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“S-COMM and Latin@ Hierarchies.”

“Secure Communities” is a policy I have recently begun learning about through my course on immigrant justice. Because this program is obscured by the general media, it can be difficult to understand what this policy is about and who it affects the most. Called “S-COMM” by the Department of Homeland Security, has been aimed at mass deportations since 2008. Whenever an undocumented person is detained under S-COMM, local law enforcement then shares data with Immigration and Customs. Currently all counties in Oregon are operating under Secure Communities. The program was sold as an effective crime-fighting and national security tool for the United States. This program at its roots is flawed in the sense that ICE’s statistics demonstrate that a majority of those arrested have committed lesser offences such as traffic violations. Additionally, of those arrested for lesser offences, nearly one third had no criminal record.

Through conversations with organizations and people invested in examining S-COMM, I have learned that strategic measures are challenging this program. CAUSA, Oregon’s Immigrant Rights Coalition, serves as a resource for people who are primarily affected by Secure Communities—predominately Latin@s and specifically Mexicans. CAUSA educates the Latin@ community and their allies about the policy through direct conversations, workshops, and pamphlets, informing people about their human rights. Although organizations like CAUSA are working towards challenging the injustices of S-COMM through educating Latin@ community, I have noticed the lack of conversations surrounding the hierarchies within Latin@s based on: physical features, language, and country of origin. Despite the racial lumping into the category of “Latino,” there is ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity within the group.

Thus, S-COMM is likely to affect Latin@s differently from each other based on perceptions and hierarchies of Latin@s. To better understand the effects of immigration policy within racialized communities, I am interested in asking: How, if at all, do physical features—specifically skin color influence who is targeted? How does language affect interactions with officers? Lastly, what is the role of country of origin by those affected by S-COMM? In Latina/o Sociology I have learned about non-traditional methods of research, such as counter storytelling where the stories of people counter a dominant narrative. I am personally investment in storytelling as a way to collect data, and allow for traditionally unheard voices to be heard. Most importantly use this as a way of healing for those being affected and invisibilized by S-COMM. Additionally, using storytelling as a method of research not only challenges dominant narratives but also challenges notions of what legitimate and academic research looks like. Currently there is little to no data regarding this issue; in doing this study, I hope to gather statistical data and a collection of stories to provide solid evidence about the effects of S-COMM based upon the hierarchies within Latin@s. This research project will be the information used by organizations like CAUSA to better serve those affected by S-COMM and challenge this unjust policy.