Humberto Marquez-Mendez.
“The Role of Gender in S-COMM”

My own story revolves around immigration. My family and I immigrated to the United States in the year of 2001. Soon after, we had the opportunity to fix our papers and became “legal” citizens of this country. However, there are many others with similar stories who have not been as fortunate and are forced to live in the shadows, silent, under fear and injustice. Instead of helping these individuals feel safe and accepted our government has implemented laws that threaten their stay in the U.S. and further widen the racial and economic divide in our society.

S-COMM, otherwise known as “Secure Communities,” is a government policy against “immigrant threats” that permits local law enforcement to racial profile their residents and act as immigration (ICE)-agents at their discretion. Although it is targeted at all immigrants it institutionalizes racial profiling and has most affected Latinos/as. S-COMM is currently being enforced by forty-four states in the nation and by all counties in Oregon. As of now, there are no real statistics about the effects of this policy; only numbers of how many people have been deported. But what do these numbers really mean? They don’t help us understand the effects of S-COMM. Through this research project I intend to give voice to those who are silenced, and to tell a larger story about the effects of this immigration policy on the residents of Oregon. I will conduct in-depth interviews with Latinos/as within the Willamette Valley who have had a family member or have directly experienced the implications of S-COMM. With the information obtained I want to learn if gender plays a difference on how it’s enforced. Latino males have been the main targets in racial profiling so how, if at all, do the effects of S-COMM differ on females? Does gender play a significant role in determining who gets detained? What about who gets deported and who is given a second chance?

This semester I am taking two courses that have given me a deep understanding of the “Secure Communities” policy and the sociological research methods that are used in projects such as this one. I am volunteering at CAUSA, Oregon’s immigrant rights coalition, for the course “Racial Justice Movements.” Through my hours spent with the organization I have gained a great amount of knowledge about S-COMM and how it has been enforced in nearby-counties.

Through phone calls to police departments from different counties, I’ve learned that there is no formal policy stating what an acceptable form of identification is. This is very problematic because it is left to the “officer’s discretion” whether the arrestee must be handed over under ICE custody. In my “Latino/a Sociology” course I have come to understand the research methods that sociologists use to collect data. With this knowledge, I understand the importance of counter-storytelling and being an “inside” researcher, who will have an advantage through personal interviews. Counter-storytelling is of high importance in social issues such as immigration, where majoritarian storytelling is the norm.