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The Lived Experience of Stigma among Immigrant Youth

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Abstract

The concept of stigma helps to explain the social effects of othering due to migrant status. Because stigma affects the overall distribution of life chances (e.g., health, educational success, employment opportunities, housing), it is important to consider the intersection of different stigmatized statuses and multiple outcomes. Here, five components of stigma are used to examine the stigmatization processes that affect immigrant youth: labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination. Since immigrants push back against labeling as well as the accompanying exclusions and limitations that follow, the role of resistance and empowerment is explored. Different from reverse stigmatization, in which stigma reverts back to the stigmatizer, resistance, flourishing, and self-representation play major roles among the immigrant youth who experience stigmatization. This can be seen in individual and collective actions as well as in political, economic, social, and legal contexts (e.g., illegalization, undocumentation, deportability), and may inform ways to counter stigma. It is necessary to consider when stigma domains can occur independently of, and then in tandem with, the structural circumstance of migrant status, especially for those who are undocumented.

Introduction

Migration has become a defining global issue of our century, with contemporary mobilities a major aspect of public debate across the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Included in these mobilities are children and youth, who are migrating for multiple reasons related to war, disinvestment, global political economic inequities, legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism, and climate change. In some parts of the world, significant numbers of unaccompanied minors are moving away from danger toward alternative futures. Some are considered "first-generation immigrants," while those who are young enough to grow up primarily in a new society are often referred to as the "1.5 generation." In addition, migrants, immigrants, residents, refugees,

asylum seekers, detainees, and other new members of society have families and children of their own. In many cases, people who did not migrate themselves, including the children of immigrants (often called "second generation") remain nonetheless categorized as immigrants. Despite living in a country for generations, many people, as well as their communities, are still perceived to be "foreign" (even "migrant") based on perceived notions of otherness. Children of migrants have long held a tenuous place in receiving countries and are often racialized in a way that characterizes them as perpetual foreigners, even if they are citizens (Chavez 2017; Flores-González 2017). Previous research has shown that these dynamics are heightened for immigrants who are marked visibly as different from the unmarked mainstream of a society, even after generations (Suárez-Orozco 2000). This label "migrant" follows ancestry for generations as a racialized, nationalized, and exclusionary status. At the same time, "post-migrancy" scholars and activists argue for moving beyond the category "migrant" or "immigrant" entirely due to these exclusionary outcomes (Römhild 2018, 2021). An "intersectional" (Crenshaw 2017) lens on the "interlocking systems of oppression" (Combahee River Collective 1977) allows for clear analysis of the different and conjugated forms (Bourgois 1988) of othering experienced by immigrant youth, especially in contexts in which undocumented status interacts powerfully with the status loss produced by stigmatization.

As coauthors, we each have decades of experience working with immigrant populations of many kinds, particularly in the area of health, and with a more specific, recent focus on the experiences of youth who are categorized as immigrant or migrant. As we stress elsewhere (Castañeda et al. 2015), migration itself can be considered a social determinant of health, including through the effects of racialized and exclusionary labeling. These negative health effects are visible among immigrants as well as their family members including, importantly, their children regardless of where they were born (Castañeda 2019). Exclusionary treatment and labeling of youth who are categorized as immigrant or migrant affects their education, social status, and future job prospects (Suárez-Orozco 2000). Many immigrant youth are the recipients of interim, temporary, transitional, or uncertain legal statuses that are proliferating globally (Abrego and Lakhani 2015; Smith and Castañeda 2021); this, however, only signals their incomplete inclusion. While most of our work has been conducted with immigrants in the United States and Mexico, we have also worked in Germany, Morocco, Syria, Spain, and Romania.

Drawing on our own research as well as the broader literature, discussion in this chapter focuses on the lived experiences of stigma in immigrant youth, with an emphasis on the processes of racialization that impact immigrant youth. Racialization and class, however, often overlap and are even coconstitutive in contemporary formations of racial capitalism. We explore how current public narratives and exclusionary policymaking have significantly increased discrimination, violent threats, and various forms of cruelty toward

immigrants in recent years (Vaquera et al. 2021). This climate and rhetoric in the United States and other countries is driving and escalating the stigmatization of immigrants and provides an opportunity to examine the role of structural discrimination.

Stigma is one important way to understand the social effects of othering due to migrant status as it is accompanied by labeling, stereotyping, separation from others, status loss, and discrimination (Link and Phelan 2001). Stigma is a "central driver of morbidity and mortality at a population level" (Hatzenbuehler et al. 2013:813) that could be considered "a fundamental cause of health inequalities" (Hatzenbuehler et al. 2013:813). Stigma affects not only health but the overall distribution of life chances (e.g., educational success, employment opportunities, housing). This requires us to consider the intersection of different stigmatized statuses and multiple outcomes (Link and Phelan 2006:528).

In this chapter, we use the following components of stigma to structure our discussion of stigmatization affecting immigrant youth: labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination (Link and Phelan 2001:363). We consider the ways in which power must be exercised for stigmatization to occur and focus on both individual and structural levels of stigma, particularly its discrimination component. It is important to note, however, that immigrants (including immigrant youth) push back against labeling along with the exclusion and limitations they imply. Therefore, we explore *resistance and empowerment as an addition to the idea of reverse stigmatization*. As Link and Phelan (2006:528) note: "There can be no stigmatization without…the exercise of power. The essential role of power is clear in situations where low power groups attempt reverse stigmatization." In addition to reverse stigmatization (in which stigma reverts onto the stigmatizer), we argue for a focus on the role of resistance, flourishing, and self-representation. We are interested in individual and collective actions against stigma (including structural stigma) as well as in how political, economic, social, and legal contexts (e.g., illegalization, lack of documentation, deportability) interact with stigma, and the possibility of counteracting this. What happens when immigrant youth actively "own," embrace, resist, and attempt to undo the effects of stigma by embracing, renegotiating, or navigating around its narratives and implications?

Here, we examine how these processes span individual and collective levels and engage structural levels of change to counteract powerful institutional sources of stigma. It is important to note, however, that the domains of stigma discussed below are deeply intertwined with the structural vulnerability (Quesada et al. 2011) of being undocumented. This structural aspect of stigma (i.e., of being undocumented) is often inseparable from other experiences of stigma. Thus, it is necessary to consider when stigma domains occur independently of, and then in tandem with, the structural circumstance of being undocumented. When the latter is present, how does stigma take on powerful and particularly oppressive forms?

Components of Stigma in the Experiences of Immigrant Youth

To understand more fully the experiences of stigma among immigrant youth, we consider the five elements of stigma in turn. Discussion centers on youth who have immigrated with their families, on their own, or with others, as well as those who grew up, and may or may not have been born, in a receiving society yet are still labeled "immigrant," "migrant," or of "immigrant background." We include the experiences of youth whose legal categorization span classifications as undocumented immigrants, legal residents, people with transitional or uncertain statuses (e.g., DACA), citizens, refugees, and asylum seekers. Although the experiences of each group differ, youth in these groups are routinely stigmatized and excluded in various and often related ways. Thus, these similarities as well as some of the distinctions are considered below.

Labeling

The first component of stigma, as laid out by Link and Phelan (2001), is labeling; that is, the attachment of a label to a person or the categorization of a group of people according to a particular label. Among immigrant youth with whom we work, labeling involves a mix of simultaneous racialization, nationalization, geographicalization, and other forms of classification. Many are routinely called "immigrant" or "migrant" even if they were born in the country in which they reside or are citizens of the country and have never left. Sometimes, these youth are "classed" in ways that are conflated with immigration status, such as being called "farmworkers" even if they have never worked on farms themselves. In the United States and other countries where we have conducted fieldwork, the category "farmworker" simultaneously and clearly connotes racialized, classed, and immigrant status (Holmes 2013). In many countries, someone who is visibly racialized as not a member of the mainstream is said to have an "immigration background" or to be a "foreigner" (Foroutan et al. 2018).

Labeling happens simultaneously on diverse levels. For example, let us consider youth who were born in the United States, whose parents are indigenous Triqui people born in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. These youth are often called "Mexican" by their U.S. White classmates, "Oaxacan" by Mexican immigrants, Latine by U.S. citizens, and "Triqui" by people with ancestry from another indigenous group in Oaxaca. This demonstrates how one person can be simultaneously labeled in multiple and different ways by different people. Each of these labels categorizes the individual and the group through an essentialized characteristic.

Using this example, let us look further at the ramifications of labeling, based on ethnographic research and interviews among immigrant youth and their classmates at a high school in a rural region in the state of Washington (Holmes 2013). The local high school was having difficulties with a rural "gang" of

self-identified White students who were harassing, bullying, and intimidating students they labeled as "Mexican." The gang, "Whites Against Mexicans (WAM)," and the students who supported the gang wrote WAM on their notebooks, phones, and in graffiti on high school property. In response, the school administration made a policy to forbid the display of WAM anywhere. At that time, a group of students who wanted to work toward intercultural understanding initiated a basketball game that played with and against the discriminatory rhetoric of WAM and called itself "Wamsketball." In interviews and conversations with members of the Wamsketball game, it became clear that the labels of "White" and "Mexican" were unstable and changing, yet powerful. One of the members of Wamsketball was a Latinx/e high school student who did not fit in the White category because of his skin color, yet he did not fit in the Mexican category because of the way he dressed. This student often served as the referee because he could not be easily labeled. He and the other students explained that to be Mexican in their school, one must not only have brown skin, but also wear a particular style of clothes and hair. Further, the label referred not only to body appearance directly but to social class (i.e., what kind of jobs they and their parents had, how much money they had) and clothing style (e.g., what they considered cool to wear). Thus, labeling reflected both social class and local culture.

This also reminds us that some immigrants are not categorized by society as immigrants, largely due to their class and unmarked racialization. In many societies, immigrant professionals are categorized as "expats" and not perceived (or labeled) as immigrants or migrants.

Stereotyping

The second aspect of stigma is, stereotyping; that is the ways by which groups of people become represented by and understood through generalizations. For stigma, these generalizations carry negative connotations. Current public narratives, including those in the media, frequently depict undocumented immigrants as outsiders, at best, and criminals, at worst. This is not new. The tone of these narratives, however, shifts over time, often aligning with the priorities of particular political moments. During the Trump presidency (2017–2021), for example, exclusionary policies increased discrimination, violent threats, and various forms of cruelty toward immigrants. This, in turn, increased the acceptance and normalization of negative media depictions of undocumented immigrants, in general, and Latinx/es, in particular (Vaquera et al. 2021).

Chavez (2008, 2017) addressed many of the negative stereotypes that have been and are still applied to Latinx/e people in the United States. To understand the ways in which Latinx/e communities are stereotyped as criminal or dangerous and as a financial drain on society, he analyzed public discourse (e.g., newspapers, television, political debate) and tracked how distinct words and categories become conflated: from "undocumented" or "unauthorized" to

words that carry negative connotations which most scholars argue are incorrect representations (e.g., "illegal"). Words like "illegal," used as an adjective (e.g., an illegal alien) or noun (i.e., referring to a person as an illegal) become conflated with concepts such as "criminal," "violent criminal," or "dangerous." Thus, individuals who lack formal documentation (e.g., a residence permit) become represented by and understood through negative generalizations (e.g., dangerous, criminal) that are empirically unfounded. Abrego and Menjívar (2011) describe this kind of stereotyping as "legal violence": laws protect the rights of some but simultaneously marginalize other groups, leaving them unprotected and ultimately more vulnerable. Even though second-generation immigrant youth, who are born in the country in which they reside, have documentation, many are affected by policies that target their undocumented family members and are routinely treated as or called "undocumented" or worse.

In other writings, Chavez lays out the ways in which immigrants are represented and understood as "lazy" or a financial drain on society. These generalizations are employed regularly in political debates, the media, and public discourse, deliberately ignoring the many ways in which immigrants (including undocumented immigrants) contribute to society (including financially), far beyond what they are offered or given. As Phelan et al. (2008) argue, stigmatization can function for the mainstream group to keep the stigmatized "down, out, and away" on social, economic, political, and even physical levels. Quesada et al. (2011) show specifically how generalizations of immigrants reflect an understanding that they are in competition with an assumed, yet undefined mainstream group in the United States, which leads to negative stereotyping and amplifies separation. Quesada analyzed the language used in a voter proposition in California, which presented immigrants as financial drains on the undefined category of "Californians," and pitted the experiences of immigrants against the experiences (and so-called suffering) of the assumed and unmarked (i.e., White) mainstream in the state. Aware of the assumption that immigrants are financial drains, prominent organizations in California have more recently engaged in public media campaigns to document the multiple and specific ways that undocumented immigrants contribute to society. These competing narratives along with the changing political landscape in California are indicative of narratives about immigrants found elsewhere in the United States and the world.

Separation

Though they do not accurately represent reality, the negative stereotypes discussed above persist in many national settings and lead to the subsequent aspect of stigma under consideration here: separation. Fundamental to this component is the establishment of boundaries that separate an "in-group" from an "out-group" or "us" from "them": "they" become a threat to "us" because "they" are perceived (through labeling and stereotyping) to be criminal, immoral, lazy,

predatory, and so forth as discussed above (Morone 1997). Ultimately, the intent is to keep certain groups of people out of full membership in society; effectively, it denies access to resources and may prevent people from entering a space altogether. It is crucial to note that this is not inherently an aspect of majority versus minority groups, since those categorized as immigrants or as a minority may actually constitute the majority in multiple settings. Rather, the stigma that impacts immigrant youth should be understood more clearly as a process of "minoritization" in the sense that one group is an unmarked, assumed mainstream group while the other group is a racialized, othered group.

Building on the work of Chavez (2008, 2017), Quesada et al. (2011) and Ruhs (2013), political debate and news discourse pits immigrants ("them") against an undefined, presumably White, middle-class mainstream (interpolated by the speakers and authors as "us"). Chavez and others (e.g., Holmes and Castañeda 2016) analyze the ways in which metaphors that refer to water (e.g., flood, surge, rising tide, tip of the iceberg) are utilized to instill fear in the mainstream ("us") toward the presumably dangerous immigrant ("them"). These metaphors culminate in claims that "we" are at risk of being "drowned" and must protect "ourselves." Such linguistic devices not only separate immigrants from other members of society, but also foster antagonism, fear, prejudice, and violence. This violence manifests in various forms: from young White children in Orange County, California shooting BB gun bullets at anyone presumed to be immigrants, to the torture and murder of immigrants by civilian vigilante groups in Texas and other border states, to the structural violence of racialized labor markets within a racialized and nationalized (though always transnational) capitalism. Quesada's work analyzes how the experiences of immigrants, including what some immigrants refer to as "suffering," are made invisible when lawmakers and anti-immigrant organizers publicly state that "they" (immigrants) have caused "Californians" to suffer. Negative stereotypes as well as separation led to antagonism, fear, and competition that impacts status loss, to which we now turn.

Status Loss

Status loss refers to a downward trajectory in the status hierarchy of society. The metaphors discussed above are often employed to inflict status loss, so that those affected (e.g., immigrants) are not successful in activities that otherwise would have contributed to the overall distribution of life chances (e.g., higher education, meaningful employment). For immigrant youth, status loss is mediated and reinforced through the structural mechanism of citizenship. The inability to regularize one's status or have the "right" citizenship confers a disadvantage on young adults and is the primary driver of stigma among immigrant youth. As shown in multiple contexts, these processes also lead to the experience of immigrants as second class (Castañeda 2019).

During childhood and early adolescence, the importance of one's own immigration status is largely suspended, as children may experience significant stress related to their parent's deportability (Castañeda 2019). In the United States, undocumented children navigate through the public school system in similar ways as their peers, largely because of the 1982 Supreme Court ruling that all children can assert claims to public elementary and secondary education regardless of legal status. This ruling represents a very important structural form of protection for students. During this time, children may make deliberate choices about when, why, and with whom they discuss their own or their family's legal status. In school, these decisions may begin early. Children as young as ten and eleven years old engage in decisions about whether they should disclose or disguise legal status to avoid stigmatization and status loss (Castañeda 2019). The right to education, in practice, has been interpreted as a kind of "don't ask, don't tell" policy. School districts don't ask questions about a family's immigration status and children "don't tell" as a result of socialization practices learned at home. Undocumented parents may explicitly warn their children not to provide information at school, which sometimes results in unintended consequences. Parents may not respond to school efforts to enlist their participation if correspondence includes words like "citizenship" (e.g., an invitation to attend ceremonies where "good citizenship awards" are given), as this may be perceived to imply immigration enforcement. Teachers can also create conflicts for children through assignments that generate anxiety about legal status or that inadvertently prompt disclosure (e.g., homework related to family history), which may elicit information about migration status and lead to labeling.

In the school setting, active concealment of legal status is a common way to avoid stigma among immigrant youth (Castañeda 2019). Interview research, conducted by a team that included one of the authors (HC), among mixed-status families in Texas found that parents often coach their children on how to conceal their origins (Castañeda 2019). For example, Daniela, now a 23-year-old college student who arrived from Mexico at the age of nine, was told to tell others that she was born in the United States:

> I remember when we first got here, our parents told us that if anyone asked us, we're from here. So growing up we knew that. If someone was like, "Oh, where are you from?" the answer was, "I was born here in Texas."

Samantha, another student, added:

> My dad would always say, "Don't be saying that you're not from here. If they ask you, just say you were born here."

Such strategies are embedded in the socialization of immigrants and serve as preparation for anticipated bias.

Bullying—an unmistakable expression of both separation and status loss due to stigma—is another reason for active concealment of legal status. Children

may be picked on because of their own or their family's illegality. In the social sciences, illegality is not the labeling of a person or a group of people based on immigration status, but rather an analysis of the phenomenological experience of illegality, of deportability, and the possibility of policing in everyday life (Willen 2007). For example, Sarah recalled an incident at her son's school:

> There are often boys or girls who bully other kids. They will say, "Your dad is a *mojado*" [or 'wetback,' a derogatory term for Mexicans who enter the United States without official government authorization]. I was called to my son's school because he had gotten into a fight. One boy told another, "Your momma is illegal," and my son tried to defend him. He was trying to stand up for parents like me. They use "illegal" as a form of racism. I went to the school and told the principal, "I want you to respect us. We never get in trouble with anyone." And we sat down with the counselor and had a serious conversation with the boys who were bullying. My son already has his head full of ideas that I am going to leave, ever since his dad was deported when he was three. He's just scared.

This illustrates how family legal status becomes a primary site of division for children in school. As Sarah notes, the term "illegal" functions "as a form of racism."

During adolescence, individuals are particularly susceptible to social influence from their immediate social environment, especially their network of peers, which plays a key role in shaping prejudice (Hjerm et al. 2018a). Often, adolescents discover, on their own, what "illegality" means, usually through interactions with peers or at school. Most have never considered where they were born or questioned their family's legal status, yet they picked up enough clues from their social environment (through the media, in their neighborhoods, at school) to know that illegality was something that is stigmatized. This often leads to difficult conversations with parents (Castañeda 2019). Mayra, for example, was confronted by her son after an incident in school. In her account:

> They were going around the room in his freshman year, saying, "Where were you born? And where were you born?" And since he had never asked me before, he just said, "I was born here." Then he came home and asked, so I told him he was born in Mexico. He said, "So I'm from Mexico?" And then that's when he told me, "Well, up until now I was going to go to college, but I can't if I don't have a Social Security number."

This sense of surprise and disappointment on the part of youth was likewise echoed in other conversations with parents. One mother, Juana, recalled a similar story in which her son "started asking why we didn't come here to have him born as well. He says he can't have the same freedom." Like Mayra's son, Juana's son became angry after this revelation:

> Even though he studies a lot and brings home good grades, he says he can't go to college because he doesn't have a Social Security number. Or he says, why study if he can't work in the field that he gets his degree in? Now he's just always very negative.

Juana's son has even used this situation against his mother during arguments:

> If I scold him for something, he blames it on that. He says, "You don't like me because I don't have papers!" He became rebellious.

Her relationship with her son has subsequently deteriorated after the status revelation.

Status loss is reinforced via the structural mechanism of citizenship. Being undocumented or unable to obtain legal status confers massive forms of social disadvantage and interacts with and perpetuates stigma for immigrant youth.

Discrimination

The final component of the stigma process, discrimination, may occur on both individual and structural levels. Indeed, discrimination is such an important and constitutive aspect of stigma that we "cannot hold the meaning we commonly assign to it when this aspect is left out" (Link and Phelan 2005:370). While the examples described above illustrate stigma, below we examine the concept within its individual and structural levels. In addition, some examples point to the possibilities of intergroup discrimination as well as intragroup diversity and intragroup discrimination (Córdova Jr. and Cervantes 2010).

Individual Level

At the individual level, discrimination refers to the unequal treatment that arises from membership in a particular social group. In participatory visual ethnographic research conducted by one of us (SH) with indigenous Oaxacan 1.5 and second-generation youth, one of the 12-year-old participants pointed out the ways in which she has been discriminated against because of her being labeled an immigrant and a Oaxacan (Librado et al. 2021). Despite being born in the United States, she has been bullied at school because of the color of her skin and height. In one interview, she described the experiences of bullying in school and then followed this up with a sense of confident resistance, stating: "Just because we are Oaxacan, we aren't dumb" and "just because we're short, we still think, we're not dumb." This example of individual-level discrimination takes place despite the individual being a citizen. It also reminds us that the categorization of racialized "immigrant" may last for generations in many societies, as highlighted above. This example not only reveals individual-level discrimination, but also points to the role of resistance and resilience (discussed further below).

On the individual level, people may experience extortion or harassment when others use information about their immigration status. Such individual-level discrimination takes place when others prey on an individual's structural vulnerability (Quesada et al. 2011; Bourgois et al. 2017). Based on the interview research conducted in Texas, 16-year-old Selena recalled a time when a

landlord sexually harassed her mother after the family fell one month behind on rent:

> He decided to take advantage of the situation and told her, "Now you have to sleep with me." My mom refused, and he threatened to deport her. I know that was really hard for her. Because of her status, he wanted to take advantage of her.

Selena's mother was too afraid to call the police and report the incident, illustrating how this type of threat effectively silences victims. There are even cases where someone's own family member has threatened to call ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) out of rage or jealousy, or to extort money. Fifteen-year-old Jaime told me:

> Somebody from our own family from Reynosa, my aunt's children, threatened to call immigration on my dad. Why? They were planning to get money out of him. It's always about money. It's crazy.

Like deportability, "denounce-ability" (Horton 2016) functions as a powerful and remarkably efficient technique of governance precisely because everyone knows someone who has experienced it. There were many actual cases where people were reported to immigration authorities, and this heightens fear for everyone who is vulnerable. Michelle was in fifth grade when she, her sister, and their father were deported after an angry neighbor called immigration following a dispute. The neighbor didn't want the family to use a side yard that was part of the space they were renting, because she used to park her car there before Michelle's family moved into the rental. After months of arguments over the space, the neighbor reported the family to ICE, which led to their deportation.

Discrimination may also play out at the individual level in very intimate ways. Concealment of status and feeling like one is living a double life can strain friendships and cause shame. Eva, a 23-year-old undocumented youth, said that when it came to social situations,

> I felt sad, heartbroken. I was ashamed that I didn't have papers. I was afraid if I told one of my friends, they would make fun or just not hang out with me anymore. I'm fearful and a little ashamed.

Often, because of their status, it may take a while for people to feel comfortable with others and establish friendships. Undocumented young adults may be inhibited when they try to adhere to normative expectations of dating and courtship, especially because marriage looms large as a potential pathway to citizenship and future stability. For undocumented persons, marriage means so much more than simply a transition to adulthood: legal status (and the stigma associated with it) is a key factor at all stages of family formation, and those who are undocumented have unique concerns and experiences compared to their citizen peers. This individual-level discrimination takes place based on the structural condition of being undocumented. Most relationships are

impacted to some degree by the decision to disclose one's status or not, and when. The stigma of being undocumented negatively impacts dating opportunities, as recounted by Armando:

> *Me daba mucha vergüenza.* I was so ashamed. I felt so worthless. Like, you don't deserve to go out with me, because there is no future with me. I can't be like a normal boyfriend. They have cars and take their girlfriends out everywhere. For me to have a car, I need a better job. So at the beginning of our relationship, I was so embarrassed. So ashamed of being undocumented.

Although Olivia can laugh about her experience now, the rejection endured at the time hurt deeply:

> One time I had a boyfriend, and the topic of legal status came up. He broke up with me the next day. I think he was in the same situation and wanted someone who was a citizen, so that he could fix his papers. It's like he said, "Why would I want you? You're no good to me."

Legal status can doom relationships before they even begin. Some people opt to break up rather than disclose their legal status and make themselves vulnerable. Others may doubt the sincerity of the relationship. The specter of hidden intentions can also linger, as people may worry that their partners are in the relationship only to gain legal status.

At the far end of risks associated with disclosure in intimate relationships lies the possibility of threats and intimidation, as demonstrated by Martha's account of a frightening breakup:

> My mom always says, "Be careful who you tell; they might turn you in," and there's always that fear in the back of your head. A few years ago, I had a boyfriend who wanted to do just that. He was really jealous and possessive, and when I broke up with him, he threatened to call ICE on me. For months after that I was afraid, just never knowing if they would come.

Disclosure produces vulnerability, even (and often especially) in the most intimate relationships. Like many of the participants in this study, Martha's parents taught her to disclose her legal status to as few people as possible to avoid the stigma and discrimination associated with it (Castañeda 2019).

Structural Level

Discrimination at the structural level refers to the societal conditions that constrain an individual's and a group's opportunities, resources, and well-being. This can manifest in limited job or educational opportunities, residential segregation as part of the legacy of redlining, poor health status and more importantly, as discussed above, "it takes power to stigmatize," and this power works through White supremacy; racial capitalism; citizenship; anti-immigrant prejudice, policy, and practice; and structural inequities. One of the most powerful examples of discrimination at the structural level concerns immigration

enforcement raids that target Spanish-speaking or Latinx communities (Kline and Castañeda 2020; Lopez and Holmes 2020). Such raids directly impact youth because of their own or their family members' deportability and the potential this holds for the violence of family separation. The detrimental impact of deportation and detention on individual, family, and community health cannot be overstated.

It is important to recognize that it is not only youth who are immigrants themselves, but also youth who are the children of immigrants. Both are affected by structural discrimination. In research among mixed-status families in Texas discussed above, many U.S. citizen youth experienced loss of opportunities due to federal and state policies that were directed toward their undocumented parents or siblings (Castañeda 2019). Although these policies explicitly affect only undocumented individuals, the children and siblings of undocumented people also experience poor health status, fewer educational and extracurricular activities, and other forms of incomplete social inclusion. Thus, citizenship formations and the structural vulnerability caused by undocumented status, deportability, and illegalization affect undocumented people as well as those associated with them.

Perhaps the most salient area where structural forms of discrimination emerge for immigrant youth is in the realm of health disparities. Structural discrimination is a fundamental cause of health inequalities that has a bearing on distribution of life chances in such areas as earnings, housing, criminal involvement, well-being, and life itself. Hostile policy environments result in intense feelings of anxiety, fear, and depression (Gonzales et al. 2013; Kline and Castañeda 2020; Logan et al. 2021), which can exacerbate preexisting health conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes. Experiences of racism and discrimination are in turn linked to risk factors that shape health outcomes. Undocumented immigrants and their family members experience a pervasive fear of deportation that negatively impacts their psychological, emotional, and physical health. In addition, loss of opportunity for immigrants related to social class and its inputs and components (e.g., education, home ownership, and income) are all factors that influence health status. Thus, the stigma which impacts immigrant youth affects not only the health of the youth themselves, but also their health over their life course as well as the health of their future children.

One aspect of structural discrimination important to the current and future life chances and health of immigrant youth relates to educational opportunities. Scholars have emphasized how youth labeled as immigrants, especially those who are racialized and classed, confront obstacles to educational achievement (Gonzales 2011, 2016; Suárez-Orozco 2000). Youth experiencing stigma as immigrants must contend with loss of opportunities in education: for instance, discrimination against bilingual and multilingual students/families and the inability to participate in certain extracurricular activities due to immigration status. They also experience anxiety, stress, and depression in relation to

experiences of status loss and bullying. The long-term impacts of these obstacles to educational achievement cannot be underestimated, including their influence on future social standing, job opportunities, and health.

Resistance, Flourishing, and Self-Representation: Opposing Stigma

What happens when immigrant youth "own," embrace, resist, and attempt to undo the effects of stigma, as some actively do, by renegotiating or navigating around its narratives and implications? García et al. (this volume) explore processes of resilience and social cohesion and suggest that there are three general responses to stigma: it can be internalized, ignored, or resisted. Resistance, then, can be divided into a number of categories, including renegotiation, re-representation, rejection, distancing, overcompensation, and the building of local moral worlds.

Discourse is one major area in which resistance takes place as a form of re-representation. Immigrant youth in the United States have developed language to represent themselves, using terms such as "DREAMers" which was developed by and with immigrant students. Undocumented youth have formed movements to counteract the invisibilization fostered by immigration policy and stigma, including the phrase "Undocumented and Unafraid" (Abrego and Negrón-Gonzales 2020; Fiorito 2019). Indigenous Oaxacan immigrant students in California have collectively drawn attention to the discriminatory use of deprecatory terms such as "oaxaquito/a" and have successfully developed and passed policies in their school districts forbidding the use of these prejudicial terms. They have also coined novel terms to express not only their own experiences, but also their membership in society, including the term "Oaxacalifornia." Indigenous Oaxaca families and communities in the United States and Mexico have engaged in diverse forms of organizing binationally for inclusion on social, economic, educational, and political levels (Rivera-Salgado and Rabadan 2020). This speaks to the concept of the "oppositional gaze" (Hooks 1992), which marginalized groups may utilize to enact change in the face of repression, discrimination, and, especially, White supremacy.

At the same time, many youth counter forms of separation enacted against and within immigrant communities by stating that all immigrants deserve respect and social inclusion, regardless of whether they are students (and therefore "DREAMers") or not. Young immigrants deploy strategies to resist negative and dehumanizing portrayals by developing and embracing counter-narratives (Vaquera et al. 2021), or renegotiation followed by re-representation. They actively resist narratives that dehumanize them and their families by uplifting alternative representations that emphasize the diversity and dignity more reflective of their own experiences and identities. This suggests that these youth are not passively absorbing information but challenging it. Immigrant

activists have long innovated to form a positive identity and challenge anti-immigrant rhetoric. Their strategies have changed over time alongside shifting political contexts, moving from close alignment with legislative efforts to increasing recognition of intersectional, marginalized, and transnational social locations (Abrego and Negrón-Gonzales 2020; Fiorito 2019). As Seif (2016:33–34) notes:

> Brave acts of speech and self-definition have allowed young immigrants to locate and support each other, organize, and advocate for assistance and rights. They allow youth during the transition to adulthood to form positive identities amidst a climate of media scapegoating and escalating deportations.

The awareness of how policies and government practices impact their daily lives gives them the courage to debunk myths and counteract discrimination.

For many young adults in the United States, "coming out" as undocumented is a critical part of their disclosure management process and autobiographical construction. This was facilitated by changes in policies and opportunities, most notably Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a program that allows some undocumented young people, who came to the United States as children, to work and stay in the country. After decades of organizing by undocumented communities, this program was facilitated by the election of Barack Obama. In 2012, DACA, an Obama-era executive action, led to an estimated 1.74 million young immigrants becoming eligible for a two-year reprieve from deportation, temporary work permits, Social Security numbers, and the ability to obtain drivers' licenses. DACA changed the landscape of opportunities for many undocumented individuals, allowing beneficiaries to experience an increase in security and to develop more trusting relationships with institutions because of sanctioned educational and work opportunities. This, in turn, provided greater independence (Abrego 2018) and reassurance that they were not deportable (Gonzales 2016). Arguably, its implementation also aided immigrant youth to shed some aspects of stigma.

Indeed, these shifts in the social and political landscape have encouraged many undocumented immigrants to come "out of the shadows." As people "come out" as undocumented, they create new and complex identities and political subjectivities, which include confronting stigma head-on (Castañeda 2019). Empowered disclosure, or "strategic outness" enabled many to view their legal status as an asset, reframe its meaning, and even challenge others. From the interview research conducted in Texas described above, Camila, for example, recalled a confrontation in school. After a classmate made an anti-immigrant comment and racial slur during class discussion, she jumped in:

> I told the guy in my class, "You know what? I don't have my papers." And he's like, "Oh, you're like a *mojada*?" He didn't say it in a mean way. I couldn't blame someone that is ignorant about it. Even when people are mean about it, I don't get mad. I feel like I need to teach them. Being undocumented, to an extent, it does hurt. But at the same time, it really empowers you to make a change.

> When you're oppressed, you want to make the change. But when you're not affected by anything, it's hard to recognize you have a privilege. It's understandable. If they haven't faced it, how can they understand?

Brian, a DACA recipient, illustrated how his personal biographical construction was intimately tied to this form of strategic disclosure and stigma management and his ability to connect with others in the same social position. During college, he had become active in an immigrant rights organization and began to present in front of large crowds. As he explained:

> I started presenting, giving my story, the story of my family. It started getting to the point where it wasn't me. It was just a huge story of people who are connected to so many people around me. It was like I was telling my story, but I'm also telling your story. It got so comfortable to the point where now I can tell my story in peace without having that fear, without being nervous or scared.

Of course, while some undocumented youth are very active in challenging restrictive policy or supporting initiatives that aim for immigrant integration, this is certainly not the case for everyone. Undocumented youth carry different meanings for ascribed identity labels: some have positive connotations and denotations, while others do not. Many DACA recipients, for instance, perceive that label as having negative connotations and denotations (Cornejo and Kam 2021). To reach the many immigrant youth who are not active, there are groups dedicated to organizing and building consciousness. The Oaxacan Youth Encuentro in California, for example, is a group run by and for Oaxacan youth to build connection, community, and consciousness. Activism is often place specific. Undocumented youth who live in more politically restrictive environments or in new immigrant destinations seek collective engagement in distinct ways.

Conclusion

Various aspects of stigma affect immigrant youth differently. Although immigrant youth face forms of injustice and inequity due to individual and structural forms of stigma that unfairly affect their educational, occupational, and health chances, they also act to resist, undo, navigate, and reverse stigma in multiple creative and powerful ways. In this chapter, we have attempted to add to the concept of reverse stigmatization (Link and Phelan 2006) by focusing on simultaneous processes of resistance, flourishing, and self-representation. The examples provided demonstrate that immigrant youth do not work to stigmatize mainstream society, but rather attempt to develop and employ counternarratives that will better represent themselves, their families, and communities. At times, this leads to distinct narratives among the unmarked assumed mainstream group, for instance in some European and U.S. contexts in which immigrants are seen to contribute to society in important ways. In

this chapter, we have asked: What happens when immigrant youth actively resist stigmatization and its effects by embracing, renegotiating, or navigating around its narratives and implications? In relation to their experiences, we see that an understanding of stigma and its effects, as well as an understanding of resistance to stigma and active re-representation, are extremely important.

Understanding stigma must involve a reckoning with the power of the stigmatizing group within hierarchies of power. Akin to Antonio Gramsci's understanding of hegemony as always being challenged and negotiated within a "war of position," we argue that the tactics and strategies of resistance of the stigmatized group must be considered in analyses of power and action. As we consider the experiences of stigma among immigrant youth and their actions to resist it, it is important for analysts and theorists of stigma in other contexts to attend to the diverse forms of negotiation, navigation, and resistance. Incorporating the concepts of resistance and opposition into our frameworks will increase our understanding of stigma itself.

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