

Realities of Immigration: Heterogeneous Status Families in South Bend

What is Heterogeneous Status?

It is estimated that roughly 12 million undocumented migrants currently live in the United States. Although immigrants come to the United States from all over the globe, this research brief will focus on the heterogeneous status of Latin American immigrants in the US. Heterogeneous status refers to the reality of varied documentation statuses of individuals within the same families living in the United States.



In this single family, there are migrants, documented migrants, and citizens living in the United States. This brief will address the public opinions concerning heterogeneous status, while hoping to contribute to the public discourse.

Public Discourse Concerning Immigration

Discourse is important because the general public bases most of its opinions concerning immigration and those that immigrate on the public discourse made available by the media.

In this brief, we define ‘discourse’ as language, written and spoken, images and symbols. It is important to note that those with access to certain resources present discourse to the public, and more often than not, their opinions are represented, while many others are ignored. Thus, common discourse can be dominated by one opinion, creating a hegemonic discourse in which one set of opinions defines public opinion.



Discourse on Mexican Immigration

The hegemonic discourse concerning immigration is dominated by the systems of values, morality, attitudes, and other beliefs of the few. The few are the power elite. The power elite consists of the corporate elite, bureaucracies, and politicians who come together to advance mutual interests. The power elite have influenced the public opinion concerning immigration by imposing their system of beliefs, values and opinions. In doing so, they have created the immigration industrial complex - the use of “anti-illegal” rhetoric, by the combined efforts of elite members of the public and private sectors, in order to criminalize undocumented migrants and increase anti-immigration law enforcement policies.

Two goals motivated the creation and utilization of the immigration industrial complex. The first goal the power elite wish to accomplish with the use of the immigration industrial complex is to shape the public interest concerning immigration so that it reflects their opinion. If the majority of the public aligns their ideology with the power elite, then they can achieve their second goal with greater ease. The second goal the power elite wish to accomplish with the use of the immigration industrial complex is to affect immigration policy so that it serves their interest. A general public with opinions concerning immigration similar to the power elite increases the likelihood that immigration policy that fits their interests will become law.

A severe problem created by the application of the immigrant industrial complex is the negative impact it has upon the Latino community. In creating anti-immigration policy opinions, the immigrant industrial complex also creates an anti-immigrant disposition, which leads to widespread prejudice toward Latinos. The anti-immigration rhetoric of the Immigration Industrial Complex has created moral panics, which further undermines Latinos and Latino immigrants by designating them as an under-class in the United States.

The Immigration Industrial Complex is successful because it uses the processes of “social specialization” and “illegalization.” Social specialization is the process by which members of a society learn to think spatially in terms of national identity. This process indirectly adds to the concept of nationality, in the sense that territory is directly tied to nationality. Therefore, social specialization solidifies the individual concept of nationality, but it can have the negative effect of creating intolerance towards others who do not fit the conceived mold of the national identity.

In conjunction with social specialization, illegalization also has a negative effect towards the public opinion concerning immigrants. Illegalization is a process that causes a person to conclude that immigrants, regardless their legal status, are: lawbreakers, violators of a national territory, and threats to the overall national social fabric of the country. Essentially, illegalization dehumanizes the immigrant. Both of these processes lead to an anti-immigrant sentiment. The use of the Immigration Industrial Complex has led to a significant portion of the public to support anti-immigration policy.

The Realities of Adolescents

In addition to creating a negative public opinion toward immigration, public discourse has neglected realities of immigration. It is estimated that of the 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, 2.1 million have lived in the US since childhood. Known as the “1.5 generation,” these Latinos have only known life in America, making them more American than immigrant.

The “1.5 generation” is characterized by a division in which one group is the “college goer” and the other is the “early exiter”. Before distinguishing between the two groups, first let us examine what Sociologist, Robert Gonzalez calls the “protected” and “unprotected” stages of life. In the United States, K-12th grade public education is a right of all minors because this is the “protected” stage in one’s life, in which immigration status does not impede access to education. Plyer vs Doe 1982 and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act have made this legal policy.



The right to education is protected because an educational environment allows students to form an identity and develop friendship patterns, aspirations, and expectations. Education also benefits the state because it allows a student to develop a role in society. For the “1.5 generation,” as students get older, their documentation status begins to have more influence upon their lives and this is when the division occurs because discovering documentation status “depresses aspirations and sensitizes students to the reality that they are barred from integrating legally, educationally, and economically into U.S. society.” A student either becomes an early exiter,” or a “college goer”

“College Goers”

“College goers” continue to pursue education because they see it as a logical extension of the protected stage experienced earlier in their life. Although they cannot attend all state institutions or receive federal aid, some manage to attain a higher education. While other “college goers” have to prematurely end their education because they can no longer support themselves financially.



“Early Exiters”

“Early exiters” take the opposite route of the “college goers.” Unfortunately, “early exiters form a larger percentage of the “1.5 generation” than the “college goers” do. As you may have deduced, “Early exiters” do not pursue higher education. Instead, this group enters the work force upon graduation. It is not seen as uncommon for early exiters to drop out of high school and enter the work force sooner. A reason for early entrance into the work force may be their legal status and the obstacle it poses for higher education. This means that many of the “1.5 generation” never transcend their original class. Immigration reform that addresses this educational problem could change this reality for the better.



“Learning to Be Illegal”



A member of the “1.5 generation” goes through three socialization stages: *Discovery* (ages 16-18), *Learning to be illegal* (ages 18-24), and *Coping* (ages 25-29). *Discovery* refers to the time when an adolescent learns of their undocumented status. The second stage, *learning to be illegal*, refers to the time when the adolescent becomes aware of all the opportunities denied to them because of their documentation status. *Coping*, the third stage, refers to how individuals deal with the reality of being undocumented.

The two groups, “college goers” and “early exiters,” are two different methods of *coping*. Both methods find a way to deal with the obstacles documentation presents.

The Realities of Undocumented Parents

The push factor for Latin Americans to migrate to the United States is economic oppression. Upon arrival in the United States, immigrants look for ways to achieve upward socio-economic mobility. Many immigrants attempt to achieve this by joining the service sector of the work force, usually taking jobs in service and manual labor.

The current militarization of the border and the increased risk to cross, have made the phenomenon of family immigration more common, because the increased danger of immigration does not remove the push factor of economic oppression and families wish to stick together.

Resource

In immigrant families, parents work. Whether it is a two-parent household or a single-parent household, parents must work long hours to provide for their children because of the typical jobs the undocumented undertake. Unfortunately, due to the increase in anti-immigrant sentiment, it is possible for one or both parents to be captured and deported, leaving their children to fend for themselves. The division of families is something common to Latinos and Latino Immigrants. This creates high levels of anxiety for the parent and the child, forcing them to live within the shadows.



Secure Communities Initiative

Recently, policies concerning the undocumented have been implemented at the federal level. The “Secure Communities Initiative” was created by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with the goal of removing undocumented persons with criminal backgrounds from communities. The initiative gives authority to local community enforcement to act as ICE officers when ICE officers are not present, which means officers can check the immigration status of all detainees. If the person is found to be undocumented, the results are sent to ICE, and the undocumented person is taken to a detention center where they await deportation. The initiative intended to remove serious criminals – rapist, murderers, drug traffickers – from communities, but the majority of those who been deported have committed minor offenses, which can be as minor as driving with a broken tail light. According to the originators of the Secure Communities Initiative, the minor offenders are the “collateral” in the mission to remove “major criminals” from communities. Since the secure communities program was initiated, 85% of the detentions made by the program can be classified as “collateral.” “Collateral” can also be classified as fathers and mothers, *tios* and *tias*.



Personal Stories: Siblings

Reyna is a 14-year-old girl from Zacatecas, Mexico. She was brought to the United States at the age of 2 years old. Not only did she not choose to immigrate, but she also lacked a conscience understanding of what she was doing as she migrated to the US. Her family migrated in order to find economic opportunity that did not exist in their home country of Mexico. Reyna and her family came directly to South Bend, Indiana. A few short weeks after arriving in the states, her younger sister Jacqueline was born.

Reyna and her sister have always had a very close relationship. They have always supported each other through thick and thin. Little has ever come in between these two siblings. However, the difference in their documentation status, not only presents the first threat of separation these two girls have experienced, but it also has led to different childhood experiences.

When Reyna was younger, she noticed that when her sister traveled to Mexico to visit family, she remained in South Bend, Indiana. Her parents never granted her the permission to visit her family in Mexico. Reyna grew bitter towards her family for this. As she entered the *discovery* phase of her life, she came to realize why she had never returned to Mexico. Reyna realized that she is undocumented.

Reyna, like many undocumented children, found it difficult to understand why documentation dictates so much of her life in the United States. "I have lived here as long as my sister. We have attended the same schools, raised the same way, and live in the same household. All that separated us is our birthplaces. If that's the only difference, than why am I denied so many opportunities that she isn't? That's the part that's hardest for me to understand."

Like many "1.5-generationers" Reyna constantly asks herself this question. It is time the United States provides a reasonable answer.



Personal Stories: La Migra y El Cucuy

Marcos Garcilazo is a 14-year-old boy who currently lives in South Bend, Indiana. His family originally comes from Michoacán, Mexico. Like many migrants from Mexico, his family came to the United States in hopes of living a more economically stable life.

Unlike many young American teenagers, Marcos has an unusual fear. Like most Mexican youths, Marcos fears “el Cucuy.” This fear is unusual in comparison to the fears of young American teenagers. Like most Mexican children, Marcos has grown up with the folk tale of “el Cucuy.” One can compare “el Cucuy” to the American monster the “boogie man”. According to the folk tale, “el Cucuy” punishes bad people when they least expect it and where they least expect it.

For Marcos, “el Cucuy” is more than a child’s parable. “El Cucuy” is real. “El Cucuy” takes the form of *la migra* (immigration officers) in the United States. As stated earlier in this brief, the public discourse criminalizes those who immigrate to the United States. Immigration is the foundation for being a bad person. For Marcos, ICE and other immigration officials are the monsters that terrorizes migrants and punishes them by separating them from their families and uprooting the lives they have established in the United States.

Marcos explains the fear he lives with: “I never know what to expect each day. I pray to God that my parents will return home. I pray that their cars won’t break down or that their work doesn’t get raided. I pray for God to guide their paths so that no harm can come to them. I need them. I wouldn’t know what to do if they never returned. This country is the only one I know.”

Marcos and many children in similar situations as him live in constant fear of not seeing their parents again, of being to a country they do not call home, or being imprisoned. With each passing day the chance of not seeing his parents, becomes a greater reality because of the current wave of ICE raids, routine traffic stops turned into immigration investigations, the horrible reality undocumented children experience has brought “el Cucuy” to life.



Policies

Immigration issues are heavily debated in the American political discourse. The main questions of the debate always seem to focus on immigrants as a problem, with questions such as: What do we do with the undocumented immigrants living in our country? Why aren't migrants coming legally? These questions fail to acknowledge the issues immigrants face; however, a proposed policy has attempted to address the issues the "1.5 generation faces."

Dream Act

In order to address the 2.1 million undocumented youth considered to be the "1.5-generation," there is national legislation currently being discussed that would enable these individuals to attain citizenship. The bill is known as the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. If the bill were passed, minors who entered the country before the age of 16 and have attended at least 3 of 4 years of high school in the United States and have enrolled in higher education or the military would be eligible for citizenship.

The DREAM Act benefits many in many ways. First and foremost, it promotes the attainment of higher education. Citizens with higher levels of education increase the human capital (in the form of education) of a nation; this is highly beneficial to the United States during a time of increased global economic competition. Also, the bill further benefits the individual and the nation, because once an individual has gained citizenship, the individual's family can apply to be citizens through him or her.

Conclusion

Political discourse has led to the vilification and criminalization of immigrants, regardless of their legal status. The Industrial Immigration Complex used by the power elite has led to this. It is their agenda that the immigrant be viewed as a criminal and dehumanized, so that their political interest may become policy. These "criminals" are in fact real people that have to deal with their immigration status in many aspects of their life; the most damaging being the strain it puts on family life. Heterogeneous families cope differently to their status depending on the proportion of undocumented versus documented members. Regardless, the families change their lives around to cater to keeping the family together, a challenge that even documented families face.

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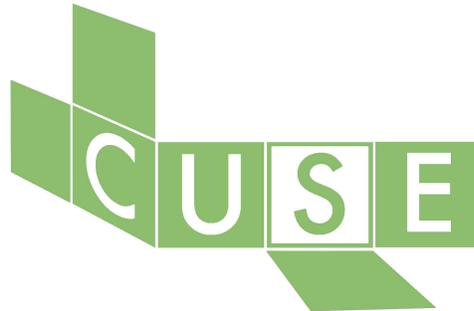
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