me the better person who I am today, if that makes sense. You know I just think that if I didn't go through that shit, I would never have known what life was all about. Now I appreciate things so much more.

Four participants recognized that their situation could be much worse. Laura said:

There's always worse that could be happening I think so I always try to keep in mind that it could be worse, I could not have my mother at all, you know what I mean? So, knowing that I can see her, that I can talk to her or knowing that I'm still young and I have a chance to fix something or to try and make some type of change. I think that's a belief that has kept me – kept my head above water in this whole situation of immigration and dealing with that personally.

**Increased motivation to succeed.** Seven participants reported that this experience motivated them to do better in school, make money, and achieve things in life. Some participants were motivated to prove people wrong, like David, who reported:

Dealing with certain people knowing that they wanted to see me down or they had said certain things about the situation and that kind of really – you know it made me angry but it also kind of – in some kind of way it also motivated me a little bit.

It has helped me grow up to be the man that I am today and it's helped me get – like have some drive to be better and to move forward and try and make a difference and try and prove people wrong.

Others were motivated to make a difference and help their parents, like Laura, who said that every time she visited:

It did motivate me to want to help her eventually and want to give her a better living situation or eventually maybe even get her back. So I think after every visit it always just continued to give me a little bit more motivation to try and make things better.

Participants varied in how quickly this motivation hit them. Laura reported feeling grateful that she was able to feel motivated right away:

I think a lot of my emotions that I had I just – I continued to use to motivate me, to do well in school. I don't – I never experienced like a – I guess a severe depression to where I didn't want to do anything or I wanted to ruin things for myself or ruin experiences. I think I was fortunate as a child to be able to know how to just use those to kind of push instead of shut down.

Tomas reported coming to this realization after going being in denial and going through a few years of misbehavior and depression:

I have a lot of drive but now I have a vision and I can really channel this anger and all this angst and all this pain and suffering and neglect and all this shit. So I was able to channel that into something better for my education, working hard, getting a job, and this and that.

**Made me stronger.** Nine of the ten participants said that the experience helped them grow and made them stronger in some way. Three participants specifically said “what doesn't kill you makes you stronger” while reflecting on their experience. They reported feeling more equipped, secure, confident, and better able to cope with difficult circumstances. Tomas reported:

Now I feel like I'm ready for it, I'm prepared for it. It's like I'm going to battle and I'm equipped, I'm ready, but back then I was just – I had nothing, I had no armor, I had no shield, but now I'm ready.

Participants shared a sense of being more prepared for future situations, but also having confidence that they can overcome. Sophia reported:

The situation pretty much came to me like blindsided me when I was younger and I lived in this perfect life where I thought no bad could happen as to where I am now where it's like anything can pretty much happen....That's the thing I've learned, being able to adapt and being able to not let the circumstances seize you but you seizing the circumstances, which is a really big thing.

Samuel, who reported dropping out of school, becoming addicted to drugs, and going to jail before he cleaned up, got a job and started a family, said:

I feel motivated just to do better because I know that even though this put me down for a while, I mean I'm not going to – I'm not going to fall, I'm not going to fold. So you know I'm stronger today because of it.

**Desire to make a difference.** Five participants said that they want to give back through social advocacy and make a difference for people going through similar situations. Felipe reported:

It impacted me a lot in wanting to get more involved with the community and try and help people that – like especially the Hispanic community, like getting involved with the student union or Latino Connections, helping out as a translator at parent teacher conferences and all of this.

Victoria said:

I definitely feel like I've become a stronger advocate for having more, I guess, more rights for immigrants. I'm all about advocating in rallies and protests for immigration and I'm about making those phone calls, righting those emails, and signing those petitions to make sure that those who deserve to stay in this country, regardless of their immigration status, can and should stay and be given the opportunity to give back to this community whether that be economically or just providing like good for our society.

Several said that it influenced the career they went into. Laura said:

A lot of my work that I do now, when we do get the opportunities to choose work that expresses our own views, I do tend to go towards social injustices and things that evolve around the immigration policies here in the United States. So I do think as I got older, or actually ever since that happened, I think that's kind of what's influenced almost everything that I do.

Overall, participants developed positive perceptions about their parents' deportation as adults. They discussed reaching an understanding of why their family members reacted the way that they did, finding ways to accept the situation, and feeling that they have grown stronger from this experience. They expressed being able to appreciate what they have more, having more motivation to succeed or to make a difference. Many of the participants held multiple positive perceptions, and felt as though this has greatly influenced who they are as people.

### **Things That Could have Helped**

Participants shared factors that might help children who have had a parent deported. In hindsight, participants reported wishing that they had more information and that people had asked them about how they were feeling. Participants also had advice for caregivers about how to help their children after a parent is deported.

**Wish I had more information.** In hindsight, six participants reported wishing that their parents had been more upfront about what was happening during their parent's deportation process. They described the negative impact of being misled or having details withheld from them. They reported wanting the truth and to be given realistic expectations. Daniel reported:

I just wish they would have explained about what was actually happening, what we were going through. Didn't no one really explain any of those things to us.... if they would have explained to me when I left school, I could have explained to people and then those people could have explained to people instead of making jokes and being ignorant about things.

Luis, whose father lied to him repeatedly for the first year and half, reported:

I guess I just wanted the truth and I just wanted closure, and I just wanted honesty and – you know? Because even though I was like – I'm still young, but even though I was really young then, I just wanted to make sure that I knew what was going on.

Sofia reported on the effects of being misled about how long it would take for her mother to come back:

I felt like people kept on giving me like false hope, like not giving me false statements, like they had initially said that she was going to be back in six months and that didn't happen and then it was like a year and that didn't happen, five years, that didn't happen, so after year five I was just like if it – I don't know if it's going to happen... it took a toll on me I feel like. After a while you just kind of like – there's only so many times you can get lifted up and pushed back down before you kind of just don't really want to even go anymore.

David also wished he had not been given false hope about the outcome:

I wish they hadn't really gotten my hopes up in terms of thinking that he was going to come back because that was – during – I'm talking about from the process from where he was detained for it and then he was actually deported, I would say I – it was a lot of – I heard a lot of good stuff and when I look back at it, it was kind of just like wishful thinking, so I wish I didn't really – I wish they didn't really kind of like hype up the good part in terms of it meaning a good ending.

**Wish people had checked in on my emotions.** Five participants said that they wished that they had been able to talk to someone about their feelings. This is illustrated in Sofia's quote:

I didn't have the chance when I was younger to have that conversation with anybody other than I guess family or during moments where I got sad. I wish I could have talked it through, I definitely think it would have helped me and definitely would have gotten rid of like that sense of embarrassment that I felt in the beginning.

And again in the following excerpt from Felipe:

I feel like it would have made me a lot – I don't know, more comfortable with the situation, like been able to cope with it a lot better than just isolating myself and able to understand what was really going on.

Victoria reported, "I guess I wish my mom would have been more open about talking to me regarding how am I feeling, is everything okay, like checking in more often."

**Be supportive and include us in the conversation.** Five participants gave advice to caregivers, suggesting that they be supportive, attentive, and patient with their children. Felipe suggested:

I would definitely let them know to talk to their children to make sure that they don't feel alone because if it's hard for them, it's even harder for the kids and to make sure that the kids feel loved.

Tomas said:

Give the kids some slack, they're kids, let them be kids...they're going through millions of different types of imperfections every day, just let them deal with it and be supportive, don't judge.

Three participants suggested that parents talk to their children about what happened. Daniel said:

Stop whispering behind closed doors thinking we don't know what's going on, I mean we don't sometimes but they're just making us feel even more alienated by doing that, so just – if you're going to have an adult conversation when kids aren't around, make sure kids aren't around. Don't go to another room and not whisper or whisper. Include us in the conversation for the most part, I know some things you want to protect kids from, but when it comes to something that they're involved in, especially when it comes to their parents being deported or their sisters or brothers being deported, that's a conversation they need to be involved in.

### **What I Want Children Going Through this to Know**

Participants had advice for children about how to cope after having a parent deported. Most of the advice was related to things they did not get during their own experiences but wish they had, or perceptions that they discovered throughout the process.

**Reach out.** Five participants wanted other children going through this to know that there are people that want to help and that they should use the support and resources that are available to them. Daniel suggested:

I would say talk to someone, talk to – well, this is what I would say: If you have questions that you need answers instead of internalizing it and making yourself feel like it's your fault, definitely ask an adult that's involved in the situation with you.

Participants also wanted them to understand that they are not alone and that their feelings are normal. Sofia and Victoria said:

*Sofia:* I know many times I felt like I was alone, that nobody else was going through this, but it's important to tell them that you're not alone and that the emotions that you're feeling, they're totally normal and there are people there who want to help you so definitely be open to it and be willing to accept it no matter how it may come off to you as.

*Victoria:* I would say to reach out for support when you want to talk to someone and be compassionate with yourself and your emotions about your relationships.

**Stay strong, this will make you stronger.** Five participants suggested that children going through this should hang in there and stay strong, because this will not last forever and they will learn from it. Luis said, “I think sometimes some things happen for a reason, you just have to kind of stay strong that eventually it will get better.” David reported:

I would try and tell them that even as bad as this might seem to you, there is something that you can gain from it and I would tell them that, you know, it's something that can make you stronger.

**Focus on goals.** Five participants suggested for children going through this to stay focused on the future instead of their pain. Tomas said:

I would just tell them to never lose sight of your dreams because your dreams are bigger than anything, more than your parents, they're beyond. Just focus on the prize and where you want to end up being.

A few participants suggested channeling difficult emotions into motivation and goal-driven behavior. This is illustrated in the following quotes by Laura and David:

Use your emotions that you're feeling to power you through school and if it's affecting you enough to motivate you to keep going through school and you want to make change, do that.

Try and get past the pain and everything and just try and use it to their advantage, use it as a motivator.

Other participants suggested using this experience to make a difference. Laura said:

I just feel like we need more people out there fighting for what's right or fighting for families who have done nothing wrong, who are here to make a better life for themselves. I think that's something that you could use towards that and to not let it break you... you're also a resource to someone else if you're out there spreading the word, fighting for something, or at least just trying to get others to understand where people like us who have been through it are coming from then you know you're a part of it, you're not losing the fight, you're just helping.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION**

The goal of this study was to understand the long-term impact of parental deportation on Latino children and how relational processes affected their perception and experience of it. A secondary goal was to find out how they moved forward and whether their experiences of resiliency fit within the ambiguous loss model. The findings of this study contribute to current

literature by focusing on the long term impact of parental deportation and the impact of family dynamics on children's perceptions. While the study results were consistent with previous findings about ambiguous loss and the experience of parental deportation, new information about the long-term impacts and resiliency emerged. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings as they relate to ambiguous loss and resiliency processes. Next this section will highlight new findings and review the clinical implications based on those findings. Finally, limitations and areas for future research are reviewed.

### **Ambiguous Loss**

Ambiguous loss is a "situation of traumatic anxiety produced by a combination of the known and the unknown" that results in a "lonely and oft misunderstood mourning with an indefinite beginning and indefinite end" (Boss, 2006, p 5). The findings confirm that participants experienced childhood separation from a parent due to deportation as an ambiguous loss. Not knowing the details about what happened, when they would see their parents next or if they would see them again at all made the loss uncertain. Being misled or lied to about what happened made the loss even more unclear, blocking coping and understanding and encouraging denial. As other studies have found, parental deportation created symptoms of depression, anxiety, and misconduct for some participants (Allen, Cisneros & Tellez (2013), which are "often outcomes of the relentless stress of ambiguity" (Boss, 2006, p 11).

This created loss and grief that was more complicated. All participants described experiencing a sense of loss, but most were unaware of what the extent of the loss would be. Some participants reported never seeing their parents again, but not knowing that would be the case when they were first separated. That left them unsure of "whether to close out" their parent or "keep the door open for him or her to return." (Boss, 2006, p 7). Others stayed connected with

their parents and were able to see them again, but had to re-experience the pain of separation with the same level of uncertainty once they had to leave them. They wondered if or when their parent would be able to come back, all while missing their parent's presence in their daily lives. They noticed their parents' absence during holidays and other important moments, and some felt guilty for enjoying moments without them. It was difficult to explain their parents' role in their lives to other people, and many hid their experience from other people due to fear and embarrassment. They had to tentatively accept having their parent in their lives in a different way than they expected before the deportation and figure out how to make sense of that.

According to Pauline Boss, "the pain of loss can immobilize or it can give momentum for change" (Boss, 2006, p 17). An ambiguous loss is unclear, unresolvable, and in many ways invisible to others. The loss is not validated by other people and there are no formalized ways for grieving (Boss, 2006). Over time, all participants developed ways of tolerating and managing the ambiguity of their parent's physical absence, some sooner than others. Below are the factors that hindered and contributed to resiliency as participants grew up with a deported parent.

**Tempering mastery.** Children reacted to their parents' deportation with confusion, a sense of injustice, and anger. Similar to other findings, participants were confused by the legal system, confused about whether their parent was "bad," and scared and worried about the future (Gonzales, 2015, Dreby, 2015, Espinoza, 2015). With no definitive answers about what would happen next, some made up theories to fill the gap and many reported not realizing that their parent was not coming back. They did not understand the legal system, were given false hope, or overestimated their parents' power to fix the situation. They blamed the country and its unfair laws. Some believed that because their parent was hardworking and good, they would be able to stay. Those thought processes hindered their ability to understand and accept what was

happening (temporarily) and increased their sense of injustice, powerlessness, and feelings of anger. Participants reported that being in denial delayed their processing of the loss and interfered with their ability to accept what had happened.

Over time participants talked about accepting that their parent would not be coming back, and that it was outside of their control. Once they allowed the reality to sink in, they recognized that there was nothing they could do about it and that they had to go on with their lives. They said things like, “What are you going to do?” “They can’t control it” and “This is the way life is”. Faith was one way of coping with the ambiguity of the situation and relinquishing control. Participants moved from blaming their parents for not being there or staying in touch to blaming the deportation that was out of their control. They recognized that bad things can happen to good people and that life is not always fair. Some accepted that they had to live a tougher life.

Some participants increased their success experiences by focusing on their goals and doing well in school. They reported using their emotions to fuel their motivation instead of allowing themselves to be paralyzed. They talked about wanting to prove people wrong or wanting to help their parents. Participants also found ways to manage their sense of injustice by focusing on making a difference and getting involved in social advocacy, which other studies have noted as a way to find empowerment through marginalization (Falicov, 2002).

**Revising attachments.** Being able to maintain connection with family members minimized boundary ambiguity, similar to studies on ambiguous loss in transnational families (Solheim & Ballard, 2016). However, even for participants that stayed in touch, there was often a disruption of at least a few months to a year. Participants managed their ambiguous loss by gradually disconnecting from their parents while reconnecting to available people. Despite feeling lonely and missing their parents, they reported allowing themselves to become attached

to other family members, while holding out hope that they might see their parent again. This expansion of family boundaries allowed them to perceive other family members as being inside of their family, thus reducing boundary ambiguity and distress (Boss, 2006). Participants also developed attachments to mentors and friends and some identified them as family when asked who they considered family as adults. To make up for their parent's absence, some reported seeking out older people for advice and guidance throughout their lives.

**Reconstructing identity.** After having a parent deported, most families were forced to reorganize by reallocating their resources and shifting roles and responsibilities. Some experienced increases in conflict due to taking frustrations out on one another or an inability to tolerate differences in coping and changes in roles. Others reported feeling more distance between family members and ending previous rituals and routines. Families that did not talk about these changes or avoided sharing their feelings about it seemed to have a more difficult time reconstructing their identities. Some participants shared how their conception about themselves and the world changed, which Walsh says is sometimes necessary for families to be able to bounce forward (Walsh, 2016). Sofia shifted from feeling that "I lived in this perfect life where I thought no bad could happen" to expecting that "anything can pretty much happen" and learning to "not let the circumstances seize you."

An increase in responsibilities and independence for children, which has been found in other studies (Dreby, 2012), seems to have had a partially beneficial effect. While participants identified feeling that their childhood ended early, they also reported feeling that they became more responsible and had a sense of purpose. It gave them a new role for helping in the family that increased their sense of competence. As Walsh says, "children tend to do better when involved in some helpful way, rather than feeling helpless on the sidelines" (Walsh, 2016, p 73).

This also might be related to the cultural value of *familismo* and feeling that they are putting their family first (Falicov, 2005; Parra-Cardona, Bullock, Imig, Villarruel, & Gold, 2006).

Over time participants embraced their roles, “got used to” their parent being gone, or accepted a “new normal.” Some were able to stay involved and to develop new rituals for connecting with their deported parent.

**Normalizing ambivalence.** Whether family members cried, withdrew, gave children advice about how to move forward, or behaved nonchalantly about the situation, it affected how children managed their feelings about their parent’s deportation. Getting different reactions from different people, such as positivity from one family member and realistic information from another, did not seem to help. Similar to other studies that found that families did not openly discuss the aftermath of the deportation with one another (Gonzales & Consoli, 2012), participants who did not share emotions with family members struggled to work through feelings of embarrassment or guilt and likely experienced more feelings of depression and anxiety. Avoidance, such as pushing away feelings, blocking things out of their mind, numbing themselves, and being in denial was helpful initially if it prevented them from being consumed by hopelessness, but not helpful when it lasted for too long.

Over time participants learned to tolerate ambiguity as well as their ambivalent or contradicting feelings about the situation. They were better able to manage the duality of their feelings or circumstances. Participants discussed contradictory feelings about visiting their parents (wanting to visit but not enjoying the quality of life) and about living in the country (feeling angry at the justice system but recognize that living in this country is better than living in their parent’s home country). They also learned to balance feelings of disappointment and loss with hope and appreciation. Many were able to “get” why their parents and families did what

they did and acknowledge the positive intent behind their actions even when the effect was negative.

**Discovering hope.** The amount of “false hope” that was given to children about parents being able to come back affected their ability to find new hope. Hoping for unrealistic outcomes seemed to keep participants in psychological limbo for longer, contribute to hopelessness, and hinder participants’ ability to discover new possibilities.

Religious beliefs have long been found as a positive way for Latinos to cope and reframe difficult situations and separations (Falicov, 2009). Many participants talked about tapping into their faith, finding motivation, and focusing on the future as ways of moving forward. Participants felt motivated to help their parents, to prove other people wrong, and to make a difference in other people’s lives. They grew to appreciate their circumstances, including the fact that it could have been worse. They appreciated the lessons that this experience taught them, and worked towards forgiving others and letting go of anger over what happened.

**Finding meaning.** All the above processes contributed to the participants finding meaning in their situation. They felt that it made them stronger, made them better prepared to handle future hardships, helped them see the silver lining in their situation, and made them more grateful for their current relationships. Some said it made them more compassionate, self-sufficient and responsible. They reported wanting to make a difference in other people’s lives. Many said that they would not take back what happened because it made them who they are today.

### **Contributions to the Literature**

While the findings are generally consistent with previous research on the consequences of deportation on families, this study contributes to our understanding of how children experience

the long-term absence of their parent after deportation and their perceptions of the experience as adults.

**Importance of sharing information.** Several studies on deportation have found that parents have lied or given inaccurate information to their children in an effort to protect them (Dreby, 2012; Lykes et al., 2013; Philbin & Ayon, 2016, Escobar, Falconier, Muruthi, in press). This form of protective shielding of children has been found in cross-cultural studies as more commonly practiced by Latino parents than non-Latino parents (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). Parents who gave inaccurate information were likely attempting to limit their children's exposure to negative information and emotional experiences related to the deportation. Withholding information might also be related to the hierarchical structure of Latino families and the strict boundaries between parental and children subsystems (Sue & Sue, 1990). The Latino cultural value of *respeto* preserves generational boundaries in the families by dictating how family members interact based on age and emphasizing child obedience and deference (Gonzales-Ramos, Zayas, & Cohen, 1998). Children are expected to be highly considerate of adults, should not interrupt or argue, and are not typically consulted on family decisions (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortez, 2010). Despite cultural explanations for misleading children about deportation, this study shows that from the child's perspective, misinformation created more confusion, anger, disappointment, and mistrust. It also shows that when children do not have answers or information, they make up stories to fill the gap. Participants in this study did not appreciate being falsely reassured that their parent would return, and said that it led to more disappointment as time went on. However, getting reassurance that their parent was safe or adjusting well in their new home country was relieving, even if it was untrue.

**Desire to share feelings.** Participants identified that having someone to talk through their emotions would probably have reduced their sense of embarrassment, made them feel more comfortable with what was happening, and prevented them from internalizing the situation. Although other studies have found that children internalize stigma, feel embarrassment, and are afraid to communicate about their parent's deportation with friends (Brabeck, Lykes & Hunter, 2014, Dreby, 2012, Gulbas, Zayas, Zoon, Szlyk, Aguilar-Gaxiola, & Natera, 2016), this is the first upon review to identify that just having someone to talk about it could have helped them work through their negative perceptions.

**Long-term loss due to parental deportation.** Another unique finding was how the loss manifested over time. Many participants experienced long-term loss that evolved and intensified a year or two after the initial deportation. They reported noticing their parents' physical absence more as they got older, especially during developmental shifts and moments when they needed their parent's guidance. Some participants reported reacting very little initially and then having intense reactions when they reached middle school or high school. This fits with literature on bereaved children, which has found that children process and re-experience loss differently as they reach new developmental stages (Eppler, 2008; Newman, 1999).

**Attachment.** The findings from this study suggest that parental deportation impacted participants' attachment styles as adults even when they were able to maintain a good relationship with their parent. As adults, participants reported feeling cautious about getting close to new people and not trusting that they would be dependable. They connected this fear with having been separated from their parent so suddenly and unexpectedly and not wanting to be unprepared a second time. This fits with and builds on Espinoza's (2015) dissertation findings on

the impact of parental deportation on adult relationships, which also revealed relationship insecurity and mistrust among her participants.

**Resiliency factors for children with deported parents.** This study extended literature about how positive perceptions can contribute to resiliency in adult children who had a parent deported. The only other study that explored positive perceptions was focused on mothers' experiences of having their partner deported (Escobar, Falconier, Muruthi, in press). This study found that having an optimistic orientation towards the future, believing in god, believing that things happen for a reason, and feeling that the experience made them stronger contributed to healthy adaptation (Escobar, Falconier, Muruthi, in press). In the current study participants identified shifting their perceptions from denial to acceptance, from viewing their situation as unfair to focusing on making a difference, from blame to understanding, and from loss to appreciation. They also identified channeling their pain into motivation, and feeling that the experience made them stronger.

### **Cultural Considerations**

Many of the findings in this study can be connected to the Latino cultural values of familismo, respeto, and spiritual faith. The value of familismo, which emphasizes loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity among family members (Falicov, 2005), seemed connected to resiliency when it was used to positively frame participant experiences. Familismo seemed to enable some participants to maintain a strong psychological connection to their deported parents, even when they were not in frequent contact. Participants shared a sense of family being family forever, and discussed their beliefs that the family bond was unbreakable. It helped other participants prioritize maintaining their relationships and close connection to their parent even when it was inconvenient or caused conflict with other family members. The role of familismo

was also evident when extended family members stepped in as surrogate parents for the children left behind, and when children stepped in to take care of their younger siblings.

Respeto is the expectation that children will show obedience and deference to adults, and partially explains why many participants did not talk about the family changes. Culturally, children are expected to accept parental authority without questioning it and to not express disagreement with adults (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010). Through this cultural lens, it would not be appropriate for children to question how their family was reorganizing after the parent's deportation, or how the adults were managing the changes. Those participants who felt that they could not ask questions likely reacted by withdrawing, while those who were bold enough to challenge their family members likely clashed due to their lack of obedience.

Research has found religious coping to be common among Latinos, and even more common among undocumented Latinos (Abraído-Lanza, Vásquez, & Echeverría, 2004; Sanchez, Dillon, Concha, & De La Rosa, 2015). Positive religious coping includes religious forgiveness, reframing of a stressful event to view it as an opportunity for growth and learning, and finding meaning in a negative situation through spiritual connection with a higher power (Hill and Pargament, 2008). Many of the participants exhibited these perceptual shifts by letting go of anger, reframing their experiences, and connecting to something larger than themselves, which was tied to them being able to discover hope, find meaning, and reach a level of acceptance (tempering mastery) for what had happened.

### **Clinical Implications through the Family Resiliency Model**

A family resiliency framework, developed by Froma Walsh (2016), offers a conceptual map to identify and target key processes in family functioning. These principles are used by Pauline Boss (2006) when suggesting therapeutic treatment for ambiguous loss and will be used

here to outline ways that protective factors can be strengthened for children who have had a parent deported. Included below are suggestions for working with children who have experienced the deportation of a parent and how remaining family members can support those children. There are also suggestions for working with adults who are still impacted by their parent's deportation in childhood.

***Belief systems.*** Belief systems that contribute to resiliency include making meaning of adversity, developing a positive outlook, and connecting with a larger purpose either through spirituality, social action, or growth (Walsh, 2016). The most important thing to help children with initially is to accept that their parent's deportation is outside of their control (tempering mastery), acknowledge the unfairness of the situation, and refocus their attention on tasks and goals that are in their control.

Clinicians can also normalize children's emotions of guilt, anger, fear, or loneliness around their experiences. Clinicians should target any constraining beliefs that contribute to shame, blame, and guilt, such as "I can't enjoy anything if my parent can't be here," "Sharing my emotions will make it worse," "It is unfair to express my emotions when my family is going through the same thing," "My parent is bad," and "Bad things don't happen to good people."

Participants in this study said that the process of sharing their story for this interview was "therapeutic," gave them "time to reflect" made them think of things that they had not thought of before, and resulted in them sharing thoughts and feelings that they had never shared with anyone. Therefore, narrative therapy might be a useful theory to use with children after a few years have passed, or with adults who are still impacted by having their parent deported. Other scholars have cited narrative therapy techniques as useful for families who have gone through ambiguous loss as a way of exploring alternate meanings around their experience (Betz &

Thorngren, 2006). It would be helpful to create space for them to share their full narrative about the experience, with an emphasis on learning, change, and positive growth. For teens and adults, clinicians can help them reflect on their transformation over time, connect to their spirituality, and get involved in social action to make a difference. Clinicians can set aside a longer session to gather a full narrative, including what their family was like before the deportation, what their relationship with like with the deported parent, how they found out about and made sense of the deportation initially, how their family and relationship with the deported parent changed, and what they have learned from the experience. If appropriate, it would be powerful for a parent, sibling, or multiple family members to be present to witness their story, and then to share their own versions of the same experience at other sessions. As Pauline Boss explained, “communal sharing of narratives helps people to find meaning” and the support garnered from that makes it easier to “overcome the reluctance to speak or express feelings” (Boss, 2006, p. 88).

***Organization processes.*** Children typically do not have control over most organizational processes in the family including how their family reorganizes, whether there is any continuity or predictability in their routines, or whether social and economic resources are mobilized. Clinicians can provide space for children to talk about the impact these changes have had on them, and the losses associated with how things used to be. They can also intervene by encouraging mutual support and connectedness among siblings and other family members.

It could also be helpful to pair children with an adult who has experienced parental deportation so that they feel connected with someone who understands what they are going through on a personal level and can also guide them in a positive direction. For adults, it would be helpful to form support groups or a one-time storytelling workshop for people to feel connected to a larger community and to feel less alone in this experience.

*Communication processes.* It is important when interacting with these children and families to “communicate empathy, not sympathy.” Conveying pity can reinforce victimized thinking and encourage helplessness (Boss, 2006, p 65). Clinicians should also help children express and work through their anger related to their parents’ deportation or how it was managed so that they do not act out in inappropriate ways.

It might be necessary to provide psychoeducation to parents about the negative effects of shielding their children by misleading them or providing inaccurate information. Clinicians can help family members understand that being upfront will preserve trust and reduce ambiguity so that children are better able to move forward. If the child is already angry about having been misled, clinicians can help parents react empathically and coach them on repairing the mistrust in the relationship. Apologizing and explaining the positive intentions behind withholding information will likely reduce blame, although it is important to do this in a way that is culturally sensitive. Clinicians can frame it in a way that emphasizes the preservation of family relationships as well as feelings of closeness and unity, and should navigate the conversations to allow parents to save face and maintain their authority.

Clinicians can also help parents feel less afraid of and more tolerant of their children’s emotions, by helping them understand that their children’s extreme reactions are normal given the situation. They can prepare parents to expect changes in their children’s reactions as they get older and help them plan for how to stay emotionally connected or seek additional help during those times. They can also prepare parents and children for difficult emotions that might reemerge during holidays and other special events.

**Limitations**

One of the limitations of the study is its small sample size. Although ten participants is an appropriate amount for an exploratory study, ideally participants would have been recruited until saturation was reached. There was also variation in which parent(s) were deported and how old participants were when it happened. Age could impact results on how participants initially perceived the deportation, as well as how their families communicated with them. Finally, the fact that two participants' parents returned might have impacted their perceptions and resiliency as adults. The broad inclusion criteria were selected partly due to difficulty recruiting participants. With the current political climate, it is possible that many eligible participants did not feel safe sharing this information. Participants were also only eligible if their parent was deported on or after 2001, causing many interested participants to be turned away. Finally, results might be biased towards people that are more comfortable and willing to share their story, although offering payment was an attempt to draw participants that might not normally want to participate.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Because this study was exploratory in nature, there was a wide range of experiences captured in this study. Several ideas that were touched on could be explored in more depth, such as how to buffer negative community experiences, how the current political climate is triggering feelings of loss in adults who experienced parental deportation as children, and what explanatory beliefs children have about why their parents did not keep in touch. It would also be helpful to explore how family members supported or interfered with children's relationships with their deported parent.

This study captured the experiences of participants who experienced childhood separation from a parent due to deportation and were currently between the ages of 19 and 31. Since the majority of participants were unmarried and did not have children, it may be interesting for future studies to capture how parental deportation impacts people once they become parents and enter later phases of their development. This study was also not able to tease apart how the gender of the parent impacted their experiences since there was a mixture of mothers and fathers. It would be helpful for future research to examine the impact of the gender of the deported parent on children's experiences. It might also be beneficial to interview sibling groups on their experiences, since the findings from this study suggest that experiences in the same family can vary based on their age and other factors. This study attempted to capture the long-term impacts of parental detention and deportation on children by interviewing a small group of young adults about their experiences. This cross-sectional view of the experience was a good starting point, since there is very little research in this area (Capps et al, 2015). However, a longitudinal research design would be more effective at capturing this experience over time.

### **Conclusion**

This study utilized Latino adult narratives to retrospectively explore their childhood experiences of family changes during and after parental deportation, their experiences growing up with a deported parent, and how they made sense of everything as adults. Participants talked about factors that eased their transition, such as clear communication about the deportation, positive reassurance, continued contact with their deported parent, and being able to rely on others. They also talked about factors that made the experience more difficult, such as being misled about the details, having negative experiences with the community, and experiencing a disruption in routines and rituals. Perceptual factors that got in the way of moving forward

included being in denial about the reality, feeling disappointed when their parent did not come back, and feeling anger, mistrust, or blame.

Several positive beliefs and perceptions emerged, including understanding why their family members behaved the way they did, accepting the reality of their situation, and having a greater appreciation for how things are. They also reported an increased motivation to succeed and a desire to make a difference. Nine participants reported that the experience made them stronger or helped them grow in some way. Overall, participants' experiences reflect resilience, although some participants reported having adverse experiences for several years before being able to adapt in more positive ways. While past studies have captured the impact of parental deportation on children, this study allowed adult children to narrate their story from a resiliency perspective.

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**APPENDIX A****Demographics**

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Religion
4. Highest level of education
5. What do you do for a living?
6. Who do you consider family?
7. Which of your parent was deported?
8. Nationality of deported parent
9. How old were you when your parent was deported?
10. How long was your parent detained before being deported?
11. How long was your parent in the country before he/she was deported?
12. Who did you live with after your parent was deported?
13. Did your parent come back to live in the U.S. after being deported? If yes, how long was the separation?
14. Did you go live with your parent in their home country after they were deported?
15. Have you lost anyone else to deportation? Who? How old were you?

**APPENDIX B****Interview Guide:**

- **1) How did you experience your parent's detention/deportation process?**
  - What do you remember about how your parent was deported?
    - How did you find out what happened?
    - What were you told about what happened?
    - What was your understanding of what happened?
      - Probe: thoughts/feelings
  - At the time, what meaning did you make out of what happened?
  - What were your expectations of what would happen next?
  - Who did you talk about your thoughts and reactions with?
  - How did family members talk about what happened?
    - Probe: Deported parent? Remaining parent? Siblings?
    - Probe: How did they talk about what happened with people outside of the family?
  - What did you think of other family members reactions?
  - How did the new affect how you interacted with other family members?
    - With people outside of your family?
  - What hopes, thoughts or beliefs influenced your initial reactions?
    - Probe – spirituality/religion?
  - What other factors affected your well being during this time?
  - What or who helped you the most through this initial period?

- **2) How did you experience your family after your parent was deported and over time?**
  - How would you describe your family before your parent was deported?
  - How did your family change after your family was deported?
  - How did your family reorganize after your parent was deported?
    - How did family member roles and responsibilities change?
    - How did the structure change?
      - Probe: rules, routines, holidays
  - How did your family talk about your parent once he/she was gone?
    - How did that change over time?
  - How did your family members coping or reactions influence you?
    - Probe: positively? Negatively?
  - Were there any changes in your relationships with remaining family members?
    - Probe: fights, distance, avoidance, tension
  - How did your family interact with the community after your parent was deported?
    - Probe: Police, school officials, hospitals, churches
  - How did you feel about living in this country after your parent was deported?
  - How did the changes influence how you behaved in other areas of your life?
    - Probe: School? With friends? Girlfriend, boyfriend
  - In hindsight, what do you wish people would have done to help you through these changes?
- **3) What was it like to grow up with a deported parent?**
  - What was your relationship like with the deported parent before separation?

- How did you adjust to the idea or reality that you would be separated from your parent?
- How did your relationship with the deported parent change over time?
  - How involved were they after they were deported?
  - How connected did you feel to your deported parent?
  - How did your communication change over time?
- At what points in time did the separation impact you the most?
  - Probe: Life transitions, holidays, birthdays, Mothers/Fathers Day
- How did your feelings about being separated shift over time?
- How did you talk about your deported family with people outside of your family?
  - Has that changed over time?
- What thoughts or beliefs influenced how you felt over time?
- How has your understanding of what happened change since you were a child?
- How has this experienced impacted decisions you have made throughout your life?
- What has this experience taught you?
- Closing
  - Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience?
  - What advice would you give to children who are going through this?
  - What advice would you give to families who are going through this?
  - What was this interview like for you?

## APPENDIX C

### Participant Narratives

**Victoria.** Victoria's father was deported to Peru when she was 13 years old. He told her he was moving to Peru in a goodbye, but bye forever, kind of way, but did not explain why, although her mother explained it to her a few weeks later. She already had an inconsistent relationship with him growing up because her parents were divorced and she did not live with him, but after he was deported she reported not talking to him for over 10 years. Her mother did not process her feelings with her, and Victoria isolated herself from her family due to other circumstances. She reconnected with him a few years ago after he got cancer, but she is cautious and does not feel understood by him.

**Laura.** Laura was nine years old when her mother was deported to Mexico, and she is now 19 years old. She reports having a close relationship with her mother, and visiting over the summers. Her family mobilized their resources and fought to get her mother back, and her aunt acted like a surrogate mother to her. Her family did not directly check in on her feelings but they kept her involved in what was happening and she knew that she could rely on them.

**Daniel.** Daniel never physically saw his mother again after she was deported when he was 14 years old. He is now 24, and she has since deceased. He corresponded occasionally through letters and spoke to her for the first time on the phone a year and a half later. No one ever fully explained what happened and he says he felt mistrustful and suspicious of his family's reaction. His father never treated his mother well and had multiple affairs, and to this day he still wonders what happened. He was separated from his two younger sisters afterward, who went to live with his grandparents, while he went to live with his aunt. He was more disconnected from his father afterwards as well, who stopped living with him as well and was not "emotionally present."

**Sofia.** Sofia was 11 years old when her mother was deported to Mexico and she is now 23 years old. Her mother was gone for over 11 years and is now back. Sofia became responsible for taking care of her younger brother and father afterwards, and says that her childhood ended early. She initially hid what was happening from others because she was embarrassed and did not want to be judged. She felt a lot of guilt and frustration, did not want to enjoy herself without her mother, and experienced repeated disappointment. She spent her summers with her mom and spoke with her regularly, and says that re-separating became more difficult as the years went on.

**David.** David was 16 years old when his father was deported to the Dominican Republic, and he is now 30 years old. He visited his father one last time in detention, who told him to be the man of the house and to take care of his mother and brother. He described an increase in conflict in his family after his father was deported, and said that it seemed like something died in his father after he was arrested. His father did not keep in touch with him very much, but he says that he understands and still thinks his father loves him.

**Felipe.** Felipe was 11 years old when his father was deported to Mexico, and he is now 21 years old. His father had escaped an immigration raid at work the year before he was deported, so they had been moving around for a year trying to evade ICE when officers picked him up in front of

his house. Felipe assumed responsibility for his younger sister, and his mother had to pick up an extra job in order to make up for the lost income. Felipe talked about feeling lonely and like he lost both of his parents at the same time. He reported feeling disconnected from his father during their four-year separation, and then reconnecting when his father came back.

**Tomas.** Tomas was 7 years old when both of his parents were deported to Cuba, and he is now 25 years old. He lived with his aging grandma afterwards, who told him that his parents were going to work for a few years and would be back and never really explained what happened. He heard from his parents for the first time a few years later when they sent him cards and money. He was angry when they reached out and he told them a few years later that he did not want a relationship. He lashed out in middle school and went through a period of anxiety and depression when he was in high school, but says that he was able to move forward after he accepted what happened.

**Emma.** Emma was sixteen years old when her father was deported to Mexico, and she is now 28. She did not find out about the deportation until a week later and felt excluded. She talked about how lucky she feels that she already had a solid foundation with her father when he was deported, but said she feels bad that her younger siblings did not get to have that. She talked to her dad every day on the phone and visited him often. She says that he went through a period of depression when he was first deported, and that she is glad that he hid it from her. She is now married and has a child and talks about how difficult it is to continue visiting him.

**Luis.** Luis was 9 years old when his mother was deported to Mexico, and he is now 19 years old. He felt suspicious when neither of his parents came home one night, and then only his father came back the following day. His father lied to him repeatedly about why his mother was gone, and he felt afraid and lost. He stopped eating, was diagnosed with PTSD, missed a lot of school, and was angry with his father for a long time. He leaned on his older brothers and a therapist. He heard from his mother for the first time a year later, found out the truth 6 months after that, and began speaking to her regularly through the phone, letters, and skype. He also visited three times.

**Samuel.** Samuel was 13 years old when both of his parents were deported to Columbia. He was with them at the airport when they were detained, and he was held and questioned for hours. He lived alone for the summer and then with his uncle afterwards. He kept in touch with his parents until he got to high school and began getting into trouble. He became addicted to drugs, cut his parents off, and was in and out of jail. Now he is in touch with his parents again, married and feels that he has turned his life around. He says he does not know where he would be without his uncle, who took him in. He is now married and about to have his first child.

**APPENDIX D****Participant Recruitment Email**

Hello,

My name is Katrina Taschman and I am master's student in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at Virginia Tech in Falls Church, VA. I am in the process of working on my thesis, entitled, *Growing Up After Parental Deportation: Adults Making Sense of their Childhood Experiences*.

The purpose of this study is to understand how adults who had a parent deported in childhood make sense of those experiences now. Questions will explore how people remember experiencing family changes during and after their parent's deportation, what it was like growing up with a deported parent, how they make meaning of those experiences now, and what they found helpful or unhelpful in retrospect.

I will be conducting individual interviews that will last between 1 and 2 hours.

Citizenship or immigration status is not relevant and will not be asked.

Participants must:

- 1) Identify as Latino
- 2) Be over 18
- 3) Speak English
- 4) Have experienced the deportation of a parent between the ages of 6 and 17
- 5) The deportation must have happened in or after 2001

This is a needed area of research that can provide families, advocates, and psychological community a better understanding of how to best support and intervene with children after a parent is deported.

Each participant will receive a \$50 gift card. I have attached a flyer for you to forward to potential participants. Thank you for your support!

Katrina Taschman  
Marriage and Family Therapy M.S. Candidate, 2018  
Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia Campus  
240-338-2058  
[katrina8@vt.edu](mailto:katrina8@vt.edu)

**APPENDIX E****Recruitment Flyer****LATINOS AFFECTED BY DEPORTATION: You are needed for a research study!**

**Did you have a parent deported when you were between the ages of 6 and 17?** This study seeks to understand how adults who had a parent deported in childhood make sense of those experiences now.

You are eligible if you:

- 1) Identify as Latino
  - 2) Are over 18
  - 3) Speak English
  - 4) Had a parent deported when you were between the ages of 6 and 17
  - 5) The deportation must have happened in or after 2001
- This is a needed area of research that can provide families, advocates, and the psychological community a better understanding of how to support children after a parent is deported.
  - Participation is voluntary and CONFIDENTIAL. Your participation will not affect the services that you receive from the agency that provided you this information.
  - My name is Katrina. I will interview you about your experiences for approximately 1-2 hours.

As a thank you, you will receive a \$50 gift card

If you are interested, please contact:  
Katrina Taschman  
Marriage and Family Therapy M.S. Candidate, 2018  
Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia Campus  
240-338-2058  
katrina8@vt.edu  
Thank you!

## APPENDIX F

### Research Informed Consent

#### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

**Title of Project:** Growing Up After Parental Deportation: Adults Making Sense of their Childhood Experiences

<b>Investigator(s):</b> Bertranna Muruthi	muruthba@vt.edu	703-538-8491
Katrina Taschman	katrina8@vt.edu	240-338-2058

**Overview.** When parental deportation occurs, children are forced to deal with the structural, economic, and emotional changes in their family in addition to the sudden absence of a parent. How remaining family members manage these changes influences how children are able to cope. This study seeks to understand how adults who had a parent deported in childhood make sense of those experiences now. Questions will explore how people remember experiencing family changes during and after their parent's deportation, what it was like growing up with a deported parent, how they make meaning of those experiences now, and what they found helpful or unhelpful in retrospect.

**Purpose of this Research Project.** This study aims to identify family and individual factors that might contribute to childhood resiliency after parental deportation. The results of this study will be used for presentation and publication purposes and will be presented in a way that will help establish appropriate interventions for children in similar circumstances. Results will also be used to fulfill the co-investigator's requirements for completion of a master's degree in MFT.

**I. Qualifications to participate in this study.** (1) Participants must identify as Latino; 2) Be over 18; 3) Have had a parent deported when they were between the ages of 6 and 17; 4) The deportation must have occurred in 2001 or after; 5) The participant must speak English.

**II. Procedures:** I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to participate in a one to two hour interview. Should I agree to participate, I will be asked to 1) Read over the consent form; 2) give written or verbal consent and; 3) participate in a one to two hour audio recorded interview.

**III. Discomforts, Risks, or Stressors.** I understand that being in this study may involve minimal risks. By recalling sensitive childhood memories, I may potentially become aware of difficult feelings and attitudes about my family history. I am aware that I can skip any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering. I am also aware that I may withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, if I need additional time to process distress related to my experience in the study, the investigator will be available to offer a referral for psychological counseling services.

**IV. Benefits.** You will not necessarily benefit directly from this research. You may indirectly

discover more about yourself and your current circumstances. For some, talking through experiences may create insight or reduce emotional discomfort. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

**V. Anonymity and Confidentiality.** All audio recorded information will be stored on a password protected computer, and will be permanently erased after completion of this study. All participants will be given a pseudonym, therefore the audio recordings and transcripts will not be able to be linked back to their name. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

**VI. Compensation.** If consent is given you will be given a \$50 gift card for your participation. To receive a gift card, you must participate in a one to two hour interview.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw.** It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

**VIII. Questions or Concerns.** Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991.

**IX. Subject's Consent.** I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject printed name

### **Investigator/ Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

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Researcher's printed name