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Media Portrayal of Students from Undocumented Families

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The Media plays an integral role in shaping our perceptions and attitudes regarding various aspects in life. We biasly form our own opinions based off articles we’ve read or news broadcasts. The media has become one of the most influential resources. We can’t help but be affected by what we are exposed to. Certain groups of people in media sources such as TV, movies and among others affects how we perceive, address, and interact with these groups of people. That is media contributes to the development of stereotypes towards various groups of people. Students from undocumented families have received a lot of attention from media. We cannot help but be emotionally involved when we are presented with articles regarding Children being separated from their undocumented parents. Various media sources attempt to inform us about the lives of these students. We’ve learned how they live in tents without their parents and essentially live like a prisoner. Since media is mainly our primary source of information, it has consequently helped shape how we perceive these students and the various stereotypes people have towards these students.

Occasionally, media sources focus on the negative aspects of these students while overlooking other important aspects of the students’ lives. For example, in most cases students from undocumented families are depicted to be needy and to troubled. The students’ troubled nature is depicted to emerge from various factors such as having lived under unfavorable or poor living conditions. Additionally, the students’ families are also portrayed to be troubled in nature. This depiction of the students as troubled and needy is best highlighted in the short film “From Nowhere.” “From Nowhere” is a short film about three high school students who constantly live under the threat of being discovered by the authorities as illegal immigrants. The three students are also navigating the traitorous water of getting their legal documents to remain in the country. Moussa is the most troubled among the three and together with her family has suffered a traumatic past. Moussa’s family is from Guinea and has been subjected to horrible practices such as dictators, genocide, as well as genital mutilation. Moussa has numerous problems throughout the film including conflicts with his mother as well as troubles with his girlfriend. The terrors not only affect Moussa but other characters as well including an encounter with beat cops. Similarly, Sophie is also a troubled young girl a feature that is echoed in the film as well. The film majors on the student’s problems and challenges in life and pays no attention to other positive aspects of the students or their lives. The lack of documentation is consequently shown to inhibit the ability of the students to have an ordinary life. Therefore, most media portrayals of students from undocumented families place emphasis on the troubled nature of these students as well as their families. The families are also shown to come from backward countries with inhumane practices such as genital mutilation that further influence the perception and attitude of the viewer towards the students.

Other media sources depict the students to be highly prejudiced and stereotyped in the society. For example, in the TV series “One day at a Time”, Alex is constantly subjected to racial bullying because of his status. In one instance, Alex is told “Go Back to Mexico” a slur that portrays the racial discrimination and prejudices faced by students from undocumented families. Even though Alex is not from Mexico, the TV series shows how people do not take time to learn the students on a personal level but rather use their physical looks and language to express their prejudices. Further, the series echoes the perception developed in “From Nowhere” that the students from undocumented families are much troubled mainly due to their undocumented nature. Further, the series also shows that the students alongside their families must live under the fear of deportation that deters their ability to live a normal life. The constant bullying faced by Alex prevents him from related and associating with other students that consequently affect his school life.

Ultimately, the news similarly portrays students from undocumented families to face numerous troubles assimilating in the country. In the news, the students are also shown to live under the constant fear of been deported from the country that affects their school life. The news also portrays the students to be susceptible to falling for the wrong groups of people and consequently becoming criminals. For example, the news article, “’I’m an American without Documentation’: The Trials and Tribulations of an Undocumented College Student”, the author depicts the life of a young Nestor Gomez and the challenges he faced living in the country as undocumented student. The article also focuses on his association with the wrong groups of people that supports the common stereotype that most undocumented immigrants are criminals. Hence, students from undocumented families are depicted to be nothing but trouble in most media sources. Further, the students and their families are shown to bring nothing but trouble to the country that negatively affects our attitude towards them.

While we already know that undocumented families and the students from these families constantly live with the fear of deportation, the media sources further reinforce our perceptions of the students and their families. The media sources further reinforce our beliefs that the students’ ability to live normal lives is affected by their undocumented nature. Further, the media sources us of our knowledge of the challenges associated in living in the country as undocumented families and students. For example, the bullying experienced by Alex because of his race is a common phenomenon experienced by immigrant students. This portrayal of students from undocumented families partially supports my knowledge of this group. For instance, it supports my view that undocumented students constantly live with the fear of being deported. However, my views of the group are also contradicted by the media sources especially the depiction that these students are troubled in nature and incapable of living normal lifestyle. I have personally associated with numerous students from undocumented families and from my experience; I know these students are capable of normal lifestyles. Hence, the view that these students are troubled and incapable of having normal school lives contradicts my views and perceptions of the students.

The media in its portrayal of students from undocumented families also perpetrates various stereotypes such as the stereotype that these students bring no good to the country but rather troubles. The news article addresses Nestor’s association with bad groups that reinforces the common stereotype that undocumented immigrants are criminals. By focusing on the troubled nature of various undocumented students especially due to issues associated with their ethnic countries, the media creates the stereotype that the students are incapable of living normal lives in the country even with the provision of right documents. Further, the media sources draw the people to pity the students and their families denying them the opportunity to being treated like other people capable of living normal lifestyles.

This activity was very useful to me in understanding how media affects our attitudes towards others and the development of associated stereotypes and prejudices. I learned that the media can not only reinforce stereotypes but also creates new stereotypes as well. For example, the media sources reinforce the common stereotypes that the undocumented students are not capable of living normal lives to attain prosperity in the country. Thus, it is important to look past these stereotypes to fully comprehend the students and give them the chance to live normal lives.

Questions

How does the media portrayal of students from undocumented families benefit or harm the students?

Do the media increase the chances of the students getting the necessary documentation?

Do the stereotypes created by the media hinder the ability of the students to live normal lives?

Can a change in media portrayal of students from undocumented families change our perception of the students and our attitudes towards them?

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