

Identity Formation & Immigration: Where Do I Belong?

Brainstorm:

Overarching theme – Intersectionality & Psychology of Identity Formation

- Intersectionality of Linguistic, Gender & Sexuality, Nationalist
 - (Cisneros) Identity itself is a complicated procedure that grows and fluctuates over the course of a lifetime. It does not mean any one thing and one's primary identity changes with the community in which a person finds themselves.

These significant identity categories will be explored, and several key questions will be addressed for each category.

- Examples will include:
 - National Identity: (Huntington 1993) creates issues regarding identity formation with his comments about nationalism and national identity, and the identification of the imaginary nature of political borders.
 - How does an imaginary border actually define a person? Can it? Is that really what Nationalism is?
 - Gender & Sexuality Gender creates an entirely new set of issues as the role of gender changes from culture to culture, but also in times of necessity and emergency. (Oishi 2002; Heller 2009)
 - Welcoming communities are difficult enough to find as an immigrant... what is access like for the LGBT community across borders? Could the LGBT community maybe serve as its own safe haven?
 - Linguistic identity is a thing. See sign language, heritage languages, etc.
 - What do we do about it in times of national identity changes? Keep it? Get rid of it? Does holding on to one's linguistic identity prevent them from owning the identity of a new environment? (week 7-ish plus EDU 626 elements) (Huerta & Perez 2014; Gkaintartzi 2016)

Olnock = groups fighting for heritage language may not actually be what's being fought for; not about preservation so much as identification / recognition. Deserving of space.

Identity Formation & The Immigrant Experience: Critical Identity Projection

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Introduction: Critical Identity Projection & Intersectionality

In his examination of “Undocuqueer” immigrants and their quest to formulate an individual identity, Dr. Jesus Cisneros (2015) secondarily examines the complex nature of the rhetoric behind identity formation. For one, gender and sexuality labels, he suggests, “help explain how identities are formed by social norms and culture, and how individuals can resist the regulation of their identities by transgressing boundaries,” (Cisneros 2015). Individual identity formation is a complicated process that is molded by one’s environment and deeply seeded in one’s community (Wenger, E. 1998), so it would seem highly likely that this resistance of identity regulation is also present in other aspects of an individual’s identity, such as national and/or linguistic identity. In this, it is notable that, as Cisneros (2015) suggests, involvement in a community-based identity can also work to suppress the projection of one’s individuality and therefore remove crucial elements of one’s internal identity. As such, in the contemporary era of human mobility – both physical and virtual – wherein a multitude of cultures are overlapping in unprecedented ways, it is pertinent, as David Urias (2012) states, to build “transcultural identities that allow individuals to move more fluidly from context to context.” Identity-centered rhetoric, to this end, ought to be viewed as permeable rather than distinctive and definitive, especially with regards to immigrant individuals as they physically move into new communities and contexts.

In the case of immigrant individuals, a critical external identity projection, rather than a strictly internal individual identity formation, becomes much more prevalent. One’s internal identity may even be denied in order to project a more appropriate identity for a given context. Research suggests that individuals in circumstances of migration analytically select and project an identity most appropriate for

their survival in their new environment (Appadurai, A. 1996; Berg, J. 2015; Olneck, M. 2009; Suarez-Orozco, S., et al 2008; Urias, D. 2012), especially in the cases of national and linguistic identity formation and projection.

Redefining Citizenship: Critical Identity Projection and Nationalism

Samuel Huntington (1993), in his writing *The Clash of Civilizations*, defines civilization as “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have,” delving later into the concept that nation-state boundaries are strictly imaginary and therefore not necessarily sufficient to shape an individual’s identity. Conversely, in 2009, Huntington, addressing issues of immigration in The United States, claims that, “the persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages,” (Huntington, S. 2009). What, then, is to be seen of civilization and civil identity? If, as Huntington (1993) claims, humans are naturally grouped into this higher, community-based identification called civilization, is it really possible for immigration to be the cause of division as he suggests (Huntington, S. 2009)?

As Justin Berg (2015) highlights in his evaluation of American perspectives on immigration, “current evidence now suggests that a majority of Americans hold a positive view of immigrants rather than a negative one, with the Pew Research Center reporting that 57% of people believe that immigrants strengthen rather than burden the country, and 59% of people believe that immigrants strengthen rather than threaten social traditions [Pew Research Center 2014],” (Berg, J. 2015). Similarly, in an editorial statement for *FutureLab* regarding the current refugee crisis in Europe, Srdjan Hercigonja (2015) identifies that political divisions “as well as the often shameful images of the treatment of the refugees will weaken the EU’s soft power, which can lead to a marginalised position of the EU in international relations.” These conclusions suggest that Huntington’s 1993 definition of civilization is proving most powerful in terms of human identity. In the contemporary environment of human mobility, there is an outcry for global citizenship wherein the identity being projected is one of human nature rather than being based on

national boundaries. As such, at the individual level, national identity is already a fluid and exchangeable concept, something that is compounded by individual mobility.

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2014), national identity can be defined as, “a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language.” Therefore, immigration as a whole throws a significant wrench into the solidarity of a nation’s projected national identity. Especially for a nation of immigrants such as The United States, it must be asked: whose traditions, culture and language determine this cohesive whole? This question makes it extremely apparent that the projection of one’s national identity can and, in fact, likely does change depending on one’s environment. Tradition, culture and language, in this case, are most heavily influenced by micro-communities rather than the national power, making it evident that national identity is hugely adaptable and permeable depending on one’s individual needs and desires.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) examines in his writing, *Modernity at Large*, that national identity is often called into question and denied by micro-communities who are, in all senses of the word, citizens of the nation-state whom they are questioning. Given this, mobility comes into play when these micro-communities feel threatened by the political actions of that nation-state. Further, as is projected by Irene Bloemraad, et al (2008), national identity is often at odds with citizenship, especially in cases of immigration, as the identity follows tradition and behavior while citizenship is strictly political and boundary-based. Given this, through the lens of critical identity projection as defined above, it becomes inherently clear that – while one’s environment and community certainly work to formulate one’s individual identity – it is one’s critical analysis of their needs for survival in a given environment that ultimately shapes the selection of their projected identity. National boundaries only define an individual’s identity, in other words, when that definition is most beneficial to the individual.

Corpus Lingua: Critical Identity Projection and Language

As was explored in the previous section, a significant element of national identity is language (Oxford 2014). Language in and of itself is also a significant element of individual identity formation as communication is at the center of community development and connection (Wenger, E. 1998). Language, however, also creates significant barriers between communities thereby putting individuals at risk of marginalization, oppression and degradation. In the framework of critical identity projection as it has been explored in previous sections, it would seem a natural conclusion that an individual would simply select and adhere to a linguistic identity that best serves their needs. But in the case of language, because of the need to learn the language itself and the culture conveyed through that language, adherence to a language community is significantly more complicated. However, as is suggested by Carola Suarez-Orozco, et al, (2008) in their examination of second- and third-generation immigrants, critical identity projection may not necessarily be limited to the adherence to an identity group; it may also take the shape of the rejection of an identity group. Language is one area in which that projected rejection may be most apparent, particularly in immigrant populations.

Examinations of immigrant attitudes toward the maintenance of heritage languages and languages of origin through public education suggest that there is a desire on the part of first-generation immigrants to maintain a linguistic identity based in their country of origin. As Michael Olneck (2009) illustrates in his exploration of the desires of immigrants, immigrants have not “sought to utilize the schools to ‘reproduce’ or to ‘preserve’ cultures separate from the American mainstream. Rather, immigrants have consistently sought to utilize American schooling for purposes of incorporation into a system of American ethnic groups that exhibit aspects of acculturation and retention.” This preservation of a previous linguistic identity, coming from the voices of first-generation immigrants, presents itself as an attempt to maintain the significance of the first-generation immigrants’ backgrounds. The significance of this attempt is only compounded by the fact that, according to Suarez-Orozco, et al (2008), second- and third-generation immigrants often *reject* their parents’ heritage languages in an effort to assimilate and

better integrate into their environment. For second- and third-generation immigrants, heritage languages and languages from their parents' country of origin does not serve to benefit their current existence. In fact, maintenance of that language may actually serve to harm their efforts to assimilate – or it may at least be perceived such – so the external rejection of this linguistic identity, even if they maintain the identity internally, is the result of an analysis of their surroundings and a selection of which identity projection best serves their needs.

Conclusion: The Fluid Nature of Identity Projection

As Etienne Wenger concludes in his widely cited works on social theories of identity formation (1998), the formation of one's individual identity is heavily based on the communities and environments in which the individual is steeped. While Identity formation in this way appears to be a deeply personal journey, the experiences of immigrants suggests that identity is fluid and is actually external and often flexible. Processes of assimilation and integration on the part of immigrant individuals suggest that identity is shaped by external behaviors and the external projection of one's membership in a community through a process of critical needs assessment. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that identity formation may not be as internally bound as Lave and Wenger (1998) originally suggested. If it is true that immigrant individuals project and shape their identities based on their need to assimilate, perhaps this is true of the shaping of one's identity in every community and environment. As in the case of Cisneros' (2015) examination of "Undocuqueer" immigrants, labels regulate an individual's identity based on social norms and reject individuality as a result. Perhaps, then, identity formation and the necessity to assimilate into a community encourages this rejection of individuality and the adoption of socially normative labeling for purposes of survival. The process of an immigrant's rejection of previous linguistic and national identities for a perceivably acceptable outward identity that aligns with their new environment is a magnified example of what may be a central element of an individual's identity formation: a critical identity projection.

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