

1-24-1997

The Psychology of the Borderline and Immigration Policy

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>



Part of the [Human Geography Commons](#), [Infrastructure Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), and the [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1997) "The Psychology of the Borderline and Immigration Policy," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 9 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol1/iss9/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

Title: The Psychology of the Borderline and Immigration Policy

Author: Editor

Volume: 1

Issue: 9

Date: 1997-01-24

Keywords: Immigration

In many languages, there are expressions such as "Where do we draw the line?" "Not one step more!" "Don't come any closer!" "They're not our kind!" In many cultures, people flock to dramatizations of invasions by the different, the strange, the alien arising from inside themselves or from outside--different peoples, countries, planets, and the Great Beyond. In everyday life--perhaps everyday there has been human life--people make choices of what to eat; what to wear; which rules to establish, abide by, and insist compliance with; which rules to violate or tolerate or encourage violation of; what to do; what to be. And all the while they are asking "Is this really me?"

These phenomena relate to very basic and psychologically primitive developmental processes--differentiating self from non-self, good from bad, and later the much more sophisticated process of identifying self and non-self and good and bad within oneself and within, between, and among others. Unsuccessful development of these processes leads to various psychological disorders at an individual level of analysis, e.g., borderline personality disorder. This disorder is essentially a pervasive pattern of unstable interpersonal relationships, self-image, and emotions, and marked impulsivity. At a national level of analysis, unsuccessful development can lead to unstable policy development characterized by marked swings in what the policymakers want and how they perceive a specific policy to reflect what they want on domestic and international security issues.

As an example, let's consider immigration policy, which surely has significant domestic and international security import. At the foundation of policy are several psychological questions. "Who are we, and who are we not? (A more psychologically meaningful question might be "Who are us, and who aren't us?) "Who are like us and who are not?" "Who can become like us?" "Who and how many do we desire to be like us?" "Is the process of becoming us or like us an all-or-none, instantaneous transition much like the maligned biological and ontological concept of spontaneous generation?" "Do we ineluctably become stronger as we take in more and more of us or those like us?" "How like us should those like us end up as, assuming they don't end up as us?" "And also can those very unlike us become like us or us and strengthen us, even if remaining so unlike us?"

These questions often are not explicitly posed or consciously entertained in policy deliberations. Instead, heated debate and political action focus on differential management of legal and illegal immigration, quotas, effects on underemployment and unemployment, wages, contributions to the tax base, entitlements, education, criminal justice, effects on national identity, still occasionally effects on some mythical purity of the so-called national gene pool.

Perhaps the most important contributions from the basic psychological processes and questions underlying immigration policy debates and political action include unconscious illogic, irrationality, emotion-fueled venom, racist and sexualized stereotypes--(e.g., Yankee blue-blooded procreation as duty to God and Country versus Latino hot-blooded coupling as irresponsible Salsa pleasure)--and aggressive instincts. For these processes are intimately present and indeed permeate the original attempts at differentiating self, non-self, good, and bad. Much later on, especially in times of advocacy, disagreement, conflict, and crisis, these contributions can come to the fore and fuel ugly debate and

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

racist legislation and programs. Given that these same developmental processes and contributions are central to the development of other political phenomena such as ethnocentric war and the frequently resulting destabilization which leads to dislocation of populations, immigration policy should certainly be high on the security agenda for the 21st century.

Some solutions to illegal immigration have involved the creation of borderlines and their demarcation with walls, fences, sensors, and apprehension-oriented human agents. Borderline demarcation for legal immigration has comprised quotas, criteria for the economic viability of sponsors, and limitations on entitlements and rights. These or other physical and legal demarcations of the borderline can never, ever be satisfactory as components of immigration policy until the psychological borderline issues are resolved. Although the motivations of immigrants have long been analyzed, those of host-country policymakers and citizens have only to a lesser degree. (See Edwards, A. (1993.) *Borderline states: Disorders of the self*. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 38, 87-100; Frosch, A. (1995.) *The preconceptual organization of emotion*. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 43, 423-447; Isbister, J. (1996.) *Are immigration controls ethical?* *Social Justice*, 23, 54-67; Kirsch, P. (1991.) *Self-righteousness as a primitive defense*. *Psychotherapy Patient*, 7, 5-14; Schmitt, E. (January 17, 1997.) *Effort to cut legal immigration loses steam*. *The New York Times*. p. A10; Schreker, E. (1996.) *Immigration and internal security: Political deportations during the McCarthy era*. *Science and Society*, 60, 393-426; Vernez, G. (1996.) *National security and migration: How strong the link?* Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.) (Keyword: Immigration.)