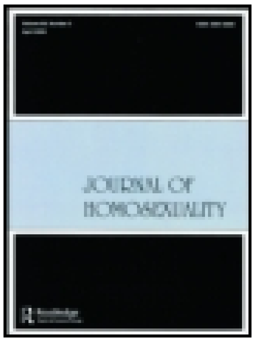

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Coming Out of the Shadows and the Closet: Visibility Schemas Among Undocuqueer Immigrants

Jesus Cisneros & Christian Bracho

Coming Out of the *Shadows* and the *Closet*: Visibility Schemas Among Undocuqueer Immigrants

Jesus Cisneros, PhD

University of Texas at El Paso

Christian Bracho, PhD

University of La Verne

Corresponding author:
Jesus Cisneros
jesuscisneros5@gmail.com
(813) 418-1220

Abstract

Centering the experiences of 31 undocuqueer immigrants, this study seeks to understand the ways that undocuqueer immigrants negotiate the boundaries of social performance by revealing or concealing their gender, sexuality, and immigration status. Findings of this study reveal how, in order to avoid the constant threat of rejection (both legal and social), undocuqueer immigrants engage visibility schemas and make strategic decisions about *coming out* of the *shadows* and the *closet* across different contexts. Undocuqueer immigrants' narratives reveal the ways the *closet* resembles the *shadows* in that both provide protection from the outside world, yet neither are considered suitable places for sustaining life. This study raises implications for both research and policy by considering how the intersection of gender, sexuality, and immigration status nullifies neoliberal narratives of *coming out* as an empowering process and illustrating the uneven landscapes of social acceptance and political control that undocuqueer immigrants must negotiate.

Keywords: undocuqueer, coming out, undocumented, queer, LGBT, immigrants, closet, shadows

Undocuqueer, as a discursive formation, highlights the vulnerabilities and ongoing criminalization of undocumented queer and trans bodies within the current sociopolitical context of the United States. After the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act failed in 2010, many immigrant youth began resisting the impulse to conform to the "good" immigrant (e.g., DREAMer) narrative of immigrant rights discourses by increasingly incorporating their gender and sexual identities into their public narratives. Queer and trans undocumented youth were key to introducing and promoting the speech tactic of *coming out* within the immigration context with new forms of protest like *Coming Out* of the *Shadows* strategies (Schwiertz, 2016; Seif, 2014; Unzueta Carrasco, & Seif, 2014). Articulated with the slogan "undocumented and unafraid, queer and unashamed," undocuqueer became a performative act by which undocumented queer and trans youth not only named their gender, sexuality, and immigration status, but also created a political subjectivity that resisted the feelings of fear and shame they had learned to associate with their gender, sexuality and immigration status.

Individuals create and practice political subjectivities in a society rife with anti-immigrant and anti-LGBT discourses. Negrón-Gonzales (2013), for example, argues that, "undocumented young people continually navigate their status as a result of growing up in a hostile political climate that they are simultaneously entrenched in and excluded from" (p. 1286). The metaphor of the *shadows* is generally used to describe the invisibility and criminalization of undocumented immigrants who live, work, study, or function within the margins of society (Chavez, 1998; Galindo, 2010). Amalgamations of federal immigration law and state and local immigration enforcement have worked together to construct the *shadows* (Strunk & Leitner, 2013; Villazor, 2013). The fear and threat of deportation ultimately leads undocumented youth to be hesitant and cautious about revealing their immigration status, pushing some to the *shadows* of society while others to *come out* and engage in political activism.

The social stigma around being undocumented echoes some of the sentiments described in studies about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals who strategically *come out* in some settings, but not others (Orne, 2011). At different points in history, federal and state laws have operated to construct the *closet* by forcing individuals to conceal their sexual and gender identities in order to avoid criminal prosecution, exclusion, and deportation (Foss, 1994; Villazor, 2013). The *closet* represents a confining figurative space that protects LGBT persons from the convergence of different vectors of discrimination and prejudice (Sedgwick, 1990). For some, *coming out* of the *closet* is a strategy of visibility that reflects self-acceptance and political action. For others, visibility politics are especially difficult, given intersecting working-class identities (Acosta, 2008, 2013; Cantú, 2009; Carrillo & Fontdevilla, 2014; Decena, 2008; Ocampo, 2012).

To date, however, little research has examined visibility schemas that take into account how being in the *shadows* and in the *closet* simultaneously may require queer and trans undocumented immigrants to engage in visibility strategies even more complex than those described in the previous literature. Undocuqueer immigrants carry the baggage of both metaphors with the added conditions of what it means to *come out* in an interlocking way (Chávez, 2013). The purpose of this study is to understand the ways that undocuqueer immigrants negotiate the boundaries of social performance by revealing or concealing their gender, sexuality, and immigration status. Because *coming out* has different consequences for people depending on their economic circumstances, becoming visible for undocuqueer immigrants is a challenging and risk-laden task. This study investigates how undocuqueer immigrants engage their social identities and negotiate visibility schemas in everyday life.

Epistemologies of the *Closet* and the *Shadows*

Despite the dangers involved in speaking out publicly, the speech tactic of *coming out* has been employed by undocuqueer immigrants as a means of building community, shedding stigma, and asserting their rights (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Terriquez, 2015). Undocuqueer immigrants *come out* of the *shadows* and the *closet* simultaneously to "break the code of silence" imposed by dominant culture (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014, p. 272). C*oming out* as undocuqueer challenges the concepts of social acceptability within LGBT and immigrant rights frameworks that rely on norms of cisgender heterosexuality and are built upon a discourse of exceptionalism and privatized notions of citizenship (Cisneros, 2017). *Coming out* promises safety via solidarity with other undocuqueer immigrants, while also invoking a sense of solidarity between LGBT and immigrant movements (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Seif, 2014). Yet, because undocuqueer is a public position made visible through interaction as well as through private subjectivity not always fully disclosed, it involves making choices to conceal or reveal and perform an identity that will subsequently change as a result of the next iteration or contextual encounter.

Prior literature casts light on the performative and interactive dimensions of *coming out* of the *closet*, with studies illustrating how individuals elect to conceal or reveal their LGBT identities based on contextual factors such as workplace attitudes, perceived risks, or social factors such as prejudice and discrimination (Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Adams, Cahill, & Ackerlind, 2005). Some researchers have posited heuristic models that conceptualize LGBT identity management as a spectrum of visibility. Griffin's (1992) study on LGBT educators, for example, describes the kinds of strategies teachers use to pass as straight, cover up their LGBT identities, or come out explicitly and implicitly. Ward and Winstanley (2005) similarly offer their own conceptual model for being visibly *out* in the workplace, notably drawing on Griffin's study to document how LGBT individuals negotiate language to "affirm identity" (p. 450).

Less research has examined the concept of *coming out* of the *shadows* among undocumented immigrants and the strategies used to negotiate the decision-making process (Corrunker, 2012; de la Torre & Germano, 2014; Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Gonzalez, 2011). Luibhéid (2008) argues international migration has transformed "every facet of our social, cultural, economic, and political lives in recent decades," particularly the "construction, regulation, and reworking of sexual identities, communities, politics, and cultures" (p. 169). Yet, queer migration studies need to continue to explore the "different kinds of boundaries that are crossed or that cannot be crossed, and by who" (Grewel & Kaplan, 2001, p. 674). For example, some scholars have explored how queer migrants negotiate *coming out* at home and in the workplace (Lewis & Mills, 2016), and find that "clear-cut, linear coming-out journeys" are unlikely to be found in the narratives of queer migrants from non-European backgrounds (Lewis, 2012, p. 214). Queer migration studies provide insight into the ways migrants weigh such issues as personal security or financial well-being against the costs of *coming out* as LGBT, but more research is needed regarding the experiences of undocumented immigrants, who must additionally negotiate *illegality* (De Genova, 2002, 2010). Muñoz (2016), for example, describes how the rationale to disclose immigration status is not only constructed based on how individuals are socialized to perceive their immigration status, but also informed by the institutionalization of anti-immigrant sentiment. Some scholars point to mobilizations in the 1990s and 2000s as examples of how migrants perform civic rights through social movements (New & Petronicolos, 1998; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007), and Weber-Shirk (2015) more recently examined how mobilized immigrant youth known as DREAMers challenge the authority of "liberal democratic citizenship" traditionally granted by the State. Schwiertz (2016) similarly describes undocumented immigrant youth mobilizations as a form of radical egalitarian citizenship, and argues that when youth decide to *come out* publicly as "undocumented and unafraid," they take on new subjectivities, aware of the potential risks associated with visibility. Other scholars describe concealing one's immigration status as a daily survival strategy or "undocumented intelligence," that is "the knowledge, skills, and intuition fostered by living as an undocumented person" (Chang, 2016, p. 2). Undocumented individuals thus manage disclosure through their understanding of contextual factors, social relationships, and potential risks.

The use of the term *coming out* among LGBT and undocumented populations challenges researchers to identify ways in which the term has become conceptually inflated, assuming a singular developmental trajectory for both populations. Orne (2011) challenges the ubiquitous and normative use of *coming out* in research that posits being *closeted* as a negative or regressed positionality. Redefining *coming out* as strategic outness, "the continual contextual management of sexual identity" (p. 682), Orne cautions scholars that positioning hiding and lying as "bad" and disclosure as "good" reproduces the "disclosure imperative" that further marginalizes individuals (p. 695). *Coming out* should not be researched as though it were practiced and regarded homogeneously across different communities (Zimman, 2009). *Coming out,* or not, reaps personal and societal benefits that need to be understood contextually, as social contexts play an influential role in how and when individuals decide to make their identities visible.

Few theorists have examined the ways that undocuqueer immigrants negotiate the intersections and boundaries of gender, sexuality, and immigration status within the context of *coming out* (Schwiertz, 2016; Seif, 2014; Terriquez, 2014). The joint pressures of being in the *closet* or in the *shadows* compel researchers to not only examine how and why undocuqueer immigrants decide to *come out* or not within different contexts, but also understand the social processes that influence these decisions. This study builds on the work of previous scholars by focusing on the *coming out* decisions employed by undocuqueer immigrants and uses personal narratives to make visible the particular intersections in which these individuals exist (Vidal-Ortiz, 2015; Waitt & Gorman-Murray, 2011).

Methodology

To explore undocuqueer immigrants' experiences, we began with a convenience sample of undocumented queer and trans immigrants who formed part of the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project (QUIP). QUIP is a program of United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth led network in the U.S. Launched in 2011, QUIP has been building bridges between the LGBTQ and immigrant communities by creating awareness of individuals' lived experiences at the intersection of two politically marginalized social movements. QUIP seeks to organize and empower queer and trans undocumented immigrants to raise consciousness about how criminalization and immigration enforcement have impacted queer and trans undocumented immigrants (United We Dream, 2017).

Participant referrals assisted in the recruitment of a total of 31 individuals who self-identified as undocuqueer, including two individuals who had recently resolved their immigration status. Participants resided in 10 different states, plus Washington D.C, and represented six different Latin American countries of origin. The majority of participants (29) were between the ages of 19-30. Cisgender men composed the majority (17) of the sample, followed by genderqueer participants (6), cisgender women (4), and transgender women (4).

Twenty-one participants were beneficiaries of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive order signed by President Obama that granted eligible undocumented immigrants temporary relief from deportations and two-year renewable work authorizations if they disclosed their undocumented status to the federal government (USCIS, 2014).

The data for this qualitative study was generated from in-depth, conversational, semi-structured narrative interviews. All interviews were conducted in person, via phone, or through Skype videoconference between November and December 2014. The interviews were designed to generate narratives that served as the sole method of inquiry. Interviews aimed to elicit descriptions of and narratives about participants' lives, experiences, and the meaning they ascribed to living at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and immigration status. Though we relied on a uniform interview protocol, participants retained the discretion to lead the direction of the interview and choose how and in what language to relay their narratives. Interviews ranged between 45 minutes and 3.5 hours.

Interview transcripts were imported into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, where initial codes were derived inductively from the data. During open coding, we read through each transcript, jotting down his initial sense making of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We placed conceptual phrases on responses that described events, experiences, and feelings reported in the interviews. After compiling the list of phrases, we read through each transcript again using the phrases previously identified to code for meta-themes across all interviews. Phrases not salient across multiple interviews were eliminated from our analysis. Our positionality as queer Latinos and first- and second-generation immigrants helped guide our interpretations of data.

Jesus Cisneros identifies as a naturalized citizen and cisgender queer Latino. He migrated from Mexico at the age of 6 and grew up in the Southwest border region of the U.S. He has been involved with QUIP as well as subsequent queer and trans Latinx organizations (e.g., Familia Trans/Queer Liberation) since 2012, where he has organized local communities and engaged in protests, marches, and acts of civil disobedience. Christian Bracho identifies as a U.S. citizen and cisgender gay Latino born to Mexican immigrant parents. He worked as a high school teacher for 10 years and has taught undergraduate and graduate level courses on immigration and education policy. He also serves on the executive board of the Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship, an organization dedicated to gay Latino studies.

We approached this study with awareness that our privileges, in terms of (cis)gender and citizenship, may represent significant blind spots in our ability to comprehend participants' experiences. For this reason, we employed member-checks and peer-debriefing strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of our interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Collaboration with participants via member-checks ensured that interview transcripts aligned with participants' narratives and meanings. During each interview, the lead researcher paraphrased and summarized participants' responses and inquired about the accuracy of interpretation. Participants were then provided the opportunity to clarify any misunderstanding or confirm the preliminary interpretation. A group of impartial critical scholars outside of our respective institutions served as peer debriefers. Peer debriefers reviewed segments of interview transcripts, challenged the interpretations of data, identified gaps in the analyses, and constructively responded to preliminary interpretations of the de-identified data. The feedback provided helped develop our final analysis.

Narrating the *Closet* and the *Shadows*

Interwoven throughout participants' narratives was the notion of simultaneously needing to navigate their social positioning. The meanings participants ascribed to their experiences guided the ways they interacted and worked within the intersection of gender, sexuality, and immigration status. Being undocuqueer required participants to evaluate their environments and determine appropriate means for interacting and working within them. As Tommy, a 24-year-old DACA recipient from California, stated, "it means being at the center of different identities, you trying to understand who you are, and other people perceiving you as a certain thing. I think it becomes a constant trying to navigate between those things…." For this reason, participants described negotiating different visibility schemas amidst popular anti-LGBT and anti-immigrant discourses. Visibility referred to participants' level of *outness* regarding their gender identity, sexuality, and immigration status within different spaces.

Mario, a 28-year-old DACA recipient from Florida, for example, highlighted the dilemma most participants attributed to simultaneously living in the *shadows* as undocumented and in the *closet* as queer and trans.

> I was coming to terms with my identity within a relationship, but also having to hide that component of my life was another *shadow* that I was living in because I was hiding it in a way from my family, and in a way from society, and I was hiding away with my family from society as being undocumented. So it was living in both the *closet* and the *shadow*. That's how I grew up my whole life.

At home, family represented one of the biggest obstructions to *coming out* as queer, while in society it was the prospect of rejection, discrimination, detention, and deportation that kept participants from *coming out* as undocumented. The risks associated with disclosure—of *coming* *out* of either the *closet* or the *shadows*—compelled Mario to keep parts of his identity invisible. As he shared,

> So from a very early age, I knew I was different, I knew I was undocumented, but I did not know what that word meant. I also knew that I had to hide pieces of myself—my identity—because people could use it against me or my family, and it would hurt them.

For several participants, the first messages regarding their immigration status came from families as a warning about the dangers of disclosing their immigration status. These messages and the degree of fear they conjured impacted participants' decision to engage (in)visibility schemas. Being visible in certain spaces while not in others represented a survival mechanism and protective strategy. Participants discussed not sharing personal information or aspects of their undocuqueer identities in an effort to protect themselves and their families. Muñoz (2015) characterizes this as (en)forced concealment, whereby undocumented youth feel compelled to hide their status to protect themselves and their loved ones from social targeting, rejection, and deportation.

Other participants similarly described how both the larger sociopolitical context and their unique family circumstances played a role in their decision to be visible or not. As Joe, a 22-year-old DACA recipient from Nevada, shared:

> I think for me, *coming out* as LGBT, I wasn't necessarily scared of my life or like scared of being deported, right? I was scared of my family not accepting me, which is a big issue—a reality for a lot of people. But I think I was more scared of like what could happen if people thought that I was undocumented.

Immigration enforcement strategies at the local, state, and federal level reproduced the possibility and threat of deportation via police apprehensions, raids, and arrest. Participants' vulnerability to the nation-state, as constructed by anti-immigrant laws, pushed them into the *shadows* as a protective strategy. As Joe shared, for him there was a heightened risk of vulnerability in *coming out* as undocumented than there was in *coming out* as queer.

Conversely, other participants talked about the ways *coming out* as queer and trans implicated their immigration status and opportunities for interacting and working within their limitations. As Maria, a 23-year-old DACA recipient from Florida, described:

> I feel like there was definitely some hesitancy in *coming out* at one point in my life because I didn't want to cancel out my opportunities to getting a green card through marriage, which is fucked up, but that's a real thing, you know? You know, if you are openly out there and then you have a friend that comes along and wants to help you out, it's like, well what are you going to do now? Immigration is going to look up your background and see that you are queer. And yeah, they'll go on Facebook and see all my *jota* pictures. So that was a real thing because I was like, I want a green card. So that was a very real thing.

The possibility to resolve their immigration status through marriage kept participants, like Maria, in the *closet* due to the inaccessibility of and stigma towards same-sex marriage across states prior to (and even after) marriage equality. Maria's fear that her social media visibility could tag her as a *jota* illustrates an awareness that her relative *outness* could be used by immigration officials against her. *Coming out* of the *closet*, hence, potentially eliminated participants' ability to *come out* of the *shadows* and benefit from structures that provided possibilities for immigration relief.

Negotiating the risks and benefits of *coming out* of the *closet* and the *shadows* became reminiscent of what it meant to be undocuqueer. Throughout their narratives, participants described situations in which it was habitual to negotiate visibility schemas in order to navigate their precarious social positioning. Fears about deportation, discrimination, and family acceptance influenced their lived experiences and impacted how and when they disclosed their gender, sexuality, and immigration status. Nowhere was this negotiation more apparent than in familial and employment contexts. The following sections describe these contexts in further detail.

"Because I Depended on My Family"

Navigating the liminal space of being *out,* but simultaneously not being *out*, became essential for retaining familial support. Prior to the passage of DACA, participants viewed themselves as more dependent of their familial networks. Given their inability to obtain or sustain continuous employment as a result of their undocumented status, several participants described the sense of interdependence they shared with their families as one of their major impediments to *coming out* as queer and trans. Felix, a 28-year-old DACA recipient from Florida, for example, described the ways in which being queer and undocumented influenced his decision to remain in the *closet* for a large portion of his adolescent life.

> I mean, that's the stuff about being at the intersection of two identities, right? I thought, well, if I get kicked out, I don't have an ID, I'm going to end up in a homeless shelter, they are going to reject me and I'm going to end up in the street. What am I going to do? That is really what I was thinking about. And, you know, I felt like really hopeless because I couldn't get a job. I kept looking for jobs and it was really hard to get jobs. You know people didn't want to give me jobs because I didn't have papers. So, you know, I just felt like, well, I think this is not…I don't know, it just felt like I can't, I just can't do this. And I was really afraid.

Family often provides an initial source of emotional and economic support that individuals rely on for economic survival and other resources (Adams, Cahill, & Ackerlind, 2005). Fear of family rejection, in addition to his material limitations as an undocumented immigrant, hence, influenced Felix' decision to remain in the *closet* in order to not risk jeopardizing that support. Immigration law and policy have created and unevenly enforced *illegality* (De Genova, 2002, 2010) by restricting access to identification documents which are often required for the purpose of procuring state public resources, including homeless shelters.

The decision to remain in the *closet* constituted a survival tactic that participants referenced in response to the limitations they experienced as undocumented immigrants. Without identification documents or the authorization to work legally, participants relied more heavily on familial support.

> It was the way my undocumented status…that I didn't have the tools to protect myself, because I depended on my family. And then I thought if they turned their backs on me, then I'm fucked. As a queer person if I *came out* to them they would turn their backs on me, but as an undocumented person I didn't have the tools to protect myself because I couldn't get a job, I can't get a license, you know I was just trapped.

Felix stressed the sense of interdependence within his family unit and how that posed a barrier to his ability to *come out* as queer. *Coming out* involved assessing the risks constantly and weighing them against the benefits. Participants recognized that their gender, sexuality, and immigration status combined could severely limit the tools and resources at their disposal.

Xavier, a 20-year-old DACA recipient from Arizona, similarly described interacting within the liminal state of being in and out of the *closet*. Given the prospect of family rejection and his ineligibility for public social services as a result of his undocumented status, he described his ambivalence *coming out* as queer.

> This really just goes back to the fundamentals of you *coming out*. Like I said, you are not accepted. Second choice would be a homeless shelter. And because you're not eligible for a homeless shelter, what's your third option? Me being hopefully at a friend's house or some very generous person's. After that, do you have a choice? These are the implications for *coming out* as undocumented and gay… But after that, really, you see a lot of prostitution. A lot of incarcerations, prison, death. To survive, or not to.

For Xavier, the prospect of family rejection implicated homelessness, in addition to other conditions common amongst similarly situated individuals in his community: sex trade, incarceration, and suicide. Not qualifying for public services as a result of his immigration status, he decided to remain in the *closet* in order to manage the uncertainty regarding the availability of familial support.

> Every other facet of my life I am *out*, even at work, except my family. I even have a Facebook that I don't use. I have a Fakebook. So this is the one where I have six friends, and they are all my family members. You would think it's smart, but it's very draining. It makes every other thing very apparent. The fact that you are *closeted*, it's like I can say this here, but not there.

Parents' enforcement of heterosexuality and the fear of losing familial support often forced participants to maintain their social and family lives separate and their gender and sexual identities tacit—often known and even visible, but not verbally disclosed within familial networks (Acosta, 2010, 2011; Decena, 2008). Being in the *closet* or maintaining a "Fakebook" allowed participants to navigate their gender and sexual identities more carefully until they were able to fully confront the potential consequences of *coming out*. As Susana, a 25-year-old DACA recipient from Arizona, similarly shared:

> Pues el no ser abierta con mis padres. Decirles, ósea, que ellos lo sepan ya por completo que yo soy bisexual. Si a la vez me da mucho... tener que ser una persona con ciertas personas, al no serlo en mi casa…A veces pienso que algún día de estos exploto y le digo a mi familia, pero ando viendo una forma correcta para decirles a ellos para que ya no me afecte tanto...porque a veces siento que soy dos personas en una sola. Que en una soy yo misma, y en otra no lo soy, y quisiera seguir siendo yo misma en ambos lados para ya no estar escondida en un solo lugar.
>
> *Well, by not being open with my parents. Telling them, like, so they know that I am bisexual once and for all. It weighs heavily on me to have to be one person with certain people, not being that at home…Sometimes I think that one of these days I will explode and just tell my family, but I'm trying to figure out the correct way to tell them so that it does not affect me too much… because sometimes I feel that I am two people in one body. In one I am myself, and in the other I am not, and I would like to continue being myself but in both places so that I don't have to hide in any one place.*

Family networks can serve as a much needed source of protection and acceptance for undocumented immigrants. Navigating the *closet* within the sphere of home, hence, bifurcated Susana's social identity as an undocuqueer woman. She described the stress of having to be two different people at once as draining, but necessary for upholding gendered, familial expectations that allowed her to retain support. Silence and invisibility served as a preservation strategy and an illusionary shield from family rejection.

Participants' desire to be *out* indicated a wish to integrate their different selves while maintaining certain networks intact and not threatening established social relations. The uncertainties associated with being out of the *closet* to family members compelled participants to negotiate visibility carefully, such as managing social media presence, in an effort to keep up appearances and avoid potential conflicts. Participants were particularly focused on the vulnerabilities associated with being in the *shadows*—such as being dependent on family for material support and the potential risks of losing such support—leading them to strategically remain in the *closet.*

"No Cualquiera le da Trabajo a Personas Como Nosotras"

"Not Everyone Gives Work to People Like Us"

The passage of DACA in 2012 significantly alleviated some of the pressures participants' felt living in the *shadows*. Participants shared how the protections afforded by DACA enabled them to not have to negotiate between safety and speaking out against their marginalization, criminalization, and persecution as undocumented immigrants. DACA facilitated participants' ability to *come out* of the *shadows,* given the opportunity to obtain a work permit and reprieve from deportation. However, DACA represented a privilege that not all participants had the opportunity to benefit from. Due to strict eligibility requirements that mainly benefited cisgender heterosexual immigrants, DACA was not responsive to the criminalization of poverty, sex trade, and homelessness often experienced by queer and trans immigrants. The lack of protection from deportation served to make some participants even more vulnerable by reclassifying them as priorities for deportation.

Work settings, in particular, engendered a specific kind of vulnerability given the criminalization of undocumented labor and the lack of protections afforded to queer and trans identities across states. As Bianca, a 24-year-old transgender immigrant from New York, stated:

> Aparte de que somos parte de la comunidad LGBT, somos Latinas, somos personas que no hablamos el Inglés. Cuando conseguimos un trabajo, no nos pagan bien, y no nos dan trabajo por no tener documentos, como también en veces por ser transgenero en la comunidad LGBT. Y no, no lo dan. Asi que somos las personas que mas sufrimos, no? Sabemos que son temas que afectan a la comunidad indocumentada, pero si eres una persona LGBT, te va afectar el doble.
>
> *Apart from being part of the LGBT community, we are Latinas, we are people that do not speak English. When we find work, they don't pay us well, and they don't give us work for not having papers, and sometimes even for being transgender within the LGBT community. They just don't. So we are the ones that suffer the most, no? We know these are issues that affect the undocumented community, but if you identify as LGBT, it is going to affect you twice as much.*

Bianca described the workplace as being affected by multiple layers of oppression. Her immigration status prevented her from being able to secure lawful employment, as she was not a DACA recipient. Her perceived non-conformance to cisgender heterosexual standards, similarly, made her increasingly susceptible to employment discrimination. These experiences imposed challenges on participants' ability to sustain their living.

Josefina, a 41-year-old transgender immigrant from New York, similarly described her experience losing a job after being *outed* as transgender.

> Entonces me botaron del restaurante por el hecho que un compañero me tocó jugando, y me toco los senos, y pues fue y se lo contó al dueño. Y el dueño en ese momento, pues a los dos días, hablo conmigo, que tomara un mes de descanso y que él me llamaría para que yo regresara al mes a seguir trabajando. Ya después de ese mes, no me llamaron. Y

> después llegué a saber que me habían despedido solamente por el hecho de mi identidad de género.
>
> *So they fired me from the restaurant for the fact that a colleague touched me playing around, and he touched my breasts, and well, he then went and told the owner. And the owner at that point, within two days, called me in and asked me to take a month-long break and that he would call me back in a month so I could continue working. After a month, nobody called me. And later I came to find out that I had been fired solely because of my gender identity.*

As a result of this experience, Josefina described learning to conceal her trans identity in order to mitigate the risks of being denied employment.

> Ósea, yo sabía que yo era una mujer indocumentada, pero también yo tenía que ocultar mi identidad en medio de mis trabajos por no decir que yo era una mujer transgenero porque pues no cualquiera le da trabajo a personas como nosotras.
>
> *Like, I knew that I was an undocumented woman, but I also had to hide my identity within my jobs and not say that I was a transgender woman because not everyone gives work to people like us.*

Josefina described the vulnerability of being *out* in the workplace and how that experience was compounded by her vulnerability as an undocumented immigrant. Given the difficulties in finding employment as an undocumented immigrant, Josefina described concealing her transgender identity in order to mitigate the additional risks of employment discrimination imposed by her perceived gender and sexual identities.

However, this experience was not unique to participants without DACA. Even participants who benefitted from DACA described the vulnerability invoked by the intersection of their identities. Santos, a 30-year-old DACA recipient from Arizona, for example, shared the hesitancy he felt disclosing facets of his undocuqueer identity within the workplace.

> Now that I have DACA, if I were to get a job at a company, I have to be very careful whether I am *out* at my workplace or not because of the fear that it may have a negative impact for being *out* in my workplace.

For Santos, DACA provided the authorization to work legally in the U.S. Having this privilege, however, he mentioned having to negotiate the visibility of his gender, sexuality, and immigration status in order to maximize his job opportunities. Work authorization and protection from deportation, after all, did not alleviate the risks of employment discrimination imposed by the animus against LGBT and undocumented immigrants embodied by U.S. culture and law.

Xavier shared a similar sentiment:

> So you have to think about it, and then the choices, maybe big choices. Oh, I am going to work undocumented. I'm gay. I'm at work. Okay, I'm just going to keep quiet. That's my first choice. Then I made the choice to talk to a girl about boys. Second choice. You have to think about it because there's so much more at stake than just like an income. This is my income. This is my livelihood. This is the money that I'm using towards my goal of going to school. This is towards a car. Maybe I will get a car, but I don't have a license. What if I work this hard for a car and then it's taken away from me? I just wasted months of saving up to have my car taken away from me. But I work here in Arizona, you can get fired for being gay!

For Xavier, despite the protections afforded by DACA, being *out* in the workplace posed a threat to his livelihood. The stigma against queer and trans people compounded by the lack of state and federal protections made him particularly vulnerable to employment discrimination. Such vulnerability made him hyperconscious of the ways his gender and sexuality implicated the temporary opportunities afforded by DACA, like being able to work and having a reliable source of income.

While in the familial context, participants were concerned with the social and material implications of *coming out*, *staying in* the *closet* at work is often a practical necessity to avoid targeting and discrimination. Undocuqueer immigrants recognized that although DACA and other laws might provide some protections, implementation was inconsistent and unpredictable, thus making participants susceptible to the prejudices of co-workers and supervisors. The stakes of losing a job, given their sociopolitical and economic vulnerabilities, compelled participants to pragmatically restrain their visibility to the extent possible.

Discussion

Our findings stress the spatially contingent and variegated dimensions of disclosure that undocuqueer immigrants strategically manage as they navigate *coming out* as LGBT and undocumented. Gender, sexuality, and immigration status have become normative components of human identity (constructed in binary terms) with little room for variance or difference. The discursive regulation of gender and sexuality has posited queer and trans as deviant categories and produced silences where individuals maintain secrecy around their gender identity and sexuality. Being in the *closet* is a performance often initiated by the speech act of silence, with individuals concealing their gender and sexual identity in order to avoid conflict or exposure that can jeopardize the availability of support and personal safety. In similar ways, having to keep one's undocumented status in the *shadows* also requires secrecy, silences, and negotiating the risks of public visibility. Undocumented immigrants are relegated to the margins of society and form part of a permanent underclass without legal protections or often the opportunity to become incorporated. The findings of our study reveal the ways the *closet* resembles the *shadows* in that both provide protection from the outside world, yet neither are considered suitable places for sustaining life. Such discordance is further complicated at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and immigration status, as undocuqueer immigrants must navigate the simultaneous pressures of the *closet* and the *shadows.*

Coming out as undocuqueer heightens the constant threat of rejection (both legal and social) by amplifying the exposure to homo/transphobia and xenophobia (De Genova, 2002; White, 2014). For this reason, undocuqueer immigrants engage visibility schemas and make strategic choices to reveal or conceal their identities across different contexts, including family and work. Exclusionary and restrictionist policies across states perpetuate the stigmatization of queer and trans undocumented identities and push undocuqueer immigrants into the *closet* and into the *shadows*. Given the social and legal repercussions of public visibility around each identity, participants described a heightened level of sensitivity for disclosing their social locations. Being *out* in certain spaces, while *closeted* or in the *shadows* in others, represented a survival tactic and a common experience amongst participants. Xavier, for example, described exercising exceptional caution and self-control navigating the *outness* of his social identities at home and in the workplace, given the potential of rejection, discrimination, detention, and deportation. In this sense, to be visible as undocuqueer, individuals often have to manage multiple *coming outs* and constantly assess the risks and vulnerabilities that come with identification.

Participants' narratives highlighted how visibility schemas were often ensued for safety and self-protection, as well as for the purpose of interacting and working within the intersection of gender, sexuality, and immigration status. The contradiction between participants' physical and social presence as undocumented, in addition to the many covert inequalities and biases based on gender and sexuality, made the process of *coming out* particularly difficult. The prospect of family rejection and their susceptibility to discrimination, detention, and deportation kept several participants in the *closet* and in the *shadows* for a large portion of their adolescent lives. The process of *coming out* as undocuqueer, hence, required a constant repositioning of the self to adjust to potentially vulnerable situations.

Decena (2008) and Acosta (2010, 2011) point to the roles immigration status and economic interdependence play in individuals' negotiation of *coming out*. Valentine, Skelton, and Butler (2003) make similar claims, arguing that the emotional and financial support families offer can hinder individuals' ability to *come out*. In line with the results of previous studies, participants in this study described the ways gender, sexuality, and immigration status simultaneously impact the decision to *come out* across different settings and how family interdependence represents a significant barrier to *coming out* of the *shadows* and the *closet*. DACA recipients, for example, are often the only ones in their family with work authorization (Gurrola, Ayón, & Moya Salas, 2013). In the interest of procuring safety, resources, or potential integration via mechanisms such as DACA, undocuqueer immigrants employ strategic *outness*. The social and political climate require them to be pragmatic about *coming out*, not because they have not fully evolved into some sort of integrated self, but because their vulnerability requires them to consider contextual and relational factors. Hence, rather than cast participants as individuals who are fragmented or experiencing identity crises, this study reveals the ways undocuqueer immigrants make sense of visibility as a strategic choice to maintain familial ties, economic security, and political viability.

Implications for Research

This article has built on Orne's (2011) study by examining the strategic *outness* of undocuqueer immigrants and responding to Zimman's (2009) call for the study of heterogeneity in *coming out* processes. The vast majority of *coming out* literature has focused on the narrower experiences of LGBT individuals grappling with their public visibility at home or work, but has not examined the important intersections within gender, sexuality, and immigration status. More research is needed to dismantle the normative assumptions around *coming out* as a developmental process or as an essential component of becoming integrated, particularly as it relates to individuals both in the *shadows* and in the *closet*. For example, disclosure of their gender, sexuality, and immigration status was not always the primary end goal for participants; rather, their decisions to *come out* or not were contextualized by the realities of their sociopolitical contexts and unique family circumstances. For this reason, and given the rightward and nativist turn in American politics as a result of the recent presidential election, it is incumbent upon researchers to continue to document how individuals grapple with the dangers of being publicly *out* as undocumented, queer, and trans.

Future studies should further examine the complex ways individuals negotiate their identities and deploy various visibility schemas across multiple spaces and networks. For example, some participants in this study alluded to the management of their public personas in social media environments and articulated fears that immigration officials might use data from these profiles to expose or disfranchise them. Recent instances of individuals having their phones checked by airport personnel or border agents, and being asked to log on to social media sites or apps, suggest that how people engage online is increasingly becoming a proxy for determining their legal status, political orientations, or sexual proclivities (Lee, 2017; McFadden, Cauchi, Arkin, & Monahan, 2017). As the national security state dramatically expands and asserts itself in all corners of social life, the visibility schemas deployed by individuals to protect their safety must be an integral part of research agendas. For example, researchers might ask how the increase in violence (both physical and symbolic) against undocuqueer immigrants compels individuals to further conceal their identities or assert them as a form of political activism and resistance.

Implications for Policy

The rescission of DACA in 2017 has resulted in uncertainty for beneficiaries, with many fearing that the disclosure of their status has placed them and their families at risk of deportation. The decision to rescind DACA reveals how compelling immigrants to reveal their undocumented status to authorities for the purpose of obtaining temporary relief increasingly exposes applicants to the threat of rejection, detention, and deportation. Immigration enforcement at the local, state, and federal level poses a significant threat to undocuqueer immigrants who already face disproportionate policing and fear as a result of their gender, sexuality, and immigration status (Chávez, 2011; Gruberg, 2017). Though DACA temporarily reduced some of the challenges undocumented immigrants must overcome to achieve economic and social incorporation (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014), undocuqueer immigrants generally still face challenges with regard to family acceptance and employment discrimination. No-longer exempting classes or categories of undocumented immigrants from potential enforcement (White House, 2017), the vulnerability of queer and trans identities within the current sociopolitical context will increasingly limit the extent to which undocuqueer immigrants can be incorporated, as incorporation is contingent upon cisgender heteronormativity and citizenship.

As the political climate changes, it will be important to study the ways that policy decisions impact undocuqueer immigrants' decisions to *come out*, or not. The current absence of permanent federal protections for undocumented queer and trans immigrants renders undocuqueer immigrants vulnerable to both structural and disciplinary domains of power that push individuals further into the *shadows* and into the *closet* (Collins, 2000). Without challenging the contexts and environments that disproportionately impact undocuqueer immigrants' experiences, the acquisition of any form of relief is thereby more likely to result for individuals who already benefit from structural privileges (Chávez, 2010). Because visibility schemas are the product of uneven social and political landscapes, it will be important to remain conscious of the ways that gender, sexuality, and immigration status mediate the heterogeneity of *coming out* as a non-linear transition.

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