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“Educational Experiences Amid Anti-Immigration Policy”

Anti-immigration policies in the post-9/11 United States, has been fueled by the for-profit prison and detention industry, and has led to an increased police state, the separation of families, and legalized racial profiling of anyone who might “appear” to be undocumented. Oregon is in the process of its own anti-immigration initiatives, including “Secure Communities” (which is being studied by another team in our research community). On the surface, anti-immigrant policies are thought to only affect the undocumented immigrants themselves. However, upon closer analysis, this type of legislation has ramifications beyond the individual who is undocumented. The youth of undocumented immigrants are rarely considered in the discourse about immigration, and are invisible victims of this broken system.

The effects of anti-immigration policies on youth are abounding. They create a climate of fear and silence, which can have a tremendous impact on the educational aspirations and success of young people. For example, a student may not be able to attend school because s/he might be the only person in a family who has the ability to hold a driver’s license and thus, must drive family members. Or, many youth must keep their lives a secret from peers because of the fear of deportation, or being in school and worrying about whether their family members are safe. There are also many young people who are themselves not documented, usually having immigrated to the United States as small children, who work hard in the public school system, only to graduate from high school with little to no access to higher education.

I am interested in analyzing the ways in which immigration policy affects the education of the children whose families are affected by anti-immigration policy in Oregon. My project will focus on the unseen faces of the “immigration debate,” and will investigate how young people navigate the complicated experiences between attaining an education and assisting their families. I am not only interested in their educational achievement in this climate, I also want explore how it affects their “educational self,” their ability to participate in extracurricular activities, and their relationships with peer groups and teachers.

Studying how immigration policy affects educational achievement is a new venture for me, but immigration policy and immigrant rights have interested me for quite some time. I have witnessed families be torn apart as a result of deportation and I have seen the damage it can cause to the entire family and the potential it has to impede the educational aspirations of students whose parent(s) is deported. As a person who strongly believes in immigration justice, I would like to draw light to these issues in an effort to help youth whose educational attainment is affected by this policy. I will be studying the “Sociology of Education” this spring semester with Prof. Davila to become familiar with the major discourses and methods in the field. This research project will equip me with more tools to be successful in a public policy graduate program.