

Till deportation do us part: the effect of U.S. immigration law on mixed-status couples' experience of citizenship

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Though understudied, mixed citizenship status couples represent a growing proportion of families in the United States and around the world. They also embody an important intersection between immigration, citizenship, family, and the law. In this study, I investigate the citizenship experience for U.S. citizens in mixed-status marriages and find that the individual experience of citizenship can drastically change even when one's legal citizenship status remains constant. The data presented here demonstrate that the citizenship relationship involves more players than just the citizen and her state, highlighting the importance of family-level traits in shaping the individual experience of citizenship.

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Beginning with the first U.S. immigration laws enacted in the late nineteenth century, preserving family unity and facilitating the reunification of families have been central tenets of American immigration policy (Colon-Navarro 2007). Historically, this focus on maintaining and restoring family unity enabled American citizens' undocumented immigrant spouses to easily adjust to legal status. But with the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), the goal of discouraging illegal immigration trumped the goal of family unity, resulting in a series of laws that have increased barriers for many mixed-citizenship families to safely and legally reside in the U.S. (Gimpel and Edwards 1999). In this study, I examine how these immigration laws have impacted the citizenship experience of U.S. citizens in mixed-citizenship marriages and the implications of those experiences for future immigration and citizenship policy.

Though immigration and legal scholars have often overlooked mixed-citizenship status families, these families represent a significant and growing proportion of the American population. Millions of mixed-status couples composed of a U.S. citizen spouse and an immigrant with legal status are living throughout the U.S., with their ranks growing by more than 250,000 each year (Monger & Yankay 2012). An additional nine million people, roughly three percent of the U.S. population, form part of an 'unauthorized' mixed-citizenship family, with both undocumented immigrant and U.S. citizen family members (Taylor *et al.* 2011). For many years undocumented individuals married to U.S. citizens could adjust to legal status with little fanfare, but the IIRIRA changed that. Seeking to punish all individuals who entered the U.S. illegally, the IIRIRA established a 10-year bar from re-entry for any "illegal" immigrant who had lived in the U.S. for more than a year. Immigrants who entered the U.S. without inspection who are married to U.S. citizens may apply for an adjustment to their immigration status, but they must apply from their country of origin, which triggers the automatic 10-year bar. But undocumented immigrant spouses of U.S. citizens who overstayed a visa may apply to adjust their status from within the U.S., meaning that the automatic bar to re-entry is not activated. This small distinction in the law has led to divergent outcomes for mixed-status couples -- depending on the immigrant spouses' original mode of entry -- resulting in drastically different access to and experiences of citizenship.

The dimensions of citizenship

Though citizenship is an ‘abstract, formal construct’ designed to aid states in determining who ‘legitimately’ belongs within their borders (Brubaker 1992: 30), it is much more than just an official legal status. Bloemraad *et al.* (2008) argue that, in addition to its legal status ‘dimension,’ citizenship also encompasses ‘rights, political and other forms of participation in society, and a sense of belonging’ (154). These four dimensions of citizenship ‘cut across each other, reinforcing or undermining the boundaries and content of citizenship’ (156). By considering the four dimensions of citizenship together, rather than simply focusing on legal status, scholars can better capture ‘lived citizenship,’ or ‘the meaning that citizenship actually has in people’s lives and the ways in which people’s social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens’ (Hall and Williamson 1999: 2, quoted in Lister *et al.* 2003).

Various scholars have explored the ways in which these four dimensions of citizenship interact, as well as the relationship between citizenship status and citizenship identity (e.g. Tilly 1995; Crul and Schneider 2010; Joppke 2010; Herzog 2011; Gonzales 2012). The different dimensions of citizenship have been closely linked in both scholarly works and social policies to the process of immigrant assimilation, and many countries have put in place policies that help facilitate the formal integration and naturalization of immigrants (Bloemraad 2006). Citizenship within a state, and the rights and responsibilities associated with it, has been shown to be a complex identity encompassing an individual’s relationship with a state and its people. According to Stolcke (1997), distinct dimensions to an individual’s membership in a nation-state include the dispensation of rights upon the individual by the state and a sense of ‘shared national identity’ (61). Citizenship encompasses both an individual’s claim to rights and services from a state and a claim of ‘belonging’ to a place and with a specific group of people on the basis of shared language, culture, traditions, and history (Marshall 1964). In the U.S., the notion of ‘being American’ is a complex and often contradictory concept that may or may not encompass legal citizenship status (Schildkraut 2007).

Citizenship identity and ‘lived citizenship’ are also shaped by individual traits that shape access to citizenship and social inclusion, such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Hall and Coffey 2007; Bloemraad *et al.* 2008). Scholars studying the citizenship identity of

children and youth have also demonstrated the effects of parental status, traditions, and beliefs in shaping young people's notion of citizenship (McIntosh *et al.* 2007). But little attention has been paid to the effects of family relationships on adult citizens whose legal status and citizenship identities are presumed to be fixed (McDevitt and Chaffee 2002). Though citizenship is broadly understood to be an individual-level trait that encompasses a mutual relationship between an individual and a state, citizenship has proven itself to have impacts beyond the individual (López, 2015). These family-level effects of citizenship mean that, for citizens with immigrant family members, citizenship laws can enable them to sponsor their non-citizen family members for residence (and ultimately citizenship) in the U.S. But the same family-level effects also expose citizens to the consequences of immigration laws as applied to their non-citizen family members. The data presented below will demonstrate that, as a result of these laws, U.S. citizens in mixed-status marriages often experience dramatic shifts in one or more citizenship dimensions, significantly altering their 'lived citizenship,' without undergoing simultaneous changes in their official legal citizenship status.

Methodology

The goals of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted for this study were to identify the dynamics of citizenship identity maintenance among U.S. citizen spouses in mixed-status couples and to identify the practical struggles they regularly face. In order to capture some of the similarities and differences in citizens' experience that could be affected by the spouse's home country while minimizing the influence of cultural and linguistic differences, I limited my participant pool to U.S. citizens in mixed-status marriages with spouses from any (Spanish-speaking) Latin American country. Any U.S. citizen married to a current or formerly non-citizen Latino was eligible to participate in the study, regardless of his or her own age, race, ethnicity, gender, or current place of residence. To recruit participants, I directly contacted individuals in my social networks that met study criteria or who I believed could help me identify potential participants. (I was acquainted with one-third of the interviewees prior to their involvement in the study.) Additionally, many of the interviewees identified through this process recommended other interview candidates.

In all, I interviewed 22 U.S. citizens, eight of whom were also joined by their spouses, for a total of 30 study participants. The U.S. citizens who participated in this study included eight male and fourteen female U.S. citizens married to immigrants from various Latin American countries including Mexico, Colombia, Guatemala, Argentina, El Salvador, and Chile. Seven participants were living with their families outside the U.S. as a result of their spouses' deportation or voluntary removal; two other participants were living in the U.S. while their fiancé/spouse was living in another country waiting for visa approval. Two-thirds of the citizen participants' spouses were undocumented at the time they married, having either entered the U.S. illegally or overstayed a visa. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 65 years old and had been married anywhere from one month to more than 30 years (as well as one participant who was waiting to be married upon the issuance of her fiancé's visa). Interviews were generally conducted in person -- five were conducted over Skype -- and were recorded, transcribed, and translated (when necessary) by the author. (Eight interviews were conducted in Spanish.)

Using an inductive analytical strategy to look for trends and common themes across interviews, I was able to identify recurrent themes that pointed to broader issues directly affecting mixed-status couples and families. Interviewees in this study serve as a powerful example of the real and lasting effects of immigration policy on American citizens and demonstrate the ways in which immigration policies, generally considered to be unrelated to American citizens, impact their experience of citizenship, even when their legal citizenship status does not change.

Lived citizenship across all its dimensions

Legal Status. The American citizenship status of all of my participants was stable at the time of our interviews. All but two had been citizens since birth, and only one had also gained dual citizenship status in her husband's home country. Most interviewees had undergone at least part of the process of seeking legal immigrant status for their spouses, during which time the legitimacy of their own legal citizenship status was never explicitly called into question. Instead, it was the legitimacy of their marriages and their ability to live with their spouses in the U.S. that was often challenged. While this antagonistic relationship between citizenship and marriage for mixed-status couples did not ever threaten to alter the U.S. citizens' individual legal status, it did

lead to significant changes in the way these individuals experienced the other dimensions of citizenship. For those who eventually secured legal resident status for their spouses, being a mixed-status couple enhanced their citizenship experience. Those whose citizenship and familial identities could not be reconciled experienced alienation as their familial goals clashed repeatedly with immigration laws.

Rights. Many U.S. citizens in mixed-status families, including Sandra and Angelica, have found that their access to citizenship rights -- civil, political, and/or social -- has been directly impacted by their family's non-citizen status. These two women both live in Mexican border towns, close enough to cities in the U.S. that they can live in Mexico and commute across the border each day for work. Both of their husbands, currently barred from legally entering the U.S., had previously lived without documentation in the U.S., one for about five years as an adult and the other from age two to age twenty-four. Sandra, originally from California, met her husband, Esteban, while both were living in Tennessee. Sandra had moved back to California before they started dating long-distance, and when they decided they wanted to get married, they knew they would want to live near California, where Sandra was employed. Fearing that the Border Patrol would be much more active in Southern California than in Tennessee, they decided that Esteban should move back to Mexico, where they would apply for a visa for him to legally enter the U.S.: "We said, "If they catch you, you will face an automatic punishment, and it's going to be more difficult [to get you a visa.]" Sandra had family living just across the border, so they decided to move nearby. Once their first child was born, Esteban worked and Sandra stayed home with their little boy, but they soon realized that Esteban's salary would not be sufficient to cover their monthly expenses and pay for his visa application. When Esteban was working, Sandra had tried to get social welfare benefits from the U.S. for herself and their son to help cover food and medical expenses, but she found that, because they were not living in the U.S., they did not qualify for assistance:

Because I didn't live there, I couldn't ask for any help. Even though I'm a citizen, I need to be living there for them to help me. This is how [our situation] has affected me, because you *have* to be there, but how are you going to be there if your family -- ok, your husband -- is here [in Mexico]? You cannot get help -- I'm not even talking about money, I just mean help

with health insurance and food. This is what made it so hard for us because we simply could not do it.

Now, Sandra works in the U.S. and Esteban stays home with their son. She gets health insurance for herself and her son through her job, and because of a favorable exchange rate, she has been able to cover their monthly expenses and save up enough money to begin Esteban's visa application process. But until Esteban receives permission to live in the U.S., Sandra cannot access many of the rights and protections that have been put in place to help citizens like her.

Angelica met her husband, Ramses, shortly after he voluntarily self-deported to Mexico. He had lived in the U.S. for almost all of his life, but it became clear to him that he would not be able to find stable work or progress toward the American dream as an undocumented immigrant. Angelica, a naturalized American citizen, had grown up on the Mexican side of the border before her parents immigrated to the U.S. when she was a teenager. Looking for a change of scenery after some personal frustrations during her mid-twenties, she moved back to her hometown in Mexico for what she anticipated would be a brief stay. After meeting Ramses, who lived a block away, all of her plans changed:

We found each other and -- rather, we fell in love without knowing each other and our situations really well, and I thought, 'Oh, he doesn't have papers. He voluntarily deported. We can fix that.' It was all really easy. We didn't think: 'It's going to take many years. It's going to be very expensive. We're going to have to -- I'm going to have to live in Mexico as long as he can't cross.' We didn't think about any of that. We didn't think: 'When we have children, I will have to give birth to them alone. He won't be there with me.' [...] There was simply a connection between us, and our problems have come little by little. When they have come, that's when [we say], 'Ok, and what will we do about this?' But the connection was about falling in love, regardless of whether or not it was convenient.

Like Sandra and Esteban, Angelica and Ramses had originally planned to live off of Ramses' salary alone, but Angelica soon decided that she needed to work in order to show immigration authorities that she could financially support Ramses and their children: 'I needed to use my Social Security number and show [immigration authorities] that, when [Ramses] comes to live in the U.S., I can take care of him, and we will not ask the government for help.' For similar reasons, though she thinks she could qualify to receive social benefits for herself and her

daughters, she felt that accessing those social citizenship rights would negatively impact their larger goal of securing a visa for Ramses.

Other interviewees noted having to abruptly stop studying upon the deportation of a spouse or having to live apart from their spouses for years while they finished their degrees. These citizens in mixed-status marriages found that, ironically, by exercising their civil right to marry, they often had to forfeit access to other citizenship rights. Though the decision to put family before citizenship (or for the sake of eventually being able to share that citizenship with a spouse) has involved detaching themselves from the rights-related dimension of their citizenship, Angelica, Sandra, and others in mixed-status marriages have decided that protecting their family relationships is more important than accessing all of their citizenship rights.

Lucy's experience was very different. As she and her El Salvadoran fiancé, Javier, went through the process of applying for his visa so he could come to the U.S. for their wedding, they both realized just how many rights and benefits U.S. citizens had. As Lucy has explained to Javier her work benefits and other rights she used to take for granted, his reaction has changed the way she views and appreciates her citizenship rights:

It just kind of blows his mind that we have so many freedoms and so many rights in this country. So, I think he's really grateful just -- I -- like I said, just humbled to the fact that he will even get an opportunity to have those same rights that we do. [...] I just think of all the rights that we have here and, just, I mean, I was born a citizen. I've never had to go through anything like this, and it just makes me grateful for that.

Being in a mixed-status relationship has helped Lucy appreciate many of the citizenship rights that she had previously overlooked and has enhanced her desire to be more engaged as a citizen. The legal right to sponsor her fiancé has increased Lucy's appreciation of and respect for her citizenship; but the legal penalties associated with some immigration laws have left other citizens in mixed-status marriages detached from their citizenship rights.

Political Participation. The levels of political participation varied between study participants, in many cases because those who were living outside of the U.S. as a result of their spouses' deportations (a) were not able to hold public office while living abroad and (b) felt that voting for

political representatives would offer little help to them as long as they lived outside of the United States. Many of those living in the U.S. with undocumented spouses, including William and Juliette, became more politically active, feeling that exercising their political citizenship rights was their only recourse to advocate for the legal changes that would eliminate the threat of deportation and enable their spouses to adjust to a legal immigration status. They expressed optimism at the recent renewal of serious talks in Washington on immigration reform, including potential ‘amnesty’ for millions of undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S. But for Julia, who left the U.S. for Mexico five years ago with her new husband, Santiago, after he received a letter from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) ordering him to leave the country within thirty days, the new immigration talks continue to disappoint:

I remember when we were together in the U.S. and everyone talked about illegal immigrants. I was a very strong supporter because I saw why Santiago was in the States, and I saw what he was doing for his family and what he could have never done [in Mexico]. [...] I thought it was a noble cause to do what he did and risk -- it was a risk what he did, but I saw it as a noble thing and not something wrong. And then we got the ugly side of immigration. [...] Now, it’s so hard to be on the outside and watch talk of amnesty or Obama’s plans to provide a path to citizenship for illegal Mexicans. It’s unbearable pain because it ultimately has almost ended our marriage, for what we’ve gone through. And I now look at illegals and I feel completely different about them because I felt like we did the right thing and we were punished. And that was a hard reality to accept. We wanted to be honest. A lawyer told us to lie, and we didn’t want to. And we told USCIS the truth, and that isn’t good to do. And we really were punished for doing the right thing. So it’s hard to look at illegal immigration now and want to support it. Or if there’s talk of what can be done for illegals, you know, the resounding question in my head is, ‘What happens to all of those that you told to leave and they actually did? What about all of us whose lives changed because we [did what we were told to do]?’

Exercising her political citizenship rights in hopes of avoiding the 10-year ban her husband faced, Julia contacted her national representatives for help:

I did write a letter to my congressman. This was back when we were -- we had the fire to still fight. So, I wrote my Idaho senators and congressmen. I wrote George Bush. I wrote Oprah

Winfrey because she can do anything. [...] And my senators actually let me make a case, and I got a formal letter back. And there was correspondence for about a month. But that fizzled, and yeah, I mean, they're legislators, but it's gonna take time. And, honestly, when I talked to this lawyer a couple weeks ago, he said, 'All I can advise you to do right now is write your congressman and have your family write your congressman because they are your spokespeople.' And that's no immediate solution, but it's the reality. If you wanted, you know, gee, to have your voices heard, you could talk to them. And maybe in a meeting they'd mention it to someone else and then it takes years for reform and a law, if you want it. So, your hope feels pretty dim at that point when you're told to write your congressman.

Unfortunately for Julia and thousands of other mixed-status families in her situation, hope for immigration reform that will take their needs into account is in short supply. While undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. continue to play a central role in immigration reform talks, mixed citizen-noncitizen families living outside of the U.S. who desperately seek a way to return to the U.S. as a family have not been publicly mentioned in these discussions. This led Julia to draw the conclusion that, though she technically retains her political citizenship in the U.S., she does not matter to the U.S.

Through everything, [I] started to feel like my country didn't care about me. How could they? There's too many people. But U.S. Immigration does not sympathize or think about the U.S. citizen, and they only worry about the immigrant and how to punish them without thinking about the rights that a U.S. citizen should have to marry who they please. And I think him being married to me should have meant something in our case, and it totally didn't.

The experience of Steve and his wife has been very different. Steve and Luz met while she was traveling on a visitor's visa to the U.S. She overstayed her visa, but given the differential treatment by the law of visa overstayers versus those who entered the country illegally, she was able to adjust her status with little fanfare shortly after their marriage. Luz recently naturalized, and Steve has enjoyed teaching her about the political process and actively engaging in politics with her. They participated in the 2012 primary caucuses and watched the party conventions together. Luz's political activity has enhanced Steve's own political participation and reinforced his appreciation for the American democracy. For Steve, being American means 'freedom.'

I think, the freedom and opportunity to do what you choose. If you want to do something, you do it. [...] I like the freedom to choose your own path, whether you want to be poor or work your butt off and still not have anything but do what you want. I think it's opportunities, freedom.

With Luz, Steve has been able to enjoy those opportunities and help to ensure them for future generations by exercising his political citizenship. Watching Luz go through the naturalization process and gain the right to vote has reinforced Steve's notion that anyone who works hard to achieve the American dream can do so. George and Maria had a similarly positive experience through Maria's naturalization. Maria, born in Peru, was studying at a university in Arizona when she met George, who was serving in the military. Her experience as a military wife and mother, singing the star-spangled banner at school assemblies and political events, has helped her feel American. Their decision to raise their children in the U.S. and be active citizens has reinforced George's sense of responsibility and feelings of membership in his country. Contrasting Steve and George's experiences with Julia's, it becomes clear that small distinctions in the law -- and the enforcement of that law -- can lead to significantly different outcomes in the way U.S. citizens experience their citizenship. In addition to impacting access to rights and political participation, these outcomes also directly influence U.S. citizens' sense of belonging to both the American state and to their families.

Sense of Belonging. For families dealing with deportation and bars to re-entering the U.S, the rejection of a spouse is often perceived as a rejection of the citizen herself. In the aftermath of Santiago's deportation, Julia felt rejected by her country, which she felt had punished her for choosing to marry someone without legal status. And while other mixed-status families have not yet been expelled from the U.S. through the deportation of a family member, living in the U.S. with the threat of deportation lurking in the background can leave citizen family members feeling equally alienated from their country. Though Juliette wants to believe her family is like any other 'normal American family,' she concedes that 'normal American citizen families don't have to worry about if someone's leaving -- getting kicked out of the country.'

Even the process of legally sponsoring a spouse for entry to the U.S. can lead citizens to feel detached from both family and country. While Carlos has anxiously waited for his wife,

Estrella, to receive her visa, he has felt estranged from the rest of his family with whom he lives in the U.S. Estrella recently gave birth to their first child, but Carlos has not yet been able to travel to Mexico to meet her. Meanwhile, Carlos' brother and sister-in-law are a constant presence with their baby boy, who has become a painful reminder of what Carlos cannot yet have in the U.S: his family. 'I like to hold [my nephew] and I have fun with him and stuff. But you still have that thought in the back of your mind, "Man, I can hold my nephew but I can't hold my own daughter."' Having to endure this prolonged separation, despite the fact that they have tried to do everything according to the law, has left Carlos jaded regarding his citizenship:

Well, I guess when I was younger, I thought of it more as ... kind of like a mix, you know Mexican-American. I mean, my parents are both Mexican, and I'm Mexican, but I was born in America. But, I guess growing up, my perspective changed on the whole thing, and now I believe that it's no difference -- you know, we're all human, I mean, we all have fingers and hands, etc. I mean, I don't see the world as nationalities, I see it more as just mankind. And, I mean, as far as citizenship status goes, it's all government controlled. I -- I can't really do anything about it.

Despite their current hardship, Carlos believes that, once his wife and daughter are able to live with him in the United States, they will be able to enjoy as a family all the benefits of American citizenship.

Unfortunately for Camille and her family, it appears that they will never get that chance. Camille's husband, Giovanni, had lived in the U.S. since he was six years old, and even though he was undocumented, he felt as American as any citizen. When they married, Camille and Giovanni thought of their family as 'one-hundred percent American.' They could not imagine establishing their family anywhere else. Yet, shortly before the birth of their first child, Giovanni was detained and later deported to Guatemala. Because of complications with his case, it is likely that Giovanni will face a permanent bar to legal entry into the U.S. Despite their devastation, they have tried their best to stay strong as a family together in Guatemala. But the experience has taken its toll on Camille: 'In so many ways I feel like I should feel American still, but I don't. I don't feel Guatemalan, either. I just feel like no nationality.' When I asked her if she felt more tied to her family than to her country, she replied:

Oh, yes. One-hundred percent. One-hundred percent. Because my country didn't help me keep my family. So how could I feel tied to them? [...] It's just so much more important for me personally to make sure that our family is together rather than whether or not I'm a citizen of the U.S. Because I -- the U.S hasn't really done anything for me. I'm sorry, but when it was important, when I needed someone to be there to fight for me, nobody was there. You know what I mean? Where were my senators and my congressman? Where was my president? They weren't there. They didn't care. And, I mean, I can't owe loyalties to a place that never fought for me, never fought for my family.

Camille's legal citizenship status has not changed, but her inability to access her citizenship rights and responsibilities with her family has left her feeling rejected by her country, leading her to reject her citizenship identity altogether.

Other mixed-status families have had better luck. Mark's wife, Susana, was able to adjust her undocumented status with an exemption to the automatic bar to re-entry. While the three and a half months that she spent in Mexico waiting for her extreme hardship petition to be approved felt like an eternity, especially since she had left behind her two children with Mark in Minnesota, gaining legal status was worth it. Now that they do not have to worry about deportation, Mark feels like his family is as American as any, if not more.

I think it's more a mirror of America than a lot of other families just because that's -- there are so many backgrounds in America. That's kind of what we're about now, so our family portrait is much more the picture of an American family than what it maybe used to be 50 years ago.

Securing legal status for Susana confirmed for Mark that he *and* his family belong in the U.S., that they are an American family. As with Steve and Lucy, Mark experienced an increased sense of belonging in America as a result of his mixed-status marriage. Now that Jennifer's husband, who had overstayed a visa, has naturalized, she also feels that they are an American family, and they fly an American flag in their front yard with pride. For nearly every U.S. citizen participant, the effects of immigration law as it applied to his or her non-citizen spouse ultimately determined the way they felt about their citizenship: those whose spouses had achieved positive immigration outcomes felt even more American than before, whereas those whose spouses had been rejected

by or otherwise expelled from the U.S. felt equally unwanted. Those whose spouses' fate had not yet been determined by immigration authorities expressed both frustration and hope.

Discussion and conclusion

The experiences of mixed citizenship status couples described above reveal two important points regarding the dimensions of citizenship and related notions of the way citizenship is experienced. First, legal citizenship status is not essential for one to experience strong feelings of citizenship in other dimensions, nor is it a protection from loss of access to citizenship and a sense of national belonging. The experiences of citizens presented here clearly demonstrate that legal citizenship status does not solely determine citizenship identity, access to citizenship rights, and the ability to fully participate in citizenship. Furthermore, these data show that citizenship identity and access to citizenship rights are not even solely dependent upon individual traits. Family-level citizenship status, like race, gender, and socio-economic status, can affect access to and the experience of citizenship and its associated rights and responsibilities.

This finding contributes to the debate between liberals and communitarians over the nature of the relationship between citizens and the state. Liberals assert that society is composed of atomized individuals, 'unencumbered selves,' whose interactions with the state and society occur on a purely individual level, unburdened by other social relationships and networks (Rawls 1971; Gutmann 2003). Communitarians counter that, while one could conceptually isolate the relationship between citizen and state, in the real world, all individuals are situated within networks, social groupings, and other relationships, including families, that impact the individual-state relationship (MacIntyre 1981; Sandel 1984, 1988). My data strongly support the communitarian argument, demonstrating that people do not experience citizenship as atomized individuals, but as social beings, constrained by spouses, children, and cultural understandings that lead to conflicts between individually-based citizenship, state regulations, and immigration laws. Citizens in mixed-status marriages are not the only U.S. citizens to experience this conflict; a broad range of Americans experience similar discord in their individual relationships with the state as a result of their networks and inter-personal relationships.

Second, following this logic, citizenship can be enhanced or diminished depending upon the legal citizenship status of one's family members, regardless of one's own citizenship status.

The data presented here show that sometimes marriage between a citizen and a non-citizen can lead to fuller assimilation and a stronger sense of national belonging for the immigrant spouse, the citizen spouse, and the family as a whole. But marriage between a citizen and a non-citizen can also lead to the de-assimilation and diminished feelings of membership of the citizen spouse while simultaneously preventing the assimilation of the immigrant spouse. By focusing solely on the immigrants' movement along a straight, unidirectional assimilation path, rather than also evaluating the movement of citizens towards or away from immigrants and citizenship, scholars overlook important aspects of incorporation and belonging. Rather than conceiving of the assimilation process and the accompanying experience of citizenship as formulaic and unidirectional, we should acknowledge that it is a multi-directional process in which citizens and immigrants can both move toward or away from assimilation and full citizenship in all its dimensions. More than a static legal status, 'lived citizenship' is a dynamic relationship that can change even if one's legal citizenship status remains constant.

Both the scholarly and political definitions of citizenship should be expanded to include its family-level characteristics. Future research efforts should examine the extent to which familial citizenship status impacts the individual citizenship experience, as well as explore other types of relationships that can similarly affect citizens. With regard to citizenship and immigration policies, policy makers must take the family-level impacts of citizenship into consideration and recognize that citizens regularly experience collateral punishment as a result of their relationships to non-citizens. My data show that, when immigration proceedings end favorably, both U.S. citizens and their future-citizen spouses engage more (and positively) with the state and with their American identity. Rather than disenfranchising U.S. citizens and their non-citizen spouses, policy makers should strive to strengthen mixed-status American families through family-friendly immigration policies.

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