PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STUDENTS

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Historical Overview

- 38.5 million foreign born individuals in U.S.
- U.S. as land of Native, immigrant and refugee
- Several waves of immigrants from various continents
- Variations in immigration status: approximately 11 million undocumented
- Reasons for immigration: search for work, natural disaster, political trauma, family reunification

Why do Children and Adolescents Migrate?

Manufacturing

Agriculture

Service

Knowledge Sector

Why do People Migrate?
War & Humanitarian Crisis

Why do People Migrate?

Environmental Catastrophes

Why do People Migrate?

Family Reunification

Growing Population of Children of Immigrants

Children of Immigrants

Vast Majority (over 80%) of 1st & 2nd generation are Citizen Children

- Citizen Child/ Adolescent of Unauthorized Parent
  - 4.5 million
  - Citizen Child/ Adolescent in Mixed Documentation Family
- Family/Child with Ambiguous Documentation
  - In Process
  - Temporary Status
- Unauthorized Child/Adolescent
 - 1 million +/-

Pre-Migration Context

- Consider reasons for why youth migrate (e.g. family reunification, parental employment, education, poverty, war, persecution, environmental disaster)
- Nature of the pre-migration context—access to family and peer support
- Separation from family (e.g. grandparents, relatives) and friends
- Separation from familiar social, cultural and linguistic context
- Hope for a better future for family and for oneself

Post-Migration Context

- Importance of migration for whole family and for oneself

- Optimism co-exists with sense of disorientation and sometimes disillusion

- Complexity of re-uniting with parents or children from whom one has been separated

- Realities of xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and racism

- Immigration policy in flux: Travel ban as example

Prevailing Stereotype
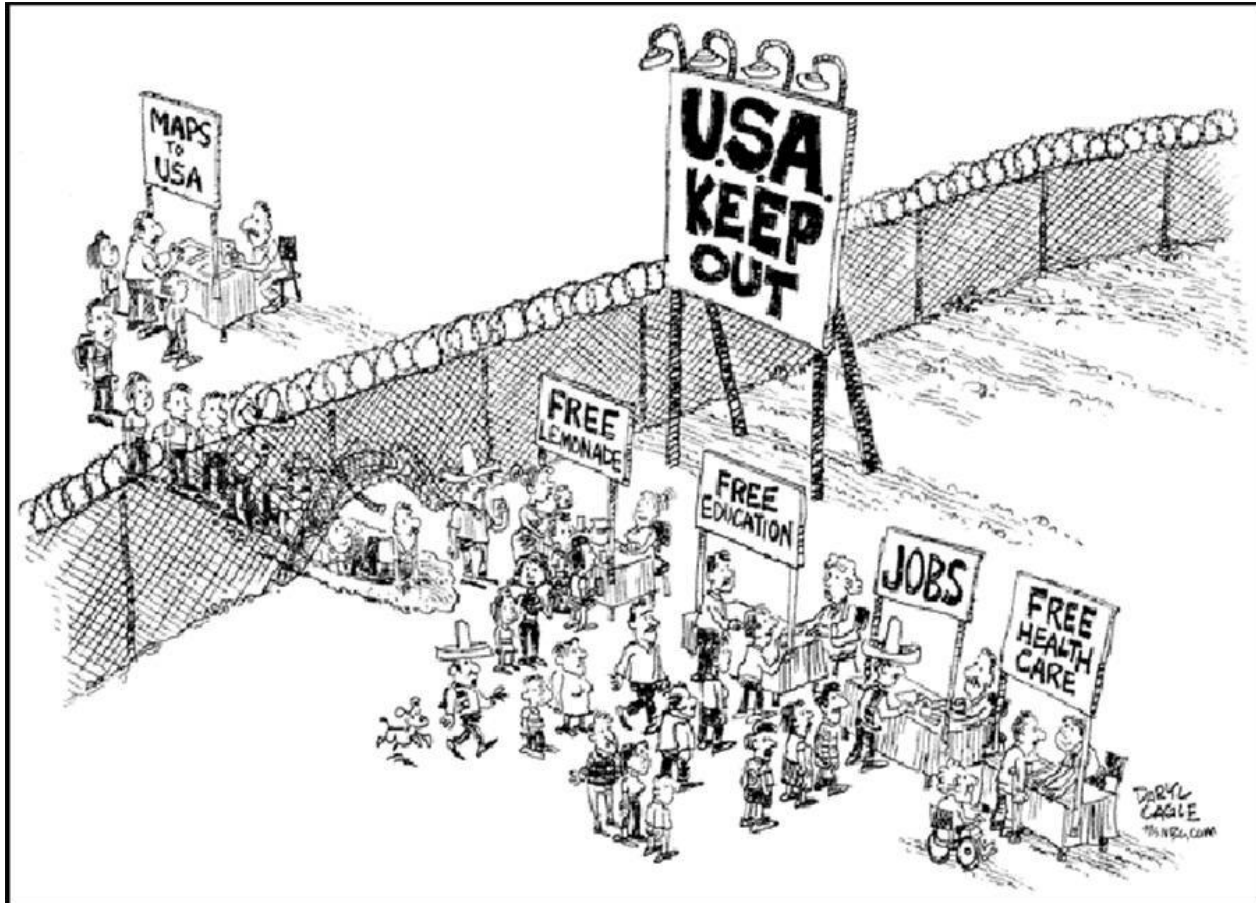
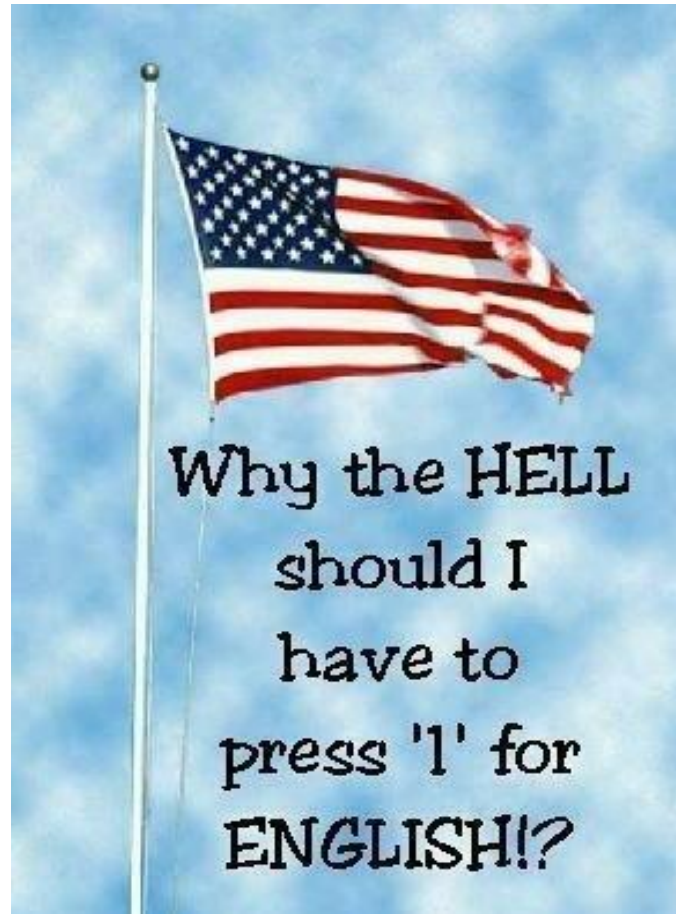"Illegal immigration" overwhelming the nation

Stampedes

Taking our jobs

They are frightening

They force us to change our lives

Why the HELL should I have to press 'l' for ENGLISH!?

Acculturation

- Psychological acculturation: The dynamic process immigrants experience as they adapt to the new country

- Process of acculturation is stressful
  - Particularly when the two cultures are in conflict

- Acculturation is a process

- Age of immigrant matters

Acculturative Stress

- Stressful events/appraisal of events related to the acculturation experience
- Linked to psychological outcomes
- Discrimination is a component of acculturative stress
- Immigrants of color experience higher levels
- Uncertainty of immigration policy and deportation
- Stress of having to hide one's ethnic identity

Family Acculturation Gaps

- Acculturation Gaps:
  - Parents oriented to the Heritage culture
  - Children oriented to Host culture
- Immigrant parents have difficulties with:
  - Understanding and communicating with schools
  - Determining an appropriate level of autonomy and supervision -- in new cultural context
- Children may:
  - Not turn to parents with problems
  - View their parents as an obstacle in achieving their goals

Recent study with Immigrant-origin high school students

- Tummala-Narra & Sathasivam-Rueckert (2016)
- 64 adolescents (35 girls and 29 boys); 9th-12th grade
- Pride in heritage culture and language:

I feel really proud of being Latina because I remember after 9/11 a lot of people went to help clean up the city. The most people who went to help were Latinos. They made me feel very proud because we Latinos like to be together, in harmony and help each other. (Cuban American participant)

Immigrant-origin students (cont.)

- Difficulties in cultural adjustment:

I didn't have enough friends when I first moved here because I was different from them. I didn't know any English so I couldn't communicate to my classmates. (Indian American participant)

My mom doesn't know that much English. So, whenever she needs help with English, I need to help her like make phone calls and stuff. My brother used to do that but now he's in college and so I have to do it now. (Sri Lankan American participant)

Immigrant-origin students (cont.)

- Intergenerational Conflicts:

They're really strict. Haitian parents are strict. I just want to have American parents sometimes, because it would be easier. (Haitian American participant)

Stereotypes and Discrimination:

One day, I heard somebody saying that Spanish people are stupid, you know, lazy. (Honduran American participant)

When we hear about Latinos it's, "They work really hard in the garden," and things like that. (Cuban American participant)

Immigrant-origin students (cont.)

- Coping:

It is good to communicate within my own culture. We can talk in our own language. (Chinese American participant)

I hate when they [guidance counselors] say that when they will keep it private but then they tell all the teachers. (Haitian American participant)

I really wouldn't talk to someone [adult] from the school 'cause that's just weird. (Guatemalan American participant)

I know a teacher. She's a Chinese person. She helps many Asian kids, many Chinese kids, even stays after school if someone comes and asks for help. (Chinese American participant)

Immigrant-origin students (cont.)

- Coping:

I think it just depends on the level of seriousness. If it is something that is pretty small, then I will go to my friends, but if it is something really serious, and can affect me or my health or just anything, then I will probably go to my older brother and my parents. (Haitian American participant)

I think because you do not want your parents to get worried about you and concerned about you. So, most kids like to keep hiding. I mostly do not tell my parents how I feel. I just put it on my journal and just let it be. (Cambodian American participant)

Presenting Problems in Clinical and Educational Contexts

- Most immigrants adapt well to their new living circumstances.

- Studies suggest that 1st generation immigrants may experience **less psychological distress** compared to 2nd generation immigrants (Alegría et al., 2006).

- It's possible that their psychological distress is going **unnoticed**.

- Many of the mental health problems particular to the immigrant experience can be linked to **acculturation, discrimination and trauma**.

Acculturation-Based Presenting Problems

- Changes in gender roles

- Intergenerational conflicts

Trauma-Based Presenting Problems

- Migratory trauma
  - Pre-migration
  - Migration
  - Post-migration

- Interpersonal violence

Discrimination- & Racism-Based Presenting Problems

- Discrimination
- Profiling and Deportation

Poster by Ester Hernandez against SB 1070

Recommendations

- More safe spaces within and outside of the school context for dialogue on cultural adjustment
- Education concerning cultural and linguistic adjustment with students and their parents/guardians
- Training for school personnel regarding the impact of migration, stress, and trauma
- Increasing access to support through building awareness in school community about emotional well-being and how to access help
- Recognizing the impact of immigration status and policy
- Addressing sociocultural barriers—bridging school, family, and student